



Barnaby, Buddhist

Becoming interested in Buddhism:

I heard about Buddhism at school when I was 12. I had an interest in philosophy at this time and I wanted to broaden my horizons, so all I did was pick up a book. It was called *A short introduction to Buddhism*. It was only later that I found out that my parents' friends were running a Tibetan group near our home. I went along and my interest grew stronger from that point.

There are a few Buddhist pupils at my school. However, because this school has a lot of pupils from many different countries, they are mainly Buddhists by tradition and culture, rather than Buddhists by searching for the truth. Most of them come from Thailand so they are Theravada Buddhists, and I'm Mahayana, so we don't have much of a dialogue.

My friends are fairly respectful of my views, but I think that comes from a sort of 'New Age' tradition of thinking that Buddhism is in some way 'cool', it's different from established religion in this country so therefore it takes on a sort of mystical element. I think they respect dedication as much as anything.

Following his Mahayana Buddhist path, Barnaby 'searches for truth' – for the benefit of all and not for any personal fulfilment.

People are constantly thinking about their own goals. They believe that they can gain happiness through seeking to please oneself.

I like the idea of a Bodhisattva Warrior, a sort of Buddhist saint, who is fighting constantly to make people understand that their happiness is interlinked with the happiness of all beings. Without that battle there would be no need for Buddhas, there would be no need for Buddhists, because it is all about changing the situation; it's all about curing the causes of suffering.

A lack of self is anchored in the Buddhist understanding of reality. The main focus is the lack of self-grasping – grasping at things that will make us happy. That is the cause of suffering. Not only because we are incapable

of having those desires fulfilled, in this world, but also because it leads to stepping on other people to get them.

The Buddhist idea of love is love and compassion. Compassion being the will to free beings of suffering. It's not taking pity on someone, it's having a true aspiration to free them of their suffering. Love and compassion are really two parts of the same thing.

Buddhism offers an approach to ethical questions such as euthanasia.

Buddhism teaches that we all contain the potential to be fully awakened, to be Buddhas ourselves. The Zen tradition follows this meditation where in everyday life you're trying to break down the barriers between unenlightened and enlightened beings, trying to see yourself as a Buddha and everyone else as a Buddha, because the essence of our mind is the Buddha nature.

So, euthanasia is difficult because you are forced to balance this sanctity of life, this amazing reverence that all Buddhists hold towards beings, because they are capable of achieving enlightenment.

Somebody on their deathbed is seen as capable of achieving enlightenment. Balance that out with the very real presence of their suffering. Although that is essentially illusory, because it's come from a misunderstanding of objects and subjects, during the experience it's very real. I don't doubt that; it's a reality.

Life goes on and whatever your understanding of life after death, all Buddhists do have this idea of continuation. I would be inclined to say that the suffering, the immediate suffering, is more important than the sanctity other people feel, in that person's life. If they feel their suffering is so unbearable that they want to end it, than I think that outweighs anyone else's conception of what their life is, or should be.

The ten moral precepts and drugs:

Of the ten moral precepts (there are five for lay people), the fourth says we are to refrain from intoxicating liquors. I wouldn't like to

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put anyone off future interest in Buddhism by saying that drink is strictly prohibited.

The main point here is that it's important not to think of yourself as enlightened straight away. Becoming attached to any substance thinking it will give you happiness is a fallacy. The same is true for any pleasurable sensation.

You can't expect to cut off any pleasurable sensation immediately, at the beginning of your path, saying that it's going to disrupt your practice, but I think it's important that you try to make a conscious effort. You are working towards a state of mind where you realise that it's completely pointless. I wouldn't say that it's looked upon as an evil.

Heroin is something completely different and there are obviously stages of attachment, but a substance which by its nature leads to you being enslaved in dependence upon it for your happiness, it's got to be the worse thing for a Buddhist to be involved in. In the short term drink and drugs may make you happy but in the long term they are not going to do so.

Barnaby explains the importance of meditation in his search for truth:

A lot of my, I suppose you would call it worship, revolves around personal contemplation; my own thoughts and my own personal assets.

I quieten my mind upon the image of the Buddha that seeks to translate the teachings into a visual form. It's not actually worshipping the personality of Buddha, it's focusing one's mind and having deep reverence for the truth of the Buddha's teaching. It's trying to transform ourselves, or to realise that we are no different from Buddha or from a Bodhisattva.

Buddhist meditation seeks to develop single pointed concentration; discipline over a scattered mind. To do this you need to discipline yourself (using breathing exercises and so on) to develop understanding of the teachings.

Through prayer and meditation (sitting or walking), reciting mantras, or just reading Buddhist teachings really thoughtfully and mindfully, you are seeking to fulfil two things:

Firstly, to actually ask for help from an external Buddha, to seek the guidance and grace from something that is out there, what is known as the *Dharma Kaya*, the universal Buddha mind, the Bodhisattva who are said to have a power to actually affect our lives.

The second and more important point is that it is related fundamentally to the potential in ourselves to *be* those Buddhas and Bodhisattva, to reach a state where we can help other beings who pray.

The Dalai Lama described Buddhism as 'an ethics of kindness with a philosophy of interdependence', which I rather like.

