Name

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Date

**Cultural Experience**

**Introduction**

 Ever since this world came into existence, countless cults, groups and religions have emerged. Every religion has a specific background and history. The history of most of the religions is quite well known. Majority of the people are familiar with the basics of the most followed religions. Having said that, Buddhism is a religion that no one knows much about. There is no clear or defined meaning present for this belief. Siddhartha Gautama is the founder of Buddhism. He is more commonly known as Gautama Buddha. There are many aspects of the history that suggest that Buddha had supernatural powers. Gautama Buddha was born in Nepal and his journey mainly started in India. From India, he started to travel so that he could learn more about life. In the middle of his journey, he discovered Buddhism that was the turning point for Gautama Buddha. He came to the discovery of Buddhism by experiencing a deep consciousness of the nature of life, existence itself and finally death (Cooper and James). That was the initiation of Buddhism. Gautama Buddha started teaching people about Buddhism and today it is one of the most popular religions all around the world. This paper will discuss and reflect on Buddhism in-depth.

**Discussion**

 Buddhism is now one of the most ancient religions in the world, dating up to 26 hundred years back. The religion has been followed and passed down by many civilizations over the course of time. The word Buddha itself means “The awakened one.” Gautama Buddha’s teachings helped Buddhism gain the popularity that it has today. Buddhism succeeded as a religion that was native to West India. The religion comprises of various beliefs, practices and traditions, which are mainly stemmed from the teachings of Gautama Buddha (Siderits). There are a plethora of reasons why Buddhism gained the popularity that it has today. Buddhism is especially appreciated in the contemporary world and the West is heavily adopting it today. There are a lot of questions surrounding the notion of Buddhism's popularity (Rapgay, 590-591). There must be something special about the religion that no other belief can offer, hence the widespread and consistent popularity all across the globe.

 The many civilizations that are following Buddhism are inclusive of India, Japan, Vietnam, China and Korea. The most surprising fact is that Buddhism is spreading its wings even in America. The religion has made significant changes in the American culture over the course of time as well (Burton, 53-64). Nowadays, the world has become more materialistic. In this materialistic world, Buddhism has the answers to many issues that the various societies face. That is why the religion has more than 300 million followers all across the globe and the number keeps on increasing by the day. Buddhism gives its believers a spiritual development and an enlightening path that leads to insight and awareness regarding the nature of reality. Buddhism revolves around the practice of meditation. The follower meditates to change themselves and this also leads to the development of qualities like kindness, awareness and wisdom. One of the main reasons why Buddhism has a cult following is that the believer does not have to worship a God (Coltart). Many individuals of the contemporary world like this aspect of the belief.

 Buddhists do not look to a God for salvation, they believe that seeking a God to bring them enlightenment and redemption is a hollow concept. Buddhism in general addresses its belief to the people from every single background regardless of caste, nationality, gender, color and sexuality (Keown). That is why a lot of the members of the LGBTQ community are directing towards this religion because of the inclusive nature that the belief showcases. The religion teaches its follower the practical methods that enable and empowers people to become fully responsible and accountable to their own life. Every Buddhist lives under the light of the five principles. The five principles make sure that everyone is safe and following these precepts leads to the happiness and peace of mind. The principles are stated as follows:

1. The first principle is made on the basis of compassion and in accordance with this precept, the believer is prohibited to torture, hurt or kill.
2. The second principle of Buddhism forbids any activity of stealing, any action that may support stealing and any activity or action that might be equivalent to stealing. This principle helps secure every individual's belongings and property.
3. The third precept of Buddhism refrains the believer to ever cheat and be unfaithful in marriage. Sexual activity outside marriage is strictly prohibited.
4. The fourth principle prohibits the believer to tell direct or indirect lies. Truthfulness is given great importance and breaking of promises is highly prohibited.
5. The last principle of Buddhism prevents the believer to indulge in intoxicants as they cloud the mind and judgment of a person.

Through these five principles, Gautama Buddha is asking the believer to lead a life that revolves around kindness. Any behavior that might lead to anyone getting hurt is strictly prohibited. The concept of Buddhism gives purpose to the believer's life. The fact that Gautama Buddha gave these principles makes it evident that there is great injustice and inequality in this world. However, the values given by Buddhism can help anyone lead a happy and peaceful life. The fact is that in Buddhism, there is no concept of worshipping a God, which makes many people believe that it is not a religion but a way of life (James). The Buddhist teachings are straightforward and quite basic, which is among one of the many reasons why many people follow this religion. As opposed to other religions like Islam and Christianity, change is possible at any step. In fact, Buddhism is a belief in which change is constant. The Buddhists work around finding ways to meditate, which further helps them enrich their life.

 The act and main concept of Buddhism started after the death of Gautama Buddha. After the death of Buddha, around 500 monks got together for the first council which was held in Rajagrha. The meet up was under the leadership of Kashyapa. The monastic code which is also known as Vinaya was recited by Upali as he remembered it. The main lessons given by Buddha which are known as Sutra were recited by his beloved cousin Ananda for the monks to hear. After the monks debated on the details, votes were made on the final version of Buddha’s teachings, which were further taken forward to the believers (Lopez Jr). Many monks translated these teachings into various languages found on Indian plains, and these aspects were then memorized. One of the most interesting and baffling fact is that Buddhism is an oral tradition for around two hundred years now.

Buddhism is widespread in China and everyone knows it throughout the country. In accordance with a legend, Ming Ti the Chinese Emperor had a dream that made him send his troupes to the Silk Road. When the Emperor's agents came back, they brought back the picture of Buddha along with a copy of Sutra which was divided into 42 sections. There are mainly two major schools of thought in Buddhism that are inclusive of Theravada and Mahayana. Theravada is the teaching that was taught and passed down by the elders. Mahayana is the teaching that was developed later on (Albahari). Theravada Buddhism mainly teaches people that redemption is something that a person can only achieve on their own and the teacher can only give guidance. The individuals who believe in Theravada believe that Buddha was a man who carried superpowers, but at the end of the day, he was a man.

On the other hand, people who follow Mahayana believe that there are many claiming Buddha's but only one who can be given the title of Buddha. The other Buddha's teach people and help them reach salvation. They have elevated the actual Buddha to God's level. Mahayana emphasizes that part of Buddha's life in which he delayed Nirvana to help people with salvation (De Silva). The first 60 monks that Buddha sent taught people based on the five principles. They mainly taught people compassion and kindness, since these values are embedded deep in the Buddhist views. The main essence of Buddhism is kindness and treating everyone with inclusivity.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt in the fact that Buddhism was and still is one of the most popular religion. Most people like it because of its simplicity and teachings. The contemporary world has given the religion great appreciation and acceptance because it excludes worshipping of any God. The religion is centered on finding oneself through meditation. Further, the five principles of religion enrich it even more. Buddhism teaches people to be happy and kind to one another. Most people find these teachings to be in sync with their own life goals. The fact the religion encourages change makes it more popular among the believers as well as the non-believers. Gautama Buddha and his teachings have indeed made a significant mark on people all around the world.

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