

## **Meet Buddhists**

The second group of people you might encounter are those who follow Buddhism. The leader/founder was Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, from Nepal. He lived around 600 BC. “Buddha” means “awakened one” or “enlightened one.”

There are some 500 million Buddhists worldwide, and the religion is growing quickly in the West. It’s more a set of philosophies and practices than it is a true religion; it has no god figures (not even the Buddha).

There are two main types of Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana, each established as a self-denying path to control desires. Buddhism focuses on karma and managing karma (the impact of your actions), and it features four key truths about the nature and causes of suffering and how to overcome it. Buddhists use karma to mean our actions and also speak of the effects of our actions. Buddhism is committed to meditation and achieving enlightened perspectives on reality, but nothing is fixed or permanent. Buddhists also have deep environmental and humanitarian concerns.

Buddhism developed as a response to suffering and a need for peace. It outlines a purpose to life, explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world and teaches a peaceful way of life that pursues real happiness by seeking to downplay or deny suffering and certain aspects of reality.

**Core values:** peace, mindfulness, tolerance, self-awareness, non-violence and personal responsibility for peace and happiness.

## **According to Buddhists**

Some Buddhists will see clear commonalities of value with Christians, such as charity, generosity, self-sacrifice and self-acceptance, and peace as Buddhists would define it. But much like with Muslims, Christ followers will also have some misconceptions to overcome in connecting with Buddhist neighbors. Many Buddhists consider Christians dogmatic, rigid or oppressive. They think Christian “myths” prevent them from seeing the world clearly and distract them from practical, real questions.

As serious Buddhists are non-argumentative and looking for commonality and peace, they can be suspicious of Christians who seem to have conversion as a goal. Most Buddhists reject the idea of supreme beings or a Creator God. They see the concept of sin as unhelpful. Jesus was a good teacher with some enlightened ideas, but people should not worship him or any other teachers as divine.

## **Connecting With Buddhists**

Remember that your religious language will be foreign to new Buddhist friends. Remember that there are many different Buddhists and not just one kind of Buddhism. <sup>1</sup>Find new ways to articulate truths about what Jesus brings (for example, “freedom from evil/suffering,” “achieving eternal peace,” and breaking the cycle of “bad karma”). Confrontation and apologetics will not be effective, so instead look for opportunities to share simple teachings of Jesus that are appropriate to the circumstances. Jesus’

words carry ultimate, divine authority and can completely transform your new friends' perception of reality. But first it's okay to seek to understand your new friend's personal Buddhism. Pray for God's protective care as you interact with them, since false worldviews can be spiritually tempting at times.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://radical.net/articles/sharing-the-gospel-with-a-buddhist/> last accessed 2/20/2020

### **Engage Buddhists With Questions Like...**

How do you think people can individually achieve true peace? How would you define peace?

What has most influenced your ideas about life and the world?

Who would you consider the most enlightened/awakened person you know? May I share mine?

May I share about Someone who opened my spiritual eyes in a transformative way?