

The Buddhism starts with Questions

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Have you ever thought, “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” “What is the reason for me to live here?” If you have ever wondered these questions, you will be a good Buddhist.

The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, had a lot of questions since he was very young such as why my mother passed away soon after I was born? Why the weak is always killed by the strong? Why people get old, why they get sick, why they die? Is there any solution not to get old, not to get sick, and not to die? The answer for these questions are very simple, the solution is not to be born. Therefore, the fundamental Buddhist monks tried to quench all desires. After he or she quenches all desires, one will attain Nirvana, not to be born again. Some people may think that Nirvana is the final goal for all Buddhists, but the Lotus Sutra teaches that the Nirvana is not true teaching. The sutra teaches us how to live.

Let us go back to the first question, “Who am I?” If you do not know who you are or what you are, just type your full name in Google and look at the results. I found Cindy Campbell and Katie Hutchinson, but they were not the ones I was looking for. They were different people with the same name. Although there are many, many people who have the same name as you, you are one and only truly unique on this earth.

You are very unique; therefore, Sakyamuni Buddha said, “From heaven to the earth, I am the most honored one.” There is nobody exactly the same as you, but Buddhism teaches that you do not exist all by yourself. Buddhism teaches “Non-Self” or 無我. It means nothing exist self sustained. “Dependent Origination” is the term for it.

Let go back to the second question, “Where did I come from?” We are not aliens from another planet. We were born from our parents on this earth. Even a single mother child or a single father child had two parents. Your parents were also born from your grand-parents. Your grand-parents were born from your great-grand-parents. We call them ancestors. Every generation goes back two parents; thus, you have over 1,000 blood related ancestors in tenth generation back. If any one of them missed a connection, you would not exist. Isn't that amazing?

Soon after you were born, you drink milk, inhale air and wrapped with warm blanket. In order for all living beings to survive, they need water, air, food, energy, place to live and many other things.

Your life depends on others. Buddhism teaches “Not to kill.” However, someone has to kill cows, pigs, chickens, fish, vegetables, and other living beings. Although we do not involve killing directly, we eat food that someone killed. This is reality of life. Your life is depending on the lives of other living beings; therefore, we, Japanese Buddhists, say, “Itadaki-masu” before all meals. This means, “I respectfully receive the lives of other living being.” The meal helps us to maintain good health and good spirit, so we can serve others and contribute to our communities.

Let’s go back to the third question, “What is the reason for me living here?” I already answered the question. The answer is to help others and to contribute to our communities. We live in the society of Give and Take. You work and you receive wage. You pay first for what you get. You help others and others will help you. Whatever you are learning now or through education you had in high school and college are not just for your knowledge, you must return the favor to others by using your knowledge for the betterment of society. Please do not waste your skill, knowledge, and talent.

I said before that Nirvana is not the final goal for Buddhists. If all people around the world attained Nirvana not to be born on this earth, what will happen to this wonderful world? Therefore, the Lotus Sutra teaches the way of Bodhisattva in the last 14 chapters of the sutra. Even if you attained Buddhahood, you should come back again to this earth and lead suffering beings to awaken to the Reality of Existence.

To learn Buddhism is to practice it in daily life. Please utilize what you have learned at this temple, your school, your work, at your home to help others around you.