

What do Buddhists believe about God?

INTRODUCTION

This session looks into Buddhist beliefs about God and asks students to evaluate the good things and bad things about religion without God. It also asks students to think about why some people believe that Buddhism is compatible with science.

ACTIVITY

Ask students to create two lists in groups. These lists should contain the good things and bad things about following a religion with a God or worshipping a God.

Explain to students that in mainstream Buddhist teaching there is no creator, supreme God or person to offer salvation, but that there is a belief in spiritual dimensions of life.

Use the following clip to explain some key Buddhist teachings:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dcluP1q-HQ

ACTIVITY

The clip above explains that Buddhists want to become like Buddha. Buddhism is presented as a way of life or philosophy rather than a religion, though there are signs of 'religious practice' and 'religious belief' in the film. Ask students to respond to the following questions.

- *Is there any difference between following a God and the Buddha?*
- *Are Buddhists atheists?*
- *Is Buddhism a religion if it does not have God?*
- *What do the Buddhists in the film say about life after death?*

Point out that most Buddhists in the world believe that there are 'spiritual' beings that exist – gods, ghosts and so on – and that they believe in 'karma', i.e., that one's intentional actions have an affect one's circumstances in this and future lives.

ACTIVITY

Read this quote from Albert Einstein about Buddhism:

Albert Einstein once said this of Buddhism, 'The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both natural and spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things,

natural and spiritual and a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.'

Ask the students to respond to such questions as:

- Einstein believes that Buddhism is compatible with scientific developments. *Why is it that Buddhists might accept scientific beliefs about how the world began?*
- *Are there things that Buddhists believe that go beyond what science can discover?*

CONCLUSION

Ask students to summarise their overall views on Einstein's last point. Do they think a religion without God will be the religion of the future?