

I received a question this week, which, I'm told affects a lot of people. How do you deal with the guilt of leaving Christianity and becoming a Buddhist? Although this vlog referenced these two religions, I think the issues would apply to most other circumstances where a person has transferred from another religion to Buddhism. In this vlog I have interviewed four people who had different experiences to discover what we could learn.

### **Their Lives When They Became Buddhist**

*Caroline;* "I had left Christianity so I never felt guilty about the beliefs of the practice when I started studying, I saw the validity of the practice to benefit others."

*Martha:* I had stopped my Christian practice and was searching when I found Buddhism. It had a profound effect on me. My biggest struggle was with beliefs I had learned as a child which were off. I had to reconcile them and that took a while.

*Jessie:* As a Christian, I had always liked the new testament with its humanitarian ideas. I never bought the into God will punish you idea in the old testament, which is more fear based. I liked the idea of universal laws better, rather than commandments.

I feel Buddhist ideals were very like the Sermon on the Mount with the one exception of charity - since Buddhism teaches people to fish rather than give hand-outs.

As my practice deepened, I studied, and began the practice of caring and supporting others. When I did this any guilt still remaining just fell away.

*Bella:* I had given up on my Christian faith but had been told it was a mortal sin to adopt another faith and I would go to Hell. But I knew that chanting made me feel better and I followed my deepest instincts, because I felt chanting was helping me. I knew I had to make a choice between the two religions, so I made the leap and became a Buddhist. Letting go of the guilt didn't happen overnight.

She had been raised with right and wrong. She liked the idea of creating value, which was the Buddhist thrust.

### **Problems That Arise in Social & Familial relationships**

The biggest conflict and largest source of guilt seemed to come, not from the change in beliefs but from family and friends. We all want to belong and the family can threaten this wish if violently opposed. We love our family members and don't want

**to be estranged so this creates a real pull-tug.**

*Caroline:* Guilt came from my mother, who had raised her in Catholicism. She said, said "How can you do this to me?" Her mother saw my becoming a Buddhist as a defection and a slap in the face."

*(Martha).* I didn't have a conflict with my family. We didn't ever talk about religion and politics.

*Jessie:* I experienced some real difficulty from my older sister. She had been like another mother to me. She was a fundamentalist and was very upset, writing me bad letters, attacking the practice, telling me I would go to hell. I got guidance and was told that her sister's slandering of the practice was not good for her. So I wrote my sister that I loved her but I was not going to do this anymore. If she couldn't be positive, please not to write me. They had no contact for ten years.

*Bella:* "My husband totally opposed my becoming a Buddhist. He would throw things, call me names. I would have normally given in but not this time. Chanting made me feel too good."

My family was afraid to confront me. "What I was doing was the big no,no. They were embarrassed that I was different. If I visited I had to do gongyo in my room. 'Don't do it here, people can't handle it.' It was like I was the family puppy who had pooped on the carpet. They completely ignored the fact I was a Buddhist."

In her later years, my mother told her she'd seen positive changes in me, and eventually expressed curiosity about what my practice was. I think she would have asked me sooner but her husband was very conservative and she didn't want to rock the boat."

*Jocelyn:* I had been raised in Christianity and been active in the Christian church. But I always felt something was missing and I wasn't getting answers to my questions.

Becoming Buddhist I turned my back on family traditions. I had raised her own children as Christians and they were surprised and maybe a little confused about my shift. But I had always been the head of the family so they took a wait and see attitude.

## **Resolution**

*Caroline:* "My mother saw that I had become a good, solid human being. She met my friends , whom she liked, and my husband whom she loved. At the end of her life she chose to come to my house, I was one of five siblings. She chose my house, even though she knew we would be chanting everyday. The members came to visit her and it was a lovely time."

*Martha:* "I never had to deal with my family."

*Jessie:* " After 10 years my mother was troubled with the stand-off. I told her I would like to have a relationship with my sister, and had no animosity. Her sister admitted she saw how my life had changed for the good. We never discussed religion. But we ended up having a relationship.

"My mother didn't like the practice either but didn't confront it. Later on she went to a meeting with me, as I had gone to church with her. We agreed to disagree."

*Bella:* My mother saw positive changes in me and years later eventually expressed curiosity about what my practice was. I think she would have asked me sooner, but her husband was very conservative and she didn't want to rock the boat. My brother and sister are supportive but don't discuss religion. Their attitude is "Our sister is a Buddhist and believes in peace, so be nice to her."

*Jocelyn:* "My children have come to a meeting or two, but have stuck with their Christian beliefs. They admitted that they see the happiness in me and so are supportive of what I do."

## **What Have We Learned?**

### **Getting Over Guilt Takes time**

First of all each person told me that letting go of the guilt didn't happen overnight. When they found points of commonality with their former religion it made it easier to let go of guilt . They all recommended study to help that process.

### **Study Helps**

If beliefs are a the issue as they were for another person, who felt he was abandoning God, that person may not make the shift. But if basically you feel good about Buddhism but still have questions, study will help.

### **Do Your Human Revolution**

If a person is searching and has in many ways disengaged from their religion, then the main issues seem to be with family, and friends. Their family members love them and because of this want to have a relationship. In most cases, even if they didn't agree they abstained from argument in favor of the relationship. When the Buddhists stuck to their guns and did their human revolution, their family saw this and reconciled themselves. At least they could see Buddhism had been good for their family member.

### **Other readings you might like**

We have put together a down loadable booklet for you with 11 articles written by the SGI study department showing areas of commonality and difference between Buddhism and Christianity. They were written in 2004 for Living Buddhism and I couldn't find them on the website [www.sgi-usa.org](http://www.sgi-usa.org) because the Living Buddhism archives only go back to 2016. I have also included a quote from President Ikeda from his book, *Life an Enigma A Precious Tool*, which can help with the question, do Buddhist believe in God?

Thank you so much for your questions and comments. As always send me your questions. I will use them in the order I receive them. See you in two weeks.