

Living Buddha, Living Christ

Questions for Discussion: Chapters 3-4

1. When has your faith been called into question? What aspect of your faith led others to think you were in the wrong?
2. What helps you to embrace the presence of food and the experience of eating it?
3. What does the Eucharist or Communion mean to you?
4. Why is it so hard for us to accept the non-duality of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine?
5. When have you felt a seed within you blossom into flower?
6. What would you like people to know of your dharmakaya (body of teachings) when you are gone?
7. How do we confuse the specific teachings of Jesus with his underlying message?
8. What dharma doors can we open for the people that follow (pg 39)? What in your life opens a path for those who come after you?
9. Who are your spiritual ancestors and how are they meaningful to you?
10. How can we embody Jesus?

CHAPTER 3 – THE FIRST SUPPER

Companion Scripture Readings

To Be Grateful

I Corinthians 11:20-29

Living in the Presence of God

Genesis 1; Genesis 9:3-4

The Bread We Eat

Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:22-25

The Body of Reality

John 14:8-11; John 14:25-28

Questions for Reflection

1. *To Be Grateful* ~~ This chapter focuses on being aware and mindful, of being truly present to the many gifts God gives us. Paul in I Corinthians chastises the early church which is gathering for the regular agape feast for not being grateful, but in fact being just the opposite, in essence for being like “pigs”. How grateful are you for the little miracles of life that Thich Nhat Hanh suggests e.g., seeing a flower, breathing fresh air, eating a meal?
2. *Looking into Our Food* ~~ In Buddhism before every meal the Five Contemplations are recited to help the monk or nun deepen their appreciation of the meal they are about to eat. How often do you say thanksgiving before a meal? When you do, is it done mindfully? When it is done in deep gratefulness is the experience of the meal changed in any way?
3. *Living in the Presence of God* ~ Read Genesis 1. Consider God’s work through Creation and that Presence in your every breathing moment. As our text suggests, “Piety is the recognition that everything is linked to the presence of God in every moment.” How do you experience this?
4. *The Bread We Eat* ~~ Read Matthew’s and Luke’s versions of the “Last Supper”. The feast of Passover/Seder is celebrated as a thanksgiving and a memorial for the release of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Jesus followed the tradition with his disciples. In Christianity, the tradition continues and is the basis for the Eucharist/Holy Communion, helping us celebrate our release from the old ways of being and seeing. “. What meaning do these texts have for you personally? What meaning does Eucharist/ Holy Communion have for you?
5. *The Body of Reality* ~~ Read the texts from the Gospel of John. What is Jesus saying about the Ultimate Reality?

Exercises and Meditation

1. From *Looking into Our Food* ~~ This week eat at least one meal in total silence. Eat slowly, paying careful attention to the food on your plate, the actual process of eating and giving thanks for this wonderful gift. How does this change your perspective of meal time?

2. From *Living in the Presence of God* ~~ Spend one day this week living in the Presence of God. When you wake up, be mindful of how you feel, the comfortable bed you slept in, the light coming in the window. When your feet touch the floor, pay attention to the sensation and gift of being able to walk. When you turn on the faucet, be thankful for the clean water that is available to you on demand. Note in your journal your experiences and observations as you go through the day with gratitude.
3. From *The Bread We Eat* ~~ If possible this week, attend a worship service at a church that offers Eucharist/Holy Communion. Listen carefully to the readings, the liturgy and when receiving the bread and wine, consider what these words mean to you personally at this time in your life and in your spiritual journey. Journal your experience.

Notes:

CHAPTER 4 – LIVING BUDDHA, LIVING CHRIST

Companion Scripture Readings

<i>His Life is His Teaching</i>	Luke 11:9-13; Matthew 7:7-11; Thomas 94; Thomas 2; Matthew 7:12-21; John 6:45-51; John 14:1-12
<i>Mindfulness is the Buddha</i>	Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; John 1:29-34; Acts 2:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:16-18; Galatians 5:13-25
<i>More Doors</i>	Mark 4:11-12; Matthew 13:10-15; Luke 8:9-10
<i>The Mother of all Buddhas</i>	Matthew 6:1-6; Matthew 5:43-48; Matthew 7:1-4; Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10
<i>Touching Our Ancestors</i>	John 8:31-47; Romans 4:18-25
<i>I am the Way</i>	John 14:5-11
<i>I Am Always There for You</i>	Matthew 18: 19-20; Matthew 28:18-20
<i>Freedom from Notions</i>	Matthew 19:27-30; Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 12:13-21
<i>Seeing the Way, Taking the...</i>	John 14:5-6, Acts 9:1-2; Acts 18:24-26; Matthew 10:37-39; Thomas 55; Matthew 6:24-25; Mark 8:34-37
<i>Your Body is the Body...</i>	Romans 7:4-6; I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 2:11-22

Questions for Reflection

1. *His Life is His Teaching* ~~ What does the author mean by appreciating Jesus as “both a historical door and an ultimate door”? Consider Luke 11:9-13; Matthew 7:7-11; Thomas 94; Thomas 2

Consider the concept of non-duality suggested by Thich Nhat Hanh. How do you understand this concept? How does it apply to Jesus Christ? How does it apply to you? John 14:1-12; John 6: 45-51

Where do you focus your faith – on the crucifixion, on the resurrection, on Jesus’ teachings or a combination?

2. *Mindfulness is the Buddha* ~~ Buddha was enlightened and Jesus became “enlightened” at His baptism. The followers of Jesus received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and their lives were irrevocably changed. How has your spiritual path changed you? How has the Holy Spirit touched you? Have you become more mindful, e.g., tolerant, open, compassionate, understanding, reflecting the fruits of the Spirit?
3. *More Doors* ~~ How do you respond to the idea that the Kingdom of God is here and now? If this is true, does it call you to live your life differently than if one assumes that the Kingdom of God is a future event? Mark 4:11-12; Matthew 13:10-15; Luke 8:9-10

Christianity does not have “dharma-doors” e.g., “teaching doors” but there is a view that the Holy Spirit always leads us to new ways of understanding if we listen. Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that “we should not be afraid of more Dharma doors”. If the same were said of our understanding of Christianity, and the Holy Spirit encouraged you to change your beliefs and understanding, how would you respond?

Thich Nhat Hanh also suggests that new ways of understanding allow the teaching (dharma doors) to become a living organism that allows for growth and a deeper wisdom as the world changes. From your perspective, can the same be said of Christian teaching and belief? How has it changed and grown? What examples can you identify that might reflect your view?

4. *The Mother of all Buddhas* ~~ The living Dharma (way of understanding and love) is mindfulness. In Christianity, we might consider the Great Commandment our “Dharma” and there are many ways to move this “law” into everyday practice. In Buddhism, it is mindfulness which is deepened through practice, practice is deepened through meditation. In Christianity, we often start with “the Law” – the action – and forget the need for prayer and mindfulness of “the Holy”. Are the results different depending on the outcome used? If so, in what respect? Matthew 6:1-6; Matthew 5:43-48; Matthew 7:1-4; Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34

Buddhists consider “mindfulness” instrumental in deepening their spiritual practice. In Christianity, this might be considered “awakening to the Kingdom of Heaven”. Jesus offered many parables about “awareness”. What do these texts suggest is necessary? Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10

5. *Touching Our Ancestors* ~~ The Old Testament writers put great import on the ancestors of the nation, Israel. The Jews of Jesus’ time did also, and in doing so, at times completely missed the point. Paul, in writing to the Roman community between 57-58 A.D. also ties the history of the Jews to the new “faith” of Christianity. Who are your spiritual teachers/ancestors? What have you learned from them? Like the Jews of Jesus’ time, are there beliefs that could now be left as you grow on your journey?
6. *I am the Way* ~~ Buddhism has both a historical orientation (Theravada) and a metaphysical one (Mahayana). Christianity has developed similarly, with some Christians basing their faith in the “historical” teaching of the Church and a more literal view of the Scriptures while other Christians are more “metaphysical” in their belief. So, when Jesus says, “I am the Way”, what does this mean to you?
7. *I Am Always There for You* ~~ After reading this section, consider these Scriptures from our own sacred texts: Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 18: 19-20. How is Jesus present to you in your daily life? How do you make yourself available to His Presence and help?

8. *Seeing the Way is Seeing Me* ~~ The author tells of a story of a pilgrim who came to Buddha but could not see him because his eyes were closed. What stories/teachings from the Christian scriptures convey the same truth?
9. *Freedom from Notions* ~~ Jesus often taught that what society and religion considered important are, in fact, not. Consider Christianity as you experience it, what aspects of the tradition seem not of importance to you? Or, very important? What freedom does Jesus lead you toward? What do the companion scripture texts (Matthew 19:27-30; Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 12:13-21) suggest about our notions?

The teachings of Buddha have at times been taken out of context. In the East, there is a saying that one often focuses on the “finger pointing toward the moon” and in practice completely misses “the moon”. In your experience, what teachings of Jesus have been taken out of context so that we end up focusing on the means, not the end? What happens when we do this?

10. *Seeing the Way, Taking the Path* ~~ The Gospel teaching that one must lose one’s life to gain it can be interpreted literally (consider the Christian martyrs of the 1st through 3rd centuries). But one might also consider this a call to renounce the “self” or “ego”. Do you see parallels between Buddha’s teaching and Jesus’? How does your practice deepen your understanding of this teaching?
11. *Your Body is the Body of Christ* ~~ How would you respond to the author’s question as to whether God has to be personified? How would you explain the concept of the “mystical body of Christ” to someone who was unfamiliar with the concept? Paul often emphasized this to the early church, consider the following texts: Romans 7:4-6; I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 2:11-22. How do these explain how our body is also the body of Christ?

Exercises and Meditation

1. From *His Life is His Teaching*. Depending on our personal “theology” or frame of reference, we will engage our secular and spiritual lives through our preferred perspective. How might this inform your world view and effect your conversations with other Christians and non-Christians? Consider your personal theology this week and how it influences your relationships and world view. Journal what your awareness.
2. From *The Mother of All Buddhas*. After reading the Scriptures suggested for this section, consider how Jesus is calling you to become more aware. Prayerfully sit with this question during the week. How are you called to deepen your own “mindfulness” or “awakening”? Whatever practice you select, use it throughout the week and pay attention to how your perceptions/actions change. What do you discover?

3. From *I Am Understanding, I Am Love*. When we consider the Gospel telling of Jesus' life (the birth narrative telling of the star, shepherds, and Magi); the calling of the disciples from Peter to Mary Magdalene to John to Thomas or the recognition by the Samaritan woman at the well, it becomes clear that Jesus had an amazing presence and spirit. This week, in prayer, sit with Jesus (however you perceive him ~~ as friend, teacher, brother, Savior, or God). Be aware of how "relationship" may change your awareness and meeting of Christ. What do you experience?
4. From *Suffering and the Way Out*. Make a concerted effort this week to set time aside for silence and being apart from life's daily demands. Ideally, the minimum time should be an hour or two. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and be silent. Do not engage in any action, simply sit in silence and pay attention to what you think, feel, experience. What do you discover?

Notes: