

Feeling Guilty Shifting from Christianity to Buddhism? What To Do.

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 Christianity and Buddhism,, I think the issues would apply to most other circumstances, where a person has transferred from one religion to another. For this vlog I interviewed five people, to discover what we could learn from their experiences.

The areas I'm going to address are:

- First: Where were you in your life when you encountered Buddhism?
- Second: How did your family members respond to your decision?
- Finally: I'm going to look at whether there was a possibility of a resolution with family members who opposed the shift.

The biggest conflict and source of guilt, seemed to come, not from the change in beliefs but from the reaction of family and friend to their becoming a Buddhist. We love our family members. 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 can create a real pull- tug.

Five Experiences

Where were you in your life, when you discovered Buddhism?

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."

How did Your family respond?

My mother, who had raised me in Catholicism made me feel guilty. 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, as she was the one who had raised me to be Christian. This was very hard for me because I loved my mother and didn't want to hurt her."

Did this opposition ever resolve?

My mother saw that I had become a good, solid human being. She met my friends , whom she liked, and my husband, who is also a Buddhist, whom she loved. At the end of her life she chose to come to my home. 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 - Where were you in your life when your discovered Buddhism?

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 Christian beliefs I had learned as a child, which were off. I had to reconcile them and that took a while. I studied a lot.

How did your family members respond?

"I didn't have a conflict with my family. We didn't ever talk about religion and politics."

"I never had to deal with my family., so there was no need for resolution.

Jessie: Where were you in your life when you discovered Buddhism?

As a Christian, I 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 are 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.

How did your family members respond?

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. We had no contact for ten years."

Did this estrangement ever resolve?

Jessie: " After 10 years my mother was troubled with the stand-off between my sister andd me. I told her I would like to have a relationship with my sister, and had no animosity. My 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, where were you in your life when you discovered Buddhism?

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. I had been raised with the idea of right and wrong and you'll be punished and it takes a while to get over that.

I liked the idea of creating value, which was part of Buddhism.

How did your family members respond?

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. their attitude was, ‘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.”

Was this conflict ever resolved?

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, Where were you in your life when you discovered Buddhism?

Jocelyn: I was still practicing Christianity but felt something was missing. I couldn't get my questions answered but was told I should just have faith." That didn't work for me. It's ducking the questions.

How did your family respond?

Jocelyn:" Becoming Buddhist I turned my back on family traditions. I had raised my 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."

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 want me to be happy and so they are supportive of what I do.”

What Are The Take-Aways?

1. 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. More than one person mentioned that they followed

what made them feel good, and what they knew was beneficial for them. In other words they trusted their own inner voice more than an outer authority.

2. Find points of commonality between the two religions

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3. Trust Your Inner Knowing

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4. Study

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.

5. Get Guidance

If you don't know how to handle the reaction of your family members or still have questions about Buddhism, get guidance.

6. Do Your Human Revolution

If a person is searching and has in many ways disengaged from their former 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 many cases, even if they didn't agree, they abstained from argument in favor of the relationship. In the cases where three family members tried to control the practitioner through guilt or threats, when the Buddhists stuck to their guns and did their human revolution, their family saw this and reconciled themselves. They recognized Buddhism had been good for their family member.

Comments: Thank you so much for y