

JESUS AND BUDDHA:

Practicing Across Traditions

Discussion Guide

1. What is your overall impression of this film? What part(s) struck you the most?
2. Paul Knitter says that he discovered how he could “*experience the reality of God*” through the Buddhist teaching that “*ultimate truth, the way things are*” is to be found within himself and within the world. He says, “*in other words what I call God is not an entity out there who has to step into my life.*”
 - Do you experience the reality of God? If so how? How would you describe your notion of God?
 - Is your experience of God relational – someone outside of you, or something inside of you, not separate? Or do you experience the reality of God both ways?
 - Is experiencing the reality of God something you are seeking in your life? If so, is this sense of the reality of God something that is growing in you or does it stay the same?
3. Father Kennedy (and Thomas Merton) had a deep, intuitive feeling that “*Buddhism is IT.*”
 - What do you think they mean by “IT”?
 - Have you had the same experience with Buddhism? If so, please say more about it.
 - Have you had that same experience with any other faith tradition or in any other way?
4. Father Kennedy says that Buddhism is not about faith, rather it is a skill, like learning to play the piano, and faith need not enter into it. He also says that Buddhism can enrich your faith – have you found this to be true? What do you mean when you say “faith”?
5. “*All things are impermanent*” is a central teaching of Buddhism.
 - How does this awareness of impermanence affect you? Is it a frightening thought? A comforting thought? A sad thought? Does it evoke “wonder?” Do you see life and death as two things, or part of one thing?
 - How do you deal with the many losses that impermanence brings to each of us? Are you helped by Buddhism or any other faith tradition?
6. Professor Chung says that during your meditation if you continue to ask yourself the question “**Who am I?**” and continue to answer “**I don’t know.**” You will eventually “*find the answer and you will find your true self. Then you will not suffer any more.*”
 - What does she mean by this? What truth is she getting at?
 - Have you tried doing asking yourself, “Who am I?” If so, what did you discover?
 - Why does she say that if we find our true self we won’t suffer anymore? Do you think that is universally true, or just her personal experience?
7. Professor Chung refers to the “don’t know mind”,
 - What does she mean? What is the value of not knowing?
 - She says the bigger her ‘don’t know’ gets, the bigger her freedom gets. Why would that be true?
 - In what ways do you feel free? in what ways do you feel unfree?
8. Professor Chung says, “ We don’t always know what we need to be happy?” Do you agree?

9. The Zen master Yamada Roshi said to Fr. Kennedy *‘I’m not trying to make you a Buddhist, I’m trying to empty you in imitation of your Lord, Jesus Christ, who emptied himself.’*

- What does it mean that Christ emptied himself? What IS this self-emptying, and why is it of value to both Buddhist and Christian teaching?
- Have you emptied yourself, or tried to? What does that mean in your life?
- What have you not emptied? Does it get in your way?

10. Paul Knitter says that enlightenment means, *“We wake up to the fact that all things are profoundly related.”* We often hear this statement in spiritual teachings, but what does it really mean? What does it mean to you, personally? Do you **experience** yourself as “profoundly” related to all things, or is it just a concept? Say more about this.

11. Paul Knitter is deeply moved and excited by the teaching that *“nothing has its own individual being, but I am part of a spirit that I see in Jesus Christ, and that is my true identity and that can give me deep peace.”*

- Do you believe that you are part of an interconnecting spirit that is your true identity?
- If so, is that just a belief, or do you experience that connection in some concrete ways?
- Can you give an example of that experience?

12. Paul Knitter says that Buddhism is a way of helping Christians come to a deeper, more personal, more mystical experience of God.

- Has your Buddhist practice (or your prayer life) helped deepen your experience of God?, If so, please say more about this.

13. Professor Chung quotes her favorite words from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas where Jesus talks about salvation: *“If you bring out what is within you, what is within you will save you. But if you cannot bring out what is within you, what is within you will destroy you.”*

- In what ways have you experienced the truth of this statement in your own life?
- What does Professor Chung mean when she says ‘what is within you is your **true self**’?

14. Paul Knitter says: *Gautama became Buddha because he woke up. Jesus, the son of Mary, became Christ, the son of God, because he woke up.”*

- What does waking up mean? Waking up to what?
- Professor Knitter says Christ woke up to the divine spirit that given to him in his very being. Who gave it to him? Who gives it to us? Is there a “giver” at all?

15. Karl Rahner says: *To say that Jesus is divine means that Jesus realized the full potential of what it means to be human.”*

- Does this mean that there is no difference between us and Jesus except that we may not yet have awakened to our true identity?
- And if that’s what it means, how do you feel about the implications that there is no essential difference between you and Jesus?
- How would that belief affect the way you would relate to Jesus?

16. Professor Chung says that in difficult times in her life, the present moment pulled her through like a very loving mother. Again and again in Buddhist teachings we are told that if we can remain in the **present moment**, “it will provide all that we need.”

- Why do you think the present moment is so greatly emphasized in Buddhist teaching?
- What’s wrong with thinking about the past or dreaming about then future? Can’t that be done mindfully as well?

17. Fr. Kennedy cautions us not to focus on 'self-improvement.' Because that puts the emphasis back on the self and not on the present moment.

- Have you been intent on 'self-improvement' in your spiritual life or are you accepting of all your flaws and foibles?
- How do you work on self-acceptance in your own life and practice?

18. Fr. Kennedy was deeply moved by Marie Howe's poem, "**Annunciation**"

- What do you make of this poem?
- Have you had similar experiences?

ANNUNCIATION

Even if I don't see it again — nor ever feel it
I know it is — and that if once it hailed me
it ever does —

And so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,

as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't — I was blinded like that — and swam
in what shone at me

only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

Marie Howe

19. Professor Chung refers to the Kingdom of God as "a feast of equals where justice is flowing." How do you relate to this understanding?

20. Fr. Kennedy says that the purpose of meditation is compassionate outreach to others. And Paul Knitter cautions us about our tendency to work so hard on our own transformation that we forget about people who are poor and marginalized, and the policies that keep them poor and marginalized

- How does your practice inspire compassionate outreach to others?
- If it does not, how might you change that?

21. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?