

## S M A L L G R O U P Q U E S T I O N S

M i l e s   M c P h e r s o n

**Cult Fiction, Part 5 – The Hopeless Suicide of Buddhism**

**August 6-7, 2005**

### A N N O U N C E M E N T S

**Book Drive:** The Rock Academy is building a school library and we are in need of book donations. If you have books that you would like to donate to our library, you can leave them at the back of the Rock Church Sanctuary next to the Share Ministry Box, drop them by the Rock Academy, or call for a pick up. Contact the Rock Academy at 858-467-4787 with any questions.

**Women of the Rock:** What's Your Identity in Christ? Join us as we hear from our guest speaker, Nancy Stafford, this **August 12-14** at Murrieta Hot Springs for our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Retreat. Registration has been extended for one more week! The cost is just \$155, payable at the Rockpile Bookstore. For registration questions, or to donate and help another woman attend, contact Karen Sutton at 619.225.0145 or [karensutton@cox.net](mailto:karensutton@cox.net).

**Opportunity to Lead Worship:** Luv-em-Up, the Rock's ministry for disabled adults, meets every Monday night for Bible study at Calvary Chapel Lakeside. Approximately 50-75 people attend each week and they love praising God through song. Perfect voices and skills are not required. If you can volunteer, even just once or twice a month, contact Bobby & Rosie Yates at 619.312.0174 or [ryatessd@yahoo.com](mailto:ryatessd@yahoo.com)

**Parking Ministry:** During the summer months, many of our volunteers are on vacation. If you currently attend any weekend service, we would love to have you! Help us make weekends a better experience for everyone by lending a hand. Sign up in the back of the sanctuary or contact [garyg@therocksandiego.org](mailto:garyg@therocksandiego.org).

**Tijuana House Building:** Your group can come together and build a simple shelter for a family in Mexico. Put some action to your faith and plan to join us during any of the following dates: **October 29, December 3, or January 28**. For more information, contact Ed Crenshaw at 858.571.3427 or [tjhousebuilding@therocksandiego.org](mailto:tjhousebuilding@therocksandiego.org). (*September 10<sup>th</sup> date has been cancelled.*)

**Memory Verse:** *“Just as a man is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...”* **Hebrews 9:27**

#### **Prayer:**

Pray for the upcoming Women's Retreat. Pray that finances would come in for those in need. Pray that the women attending the retreat will grow in their relationship with Christ and one another. Please lift up the leaders of the retreat and the main speaker, Nancy Stafford. Please pray for the various volunteer needs – that the roles would be filled.

**Connect:**

1. Last week you were asked to share the name of one person in your life that needs Jesus. Spend some time sharing what you did this past week to reach out to that individual.
2. How has your week been drawing near to God? What did you do to move closer to Him?

**Grow:**

3. Buddhists view life as an endless cycle of useless suffering and sorrow.
  - a) How does God say to view our hard times in life? (John 16:33)
  
  - b) Why are hard times valuable in our lives? (1 Peter 1:6-7)
4. Buddhists view salvation as nirvana, the complete end of your existence.
  - a) What does the Bible say about death and resurrection? (Hebrews 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10)
  
  - b) Since we will give an account to Christ of everything we've done, how should our lives be different today?
5. Buddhists view the process of salvation as repeated reincarnation until nirvana is achieved.
  - a) What does the Bible say about salvation? (Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:8)
  
  - b) Why do people desire to control their own spiritual destiny? What is the problem with this thinking (Philippians 1:6)

**Live:**

6. What will you do this week to continue building the relationship with that person in your life who needs Christ?
7. We discussed the value of trials in our lives, is there someone in your life who is going through a difficult time that you can encourage with God's Word?

## For Additional Study

Remember, cults and false religions are powerful because there is an element of truth in them at times.

<b>GLOSSARY</b>	
<b>caste system</b>	Social groups in India that rank in a hierarchic order and within which there is a minimum of social mobility.
<b>Pali Canon</b>	The most complete and generally regarded as the earliest collection of canonical literature in Buddhism.
<b>Sanskrit</b>	The sacred language of India, which the Indians consider "the language of the gods"; means "perfected" and "cultured."
<b>Theravada (Theravadin tradition)</b>	The oldest surviving Buddhist tradition, which flourishes in parts of Southeast Asia and is known as "the doctrine of the elders."

In the sixth century B.C., Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama. A biography of Siddhartha Gautama was not written during his lifetime and the earliest accounts of life were not recorded until some three hundred years after his death. Because there has been much debate by historians on where to draw the line between history and legend, the history probably contains much myth. However, this history is accepted by most Buddhists and forms a model for all Buddhists to live by.

Born around 563 B.C., Siddhartha Gautama was son to King Suddhodana Gautama, a raja (or chieftain) of the Sakya clan and family of the Kshatriya caste of ancient Bharata. His father reigned over a small district in the Himalayas between India and Nepal.

At birth he received the name Siddhartha, meaning "he who has accomplished his objectives", but was also called Sakyamuni ("the wise sage of the Sakya clan"), Ghagavat ("blessed with happiness"), Tathagata ("the one who has gone thus"), Jina ("the victorious"), and, probably most common, the Buddha or "the enlightened one".

When Siddhartha was an infant, a sage visited the King's court and prophesied that Siddhartha would become either a great ruler like his father if he remained in the palace or, if he went out into the world, he would become a Buddha. The King believed that if Siddhartha was exposed to any human misery, he would leave his home to seek the truth. Therefore, he ordered his subjects to shield Siddhartha from any form of evil or suffering.

At age sixteen, Siddhartha won the hand of his cousin by performing 12 feats in the art of archery. He may have taken more wives during his life, but his cousin Yashodara was his principle wife.

Despite his father's attempts to keep him confined to the palace, he ventured outside and observed a leper, a corpse, and an ascetic. From these observations he determined that happiness was an illusion. As soon as his first son was born, assuring him that the royal bloodline would be continued, Siddhartha left the kingdom on a pilgrimage of inquiry and asceticism as a poor beggar monk seeking truth.

**Ascetic:**

*n.* A person who renounces material comforts and leads a life of austere self-discipline, especially as an act of religious devotion.

*adj.*

1. Leading a life of self-discipline and self-denial, especially for spiritual improvement. See Synonyms at [severe](#).
2. Pertaining to or characteristic of an ascetic; self-denying and austere: *an ascetic existence*.

For six or seven years, he sought communion with the supreme cosmic spirit, first through the teachings of two Brahmin hermits and then in the company of five monks. However, despite his efforts, he didn't feel he had found truth. At this point he discovered the importance of what he called the Middle Way. Instead of denying himself food or sleep as the other monks did, he ate solid food and did not deny himself worldly things. This angered the monks he was with, so Siddhartha moved on.

At Gaya in northeast India, he sat at the foot of a fig tree where Mara, the evil one, tried to thwart his becoming the Buddha. After withstanding the temptations from Mara, he received a revelation. He now felt he knew the way to escape the cruel cycle of rebirth. He claimed to have discovered the four noble truths (Pativedhanana), and henceforth was the Buddha.

The Buddha was then faced with a choice. He could retreat into solitude with his knowledge as the other monks did when they felt they had reached spiritual truth, or he could remain with the people and share his knowledge. It is because he chose to stay with the people that Buddhists feel Buddhism is based not only on truth, but on compassion as well.

Two months later, the Buddha gave his first sermon and began the "Wheel of the Law", a symbol of the Buddhist faith. For more than 40 years he dedicated himself to the spread of this new religion. At age 80, a blacksmith fed him a poisonous food and the Buddha became extremely ill. He died at Kusinara in the district of Gorakhpur. His last recorded words were "Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your own salvation with diligence."

# THE DHARMA

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Dharma is an Indian term that is understood to mean simply the law of life. Within Buddhism, the Dharma means more specifically the teachings of Buddha.

Following Buddha's death, his followers convened to create a system of doctrines that they could all agree on. These teachings were then handed down orally over future generations through Buddhist monks. In 80 B.C., Buddhist scribes finally compiled the teachings of the Buddha on paper, which became the Pali Canon, also called the Tripitaka. The teachings contained rules for conduct, methods for spiritual attainment, and the ethics taught by the Buddha.

Contrary to Hinduism's caste system which required a series of rebirths to move up through the different castes, the Buddhists recruited disciples from all castes. According to Buddha, nirvana, or deliverance from suffering, is extended to everyone who strictly obeys the laws of a monastic life. However, he did feel that the caste system was important for the framework of a temporal life. It was a step away from the strict caste system of India.

The Buddha rejected subservience of any kind to a supreme God and denied belief in an eternal self. While he believed that karma would determine the kind of rebirth and quality of life one would have at rebirth, he didn't believe it was a self or soul that was reborn. He taught instead that there is a rearrangement of the elements of a person's identity, which are called "self". In other words the new self is still comprised of the same parts.

Where the Brahmins of India taught that nirvana was attained when the soul becomes one with the Universal soul, Buddha held that nirvana is actually the termination of rebirths. That is, you finally get to get off the wheel. You've reached Nirvana, you're done, you cease to exist. It's hard to see where the hope lies in this, but rebirth after rebirth could, I suppose, make your complete elimination from existence sound appealing.

Buddha believed that we are temporal creations born to lives of sorrow and suffering. This suffering is a result of selfish desires that chain people to the wheel of insubstantial impermanent things. Living according to the Dharma will help one eliminate these desires thus leading you to Nirvana. According to Buddha, the way to deliverance is summed up in four noble truths:

1. The universality of suffering - People discover through rebirth, aging, and death that life is full of sorrow. We suffer this sorrow until deliverance is achieved.
2. The origin of suffering - Suffering is caused by the false desires of the senses that have been deceived into clinging to the impermanent world. The quest for immortality further aggravates human suffering.
3. The overcoming of suffering - If false desires cause suffering, then the desires need to be suppressed, abandoned, or rejected in order to nullify their effects. Ignorance of the way of deliverance and the delusion that there is a permanent self are the primary cause of suffering.

4. The way leading to the suppression of suffering - The noble eightfold path is a sacred path with eight branches called right views of understanding, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct or action, right livelihood, right effort or endeavor, right mind control or concentration, and right mindfulness. These eight branches are not stages that can be lived out in succession or isolation from one another. They are different dimensions of a total way of life.

While Buddha did not deny the existence of gods, he taught that the worship of gods obstructed one's quest for nirvana. To him the gods inhabit the cosmos and are impermanent like all of us, so they too must escape rebirth through nirvana.

And how long will it take to follow these truths to deliverance and reach this state of spiritual suicide? According to the Buddha, several lives are required to attain it. He taught that the journey to nirvana is long and difficult. The reward for all your effort is inner peace and harmony with all beings just before you reach Nirvana; and then.....nothing.