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### Buddhism – Religion or Philosophy?

Buddhism originated during the Fifth Century B.C.E. by a man known as Siddhartha Gautama, who is often referred to as the Buddha. Siddhartha witnessed the suffering that took place in the world and aimed to find a cure to it. In his efforts to do so, he attained enlightenment and by doing so, he expressed his end of suffering (Gethin). Even though there are various branches of Buddhism they each have similar beliefs regarding Buddha and his role in Buddhism. Any misconception that has developed over time must be disregarded to fully understand the meaning and purpose of Buddhism as it originated. Although Buddhism is traditionally classified as a religion, the sole focus on reaching enlightenment in one's life along with the neglect of the need for faith - or belief in a deity - in order to reach reincarnation leads to the idea that Buddhism is a philosophy rather than religion.

Since Buddhism is essentially a non-theistic religion and solely focuses on how an individual lives his or her lifestyle, it must be classified as a philosophy. In fact, just by looking at the definitions of the words religion and philosophy, it is clear that Buddhism is categorized under the term philosophy. Precisely, Webster's New World Dictionary defines the term "religion" as "any specific system of belief and worship, often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy. (Merriam-Webster)" Additionally, Webster's Dictionary defines philosophy as "a set of ideas about how to do something or how to live. (Merriam-Webster)" These two definitions are completely different, allowing for the categorization of Buddhism between the

two to take place. When comparing Webster's definitions with the overview of Buddhism, the idea that Buddhism is a philosophy – rather than religion – is illustrated. The lack of worship in Buddhism restricts the possibility of it being a religion. In order to convey this idea further, the origins, beliefs, customs, and traditions of Buddhism will be examined in detail in order to make the proper classification and reveal how Buddhism is in fact a philosophy. One extremely important fact is that worship to a supreme being is not a necessary aspect of Buddhism, which, when compared to the definition of religion, reveals that Buddhism is in fact not a religion at all. Additionally, there is no divine and supernatural deity or myths concerning a deity and the creation of mankind in this religion. Because of this, Buddhism is viewed as a philosophy rather than religion.

In fact, Buddha himself never explicitly stated that he was a God that needed to be worshipped. Instead, Buddha taught individuals how to lead a peaceful life towards a higher state of being until they reached enlightenment and end the cycle of reincarnation. He – a human himself – discovered the path towards enlightenment and simply aimed to educate others of his discovery. He taught other individuals how to become enlightened based off his own experience. By having documentation of Buddha as a natural human, rather than Supreme Being, there is no uncertainty that Buddha is not classified as a God whatsoever. Instead, he serves as a symbol of Buddhism and its origin. Buddha also never stated that other deities existed, revealing that his teachings were merely a way of life to follow. He neglected one of the most important aspects of religion – gods – and solely focused on the path towards living a peaceful life. Rather than revolving around the existence of a supreme being, he disregarded the idea completely, ultimately conveying Buddhism as something philosophical, not religious (Robinson). Buddha was able to guide individuals towards peace from wisdom, not a state of higher being. Rather

than act as a God to those he educated, he served as a mentor and guided them towards enlightenment and a more peaceful life.

Adding on, since Siddhartha Gautama – or Buddha – was a human being, not a supernatural being of higher supremacy than mankind, the classification of Buddhism as a philosophy is further revealed. Because of this, there are no documented supernatural actions that Buddha had done for mankind or creation (Debate.org). There are no creation stories of Buddha forming neither the Earth nor mankind. The lack of Buddha having the ability to create highlights the lack of supremacy, which ultimately leads to the conclusion that Buddha is not a God at all. When comparing the information concerning Buddha not being a god with the definition of a religion, it is obvious that Buddhism is indeed a philosophy rather than religion. That fact that he is not a God classifies Buddhism as a philosophy, as religions have a God – or gods – that hold supernatural powers over mankind. Buddha himself states that anyone can become Buddha. In fact, he stated that any man could become Buddha, revealing that there is no differentiating aspect between the average man and Buddha. Since Buddha himself highlighted the idea that there is no supreme being by stating anyone could become Buddha, he revealed how Buddhism is a philosophy. He also never claimed divinity; he only claimed purity of apprehension of truth, which led to his fate of enlightenment. In addition, Buddha never stated that he had the power to guarantee and bring an individual towards enlightenment (Figen). He was solely a teacher, instructing individuals on how they should act. However, no matter how the individual acted, Buddha did not have the power to determine their fate.

In terms of ancient texts during the beginnings of Buddhism, no text states that prayer is a necessary component of Buddhism. No text also states that Buddha is a God or has higher powers than that of the average man. Although an individual's idea of Buddhism may shift and

cause them to believe Buddha is a God, the texts that Buddhism was initially founded off of fail to support this idea. Modern misinterpretations and ideas must be disregarded in order to accurately illustrate how Buddhism is a philosophy. The Dhamma, or the sacred texts, contain wise teachings, none of which are derogatory to the faiths of other creeds. Because of this, Buddhism falls under the classification of being a philosophy. Additionally, The Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path both disregard any idea of Buddha being a God, or a deity greater than man. Both of these – the base of Buddha’s teachings – solely focus on moral conduct and action, conveying how Buddha intended Buddhism to revolve around how an individual lives their life, rather than any religious aspect, such as faith, prayer, or the acknowledgement of a supernatural deity of higher supremacy (Oxtoby, Amore, Hussain, Segal). In fact, when comparing the context of the Eightfold Path to the definition of philosophy, it is clear that Buddhism is a philosophy, as the Eightfold Path solely instructs individuals on how to live their lives in order to end suffering and reach enlightenment. Just like the definition, Buddhism is a set of ideas of how to live. The focus of Buddhism on an individual’s desires and actions highlights the sole focus of personal cleansing until reaching enlightenment, ultimately classifying Buddhism as a philosophy.

Furthermore, the way Buddha referenced Buddhism was the complete opposite of how Buddhism is sometimes thought of being like today. Instead of referencing Buddhism as something religious, Buddha himself revealed that Buddhism is a philosophy through the word choice he utilized when discussing his teachings. The origin of the term “religion” had not been founded until after Buddhism’s establishment. Buddha himself utilized the word “Sasana,” which translates to “teaching” as well as “the teaching of the Buddha. (Wisdom Library)” Since Buddha himself utilized this word, Buddhism can be understood as a philosophy. Buddha

himself understood Buddhism as a lifestyle that was needed to be taught to others. Buddhism is a way of life that is intended to be taught to others in order to lead them through the pathway towards peace and an enlightened state of being. He focused on the aspects of living a moral life that an individual can learn and teach to other, rather than any religious aspect. Instead of referring to Buddhism as revolving around something more divine and supreme, he merely referred to it as something he taught to others. He never mentions himself, his journey, or his teachings as being divine, revealing Buddhism solely as a way of life – or a philosophy to be exact.

Although modern ideas many have shifted over time, the origins of Buddhism reveal the true meaning and intentions of the founding of Buddhism. When compared to the definition of religion and philosophy, it is understood that Buddhism is a philosophy. The aspects of Buddhism all fall under the definition of philosophy, but not the definition of religion. Because there is no faith, necessary prayer, or real supreme and supernatural being, Buddhism cannot be classified as a religion. However, because there is a sole focus on reaching enlightenment through living a moral life, Buddhism fits the definition of philosophy and is thus classified as a philosophy. The lack of a God, lack of faith, and lack of creation along with the sole focus of how one lives their life highlights the philosophical founding of Buddhism, ultimately conveying how Buddhism is in fact a philosophy, rather than the modern mistake of classifying Buddhism as a religion.

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