

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Aspects of Buddhism
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of the present experience. It isn't more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is, without either clinging to it or rejecting it.

~ *Sylvia Boorstein*

The only reason we don't open our hearts and minds to other people is that they trigger confusion in us that we don't feel brave enough or sane enough to deal with. To the degree that we look clearly and compassionately at ourselves, we feel confident and fearless about looking into someone else's eyes.

~ *Pema Chodron*

Check-in: *What is on your mind today?*

Focus Reading:

Our modern Western culture seems to only recognize one type of freedom – the freedom to desire. It's as if we almost worship such a concept by enshrining it at the forefront of national constitutions and bills of human rights. The funny part is that anyone can desire something and no amount of laws or enforcement can prevent people from the act of desire!

To take a deeper look, we can say that the underlying creed of most democracies is to protect people's freedom to realize their desires, but the countries that do so consistently produce unhappy citizens. It is remarkable that in such countries people do not feel very free or feel very good about the things they own or have achieved in their life of pursuing desire. So what gives? Maybe we pursue the wrong ideals? Maybe desire or the right to fulfill our desires isn't the approach required. There is another type of freedom we hear very little about and that is freedom from desires, is celebrated in some small circles of people and beliefs. This idea celebrates contentment, it celebrates working with what we are given at any point in life and it celebrates the peace that results in being liberated from desire.

Now no one is saying that the eradication of all desire is easy or is for everyone, but it is worth noting and investigating in our own lives how desire or the pursuit of desire affects us, how it builds us up and lets us down, how it goes hand-in-hand with expectations and often all of it is quite unrealistic. Today may we all take up the courage to investigate our desires and visualize their purpose and outcomes in our lives. We may find that to chase desire is to end up right where we started – wanting more.

Our destiny changes with our thoughts; we shall become what we think and do what we wish to do, when our thoughts shift from what we desire to being free of desire.

~ from *The Daily Buddha*

Focus Questions:

1. How much do you know about Buddhism and what has been the primary source of your information?
2. Based on what you know about Buddhism, do you feel positively or negatively disposed

toward this religion? Why?

3. What are the most appealing aspects of Buddhism?
What, if anything, troubles you about it?
4. Is there anything UU's can learn from the Buddhist faith?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: *Did this session meet your needs for spiritual growth?*

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

The Five Remembrances

(Thich Nhat Hahn's version)

1. I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.
2. I am of the nature to have ill-health. There is no way to escape having ill-health.
3. I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.
4. All that is dear to me and every one I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.
5. My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

You can explore the universe looking for somebody who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, ^[L]_[SEP]and you will not find that person anywhere.

~*Buddha*

For more information:

The Buddha on PBS

The Story of Buddha's Spiritual
Journey Premieres April 7 at 8/7C

youtube.com/pbs

Buddhism At-A-Glance

History, Beliefs and Practices

Buddhism is a religion to about 300 million people around the world. The word comes from 'budhi', 'to awaken'. It has its origins about 2,500 years ago when Siddhartha Gotama, known as the Buddha, was himself awakened (enlightened) at the age of 35. To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or 'way of life'. It is a philosophy because philosophy 'means love of wisdom' and the Buddhist path can be summed up as: (1) to lead a moral life, (2) to be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and (3) to develop wisdom and understanding. Buddhism explains a purpose to life, it explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world, and it provides a code of practice or way of life that leads to true happiness.

Who Was the Buddha? Siddhartha Gotama was born into a royal family in Lumbini, now located in Nepal, in 563 BC. At 29, he realized that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different teachings religions and philosophies of the day, to find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he finally found 'the middle path' and was enlightened. After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism — called the Dhamma, or Truth — until his death at the age of 80.

Was the Buddha a god? He was not, nor did he claim to be. He was a man who taught a path to enlightenment from his own experience.

Do Buddhists Worship Idols? Buddhists sometimes pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favors. A statue of the Buddha with hands rested gently in its lap and a compassionate smile reminds us to strive to develop peace and love within ourselves. Bowing to the statue is an expression of gratitude for the teaching.

What is Karma? Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life. Karma underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions. How can we test the karmic effect of our actions? The answer is summed up by looking at (1) the intention behind the action, (2) effects of the action on oneself, and (3) the effects on others.

Why are so Many Buddhist Countries Poor? One of the Buddhist teachings is that wealth does not guarantee happiness and also wealth is impermanent. The people of every country suffer whether rich or poor, but those who understand Buddhist teachings can find true happiness.

Are There Different Types of Buddhism? There are many different types of Buddhism, because the emphasis changes from country to country due to customs and culture. What does not vary is the essence of the teaching — the Dhamma or truth.

Are Other Religions Wrong? Buddhism is also a belief system which is tolerant of all other beliefs or religions. Buddhism agrees with the moral teachings of other religions but Buddhism goes further by providing a long- term purpose within our existence, through wisdom and true understanding. Real Buddhism is very tolerant and not concerned with labels like 'Christian', 'Moslem', 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist'; that is why there have never been any wars fought in the name of Buddhism. That is why Buddhists do not preach and try to convert, only explain if an explanation is sought.

How do I Become a Buddhist? Buddhist teachings can be understood and tested by anyone. Buddhism teaches that the solutions to our problems are within ourselves not outside. The Buddha asked all his followers not to take his word as true, but rather to test the teachings for themselves. In this way, each person decides for themselves and takes responsibility for their own actions and understanding. This makes Buddhism less of a fixed package of beliefs which is to be accepted in its entirety, and more of a teaching which each person learns and uses in their own way.

Beliefs

A key concept of Buddhism is Nirvana, the most enlightened, and blissful state that one can achieve. Enlightenment, or the realization of the basic truths about life, as summed up in the “Four Noble Truths”:

1. Suffering exists
2. Suffering comes from attachments (desires)
3. There is an end to suffering
4. To end suffering, you must follow the Eightfold Path:
 1. Right view
 2. Right thought
 3. Right speech
 4. Right action
 5. Right livelihood
 6. Right Effort
 7. Right mindfulness
 8. Right contemplation

Common Misconceptions

- Buddhists worship Buddha as Christians worship Jesus
- Overemphasizing reincarnation
- Buddhism Is masochistic
- All Buddhists look at meditation in the same way
- Buddhists hate life