

BUDDHISM RELIGIOUS FAITH

Buddhism is a tradition that focuses on the personal development. It is a philosophy that includes a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices.

It is a religious faith based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as Buddha “the awakened one.”

Buddha lived and taught in North-Eastern India between 6th-4th BC. Followers of this religion are called Buddhists. They recognize Buddha as the awakened or enlightened teacher, who shared his insights to help human beings end ignorance.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHISM

The foundations of the Buddhist tradition are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, as well as the Buddhist path, which distinguishes a Buddhist and a non Buddhist.

Buddhism is based on the holy writings and scriptures of Vinaya Pitaka, which is one of the three parts of the Tri Pitaka. The other two parts are Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamam Pitaka.

The religion emphasizes good moral and ethical conduct that in the end leads to good Karma, following the Buddhist belief in the Law of Cause and Effect.

Buddhism believes in four noble truths and these are; the existence of suffering, cause of suffering, cessation of suffering and the path to cessation of suffering.

The path to cessation of suffering is an “eight fold path” of right views, right resolve, right speech, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

Buddhism believes in the development of mindfulness and the practice of meditation. This is based on the teaching that at the age of thirty five, Gautama Buddha sat in meditation under a sacred fig tree and vowed not to rise before achieving enlightenment.

It encourages living a simple life, renouncing conventional living and becoming monastic. For example, Buddhists are called upon to refrain from using luxurious seats and beddings.

Buddhists practice ceremonies to invoke the Buddha to take part in their daily activities. This is especially during worship.

Buddhists call for a middle way, a path of moderation between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification.

They believe in simple fasting, as prolonged and painful fasting causes extreme suffering and pain, that does not offer solution to worldly problems.

The main goal of a Buddhist middle path is attain Nivarna (complete freedom, liberation and non-attachment), which relieves all satiate beings from worldly suffering.

Buddhists believe in a cycle of spiritual rebirth, reincarnating as either human, animal, ghost or other beings, till they attain Nivarna.

In Buddhism, the Buddha is a title for those who have attained Nivarna and therefore qualify to serve as Buddhist religious leaders.

They believe in the Dharma which is the Buddhist teaching or the Law that provides guidelines for the alleviation of suffering and attainment of Nivarna.

Buddhism emphasizes restraining from intoxicants like drugs and alcohol that lead to loss of mindfulness.

It also encourages vegetarianism although the Buddha himself did not prohibit the eating of meat.

Buddhists are encouraged to refrain from eating at a wrong time or unreasonable time. They only eat from sunrise to noon and no eating after midday.

Worldly entertainment like dancing, playing music, attending shows and other performances is prohibited.

Perfumes, ointment, garlands and other things that tend to beautify or adorn a person such as jewelry and cosmetics are also prohibited.

Buddhists are encouraged to give offering to Buddha as a form of worship thanksgiving and seeking blessings from Buddha.

They have temples that serve as places of worship and meditation. In the temples are religious objects and symbols as well as statues of different Buddha's.

Buddhists are encouraged to make pilgrimages to Mahabodhi temple in India where Buddha Gautama attained salvation. It is believed that this helps them to attain blessings, forgiveness of sins and success in life.

Buddhists devotees reaffirm their faith in five principles called Panchsheel. These principles are; Do not take life, Do not steal, Do not commit adultery, Do not lie and Do not consume liquor or any other intoxicants.

Buddhists accept the teaching of other religions as it uses them to open for the truth. It therefore provides a peaceful coexistence and cooperation among different religious faiths in East Africa.

BUDDHISM IN EAST AFRICA

Buddhism was introduced in East Africa by the people from Sri-Lanka, who had come to work in Dar-es-Salaam as early as the time of German colonial rule in Tanzania.

They established themselves on a two-acre piece of land in the City Centre. This land had been donated to them by the German colonial regime.

From Tanzania, Buddhism spread to Uganda and Kenya. In Kenya, it was introduced in the 1980s and only came to Uganda in 2005.

Significance of Buddhism

With a small number of followers, Buddhism serves as medicine to the different forms of suffering that people go through. This is done through its teaching of suffering as a way to enlightenment.

Buddhism promotes peaceful co-existence and cooperation among the different religious faiths as it accepts the teachings of other religions, thus promoting peace and harmony in society.

The religion has contributed to infrastructural development in East Africa. For example it has built temples, schools and other structures in all the three major countries of East Africa.

It promotes international relations with the Buddhist foreign countries especially in Asia and also leads to development. For example the Tanzania Buddhist temple and meditation centre was built by the Sri-Lankan people.

Buddhism helps to promote unity and cooperation in East Africa. For example in Tanzania, the Buddhist Association brings together the Thai, Burmese, Africans, Chinese and other Buddhists.

Buddhism has attracted international funding in East Africa. For example in the year 2000, the Buddhists in Tanzania completed a multipurpose hall with the main donation from the Chinese Buddhists.

Buddhist faith strives to create the virtues of peace, harmony and happiness among its followers, which is vital for co-existence. For example in Uganda, a Peace school is run at the Buddhist centre in Entebbe.

The faith also advocates for a strong sense of social concern and love for one another and being mindful of all people.

Buddhism provides charity to the less privileged such as the poor and orphans. For example, the Uganda Buddhist Peace School provides financial support to the poor children and orphans, whose parents and guardians cannot afford school fees.

It contributes to the offer of formal education to the people of East Africa. For example since 1996, students from Tanzania have been sponsored and completed education at the African Buddhist Seminary in South Africa.

Buddhism has promoted leadership skills and opportunities to Africans who serve as Monks at their temples. For example, the Buddhist centre in Uganda located in Entebbe is headed by the venerable Buddhakhita who is the first Ugandan Buddhist Monk.

WHY BUDDHISM HAS FEW FOLLOWERS IN EAST AFRICA

The spread of Buddhism was challenged by the strong belief in African Culture. For example this religious faith condemns alcohol drinking but in African tradition, alcohol was important for bringing people together as a community and also used in worship.

The early dominance of Christianity on the African continent made it hard for Buddhism that was introduced in the recent past to have roots. For example Buddhism was introduced in Kenya in the 1980s and in Uganda as late as 2005, yet Christianity was introduced in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

There is a challenge of limited Buddhist charity services to attract Africans into the new faith. For example there are very few Buddhist schools and hospitals in East Africa that would act as pull factors and as centers of spreading the new faith.

Food restrictions to Buddhist followers, such as prohibiting them from eating meat and eating during specific hours were another challenge that limited the spread of Buddhism in East Africa.

Respect for other religions as legitimate by the Buddhists for purposes of co-existence and cooperation, makes the Buddhist faith weak as people do not see any reason for converting into it hence attracting very few followers

Lack of faith in God by the Buddhist followers also makes the religion less appealing to East Africans thus attracting few believers.

The Buddhists teaching that discourages followers from participating in worldly entertainment like dancing and playing music discourages Africans from joining the new faith as many people indeed like to enjoy themselves.

The demand that Buddhist followers must denounce material things of the world in order to become holy and perfect is itself unwelcome to many people of East Africa and made the religion less appealing.

Buddhism received very little support from foreign countries. The little support in terms of human resource and materials limited aggressive preaching thus leading to a small number of followers in East Africa.

Buddhism did not have a strong founder and promoter in East Africa, as compared to the Christian faith that had many missionaries who came purposely to spread Christianity among Africans.

The demand that Buddhist followers should refrain from beautifying themselves with ointment, jewelry and perfumes among others discourages many people of East African especially women from joining it.

East Africa was colonized by Western Christians who gave all opportunities to the Christians to spread their faith at the expense of Asian faiths including Buddhism, hence the faith having few followers.

The influence of Islam on the East African coast also limited the spread of Buddhism in East Africa as Islam gained more dominance than any other Asian faith hence accounting for the small number of Buddhist followers in region.

JUDAISM RELIGIOUS FAITH

Judaism is a practice and belief in the Jewish religion or the religious system of the Jews. It is a religion that emphasizes the Jewish culture in conjunction with Christianity. It uses the Old Testament and the Apocrypha as its scriptures.

CHARACTERISTICS OF JUDAISM

Judaism is characterized by a commitment to traditional Jewish laws and customs, including observance of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is considered the Holy day of the Lord and a day of rest from work. It falls shortly before Friday night to night fall Saturday. This commemorates God's day of rest after six days of work as in Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:8-11.

They emphasize prayer as a communications between them and the Almighty God. Thus they encourage a prayerful life among the followers. They recited prayers at least three times a day as a sign of devotion.

Most of their prayers in traditional service can be recited in solitary, although communal prayer is preferred. This is done in the synagogue, which is their house of worship.

When entering the synagogue, the faithful are obliged to remove shoes as it is expected to be a holy place with the presence of God. This custom is believed to have been practiced by the Jews during the Biblical times as written in the book of Exodus 2:5-6.

A special dressing code is emphasized during prayer. For example, while praying, eating, reciting blessings and studying Jewish religious texts, men wear Kippah and women wear Kippot.

Female Jews are given their due respect. For example they participate in prayer service on an equal basis with men, including roles of reading from the Torah.

Judaism strongly believes in the Old Testament scriptures although it borrows some teaching from the New Testament. However some groups of the Jews do not believe in the Messiahship of Jesus and so they are still waiting for the Messiah to come.

Judaism believes that the creator, Yahweh is God. He is the creator, the controller and guider of everything that has been created. He alone has made, does make and will make all things.

It teaches and emphasizes monotheism in line with Exodus 20:1. Any act of syncretism and idolatry are strongly condemned.

They believe in the Torah that was given to Moses or believed to have been written by Moses and that there will never be any other Torah from the creator.

They believe in circumcision of the young ones in accordance to the Abrahamic covenant. This is one of their rites of passage and is meant to welcome male babies into the covenant on the eighth day of life. The baby boy is also given his Hebrew name in the ceremony.

Judaism believes in the prophets as messengers of God. They therefore believe in the prophecies of Moses as true, and they consider him as a chief prophet of God.

Judaism teachings have more respect for Prophet Moses than Jesus Christ. Jesus is considered a prophet and not a Messiah, which explains why he was on many occasions addressed as Rabbi.

Judaism teaches that faithful believers will be rewarded by the creator at the end of time and those who violate His commandments will be punished. They therefore encourage each other to respect God's commandments so as to be blessed.

Modern musical instruments as well as traditional instruments such as drums are used during praise and worship. In Uganda, the Abayudaya are well known for their wonderful singing and music. They even produce music CDs from which they raise money to support their projects and the word of God.

Judaism encourages making pilgrimages to holy places. It was customary for the Israelites to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice in the temple and this is the culture that the Judaizers uphold.

The faith teaches and encourages offering and sacrificing to God as it was in the Old Testament. This teaching conflicts with Christianity which emphasizes that Jesus was the last and perfect sacrifice to God.

Judaism is also characterized by a belief and practice of food prohibitions in line with the Torah. For example it prohibits eating of animals which do not chew the cud and those without divided hoofs such as camels, rabbits and pigs.

Judaism teaches that there will be resurrection of the dead at the time when it shall please the creator and His mention shall be exalted forever and ever.

Marriage is an extremely important lifecycle even among the followers of Judaism. A wedding takes place under a wedding canopy which symbolizes a happy house.

The followers of Judaism encourage monogamous marriage. However, they do not condemn polygamy as it was practiced by the great people of the Old Testament such as Jacob and King Solomon among others, yet these did not fall out with the creator.

They celebrate important holy days such as Exodus from Egypt and the giving of Torah to God's people. Christmas and Easter days that are much honored by Christians are regarded as ordinary days in the Jewish teaching.

They emphasize ritual cleanliness and holiness and they teach against ritual impurity. For example they encourage avoidance of any acts and environments that are ritually unclean such as contact with human corpses, graves, menstruation and semen among others as written in Leviticus 15:1-33.

Judaism stresses strict fasting as a way of self sacrifice and seeking God's blessings. It also encourages washing of hands to the elbow before eating.

NATURE OF GOD IN JUDAISM

God is believed to be the creator of everything out of nothing. He created everything using his divine command as written in Genesis 1:1-31. He is the first cause, the uncaused cause.

God is believed to be one and alone is the creator, who was, is and will be forever. He is the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

God is believed to be a spirit, that He has no body and that He is free from all the properties of matter, and that there can be no comparison to Him whatsoever.

He is the guide of everything that He created and that is why man should always seek God's guidance in whatever he does through prayer.

God is believed to be all knowing. He knows the thoughts and deeds of human beings even when they are done in hiding as it is written in Psalms 33:15 that "He forms their thoughts and knows everything they do."

God works through His messengers and prophets such as Moses who delivered His message to the king of Egypt and the Hebrews about their liberation from slavery.

God is believed to be good all the time. His goodness is reflected through the many blessings that He gives to His people including protection.

God is believed Almighty. He is above every creature on earth and in the heavens, which is why all creatures should always worship Him.

God is believed to always reward and bless those who do His Will, with material wealth on earth. He also punishes those who disobey Him, just as He did to the stubborn king of Egypt.

God is living and is immortal. He is God today, God tomorrow and God forever.

God is impartial and He treats all people of different backgrounds and different ethnic origins equally.

God is believed to be eminent and omnipresent. He is considered to be everywhere and near His people all the time.

God is believed to be most holy and does not tolerate sin. Therefore, those who go to Him should do so with repentant lives and broken hearts.

God is believed to be wiser than any other creature as He is the one who created them. Where man's wisdom ends is just the beginning of God's wisdom.

God is believed to be caring and loving as He provides the needs of His creation and sustains it.

God is believed to be the protector of His creation from all troubles, oppressions and challenges. For example, He protected His people when they were slaves in Egypt, He liberated them and took them to the Promised Land.

THE HISTORY OF JUDAISM IN EAST AFRICA

In Africa, the oldest community of Judaism is made up of the Falasha Jews who form part of the Agao people in Ethiopia. Believers in Judaism are referred to as Judaizers.

In East Africa, Judaism started in Eastern Uganda near the town of Mbale. Members of this congregation call themselves Abayudaya which is a Luganda concept referring to the “the people of Judah.”

It was started by Semei Kakungulu who was originally converted to Christianity by the missionaries around 1880. In 1913, he started following a brief system that combined Christianity, Judaism and Christian Science.

In 1919, after studying the Bible further and believing that the customs and laws prescribed in the Torah were really true, Kakungulu converted to Judaism by faith and practice. He was circumcised along with his sons and declared that his community was Jewish.

As a result of religious wars in Buganda, Kakungulu fled to the foot of Mt. Elgon where he started his separatist faith known as “The community of the Jews who trust in the Lord.”

This community was later visited by Yosef from Europe who was a leader of Judaism. Yosef stayed with them for about six months, taught them the religion and even gave them the Jewish calendar.

The teachings of Yosef influenced Semei Kakungulu to start a school, with the purpose of teaching Judaism to the learners and to attract more converts.

After Kakungulu's death in 1928, his followers divided into two groups. One of the groups reverted to Christianity while the other became devout Jews or Abayudaya. However their numbers were significantly reduced.

During the persecutions of late Iddi Amin, where he outlawed the Jewish rituals and destroyed their synagogues, the Abayudaya isolated themselves for self protection and survival.

These persecutions also forced about 80-90% of the Abayudaya community to convert to either Christianity or Islam. This further reduced their numbers and only about three hundred members remained committed to Judaism.

They worshipped secretly and began efforts to establish contacts with the Jews in Israel and elsewhere in the world for support in all aspects. By 2009, most of them live around the synagogue in Mbale and a few scattered several miles away.

Following their appeal for support, their spiritual leader called Gershom Sizomu was enrolled for a five year graduate program at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, California.

This enabled him to study Hebrew, Rabbinic literature, the Bible and Jewish philosophy. Upon completion of this program, Sizomu received his ordination as a Rabbi on 19th may 2008. He then returned to Uganda to lead its Jewish community.

With his effort, some community of Judaizers has been forming in Laikipia district in Kenya abandoning their Christian faith.

There are also some people amongst the ethnic groups in Kenya that claim to be one of the lost tribes of Israel. However, it should be noted that the number of Judaizers in East Africa is still very small.

IMPACT OF JUDAISM IN UGANDA

Positively, Judaism has promoted cleanliness and hygiene among its followers through emphasizing circumcision and washing of hands.

It has also promoted good health through providing medical services to the people. For example the Abayudaya medical clinic at Nabugoye Hill in Mbale provides medical services to local people.

It has provided employment opportunities to the people of Uganda and a source of income and livelihood. For example, leaders of synagogues secured employment opportunities that earn them a living.

The faith has contributed to infrastructural development in Uganda. For example the Abayudaya synagogues have guest houses, schools and health centers among other structures especially in Mbale.

It has promoted good morals in Uganda through emphasizing respect of the Ten Commandments of God as were given through Moses.

It has promoted social interaction and support to the less privileged in society. For example, the Passover celebration is an event of social interaction and support to community members.

The faith promotes formal education thereby contributing in the fight against illiteracy. For example, in 2001 the Abayudaya founded Hadassah Primary School in Mbale which provides education to children from kindergarten level to Primary Seven. They also have secondary schools like Kakungulu Memorial School in Kampala.

Some members have accessed scholarships abroad to improve their education levels. For example Gershom Sizomu was able to study from the USA and Israel.

The faith has promoted encourages commitment to monotheism and the love for one another, which has promoted social concern and unity in the community.

The faith has invested in the provision of water services to the communities in need. For example, the synagogue in Mbale has five water storage tanks that serve the neighboring people with water for domestic use.

The Abayudaya synagogues have also established shopping centers around and these cater for people's purchase demands.

It has promoted good relations with Jewish believers in the United States of America and Israel. This has promoted investment in social services like water, schools, health centers and guest house projects.

On the other hand, Judaism has contributed negatively by promoting false teaching among followers. For example, it teaches that Jesus is not the Messiah and son of God, and so they should wait for the Messiah who is yet to come.

It also emphasized the painful and unhealthy culture of circumcision, which sometimes causes sickness as it is not medically performed.

The faith promotes schism or divisionism in society based on the numerous religious groups that exist in Uganda.

REASONS WHY JUDAISM HAS FEW FOLLOWERS IN UGANDA

It is considered by many as a religion of the Jewish people and not any other tribe or race. This is because it emphasizes the Jewish culture and those converted into it are known Abayudaya or Jews.

The presence of few commissioned and committed evangelists to spread the faith to other peoples and races limited its chances of winning many followers.

The rigidity of the faith in terms of food prohibitions and strict following of the Jewish culture made it unwelcome to many Ugandans, thus attracting very few followers.

The absence of a divine founder of Judaism leaves it hanging without a medium, through whom people can expect salvation. For example, Christianity has its medium as Jesus Christ and Islam has Prophet Mohammed, but Judaism has no one.

Judaism did very little investment in social services such as schools and hospitals which would otherwise be used to attract followers and also be used as avenues to spread their faith.

The teaching against Jesus Christ as the Messiah is quite outrageous that it limited many people from embracing Judaism. The faith believes in the Old Testament

that teaches about the coming of a Messiah and this teaching is fulfilled in the New Testament, yet Judaism is still waiting for the Messiah.

Judaism lacked a strong founder and promoter in Uganda. It was founded by Semei Kakungulu who was initially a Christian but deserted Christianity without clear reasons. Therefore, many people could not take him to be serious.

The persecution imposed on the faith by former President late Iddi Amini in 1970s also contributed to the limited number of Judaizers in Uganda. This scared some members who reverted to either Christianity or Islam.

The vigorous preaching of Christianity made majority of the Ugandans to be converted to the Christian faith, thus limiting the spread of Judaism in the country.

Islam as an Asian faith gained more predominance in East Africa than any other Asian religion and so it captured the minds of a big number of Ugandans who could have embraced Judaism.

Judaism received very little support from foreign countries especially Israel which was its country of origin. This also limited its capacity to spread in Uganda.

Research Question: *(Present your findings when the School Term resumes)*

(a) Give the basic teachings of Hinduism.

(b) Why has Hinduism failed to win many converts in East Africa?