

America's Shift Toward Buddhism

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Some say Buddhism is coming into the church; others reject that idea. Will you check it out for yourself? Here's a starter exercise (30 minutes).

Buddhism across the country

(Note that there are different types of Buddhism. There's Zen, there's Tibetan Buddhism that the Dalai Lama is the head of, etc. When you see a word you don't know, look it up.) For an Internet search, key in the words *Buddhist center*, plus the name of any major city. To understand the scope of influence, I tried cities I thought unlikely. With *Reno* I got: <http://www.renobuddhistcenter.org>. When I clicked through on "rituals and rites of passage," I learned of their wedding ceremonies that combine American and Buddhist elements and present the couple "before Buddha (Truth)."

With *Portland*, I traveled to both OR and ME. The OR site featured photos of people who are learning "to develop fearlessness and joy": <http://www.diamondway.org/portland/>. With *St. Louis*, I landed here: <http://www.maba-usa.org/VesakKDayCelebration.html> and found Vesak (or, Wesak), a celebration of the birth of Buddha.

Then I tried minor cities, like *Cheyenne*:

<http://meditateinfortcollins.org/meditation-and-buddhism-in-cheyenne/>. *Peoria* brought up centers in both IL and AZ. On the AZ site I clicked through on the "consciousness" button, which said I could connect to 4,600 groups worldwide: <http://buddhist-meditation.meetup.com/cities/us/az/peoria/>.

Buddhism in cooperation with the American church

Skeptics say that Buddhist population is up because of immigration and that this does not mean that churches are involved. Let's check. One way to search is to key in: *Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala church*. I found that a church near the tornado disaster in Oklahoma has hosted Tibetan Buddhist sand mandala ceremonies for five years in a row:

http://www.oudaily.com/news/tibetan-monks-bring-meditation-sand-painting-to-norman/article_da005c79-1470-5778-96e3-5cfb436010dc.html. Does that church agree with this statement in the article: "On this planet, one religion doesn't work for all"? For more on the meaning behind the mandala ceremony, try <http://www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online/mandala/mandala.htm> and <http://www.gomang.org/mandala.html>.

That scenario is particularly unsettling. (1) Tibetan Buddhist authorities claim they can control the weather through ritual magic; (2) the very purpose of the mandala ceremony is to create a permanent dwelling for "local deities" (demons); and (3) the sweeping of the sand at the end of the ritual is intended to illustrate the "impermanence" of all things.

To narrow the church-cooperation search, insert a denomination (*Episcopal, United Methodist*, etc.). When I tried *Baptist church*, I found this: http://www.immanuelrochester.org/c_partners.html. I wonder if that church understands its partner's statement [<http://blog.whitelotusdharma.org/category/programs/>] about the deity "known as the Swift Destroyer who dispels obstacles to the flourishing of the Dharma." (Translation: He destroys anyone who stands in the way of the spread of Buddhist teachings.)

With *Christian church*, this came up:

<http://theprophecychronicles.com/christian-church-hosts-sand-mandala-in-auburn-ca/>. Try some others.

Buddhism influencing Christianity

The next level is to investigate whether Buddhist teaching (along with other Eastern/occult teaching) is permeating Christian teaching. Key in some terminology that you noticed in both Buddhist and Christian contexts: *guided meditation, yoga, compassion, mindfulness, spirituality, positive energy, contemplation...* Add the names of popular Christian writers/teachers and search out their own quotes, their theology. Do today's Christian books, seminars, Bible college classes, small group studies, and sermons align with the Word of God? What is the origin of the spiritual guidance your church is relying on?

Finally...

A word of caution regarding this research: Scripture warns Christians to be on spiritual alert (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-18), not to be curious about false religion for curiosity's sake (Deuteronomy 12:30, 31), and not to even say the names of false deities (Exodus 23:13).

Excuse some watchdog sites that have flippant, even hostile tones. Some of the most adamant sites are hosted by people once involved in Buddhism, Hinduism, or the occult. Having come out of that darkness into the saving light of Jesus, they are horrified to see once-vibrant churches fall into the same dark hole they were rescued from, and they're fighting mad! Read and research with care, with a heart fixed on truth and love, with discernment and understanding—and with your Bible open.

Further Reading

To help you speak with friends about Buddhism

1. *Buddhism Through Christian Eyes* by Alex G. Smith (Littleton, CO: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 2001), <http://www.amazon.com/Buddhism-through-Christian-eyes-Smith/dp/1929122101>.
2. *The Lotus and the Cross: Jesus Talks with Buddha* by Ravi Zacharias (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2001), <http://www.amazon.com/The-Lotus-Cross-Buddha-Conversations/dp/1601423187>.

To help you understand America's (and the church's) shift toward Buddhism

1. *Where Has Oprah Taken Us?* by Stephen Mansfield (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), <http://www.amazon.com/Where-Has-Oprah-Taken-Religious/dp/B007SRZ8XW>.
2. *A Time of Departing* by Ray Yungen (Eureka, MT: Lighthouse Trails, 2006), <http://www.amazon.com/A-Time-Departing-Ray-Yungen/dp/0972151273>.