

**The Samaritan Institute  
at  
The Sunshine Cathedral**

**\*Buddha, Lao Tzu, & Jesus  
Walk Into a Bar: Traditions  
in Dialogue**

**A Six Week Course**

**\*Course curriculum designed and prepared by  
The Reverend Dr. Durrell Watkins.**

*"Here at the Sunshine Cathedral, we are  
seekers and students of Truth, empowered by  
Spirit, sharing the Light with the World"*

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# Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Jesus Walk Into a Bar: Traditions in Dialogue

## LESSON 1

*What do the teachings of Sidhartha (the Buddha), Lao Tzu (the Wise One), and Jesus (the Christ) have in common? What message is shared by these different traditions? What universal Truth keeps showing up in various scriptures and in the teachings of the world's saints and sages? Join us as we compare and contrast some of the core teachings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity and learn how being in dialogue with other religions can lead to a deeper experience of our own.*

Introductions: Name, interest in the class, previous exposure to interreligious dialogue, etc.

Let's compare some sayings attributed to the key figures of Christianity & Buddhism:

Jesus the Anointed (Christ)	Sidhartha the Awake (Buddha)
<i>Do unto others as you would have them do to you. (Sermon on the Mount)</i>	<i>Consider others as yourself.</i>
<i>If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. (Luke 6.29)</i>	<i>If anyone should give you a blow with a hand, a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon any desires and utter no evil words.</i>
<i>Love your enemies...(Luke 6.27)</i>	<i>Hatreds do not ever cease in this world by hating, but by love...</i>
<i>Whatever you did for the least of these you did for me. (Matthew 25.40)</i>	<i>Whoever would tend me should tend the sick.</i>
<i>This is my commandment: Love one another as I have loved you. (John 15)</i>	<i>Let your thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world.</i>
<i>You know the commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't defraud, honor your parents. (Mark 10.19)</i>	<i>Abstain from killing and from taking what is not given. Abstain from unchastity and from speaking falsely.</i>
<i>Let anyone among you who is without error be the first to throw a stone. (John 8.7)</i>	<i>Do not look at the faults of others, or what others have or have not done; observe what you yourself have done and have not done.</i>

And what of sayings from the Tao te Ching (attributed to Lao Tzu, the Wise One) vs. sayings attributed to Jesus?

<i>Not everyone who says to me, "Lord! Lord!" will enter into the heavenly realm; but only those who do the divine will. (Matthew 7)</i>	<i>The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.</i>
<i>Before Abraham was, I AM. (John 8.58)...borrowing from the I AM discourse in Exodus</i>	<i>The unnamable is the eternally real.</i>
<i>The woman at the well discourse (living water, John 4)</i>	<i>The Tao is like a well: used but never used up. It is like the eternal void: filled with infinite possibilities.</i>
<i>Come unto me <b>all</b> who labor and who have heavy burdens and I will refresh you. (Matthew 11.28)</i>	<i>The Tao doesn't take sides...the Master doesn't take sides; she welcomes both saints and sinners.</i>
<i>In the beginning was the Logos... (John 1)</i>	<i>The Tao was never born.</i>
<i>Resurrection narratives in the four gospels, and Paul's experience of Jesus beyond the grave.</i>	<i>The Tao can never die.</i>
<i>The last shall be first and the first shall be last. (Matthew 20.16)</i>	<i>The Master stays behind, that is why she is ahead.</i>
<i>You are the light of the world! (Matthew 5.14)</i>	<i>Can you cleanse your inner vision until you see nothing but the light?</i>

There is so much more...but let's save some fun for later!

Let's consider comparative mythologies:

**Lao Tzu's Birth**

Legends vary, but scholars tend to place his birth between 600 BCE and 300 BCE (either a little before or a little after Buddha's birth). The "old master" (or wise one, which is what Lao Tzu means) is said to have been conceived when a shooting star impregnated his mother (OUCH)...his mother carried him for 80 years before he was born, so he was born already old and very wise.

**Buddha's Birth** (about 500 years before Jesus')

Buddha is said to have been born from his mother's side! He could walk as soon as he was born, and everywhere he placed his foot a lotus would bloom. A choir of heavenly beings sang when he was born (much like the angel choir in Luke at Jesus' birth).

**Virgin Birth**

Jesus' mother conceives miraculously (a virginal conception according to Matthew and Luke; Mark, John, and Paul seem to know nothing of this biological oddity, and Matthew, who mentions it first, seems to be referring to a mistranslation of a passage in Isaiah that he is using to make a point about

Jesus' significance. Also, in antiquity, heroes are often thought to have been supernaturally conceived or favored...even in the bible, there are many conceptions that only take place with divine assistance...these stories predate by millennia the discovery of the egg cell! That is, before anyone really understood where babies come from).

Jesus was born c. 4 BCE.

Do you see similarities in the birth narratives? Do you take the first two literally? If not, then why do you suppose we would take the third one (the youngest of the three stories) literally? They could all be true in some sense, but when viewed without an attachment to the story, all three seem unlikely to be factual. Why can we see that in someone else's sacred story more easily than we can in our own?

### **One final round of comparisons for this session:**

Though the Trinity wasn't a clear Christian doctrine until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, it did become part of "orthodox" Christian dogma. Did you know there are Trinitarian images in Buddhism & Taoism? Buddhism has the three jewels (The Buddha, the Dharma, & the Sangha...the wayshower, the truth, and the shared life!) and Taoism has three core teachings (Patience, Simplicity, & Compassion).

Words attributed to Jesus: I am the **way**, the truth, and the life; no one comes to God except through me. (John 14)

When was John written? Why is John's gospel the only one to attribute these words to Jesus? What might the author be trying to say? The early Jesus followers were called "The **Way**" or "Followers of the **Way**".

The Tao is usually translated as "The **Way**".

And the 4 Noble Truths are key to Buddhism (Life is full of dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction is a result of clinging/craving, there is a "cure" for dissatisfaction", and the cure is what the practice (or path or **WAY**) is all about.

And Buddhism has the 8-fold Path (or **Way**): Right view, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration.

Buddhism also has commandments (cardinal precepts): No killing, no stealing, no lying, no intoxication, and no sexual abuse.

Are you beginning to see how similar religious traditions really are? Why do you think that is? How might that be Good News?

## **Suggested Reading:**

**A Taste of Water: Christianity Through Taoist-Buddhist Eyes** (Chwen Juan A. Lee & Thomas G. Hand, self-published 1990)

**Getting Oriented: What Every Christian Should Know about Eastern Religions, but Probably Doesn't** (Paul Alan Laughlin, Polebridge Press 2005)

**Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings** (Marcus Borg, Ulysses Press 1997)

**Living Buddha, Living Christ** (Thich Nhat Hanh, Riverhead Books 1995)

**Oneness: Great Principles Shared by All Religions** (Jeffrey Moses, Ballantine Books 1989, 2002)

**Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists, vol. 1** (Winston Leyland, ed., Gay Sunshine Press 1998)

**Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology** (Chung Hyun Kyung, Orbis Books 1990)

**Tao te Ching: A New English Version** (Stephen Mitchell, Perennial 1988)

**Tao: The Watercourse Way** (Alan Watts, Pantheon Books 1975)

**The Buddha in Your Mirror: Practical Buddhism and the Search for Self** (Woody Hochswender, Greg Martin, & Ted Morino, Middleway Press 2001)

**The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism** (Gary Gach, Alpha 2002)

**The Complete Idiot's Guide to Taoism** (Brandon Toropv & Chad Hansen, Alpha 2002)

**The Tao of Jesus: A Book of Days for the Natural Year** (John Beverley Butcher, HarperSanFrancisco 1994)

**The Tao of Pooh** (Benjamin Hoff, Penguin 1982)

**What Would Buddha Do?: 101 Answers to Life's Daily Dilemmas** (Franz Metcalf, Seastone 1999)

**Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian** (Paul F. Knitter, One World/Oxford 2009)

# Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Jesus Walk Into a Bar: Traditions in Dialogue

## LESSON 2

### What is a mantra?

"[In] Hinduism [and] Buddhism, any sacred word or syllable used as an object of concentration and embodying some aspect of spiritual power." Collins English Dictionary

"A word or [phrase]...chanted or sung as an incantation or prayer." Random House Dictionary

*What are some famous mantras?*

Om (or Aum)...as a sound and symbol represents ultimate reality (used mostly in Hindu and Hindu influenced traditions)

Om Mani Padme Hum...a Buddhist mantra for peace and wisdom associated with the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The literal meaning has been translated many ways; the Dalai Lama understands it to mean: "Thus the six syllables, om mani padme hum, mean that in dependence on the practice of a path which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha..."

Nam Myoho Renge Kyo...chanted as the central practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Nam is from the Sanskrit and refers to taking refuge. Myoho Renge Kyo is a Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese title of the Lotus Sutra (which is the principle text of Nichiren Buddhism). There have been many ways of interpreting the mantra, but one of the simplest understandings is "I take refuge in the Lotus Sutra." Another more esoteric understanding is, "I devote myself to the mysteries of the universe." And there are even more complex understandings.

Gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha...is a simple and melodic mantra that is praised in the Heart Sutra (translated from Sanskrit as "The Heart of Perfect Transcendent Wisdom" or more simply "The Essence of Wisdom") which then ends with the mantra itself. The mantra has been translated as "Run, run, run fast, run all the way to enlightenment." Another translation attempt states it this way: "Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all hail!"

Many people suggest that the point of a mantra goes far beyond what the words technically mean (one Zen master said that one could achieve enlightenment by chanting "coca-cola, coca-cola, coca-cola" as a mantra). They insist beyond the words (which are usually positive and even poetic), the real purpose of a mantra is to get the practitioner beyond his or her discursive thinking and into a place of being totally present in the current moment.

Now, of course the mantras above are from Eastern traditions. But are there Christian mantras?

Have you ever attended a **Pentecostal** service? Did you ever notice during ecstatic moments of worship, someone mumbling (or shouting), “Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” over and over. Now, “hallelujah” is a Hebrew word (Alleluia is its Latin equivalent) which means “Praise the Lord.” But when people are saying “hallelujah” repeatedly, they probably aren’t thinking about what it literally means. In fact, they may not be thinking about much of anything, but simply experiencing the joy or the peace of being totally present in the moment. Isn’t that the method and one of the purposes of a mantra?

Also in Pentecostal and **charismatic** churches, glossalalia is common. Glossalalia isn’t a prescribed mantra, but it is a repetition of unintelligible sounds. One isn’t saying any words that one has learned, and yet one is saying something on and on and on. The effect seems to be very similar to that of mantra meditation.

Have you ever been to an **evangelical** church where people in the congregation routinely shout out, “Amen”? Sometimes, the shouts of Amen become rhythmic, automatic, and certainly repetitious. There is an almost mantra quality to the experience.

Have you been to churches that feature **gospel** music, where the congregation will sing “Amen” over and over, or the “Eightfold Alleluia” over and over?

It is believed that the “**Desert Fathers**” (monks, nuns, and hermits in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE) practiced mantra meditation, simply saying or chanting a single word of scripture over and over. Words used for their mantras included “maranatha” and “Abba”.

The revival of the practice of **Centering Prayer** includes the use of a word or phrase in mantra like fashion. In Centering Prayer, one sits comfortably and silently and simply focuses on a word, phrase or image. This takes place until one is simply “being”, “practicing the divine presence.” If random thoughts start to pop up, the practitioner starts focusing on the word or phrase again and then sinks back into the deep silence. Words and phrases that are commonly used are “Jesus”, “Heaven”, “unity”, and “peace”. A bible verse can also be used (I have often used Psalm 63.1, “O God, you are my God, eagerly I seek you”). At the end of the session, the practitioner slowly recites the Lord’s Prayer.

In the **Taizé** Community, prayer services are sung, and the prayers that are sung are usually bible verses. They sing them in different languages (German, Spanish, Latin, French, English, etc.), just a line or two, over and over and over. 30 to 45 minutes of this (along with some candle lighting and intentional silence) proves to be a very powerful and meditative experience. The scriptural prayers that are sung are used exactly like mantras:

{*Stay with me, remain here with me, watch and pray – watch and pray.* (from Matt. 26)}

{Laudate dominum, laudate dominum. Omnes! Gentes! Alleluia! (beginning of Psalm 117)}

Are you familiar with “The Jesus Prayer”? It is very popular in **Eastern Christianity**. The prayer is very simple: “Lord Jesus Christ...have mercy on me.” It is said over and over and over, ushering one into a state of mindfulness.

In the **Roman Catholic** tradition, the Rosary is a very important prayer aid. When one prays the Rosary, one says the “Hail Mary” ten times in a row. After some other prayers, the practitioner says the Hail Mary ten more times, and so on. It can become monotonous, but it can also become automatic, getting one beyond the words and beyond discursive thinking entirely, into a meditative state.

It would seem that mantra meditation and prayer is shared by both East and West, though they don't always call it the same name.

### **The Way**

Early Jesus Movements were called Followers of the Way or simply **The Way**. Buddhism is often called **The Middle Way** or the Path of the Middle Way. “Tao” is most often translated as “**The Way**.”

### **The Logos or the Way?**

John 1.1 begins, “In the beginning was the WORD (Gr. Logos, “Reason”). In some Far Eastern translations of that text, it reads, “In the beginning was the TAO.”

### **Unity**

In John 17, this prayer is attributed to Jesus, “My prayer is...that all of them may be one, *Abba*, just as you are in me and I am in you.”

This concept of unity, of one being within or part of another sounds very strange to our western, linear, literalistic minds. However, “Christ in you the hope of glory” and “If you have seen me you have seen the Eternal” and “Before Abraham was, I Am” and “In Christ there is neither Jewish nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free for all are ONE in Christ” are part of our scriptural heritage.

The language seems flowery and poetic, and perhaps it is, but we now also know that consciousness is non-local, that all things are made up of energy, and that energy can't be destroyed (it simply changes form). We know there are particles from the Big Bang in this room and there are universes beyond our universe and there may be multiple realities happening at the same time right here (wherever/whatever “here” is). The fields of Transpersonal Psychology, Quantum Physics, and Process Philosophy have dramatically altered the Newtonian “facts” we once took for granted.

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh asks us if we can see a cloud in a sheet of paper. At first, it may seem a ridiculous question. But the paper came from a tree. The tree grew in earth that was hydrated with rain (from the same clouds that watered other parts of the earth). The logger that cut down the tree ate food from a farm that was able to flourish because of the same rain. The factory that made the paper employed people who paid taxes and bought goods and services that contributed to a global economy in which we participate; those people benefitted from the same rain. By the time a piece of paper gets to us, water and earth and



food and many people have all contributed to its existence, and we are part of that chain, and so is a rain cloud that contributed to the entire process (the example is as poetic as meteorological, but you take the point). We are nourished by the same rain, we depend on the same earth, we share in the same economy, we may know someone who knows someone who helped cut down the tree, or served breakfast to the logger, or worked at the paper mill. We are all united in ways that are obvious but which we don't usually think about. Maybe, in lots of very real and practical ways, we are part of this piece of paper and it is part of us. Can you see the rain cloud now?

It was a western scientist, Albert Einstein, who told us, "A falling leaf affects the farthest star." And systems theorists tell us that a butterfly flapping its wings in Tallahassee affects the weather in Tokyo (and vice versa). Are you one with this paper? With one another? With the earth? With Jesus? With Buddha? With Lao Tzu? With all that is and ever has been? It is increasingly not such a farfetched concept! Buddhism teaches dependent co-origination of all things, which simply means that all entities in the universe/multiverse "are dynamically related and interconnected to one another in such an intimate way that everything is both the cause and the effect of everything else" (Laughlin). Inter-being is what *is*. I Am What I Am/I Will Be What I Will Be (sound familiar?). Before Abraham was, I Am. My prayer is that they may all be ONE. When carefully examined, the differences between traditions may be not as dramatic as we first assumed.

### **Thou Shalt Have No Graven Images**

In Hinduism, Brahman is the name for ultimate reality. It is inconceivable and is the source of all other beings, divine, human, and otherwise. In Buddhism, ultimate reality is called "Shunyata" which means Emptiness, or Nothingness. Sometimes it is called the Void. And yet, this Nothing (No Thing) is rich, full, and vibrant. It is a very "full" Emptiness!

{Isn't our "God" NO THING, and being OMNIPRESENT, God is NO WHERE (in particular, but is everywhere equally present) which is how God can be NOW HERE? Even one of our Ten Commandments forbids using "things" (idols, images) for God, as things are limited and God, by definition, isn't. God is No Thing and is No Where in particular and is not to be understood as any thing/image. Sounds like our God, though personified in our tradition, is very similar to infinite Emptiness/Potentiality.}

Think of the hollowness of a glass or a bell or a flute...it is "nothing" and yet it is essential to the thing. Without the emptiness, the bell doesn't ring, the glass can't be filled with refreshing liquid, the flute can't produce music. A hole in a shirt is nothing, unless we need it for buttoning, and then it becomes a very useful something.

What are we sitting in right now? A room, right? What is this room? Between the walls and the ceiling and the floor, what is there? Space! Emptiness. Nothing. And yet it is the Space that we actually think of when we think of "room." Isn't that something (or, more accurately, NOTHING)? See, Emptiness isn't negative or nihilistic, it is Life!

The Nothingness/Emptiness is really pure potentiality. The Void/Emptiness/Nothingness/Shunyata seems to be that “in which we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17.28...a phrase Luke borrows from the Greek poet Epimenides and attributes to Paul). Hindus personalize It as the non-personal Brahman. Jewish/Muslim/Christian believers personalize It as God/Abba/Adonai/Elohim/Allah, etc. Buddhists, simply choose not to personalize/personify It. Reality is inter-dependent Isness (Christian theologian Paul Tillich came close to this same concept when he defined God/ultimate reality as “the ground of being”).

The Emptiness of Buddhism is a full emptiness that allows for infinite possibilities...the process of life can take us in infinite directions and lead us to an infinite number of experiences. What is the Christian equivalent of infinite potentiality that is beyond description or limits of any kind? We may name It something else, and personify It, and relate to It in a personal way, but the need It fulfills is not so different from the need that Shunyata fills for the Buddhist.

Similarly, Taoism sees nothingness and being as two sides of the same reality. Nothingness flows into being; Being flows into nothingness. It is a continual, never ending cycle (Yin & Yang). Lao Tzu taught that the underlying substance of the universe is nothingness (Nothingness as Substantial!).

## Taoist Wisdom Compared to Christianity

<p><i>Exhibit weakness and foolishness; don't try to make people think you are strong or smart. (Lao Tzu)</i></p>	<p><i>My thoughts are higher than your thoughts (Isaiah 55.9, the Judeo-Christian bible).</i>  <i>God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise (St. Paul to the Corinthians).</i>  <i>If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other one to the attacker as well (Jesus).</i></p>
<p><i>What is stronger? Teeth or tongue? Teeth fall out while the tongue remains!</i>  <i>What is stronger? A tree or a blade of grass? Storms will knock over a tree while the tiny grass just sways back and forth.</i>  <i>Wind has no form, but it can carry away even large things that do have form.</i>  <i>Water is pliant, and yet over time it can erode mountains and carve out canyons.</i>  <i>What seems to be weak may actually be what is truly strong.</i></p>	<p><i>You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbor but hate your enemy.' I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you. After all, the sun doesn't play favorites – it rises and sets on good people and bad just as the rain falls on the just and the unjust. So, be spiritually mature. (Jesus, Sermon on the Mount)</i>  <i>Pilate and the religious authorities were accusing Jesus, but he made no answer. (Matthew 27)</i>  <i>They crucified him...then Jesus prayed, "God forgive them; they don't know what they've done." (Luke 23)</i></p>
<p><i>From Nothing came heaven and earth. From heaven and earth came myriad things, finally giving rise to the world as we know it. (Lao Tzu)</i></p>	<p><i>Every good and perfect thing comes to us from above, from the Light of all light. (James 1.17)</i></p>
<p><i>Modesty wins adoration. By doing things for others you can accomplish your own ideals. (Lao Tzu)</i></p>	<p><i>The last will be first and the first will be last. (Jesus)</i></p>

What Taoist or Buddhist concept that you encountered tonight has illumined a Christian teaching for you, or at least raised some interesting questions or possibilities for you?

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## LESSON 3

### Divine Nature

“In the beginning, God created...” Genesis 1.1

From *what* does God create? If God is the All-in-all, and the Substance of all that is, then perhaps God creates from God’s own being; that would mean that all stuff is God-stuff (though impermanent, everything still comes from and returns to the one Source).

Colossians 1.27

“...Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

What does “Christ-ian” mean?

Isn’t a Christian another Christ?

Are you familiar with the Quaker belief in the “Inward Light” or “That of God” in all people?

What does the Eucharist symbolize? How is sharing the Eucharist sharing in the life of the Cosmos? Doesn’t sharing the one loaf and the common cup imply unity? Don’t the grape and grain of the symbolic feast come from the one earth?

What do Christians who say they are “spirit-filled” mean? Don’t they mean that something of God is actually part of them?

What are evangelicals getting at when they invite Jesus into their lives or hearts? If Jesus symbolizes a relationship to/with God, then having Jesus “within” suggests a unity with divinity, does it not?

What do New Thought Christians mean by “Christ Consciousness”?

Compare the above understandings with this statement:

“If you want to know [the Tao], look inside your heart.” Tao te Ching

Sikh philosopher Teg Bahadur said, “Why do you go to the forest in search of the Divine? God lives in all, and abides with you too. As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror, so the Divine dwells inside everything; seek therefore in your own heart.”

What is the Buddha Nature? According to many schools of thought in Buddhism, who has access to the Buddha Nature? Who can become a Buddha? Who can hope to attain Buddhahood? Buddhahood is the goal and a possibility for all devotees!

“Jesus healed whatever he touched. With the holy Spirit in him, his power as a healer transformed many people. All schools of Christianity agree on this. I...[feel] that all of us also have the seed of the holy Spirit in us, the capacity of healing, transforming, and loving. When we touch that seed, we are able to touch God...” Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Praying for Others**

Matthew 5.44 (Jesus), “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

### **Metta (Loving-kindness) Meditation**

Imagine the following individuals, and then imagine sending them the energy of loving-kindness and compassion:

1. Self
2. Loved Ones
3. People in Need
4. Difficult people
5. Enemies

*May I (you) be filled with loving-kindness. May I (you) be well. May I (you) be peaceful and at ease. May I (you) be well.*

"If you love someone but rarely make yourself available to him or her, that is not true love. When your beloved is suffering, you need to recognize her suffering, anxiety, & worries, & just by doing that, you already offer some relief." Thich Nhat Hanh

“All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” Julian of Norwich (can be used as a mantra)

### **Praying for Peace**

“May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the holy Spirit be with you all.” St. Paul (2 Corinthians)

“May God bless us and keep us; may God’s face shine upon us and be gracious to us. May God look upon us kindly and grant us peace.” Priestly blessing (Numbers 6)

“Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give to you...” Jesus (John 14.27)

“Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I smile.

Dwelling in the present moment,

I know this is a wonderful moment.” Thich Nhat Hanh

## Universal Truth

"No single tradition monopolizes the truth." Thich Nhat Hanh

"Every religion is true one way or another. It is true when understood metaphorically. But when it gets stuck in its own metaphors, interpreting them as facts, then you are in trouble." Joseph Campbell

"Truth can be likened to the bright moon in the sky. Words, in this case, can be likened to a finger. The finger can point to the moon's location. However, the finger is not the moon. To look at the moon, it is necessary to gaze beyond the finger, right?" Zen saying describing that truth isn't limited to the doctrines of any particular sect or religion.

"...the letter of the law kills, but the spirit of the law gives life." 2 Corinthians 3.6 (St. Paul)

"...through friendships with Christian men and women who truly embody the spirit of understanding and compassion of Jesus...I have been able to touch the depths of Christianity. The moment I met Martin Luther King, Jr., I knew I was in the presence of a holy person. Not just his good work but his very being was a source of great inspiration for me. And others, less well known, have made me feel that Lord Jesus is still here with us...Through men and women like these, I feel I have been able to touch Jesus Christ and his tradition." Thich Nhat Hanh

"...the garden of Buddhism is now filled with many beautiful flowers, each school representing an attempt to keep the Buddha's teachings alive under new circumstances. Living organisms need to change and grow." Thich Nhat Hanh on the presence of many denominations even within his own tradition

"We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other's tradition to transform us." Thich Nhat Hanh on being open to other spiritual traditions even while practicing one's own

"Whoever is not against us is for us." Jesus (Mark 9.40)

"Breathing in, breathing out,  
breathing in, breathing out.  
I am blooming like a flower.  
I am fresh as the dew,  
I am solid as a mountain,  
I am firm as the earth,  
I am free, I am free, I am free." Thich Nhat Hanh

"I Am that I am." Exodus 3.14

# Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Jesus Walk Into a Bar: Traditions in Dialogue

## LESSON 4

“The essence of Buddha is Buddha nature. All of us have this awakened nature. In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha puts it like this, ‘All living beings have the capacity to become Buddha. The essential nature of living beings is Buddha nature.’”  
Thich Nhat Hanh

“That which is within you is greater than that which is in the world.” 1 John 4.4

“...the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Romans 5.5

“...Christ in you the hope of glory.” Colossians 1.27

“Do you not know that you are gods, every one of you, and children of the Most High.” 82<sup>nd</sup> Psalm

“Be still and know that I Am God.” 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm

One of God’s names is “I Am”. Exodus 3.14

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### **Prayer:**

*In response to an invitation to a prayer vigil for justice, someone posted this on Facebook:* Although I totally believe that prayer doesn't accomplish anything, thanks for making people aware. Now leave the chapel and go to the local school board(s) and demand equality for our youth, and respect for their sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

*My reply:* in the Buddhist tradition prayer is mindfulness, and mindfulness leads to engagement. As progressive spiritual practitioners, we aren't asking anyone outside ourselves to fix things; we are accessing the light within us to motivate US to fix things.

### **Doctrine:**

In Buddhism, there are no teachings (even those of Buddha himself) that are meant to be accepted uncritically. All things are meant to be verified in one's own experience. Nothing is beyond question in Buddhism. Buddha himself said, “Do not take anything on trust merely because it has passed down through tradition, or because your teachers say it, or because your elders have taught you, or because it's written in some famous scripture. When you have seen it and experienced it for yourself to be right and true, then you can accept it.”

“Test everything. Retain what is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5.21

Non-Buddhists are welcome to adopt Buddhist practices.

Luke 9.49-50, "John said, 'Teacher we saw someone curing mental illness in your name and we tried to stop him because he isn't one of us.' And Jesus answered, 'Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you.'"

A Buddhist concept is that life is a process of becoming what we are but never knew we were.

"All of us gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory..." 2 Corinthians 3.18

What we express is what matters:

"There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." (Jesus, Mark 7)

"Stealing, deceiving, adultery; this is defilement, not the eating of meat." (Buddha)

"Let the one without error cast the first stone." (Jesus, John 8)

"Do not look at the faults of others, or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done and not done." (Buddha)

.....

### **The Maha Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra**

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva  
when practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita  
perceives that all five skandhas are empty  
and is saved from all suffering and distress.

Shariputra,  
form does not differ from emptiness,  
emptiness does not differ from form.  
That which is form is emptiness,  
that which is emptiness form.  
The same is true of feelings,  
perceptions, impulses, consciousness.

Shariputra,  
all dharmas are marked with emptiness;  
they do not appear or disappear,  
are not tainted or pure,  
do not increase or decrease.

Therefore, in emptiness no form, no feelings,  
perceptions, impulses, consciousness.  
No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind;  
no color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch,



no object of mind;  
no realm of eyes  
and so forth until no realm of mind consciousness.

No ignorance and also no extinction of it,  
and so forth until no old age and death  
and also no extinction of them.

No suffering, no origination,  
no stopping, no path, no cognition,  
also no attainment with nothing to attain.

The Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita  
and the mind is no hindrance;  
without any hindrance no fears exist.

Far apart from every perverted view one dwells in Nirvana.  
In the three worlds all Buddhas depend on Prajna Paramita  
and attain Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi.

Therefore know that Prajna Paramita  
is the great transcendent mantra,  
is the great bright mantra,  
is the utmost mantra,  
is the supreme mantra  
which is able to relieve all suffering  
and is true, not false.

So proclaim the Prajna Paramita mantra,  
proclaim the mantra which says:

*gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha  
gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha  
gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha.*

.....

**Avalokitesvara (a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all buddhas)**  
**Shariputra (a disciple of the Buddha)**  
**Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi (enlightenment/peace/wisdom, etc.)**

# Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Jesus Walk Into a Bar: Traditions in Dialogue

## LESSON 5

### Three Jewels

1. Buddha (Awakened One; alt. Christ = Anointed One)
2. Dharma (Truth teachings or Teachings of the Buddha; alt. Gospel)
3. Sangha (Community of Spiritual Practice; alt. Church)

(Christian alternatives to the Jewels could be Christ, the Gospel, and the local Church or the Metaphysical Trinity: Mind, Idea, Expression or the Traditional Trinity: Creator, Christ, and holy Spirit.)

### Four Noble Truths

1. **The Nature of *Dukkha*:** *Suffering exists in life.* This is the noble truth of *dukkha*: *Dukkha* is usually translated as "suffering" in English. Can also mean "discontent".
2. **The Origin of *Dukkha* (*Samudaya*):** *Suffering is caused by attachment to desires.*
3. **The Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Nirodha*):** *To eliminate suffering, eliminate craving.* This is the noble truth of the cessation of *dukkha*. The third Noble Truth reflects on the belief that suffering can be eliminated. It asserts that it can be done, and that it has been done.
4. **The Way Leading to the Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Magga*):** *To eliminate craving follow the Eightfold Path.*

**Stated differently, the Four Noble Truths are:** 1. *There is suffering.* 2. *There is a cause for suffering.* 3. *There is an end to suffering.* 4. *There is a path out of suffering (the 8-fold Path).*

### Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is divided into three basic categories (*a sort of trinity?*) as follows:

**Wisdom** (Sanskrit: [prajñā](#), Pāli: [paññā](#))

1. Right view
2. Right intention

**Ethical conduct** (Sanskrit: [śīla](#), Pāli: [sīla](#))

3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood

**Mental discipline** (Sanskrit and Pāli: [samādhi](#))

6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

### Cardinal Precepts

1. No killing
2. No stealing

3. No lying
4. No intoxication
5. No sexual abuse

### **More on Unity**

“Zen practice is shutting the door on a dualistic view of life...” Charlotte Joko Beck

What are some Christian examples of a view of unity (rather than dualism)?

“When you have done something for the least of these my sisters and brothers you have done it for me.” Jesus

Jesus knew that he was one with all life. If you like Jesus, then treat everyone as if they were Jesus, because at the energetic level, we are all the One even though the One has infinite expressions.

“form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form. That which is form is emptiness, that which is emptiness form.

The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness.” Heart Sutra

“Greater things you will do...” Jesus

“My prayer is that all of them may be one...” Jesus

Can you imagine that the divine spark that we see in Jesus is also in us? If it was in Jesus, it **MUST** be in us. It may be what is really Real about all of us!

“A powerful microscope would reveal that the reality we encounter is not truly separate from us. At a deeper level we are just atoms and atomic particles moving at enormous speed. There is no separation between us and the rug or another person: we are all just one enormous energy field.” Charlotte Joko Beck

The energy of life (Jesus said, “God is spirit...”) expresses in, through, and as all life. The divine life of Jesus is the divine life of Buddha is the divine life of Moses is the divine life of Mother Teresa is the divine life of Mary Baker Eddy is the divine of YOU.

As the Quakers say, “there is that of God in every person.”

“Christ in you the hope of glory!”

So, if the divine Reality is your reality, why are you sometimes angry, sad, scared, ill, exhausted, confused, etc.?

“Each moment, as it is, is complete and full in itself...If you are afraid, just be fear, and right there you are fearless.” Beck

“To look for the Buddha dharma outside of yourself is like putting a devil on top of yourself.” Dogen Zenji

“Place no head above your own.” Master Rinzai  
Beck explains that as meaning, “to look outside of ourselves for true peace and satisfaction is hopeless.”

“When we are willing just to be here, exactly as we are, life is always OK: feeling good is OK, feeling bad is OK; if things go well it’s OK, if things go badly it’s OK. The emotional upsets we experience are problems because we don’t want things to be the way they are...When you’re tired after work, that’s the tired Buddha; when your legs hurt during [meditation when you are on the floor with legs crossed], that’s the hurting Buddha; when you’re disappointed with some aspect of yourself, that’s the disappointed Buddha. That’s it!” C.J. Beck

“I have learned, regardless of my circumstances, to be content.” St. Paul  
(Philippians 4.11)

“Every creature is a word of God.” Meister Eckhart, Christian mystic

“God is at home, it’s we who have gone out for a walk.” Eckhart

“The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.” M.E.

“The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine that they should see God as if God stood there and they here. This is not so. God and I, we are one in knowledge.” M.E.

“Truly, it is in darkness that one finds the light, so when we are in sorrow, then this light is nearest of all to us.” M.E.

“You may call God love, you may call God goodness. But the best name for God is compassion.” M.E.

“There exists only the present instant... a Now which always and without end is itself new. There is no yesterday nor any tomorrow, but only Now, as it was a thousand years ago and as it will be a thousand years hence.” M.E.

{We are NOW HERE or we are NOWHERE}

“Jesus might have said, ‘I became man for you. If you do not become God for me, you wrong me.’” Eckhart

“Let God be God in you.” M.E.

“The seed of God is in us. Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer, it will thrive and grow up to God, whose seed it is; and accordingly its fruits will be God-nature. Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God-seed into God.” M.E.

“The entire world, all good things in life, belong to God, so when you enjoy something, you think of God and enjoy it in [God’s] presence. It is very close to

the Buddhist appreciation of interbeing and interpenetration. When you wake up, you are aware that God created the world. When you see rays of sunlight streaming through your window, you recognize the presence of God. When you stand up and your feet touch the ground, you know the earth belongs to God. When you wash your face, you know that the water is God...everything is linked to the presence of God in every moment.” Thich Nhat Hanh

## **God**

While most Buddhists are non-theistic, some will use “God” when speaking with their theistic counterparts. In such cases, they often use “God” to refer to ultimate reality, the web of existence, the allness of life. This is not dissimilar to Christian systematic theologian Paul Tillich’s definition of God as “the ground of being.”

## **What is karma?**

Karma comes from a Sanskrit word meaning “action.” Basically, it is habit energy.

“In any one moment, there is both cause and effect. Every cause is an effect, and each effect is also a cause. Karma is a worldly truth that anyone can see – the process of things coming together and having a particular repercussion. For example, the moon shines on a lake causing a reflection. Or sunlight hits a magnifying glass creating fire. Events occur, and as a result, a third event takes place. The moon’s reflection doesn’t exist independently but, like magic, arises from a gathering of causes and conditions.

Karma, like gravity, is so basic we often don’t even notice it. But karma is happening everywhere. Whatever we see is a meeting of interdependent causes and conditions...”Sakyong Mipham

“For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Newtonian law of motion

“Whatever one sows one will also reap.” St. Paul (Galatians)

“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.” (Hosea)

“What goes around comes around.” Well known maxim

## **Many Worlds**

The Ten Worlds is a Buddhist concept that some may take literally but more sophisticated practitioners tend to think of as the ceaseless moment to moment movement of our inner lives. The Ten Worlds are (from lowest to highest states):

Hell

Hunger

Animality

Anger

Humanity (tranquility)

Heaven (aka Rapture or temporary happiness)

Learning  
Realization  
Bodhisattva (compassion)  
Buddhahood (enlightenment [letting light in] or absolute happiness/peace)

Most people dwell in one world more than the others, but most of us have at least touched most of these 10 worlds at some point in our emotional/psychological development.

People with habitually short tempers live in the world of Anger. People who over indulge in pleasures (eating too much, drinking too much, being greedy about money or obsessive about sex or gambling or shopping) live in the world of Hunger. People who live lives of routine, stability, habit (morning paper, morning coffee, work, home to watch TV, early to bed, repeat the next day with maybe golf or gardening on Saturday and church on Sunday) without much deviation from the routine are living in the world of Humanity (just content with the same old same old). Some people are always snapping at (demoralizing) their children or the people who work for them, they are living in the world of Animality. People who tend to get their desires fulfilled (they get the good seats at the theatre, they go to all the football games, they see all the movies on opening night, they take a vacation every year, they eat frequently at their favorite restaurants, etc.) are in a state of Heaven (relative happiness). And so it goes..

However most of us slip from one world to the next pretty effortlessly...experiencing hell one day (misery, despair, loneliness), hunger another (wanting more and more), animality that same day (growling at people) but maybe going on a growth quest and learning a lot for a while, which takes us to a place of tranquility or realization, and then our favorite season rolls around and we are doing a lot of the things that make us happy so we are in heaven, except for when our neighbor annoys us and we cross over into anger for a minute, and so on. The worlds are fluid and we slip in and out of them all of the time.

The first six are probably the easiest worlds to inhabit, but we probably want to strive to occupy the other four more often, eventually achieving the state of Buddhahood (sanctification some Christians might call it!).

Are there Christian examples of multiple worlds?:

*Lazarus with Abraham & Sarah while rich man was in "hades" (Luke).*

*Jesus saying, "In Abba's house there are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you."*

*St. Paul claiming to have a friend who was caught up in "the 3<sup>d</sup> heaven".*

While some Christians speak of Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell as "places" other Christians believe Heaven and Hell are states of being and that ultimately no one is denied the experience of bliss (universalism). Heaven and hell as allegories for human experience is compatible with the Ten Worlds philosophy of Buddhism.

# Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Jesus Walk Into a Bar: Traditions in Dialogue

## LESSON 6

### Conclusion

In this course we haven't tried to suggest that one religion is better than another. We haven't said that one religion has all the answers or has even asked all the questions. We haven't suggested that God has preference for one religion over another. We haven't suggested that religion of one sort or another will "save" one from an afterlife prison (or assure one of an afterlife pleasure cruise).

The point of this course is to show that religions come from particular cultures, and yet, the human questions they address are universal. The big questions may not have verifiable answers, and yet there is some benefit in wrestling with them.

By getting past the different symbols, myths, and vocabularies to see that we are all struggling with the same questions, trying to find more hope and peace and joy in life, trying to face difficulty with more strength and courage, and trying to be the best "us" we can be, we see that the various philosophical and religious traditions of the world are serving a purpose. We don't have to be afraid of different religions; in fact, the more we understand other religions, the more our own may prove to be relevant in our lives.

What are some insights you have gained during this course about:  
Prayer?

Meditation?

Scripture?

Ethics?

The possibility of an afterlife?

God?

Saviors/prophets/wayshowers/teachers/saints/gurus?

Your own sacred value?

How has the study of other traditions made your own clearer or more relevant to you?

