

2.8 What it is Important to Know: A Buddhist Perspective

Source: <http://www.thenagain.info/Classes/Sources/Buddhist.html#First>, accessed Nov. 6, 2018

Instructions: Buddhism is the world’s fourth largest religion with over a half million adherents. However some commentators question whether it should be considered a religion at all. They argue it would be more appropriate to identify it as a philosophy of living or an approach to understanding the world. Buddhist belief is based on the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama, known as the Buddha, Enlightened Teacher, or the Blessed One, in India, during the 5th century BC.

This is an edited version of a conversation between a monk Malunkyaputta and his spiritual advisor, The Blessed One, about what is important to know. There were questions Buddha, as a teacher, refused to answer. He believed his students had to discover the answers to these questions for themselves. Read the passages and answer questions. 1 – 5.



4th century AD statue of the Buddha, Uttar Pradesh, India (Wikipedia)

Questions

1. What does Malunkyaputta want to know from The Blessed One?
2. What does Malunkyaputta promise in exchange for this knowledge?
3. How does The Blessed One’s respond?
4. In your opinion, what is the “message” of this conversation?
5. Based on the text and your knowledge of Buddhism, would it be more accurate to describe it as religion, a philosophy of life, or an approach to understanding the world? Explain.

Malunkyaputta: “If the Blessed One will explain to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal . . . or that the worthy person neither exists nor does not exist after death, in that case I will lead the religious life under the Blessed One.”

The Blessed One: “Pray Malunkyaputta, did I ever say to you, ‘Come, Malunkyaputta, lead the religious life under me, and I will explain to you either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal . . . or that the worthy person neither exists nor does not exist after death.

Malunkyaputta: “No, indeed, Reverend Sir.”

The Blessed One: “That being the case, vain man, whom are you so angrily denouncing? The religious life does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal; nor does the religious life depend on the dogma that the world is not eternal. Whether the dogma obtain that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, there still remain birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair.