



Guidelines to pray for Buddhists

Two centuries of evangelical Christianity's engagement with the Buddhist world have resulted in less than five percent of Buddhist heartlands (Japan, Thailand, Myanmar, Taiwan, Cambodia, Tibet, and Sri Lanka) coming to Christ. Currently, there is a resurgence of Buddhism in former communist countries such as China, Vietnam, and Laos and since the 1970s, Buddhism has also been gaining popularity in the West. (Source: *Lausanne Movement – www.lausanne.org*)

Much prayer is needed for Buddhists to come to a knowledge of and living relationship with Jesus Christ. Not just in Asia where about 98% of the world-wide Buddhist population lives, but also in the rest of the world.

A [Free 30 Day Prayer Guide for Tibet](#) has been compiled by *Back to Jerusalem* for Christians to learn more about the country and how to pray for the Tibetan people. (Download the booklet from their website: www.backtojerusalem.com)

Background of Buddhism

Buddhism encompasses a series of beliefs based on the teachings of Buddha, who was born in the sixth century B.C. Buddha taught that humans are in a state of suffering produced by their attachment to temporal things. Only by releasing our desires can we avoid suffering, and in doing so, reach a more enlightened state. Reaching nirvana—the ultimate state of enlightenment—is the highest goal. Buddhism originated in India but spread to Southeast Asia and China, eventually permeating most of East Asia. In many parts of East Asia, local animistic beliefs mix with Buddhism to create Folk Buddhism. (Source: *OMF International – www.omf.org*)

Some core beliefs of Buddhism

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism. Nearly all Buddhists accept certain key teachings. These are: (a) the four noble truths, (b) the eightfold path (c) the impermanence and ultimate non-existence of all dharmas (things, events) and (d) the need for enlightenment (liberation through awareness).

Buddhist belief 1: Buddhism teaches that the whole world is a delusion and nothing but a shadow caused by the mind; thus, there is no world outside the mind. According to Buddha, every definite thing is illusion; things have no reality in themselves, but are like heat haze.

Christian belief: As Christians we believe that although no man has ever seen God “*the only unique Son, or the only begotten Son of God, Who is in the bosom [in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him*” (John 1:18, Amp). *All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him was not even one thing made that has come into being* (John 1:3), and this is anything but an illusion.

Let us pray for Buddhists to have a revelation of Jesus Christ as the One who became a human being, who dwelt among us (not a delusion, neither an illusion, but a reality) and through whom all things were made and came into existence. Ask for every hindrance to these truths to be removed from the eyes of their heart.

Buddhist belief 2: To Buddhists the “eightfold path” means: (1) right vision, (2) right conception (aspirations), (3) right speech, (4) right behaviour or conduct, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right concentration or mindfulness and (8) right one-pointed contemplation or meditation.

Christian belief: Christianity is not a philosophical system that consists only of basic doctrines. It is mainly a relationship with the Person Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. All our works and ways follow as a result from this personal relationship. Jesus said: *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me. If you had known Me, you would also have known My Father. From now on, you know Him and have seen Him* (John 14:6-7).

Let us pray for Buddhists to have a deeper understanding of what would truly satisfy their human soul. Ask for a hunger and thirst to come into their hearts. Ask that they will have opportunities to hear about Jesus as the one and only path to salvation.

Buddhist belief 3: Buddhism states that 'The material world is so impermanent it is ultimately an illusion. Every individual is also an illusion and even one's own self should be considered one's enemy, something to be destroyed because it perpetuates suffering.' In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, the individual person is the basic problem - according to them, the individual person must disappear completely.

Christian Belief: As Christians we know for sure that God foreknew us [He was aware and loved beforehand], He also destined us from the beginning [foreordained us] to be moulded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness] ... *and those whom He thus foreordained, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified [acquitted, made righteous, putting them into right standing with Himself]. And those whom He justified, He also glorified [raising them to a heavenly dignity and condition or state of being]...* (Rom.8:29-30, Amp). The body of Christ consists of different parts, each functioning with unique gifts, to the benefit of the whole body. God does not see people as faceless masses without the power to make choices. Scripture is also clear that Christ bore the pain of the world on the cross and no person is able to 'destroy' his own pain or suffering.

Let us pray for Buddhists to begin searching for the reason for their lives and purpose on earth. Ask that they will encounter God as the One who perfectly planned their existence with a reason and purpose for His kingdom. Ask for their eyes to be opened to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Buddhist belief 4: Two of the basic beliefs of Buddhism are the principles of reincarnation (they believe that after death, one can be reborn in a new body) and karma (the sum of all an individual has done, is currently doing and will still do).

Christian belief: Christians believe that Christ has bought everlasting life for people on Calvary and therefore we live once on earth (Heb.9:27), and then with Him in His everlasting Kingdom. The sum of all we have done has been cast upon Jesus Christ on the cross and therefore our sin has been completely removed and we are cleansed from it, not by our own endeavour, but by His grace. Because of and in order to satisfy the great and wonderful and intense love with which He loved us, even when we were dead by [our own] shortcomings and trespasses, He made us alive together in fellowship and in union with Christ; [He gave us the very life of Christ Himself, the same new life with

which He quickened Him, for] it is by grace and mercy which we did not deserve that we are saved [delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation] (Eph.2:4-5, Amp).

Let us pray that Buddhists will have a revelation of the love of God that surpasses all understanding. Ask that they will understand the mystery of grace and the fact that everything has been redeemed. All they have to do is simply accept and believe it.

Buddhist belief 5: Buddhists believe that by definition, sense perceptions (the sense of hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching) do not exist in Nirvana (heaven, paradise). This is a state of freedom from the ties of the four noble truths (soul, will, emotions, mind). What then exists to perceive Nirvana? And without a soul, how can they experience even their 'paradise'?

Christian belief: As Christians we do not have to work at our salvation in order to obtain it. Neither do we have to overcome this world and its sufferings and troubles by ourselves. We put our hope in the One who has completed the race and won it. He has told us these things, so that in Him we may have peace and confidence. In the world we have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but we can be of good cheer! For He has overcome the world. He has deprived it of power to harm us and has conquered it for us (John 16:33, Amp).

Let us pray that God will open the eyes of Buddhists to see the contradictions in their beliefs. Ask that they will start to search for the Living God and that the Father in heaven will supernaturally direct them to find Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Buddhist belief 6: Buddhists believe that things must be interpreted from a Buddhist perspective, not a Western or Christian view, as the belief in the Christian God and morality to them are delusive, harmful beliefs. Early Buddhism rejects belief in God and is largely non-theistic (absence of the belief in both the existence and non-existence of a deity) and atheistic (an absence of belief in the existence of gods), although a polytheistic belief (a belief in many gods, even millions of them) later emerged.

Christian belief: The Spirit of the living God teaches His children about Himself, His Word and a daily intimate walk with God testify to that. As Christians we value life, decision-making and morality from a Biblical perspective. First and foremost this would be to love one another just as Christ has loved us. From this simple value, morality, love and respect for another person's life flow. We do not have to appease many gods in order to live a safe or normal life. God covers us with His grace and we are safe in His arms. Even in trouble He is our safe Refuge.

Let us pray that God will stir Buddhists to explore the things Christians believe and ask why they believe these things. Ask for the spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph.1:17) to touch their hearts and open their eyes to see and understand the ultimate hope of their calling in Jesus Christ.

Buddhist belief 7: Buddhism teaches reincarnation (when you die, according to how you have lived your life, you will be born as something else in another body e.g. a dog, another person, or you could achieve Nirvana). But since Buddhism also denies the existence of the soul (will, emotions and mind), it is a little confusing as to what it is that reincarnates.

Christian belief: As Christians we believe that man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment. In the same way Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Heb.9:27-28). Christ is the only Way to our heavenly Father and there is no other way.

Let us pray that Buddhists will know that they can have assurance of salvation in this life and the life hereafter. Ask especially for a deep understanding of the promise of John 3:16 – *For God so loved the*

world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Reliability of Buddhist scriptures

Buddhism is difficult to define. Buddha (his real name was Sigharta Gautama) claimed no more than being a man who discovered an alleged form of spiritual enlightenment apart from divine revelation; just a mortal man trying to find a solution for human suffering. Buddha's words were never recorded, so it is impossible to ascertain if what is available today are the genuine words of Buddha, or those of his disciples centuries later.

The Christian Bible is most reliable, as many scripture manuscripts have been found over the centuries that have proved others correct that had already been found, even ages before that. Even some of the recorded history of different nations compares with things written in the Bible. Of all the different religious scriptures available today, the Bible has been proved right more times than any other religious writing. (Read '*Evidence that demands a Verdict*' written by Josh McDowell)

Let us pray for Buddhists, that their search for understanding will lead them to understand that the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. *The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever* (Ps.19:7-9).

Buddhism in South Africa

Various Buddhist groups were brought to the Cape Colony from South-east Asia during the 1680s.

The Nan Hua Temple Complex at Bronkhorstspuit is the largest temple in Southern Africa. Temples, centres and groups are common in the metropolitan areas and the country is thought to comprise the largest Buddhist community in Africa. Buddhist traditions are represented in South Africa in many forms. There has been an increase in distinct Buddhist traditions since the mid-1980s. Buddhist leaders e.g. Dalai Lama, often visit the country in order to bestow Buddhist teachings and blessings on people. Although Buddhism essentially requires a life of self-denial, many people are drawn to Buddhism because of its teachings of peace and tolerance. (*Website:*

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_South_Africa).

Let us pray for God's Spirit to touch the teachers and students at the Theravada, Zen, Nichiren and Tibetan schools in SA.

A 2003 study estimated that in the late 1990s there was a total of 6,000 Buddhists in South Africa (3,000 of whom had Asian ancestry) out of a total population of 42 million (or 0.01% of the total population). (*Website:* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_South_Africa).

Lift up in prayer each individual proclaiming him/herself to be Buddhist, or any other individuals, including Christians who unknowingly follow Buddhist practices. Ask that the Holy Spirit will touch each heart to question these practices, and for Christians who are well-equipped to lead them to Christ, to cross their path.

Pray by name for the following notable SA Buddhists: Leela Verity (founder and director of Sat Chit Anand), Heila and Rodney Downey (students of Zen Master Seung Sahn), Gen Kelsang Sangdak (resident teacher of the Mahasiddha Centre in Durban, and National spiritual director in South Africa for the New Kadampa Tradition-IKBU), Gen Kelsang Pagpa (resident teacher of the Tushita Centre in Cape Town) and Kelsang Gyaltsen (resident teacher of the Vajrapani Centre in Johannesburg).

The Nichiren Buddhist lay group Soka Gakkai International has a community centre in Parkwood, Johannesburg. Derivatives of Korean Zen have been established in the Western Cape. The Vipassana Association of South Africa has been holding meditation retreats in the Western Cape. The Shrambala, Diamond Way Buddhism and New Kadampa traditions are some recent additions to the collection of schools. (Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_South_Africa).

Let us pray for each one of these Buddhist groups operating in SA. Cry out to the Lord for especially strong leaders to have a clear revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as an understanding on how to explain the differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Ask that a hunger to explore and read the Bible will lead thousands of Buddhists to find Jesus Christ as Saviour.

The largest Buddhist temple and monastery in Southern Africa is in the town of Bronkhorstspuit near Pretoria, but another notable Buddhist centre in the country is the Buddhist Retreat Centre in Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal. (Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_South_Africa).

Let us pray for every individual from the Buddhist order and everyone visiting these specific and other Buddhist temples in SA today. Ask that the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts, so that they will have a clear understanding of who Jesus Christ is, the truths for which He stands, and His love for them.

Keep on praying that Christians will become well-equipped in ministering to Buddhists and that they will reach out to Buddhists with the love of Christ.