

Sacred Threads

Lesson 6: Life of the Buddha

4.7.2019

Objectives: Introduction to Buddhism and how reformers impact history of religions.

Materials: Flipchart, TV and DVD of PBS documentary *The Buddha*.

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Name some historical figures who had major impact on religion.
 - ▶ Name a historical figure who had a major impact on Unitarian Universalism.
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: “What would you take?” (5 minutes max)

Divide youth into groups of 3 or 4. Taking turns, each youth respond to the following scenario: “You have been exiled to a deserted island for a year. In addition to survival essentials, you may take one piece of music, one book, and one luxury item you can carry with you. What would you take and why?” Everyone takes a moment to think before sharing their choices with others in the group.

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: “We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from Buddhist teaching)

“Attachment is the clenched fist, grasping and refusing to let go. Detachment is the palm out, pushing everything away. Non-attachment is the open hand, ready to receive and let go of whatever this moment offers and takes away.”

4. Reform Movements (10 minutes)

Teacher introduces: While religions represent long-standing traditions with large-scale followings, there have always been reform movements led by spiritual teachers whose discontent or differing understanding provoked new search. For example, what religion or religious movement is associated with each of the following individuals:

- Mahavira Jina? (*Jainism*)
- Guru Nanak? (*Sikhism*)
- Jesus? (*Christianity*)
- Moses? (*Judaism*)
- Mohammed? (*Islam*)
- Martin Luther? (*Protestant Reformation*)
- Joseph Smith? (*Mormon Church*)
- George Fox? (*Quakers*)
- Mother Theresa? (*Missionaries of Charity of Roman Catholic Church*)
- Frances Dávid (16th century founder of *Unitarian Church of Transylvania*)

Questions to consider:

- More often than not, reformers seek to revitalize and reshape their religion, not to create a new one. So why does a new religion come about?

Hint: Think about different ways that people express discontent or disagreement: reforms, rebellions, schisms, or separatist movements.

- Can you think of reform movements – religious or political – in terms of: constructive or destructive, short-term or long-term, particular points of disagreement or general disagreement?

Teacher summarizes: Buddhism, while remaining consistent with the basic Hindu philosophy, also moved away from traditional Hinduism. Siddhārtha Gautama – or Shakyamuni (sage of the Shakya clan) – disagreed with aspects of Hinduism and various schools of spirituality of his time. For example:

- The Buddha did not emphasize the importance of gods/deities or priests as in Hinduism, but firmly placed responsibility for awakening on ordinary human beings.
- The Buddha did not accept Hindu belief in the existence of a true Self/Soul (Atman) that sought to achieve unity with the Ultimate Creator (Brahman). The Buddha concluded that such essence, or core self, could not be found. All that could be found was the play of impermanence from one momentary “self” to another momentary “self.”
- Different from Hinduism, the Buddha refrained from talking too much about cosmology (the origins, meaning, and ultimate purpose of the universe and our existence). He was primarily interested in the human experience of suffering or dis-ease, and how to liberate ourselves from it.
- The Buddha offered all people – not just the privileged in the Hindu caste system – hope for awakening; and not only after thousands of lifetimes but in one lifetime.

****Watch for this theme of following a different path in the video segment!***

5. Video: PBS “The Buddha” (25 minutes)

The following segments largely get at Siddhartha’s story up to his awakening experience. Please use laptop/remote to keep to time counters.

- Play chapter “Siddhartha” at **10:00 – 20:38 minutes** (Leaving palace to begin seeking)
- **Teacher summarizes next segment of story:** Siddhartha seeks a path beyond the Hindu Vedic rituals of his time because they don’t work for him. He experiments with the path of pleasure, only to find that doesn’t satisfy his search for an answer to the question of existence. He then trains with the ascetics of his time.
- Play **38:00 – 44:40 minutes** (Practicing with asceticism)
- Play **49:00 – 57:30 minutes** (Siddhartha determines to resolve problem of suffering)

6. Questions for Discussion (10 minutes)

- What elements of universal human existence are inevitable or fundamental for you? (Birth, death, aging, change, suffering, pursuit of knowledge, etc.)
- According to the story, Siddhartha grows up in the “shimmering bubble” of palace life, shielded from ever having to see the sufferings of the world. What do you think the four encounters – with the old man, sick man, corpse, and spiritual seeker/monk – are trying to say about the origin, purpose, or main concern of Buddhism?
- How might we also shield ourselves in our own version of a bubble? What do we do with the elderly, the sick, the dead, and the religious in our world today?
- Siddhartha seeks a different path from: (1) what his father planned for him, (2) the Hindu Vedic rituals of his time, (3) those who pursue pleasures, (4) those who pursue asceticism, and (5) countless schools of spirituality of his time. None of these answer his fundamental question of life’s impermanence and its related pain. So what is Siddhartha’s unique realization? (Answer: *Fully embracing life’s impermanence and change, and realizing that impermanence is just another way of describing the interconnectedness of all things: change is how all of life flows in and out of one form to the next. So then what is it that dies or is born?!*)

7. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: “May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

8. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets