

Living Buddha, Living Christ

Chapters 7-8 Questions for Discussion

1. Is having roots in multiple traditions strengthening or does it leave you directionless? How does this affect you?
2. Who are your spiritual ancestors?
3. How do your blood ancestors who have passed on help you stay grounded?
4. What are the jewels of Christianity that mean the most to you?
5. Which of the Five Precepts of Buddhism have the most potential for healing the ills of our society (pg 91)?
6. In what ways can the Fourth Precept strengthen the testimony of integrity (pg 100)?
7. What can the Fifth Precept teach us about simplicity (pg 105)?
8. How do the concept of sanctification in western Christianity (<https://seminary.grace.edu/what-is-sanctification/>) and the concept of deification in eastern Christianity (pg 123) compare? Which fits your understanding?
9. How does the story of Mrs. Ly relate to Matthew 7:21? How can you connect deeply with the Spirit?
10. Thich Nhat Hanh talks about creating a mini-Pure Land here on Earth (pg 127-128). What would it mean for the Kingdom of God to be made real in the life of our church?
11. How does regularly getting centered-down affect your response to a crisis?

Resources for Reflection

Chapter 7 ~~ For A Future to Be Possible

Companion Scripture Readings

<i>Rerooting</i>	Deuteronomy 4: 8-10; Deuteronomy 11:18-20; Proverbs 22:4-6; Isaiah 28:8-10
<i>The Jewels of Our Tradition</i>	Leviticus 19:3; Ephesians 6:1-4
<i>Cultivating Compassion</i>	Genesis 1:27-30; Genesis 2:15-17; Leviticus 19:17-18; Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Matthew 5:2-10; Matthew 5:21-48; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 19: 16-22; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 6:20-38; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 13:8-10; Romans 15:1-6; Thomas 25
<i>Cultivating Loving Kindness</i>	Luke 10:25-37; Luke 12:42-48; Luke 16:1-15;
<i>The Oneness of Body and Mind</i>	Genesis 2: 18-25; Matthew 5:27-32; Matthew 19:3-12; Ephesians 5:21-33
<i>Unmindful Speech Can Kill</i>	Luke 6:36-37; Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:14-19; James 3:1-12
<i>Mindful Consuming</i>	Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 19:16-24; Luke 12:13-31; Romans 14:16-23; Luke 12:15-34; Ephesians 5:1-20; I Corinthians 11:31-33; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
<i>Real Love Never Ends</i>	Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5: 43-48; Matthew 22:34-40; John 13:34-35; John 15:12; Romans 12:9-13; Romans 13:8-10; I Corinthians 13:1-13

Questions for Reflection:

Last chapter focused on teaching, what in Christian tradition is known as “theoria” or theory. This chapter focuses more on taking the teaching (*theoria*, theory) into everyday life through experience (*praxis*, practice). The questions and exercises that follow may challenge you to do so.

1. *Rerooting* ~~ The author suggests that to truly find our center it is often best that we become “re-rooted” in our own tradition. He suggests this is critical especially for those who have left their tradition in search of something else and also speaking specifically of the younger generation. Do you believe this is a valid observation as it relates to Christianity? If so, in what way? And if so, what do you feel is needed to achieve this “re-rooting”?
Deuteronomy 4: 8-10; Deuteronomy 11:18-20; Proverbs 22:4-6; Isaiah 28:8-10
2. *The Jewels of Our Tradition* ~~ The author talks about how our ancestors connect us to tradition. This is not a common concept in the modern Western world. Consider your “blood” ancestors, what is their legacy in your life today...how have they sustained you? Who are your “spiritual” ancestors (those who have been your teachers along the journey)? How have you/can you take what they have gifted you with into the healing of the world?
Leviticus 19:3; Ephesians 6:1-4

3. *Cultivating Compassion*~~ Do the Five Wonderful Precepts of Buddhism have anything in common with the Judeo-Christian tradition? If so, what are the parallels? What are the differences as you perceive them? You might want to consider the following texts while responding to this question: Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Matthew 5:2-10; Matthew 5:21-48; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 19: 16-22; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 6:20-38; Luke 10:25-37; Romans 13:8-10; Romans 15:1-6; Thomas 25

Identify 5 “jewels” of Christianity as you embrace and understand it. If you were to tell someone about your faith, what are the five things you would want them to know? How do these parallel (or differ) from the Five Wonderful Precepts of Buddhism?

As suggested above, the material in this section may closely parallel teachings in our own tradition although in the Judeo-Christian tradition we typically restrict the idea of loving-kindness to humans only. Read the texts from Genesis and then consider what this suggests about the food we eat (note that neither creation story says anything about God giving permission to eat animals!)? How do you respond to the idea of extending loving kindness to all living beings? What practical implications does that have? Genesis 1:27-30; Genesis 2:15-17

4. *Cultivating Loving Kindness* ~~ Most of us would say that we do not steal or take what is not rightfully ours. But, Jesus suggests we may in fact be thieves even when we do not recognize it (Luke 10: 25-37; Luke 12:42-48; Luke 16:1-15). If we expand this concept consider that we live in a culture that is highly consumer-oriented where material goods often drive our behaviors and values. Is it possible to see our constant desire for the newest phone or car or stylish clothing item as, in essence, taking resources (stealing) from others? Is this a type of greed we should consider changing in our daily living? Does our choice of items have an impact on someone in Bangladesh or on limited resources of water/soil that support another community or eco-system necessary for life? If so, how? What effort could you take to ensure you are engaging in actions that are in the best interest of the global community and just not in self-interest?
5. *The Oneness of Body and Mind* ~~ Buddhism has guidelines as it relates to sexual relationships based on the concept that the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of ourselves are inter-connected. In our Scriptures -- the Old Testament, Jesus’ teachings and those of Paul – this is also a topic of discussion. How does the Third Precept compare to the texts that have guided our tradition? What would be the underlying reasons for similarities and parallels? Genesis 2: 18-25; Matthew 5:27-32; Matthew 19:3-12; Ephesians 5:21-33
6. *More than One Root* ~~ Can a person be rooted in more than one spiritual tradition? Do you think there are issues with inter-faith marriage? If so, what are they? And, might there be also benefits? What might these be?

7. *Unmindful Speech Can Kill* ~~ How does the 4th Precept parallel the teachings of Jesus and other New Testament writers? Are there differences? Luke 6:36-37; Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 12:14-19; James 3:1-12
8. *Mindful Consuming* ~~ How do you respond to the concepts of emptiness, non-self, and interbeing discussed in this section (you may want to also refer back to the discussion of Interbeing in Chapter 1)? How do you respond to the idea that “your body is not your own”? Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 19:16-24; Luke 12:15-34; Romans 14:16-23; Luke 12:42-48; Ephesians 5:1-20; I Corinthians 11:31-33; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
9. *Real Love Never Ends* ~~ Often, we make our material world or our emotional needs our “God”. In reading the scripture texts, what are the “best values” that you could study and practice? Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 22:34-40; John 13:34-35; John 15:12; Romans 12:9-13; Romans 13:8-10; I Corinthians 13:1-13
10. *Practicing and Sharing* ~~ What do you believe are the core teachings of Christianity that are treasures that help us “dwell in peace” leading you “along a path of beauty, wholesomeness and truth”? How do you share these with those around you, especially young people with whom you may have contact?

Exercises and Meditations:

1. From *Cultivating Compassion* ~~ At the end of each day this week, look back on your thoughts, words and actions. Did you deal peacefully with others? If you identify ways that you did not, can you accept this and deal compassionately with yourself? Journal what you discover about compassion throughout this week.

In cultivating compassion this week, consider going meatless for several days. When eating, give thanks to the plants and microscopic organisms that are being “sacrificed” so that you may be nourished.

2. From *Cultivating Loving Kindness* ~~ How do you practice generosity to the world around you? These actions may be small or large. Make a list of things you do on a daily and periodic basis to show loving compassion to the world around you.

Looking back over the week, assess if you have been “mindful” in your relationships or do you catch yourself multi-tasking when you are with others instead of being “present” to the person and listening deeply to what is behind their words? If you see this behavior in yourself, pick a time each day when you will try to be totally mindful to the present situation. This is not an easy exercise so pick a small window of time, say 15 minutes to start. If you notice your thoughts drifting, do not judge yourself; simply bring your attention back to the

task or conversation that is in the present moment. Journal what you experience as you go through a week of this practice.

3. From *Unmindful Speech Can Kill* ~ In Buddhism, mindful speech mean being truthful but it goes further than that to something called “right speech”. This means that one does not gossip, spread rumors or repeat something about a situation or person unless one is absolutely sure the information is true. Pay attention this week to what you say and see how often your speech is “right speech”. If it is not from time to time, note this and be intentional about speaking differently the next time. Throughout the week, consider how you can cultivate the art of listening and speaking.

If you find yourself upset this week, try the technique of “mindful breathing” outlined in this chapter. Observe what happens. Come back to this technique whenever you feel frustrated, angry, sad or depressed.

4. From *Mindful Consuming* ~ Often, as Westerners, we are not mindful of what we consume. We are used to fulfilling all of our needs and most of our “wants”. This week, for one day, make a list of everything you consume, be it food, radio, TV, internet, alcohol, etc., On another day, keep a “time log” recording how you spend your resources (time, money, energy) in work, with family, in prayer/meditation, exercise, and so forth. Become aware of where your time, energy and resources are directed, what does it tell you about your priorities? Do you focus on your “needs” or your “wants”? Spend time in prayer/meditation discerning what is truly necessary and if there are life style changes you are being called to make.
5. From *Real Love Never Ends* ~ It is difficult to love unconditionally, either ourselves or others. Yet, the path of Jesus calls us to this practice. In Buddhism there is a practice known as *tonglen*, a heart-centered meditation practice that helps the practitioner develop compassion for him/herself and others. The process is simple although not necessarily easy. Sit as you normally do for prayer/meditation. Breathe slowly paying close attention to your in-breath and out-breath. After breathing slowly, mindfully and deeply for a few minutes, on the in-breath image that you are breathing in the pain, suffering, hurt, anxiety, or upset...either yours or another’s. Take this suffering into your heart center. Hold it there for a few seconds and then on the out-breath, release the suffering and instead focus on sending God’s Love, Light and healing.

A similar practice is that of *metta*. This practice also helps us develop compassion toward ourselves, others and all of creation. You can easily find instructions on the internet for this practice, but below is a brief overview. Consider using this practice this week when you are not feeling loved or when you realize you do not love others deeply. Ideally, direct the thoughts first to yourself, then to someone you are at odds with, then to everyone you know and then, lastly, to all Creation. To begin, find a comfortable place to sit. Once you are settled, begin slowly breathing. Do this for a few minutes. Once you have settled into the

breathing, begin to recite the following. First direct the intention to yourself, then to others, then to Creation.

May I be peaceful. May I be happy. May I be safe. May I awaken to the light of my true nature. May I be free.

May (name) be peaceful. May (name) be happy. May (name) be safe. May (name) awaken to the light of his/her true nature...May (name) be free.

May all family and friends be peaceful. May all family and friends be happy. May all family and friends be safe. May all family and friends awaken to the light of their true nature. May all family and friends be free.

May all of Creation be peaceful. May all of Creation be happy...May all of Creation be safe. May all of Creation awaken to the light of its true nature....May all of Creation be free.

Notes:

Chapter 8 ~ Taking Refuge

Companion Scripture Readings

<i>The Foundation of Stability...</i>	Matthew 7: 24-27; Mark 12: 28-38; Luke 14:16-33; Luke 12:16-21; I Timothy 6: 6-11; Thomas 63; Thomas 64
<i>Embracing not Fighting</i>	Matthew 5:2-10; Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 5:14-16; John 1:1-5; John 1:9-14; Thomas 24; Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-10; Galatians 3:27-28; Psalm 56: 10-12; Psalm 112:6-8; Luke 12:3-5; John 1:1-5; John 1:9-14; Matthew 5:14-16, Thomas 24
<i>Touching the Living Christ</i>	Matthew 6:1-8; Matthew 23:1-36; Mark 12:38-44; Luke 11:37-52; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 20:45-47; Thomas 14

Questions for Reflection

1. *A Safe Island* ~ Within Christianity, what do you consider to be devotional practices? What do you believe are transformational practices? What has been your experience on your journey in both contexts?
2. *Mindfulness is the Refuge* ~ In this section, Thich Nhat Hanh discusses the Three Jewels of Buddhism. Are there parallels in the Christian tradition from your perspective? In Buddhism, the idea and practice of mindfulness helps one find peace and happiness. What practice(s) in your own experience, carry similar meaning for you?
3. *The Foundation of Stability and Calm* ~ Jesus' teachings suggest that we often take comfort in things that do not provide a foundation of stability. In reading the texts from our own tradition, what do you discover about the ideas and/or activities that are contrary to our spiritual growth? Matthew 7: 24-27; Mark 12: 28-33; Luke 14:16-33; Luke 12:16-21; I Timothy 6: 6-11; Thomas 63; Thomas 64
4. *Embracing not Fighting* ~ When and where do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit?

What does Jesus teach about embracing and not fighting? How would life be different if you truly incorporated these teachings into daily life? Matthew 5:2-10; Matthew 18:21-35

The idea that humanity is a microcosm of God is part of traditional Christianity but generally not something we hear in church. If we are, in fact, called to become a "little Christ", would that enable you to embrace all aspects of life instead of pushing against that which causes you suffering? Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8:4-10; Galatians 3:27-28

5. *Embracing Not Fighting* identifies what may seem to be a major difference between Buddhism and Western Christianity. Yet, it may be more clearly identified as the difference between devotional vs. transformational practice (consider the section, *A Safe Island*, at the start of this chapter as well as these texts: Psalm 56: 10-12; Psalm 112:6-8; Luke 12:3-5; John 1:1-5; John 1:9-14; Matthew 5:14-16, Thomas 24). In Christian devotional practice, we often take action to “separate” ourselves from evil and our Scriptures are interpreted through a “devotional” and dualistic frame of reference (e.g., good vs. evil; the Devil vs. Jesus) not through a transformational point of view. In transformational practice, one embraces the tensions and opposites inherent in a situation in an effort to move into a non-dualistic way of seeing and being. Observe your thoughts and actions over time, identifying situations when you engage reality “devotionally” or “transformatively”. How are these experiences different?
6. *Touching the Living Christ* ~~ Jesus used similar teaching stories to address the same idea as the story related here. Often we focus on ritual, religious tradition, doctrine and canon law but disregard the “heart of devotion”. After reading the following texts from our tradition, consider the parallels between Mrs. Ly and the characters in these stories. Can you find parallels in the church today? In your own life and practice? Matthew 6:1-8; Matthew 23:1-36; Mark 12:38-44; Luke 11:37-52; Luke 18:9-14; Luke 20:45-47; Thomas 14
7. *A Mini-Pure Land* ~~ After reading this section, are there parallels in Christianity? What might these be? Have you had any experiences in a community that might parallel a “Pure Land” as discussed here? Was there any impact on your spiritual practice or path?
8. *Devotional and Transformational Practices* ~~ In Buddhism, mindfulness and mindful breathing are foundational practices to touching life deeply. Are there similar practices in Christianity that help you move more deeply into the Presence of God? If so, what are these?

Exercises and Meditations

1. From *A Safe Island* ~~ One way to develop mindfulness is to set an alarm to go off periodically throughout the day. When the bell sounds, you stop what you are doing, and be mindful of where you are, what you are doing and your breath. You can also use a moment or two to say a short blessing, a prayer of gratitude or repeat a short scripture verse that touches you. There are actually free (or nearly free) apps for smart phones for this purpose! Just web search for one that meets your needs.
2. From *The Foundation of Stability and Calm* ~~ In this section, Thich Nhat Hanh provides a meditation focused on the Buddhist Trinity. Using Thich Nhat Hanh’s meditation as a template, take time to rewrite it using the Christian Trinity. Then use your meditation as part of your devotional practice this week.

3. From *Touching the Living Christ* ~~ The traditional Christian practice of “The Prayer of the Heart” is mentioned in this section. This practice is grounded in the Eastern Orthodox tradition although it is also sometimes practiced in the West. The prayer (sometimes thought to be the words St Paul alludes to when suggesting that we pray “without ceasing”) is only one line:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.” This is repeated throughout the prayer time.

Or, alternatively, one may match the in- and out-breaths with these words: ***“I breathe in Jesus; I breathe out Jesus. I breathe in the gift of God's Life; I breathe out the gift of my own life in God.”***

This week as part of your practice, consider incorporating one of these methods of staying mindful and present in your time of prayer.

Notes: