



## CLiF Notes

A curriculum for families and small groups

### Theology

Section 1: September

Week One

### What is Theology?

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**Supplies Needed:** Largish glass or ceramic bowl—probably available from your local thrift store, acrylic paints (from craft store) and brushes and/or hot glue gun and decorative items such as pretty pebbles, craft “jewels”, etc.

#### Chalice Lighting:

(Note: if you don’t have a chalice you can either look for something like a compote dish that has a fairly shallow bowl on a pedestal or make one using a terra cotta flower pot for the base and the matching saucer glued on top for the bowl. Tea lights make an easy and safe flame, but votive candles work fine, too.)

We light this flame to guide our search for truth, and to remind us to look on the world with bright eyes, and to meet the world with warm hearts.

or

We are Unitarian Universalists (*shape hands fingers up to form two “Us”*)  
This is the home of the open mind (*touch fingers to forehead and open out*)  
This is the home of the flaming chalice that lights our way to truth. (*cup hands thumbs out and hold up*)  
This is the home of the loving heart (*fold hands over heart*)  
This is the home of the helping hands (*hold hands out*)  
Together we care for our earth  
And work for peace in our world. (*join hands amongst the group*)

Or, for older kids:

In the freedom of truth  
and the love of justice  
we bring all that we are  
to shape what we yet can be.

### **Check in**

You may wish to start this check-in time with the words “We are a family (or community.) What touches one of us touches all of us, and so we take this time to listen to each person remember and share one thing from the past week that made a difference in their life – something that made them happy, or sad, or proud or sorry or grateful.”

### **Centering**

Have everyone holding hands seated in a circle. Ask everyone to close their eyes, then say: “Imagine that at the center of our circle is a fire – maybe you see a flaming chalice, or maybe it looks like a camp fire or a burning candle. Watch this flame in your imagination, how it moves, what color it is. Know that this flame is pure energy, the life energy that makes plants and animals grow, the energy that started with the big bang at very beginning of the universe. This flame cannot burn you—it is the light of creativity and curiosity and inspiration. In a moment, when we are all perfectly still, that flame will leap out into our circle, and be passed around. When you feel a squeeze on your left hand, pass the flame along by squeezing your right hand – but don’t squeeze until you feel the pulse that tells you the flame has made it’s way to you.” After a moment, when all is very still, start the hand pulse around the circle.

### **Introduction**

This year our religious education time is going to be centered on doing theology. “Theology” is a fancy word for looking at the big questions of life – questions that we can’t ever have certain answers to. Science is very good at answering some kinds of questions like “How tall is that mountain?” or “How can you build a rocket ship that goes out in space?” or “How long ago did dinosaurs live?” But science isn’t much help with questions like “Why are we here?” or “What is God?” or “Why do bad things have to happen?” For questions like that, we can’t use laboratories or microscopes or telescopes. But we do have a set of tools that we use for doing theology: we have the stories that people around the world have told to try to make sense of things, we have the ideas of thoughtful people across time who have tried to understand the big questions, we have our own minds to try to make sense of the world and we have our own feelings to tell us what feels good and true.

### **Making a Question Bowl**

Since doing theology is all about asking and trying to answer questions, we need a place where we can put our questions. Now, we could just write them on a piece of paper, but it might be better to have something sturdier and more beautiful to hold our important questions – whether they’re written down on paper or spoken or even just trying to form in our hearts and minds. So, together we’re going to decorate a question bowl, which we can use all year to be the container for our questions. What do you think might be some good things to draw on our bowl to remind us that it’s for important questions as well as to make it beautiful?

(Making sure that you have paint that will adhere to the bowl you have chosen, have each person take a turn decorating the communal bowl.)

### **Discussion**

What questions can you think of that might be the sort of question that we try to answer with theology, rather than with science?

### **Closing**

Have each person write down a question they would like to think about. (Younger children who can't write easily can dictate to an adult.) Share questions aloud, and place them in the bowl.

## **Theology** **Section 1: September** **Week Two** **Can I Believe Anything I Want? – Theodore Parker**

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**Supplies Needed:** none

### **Opening Words and Chalice Lighting**

Light chalice. (See week one.)

**Check-in:** See week one.

**Centering:** See week one.

### **Introduction**

One of the questions that people ask a lot about Unitarian Universalists is “Can you believe anything you want?” Sometimes UUs answer “Yes,” because we don’t have a creed, which is a statement of what everybody in a religion believes. Unitarian Universalists don’t all have the same answers to the questions of theology that we talked about last week. BUT...that’s not the same thing as saying the UUs can believe whatever they want. What if you wanted to believe that people should have everything they liked, even if they had to steal or hurt someone to get it? That wouldn’t match with the UU principle of believing that each and every person is important, since it would mean treating other people like they didn’t matter. What if you wanted to believe that people had a right to use up all the natural resources they could, chopping down all the trees and polluting the air and water, so they could have more stuff, and didn’t have to worry about cleaning up after themselves? That wouldn’t match up with our UU principle of honoring the fact that people are a part of nature, and that we all belong to the “interdependent web” of all life.

## Story

Some people, including Unitarians and Universalists, have given up a lot to express the truth of what they believed – not what they *wanted* to believe because it was easy, but what they *had* to believe, because that's what their hearts and minds told them was true. One of these people was Theodore Parker.

Theodore Parker was born almost 100 years ago, the youngest child in a large farming family. Most of his family had died by the time he was 27, probably due to the disease tuberculosis. Perhaps because of his losses, he grew to hold a strong faith that the soul lived on forever after death. He also came to believe in a God who would not allow anyone to suffer after death– a belief called “Universalism” (sound familiar?). His belief in God's kindness and mercy made him decide that the common theology of the time, that God would punish many people in hell after death, was cruel and unreasonable.

Theodore considered becoming a lawyer, but his strong faith led him to theology. He wanted to go to Harvard Divinity School to become a minister, but couldn't afford it, so he read all the books in the Harvard curriculum on his own. To say that Theodore was smart would be an understatement! To support himself, Theodore became a school teacher, but when he was 24, in spite of the fact that he had no college degree, Harvard Divinity School allowed Parker in as an advanced student. A generous patron paid his tuition. While he was at Harvard, in addition to all his regular studies, Theodore decided that he wanted to learn foreign languages. He wanted to study religious books like the Hebrew and Christian Bibles in the language they were written in, as well as being able to read scholarly books written by people around the world. He learned a new language a month, and by the time he was 26, he could read in some twenty languages!

While he started with a strong faith, over time he began to ask questions. He learned of the new field of historical study of the Bible, which was starting up in Germany, and he found that people were starting to read the Bible not as something that was handed down direct from God, but as a book that people wrote over time. The idea that you could study the Bible as something from history meant taking a whole different view on its meaning than most people had at the time. If the Bible came straight from God, then you pretty much had to accept the whole thing as fact, including the miracles and stories that involved things like the sun stopping in the sky. Theodore came to disagree with these traditional views. In the end, he rejected all miracles, and saw the Bible as full of contradictions and mistakes, but still full of important stories with truths to teach about life and religion. Although Theodore changed his understanding of the Bible, he kept his faith in God.

Parker was attacked when he said the miracles in the Bible never really happened, and when he said that neither the Bible nor Jesus were absolute sources of truth. Some felt he was not a Christian, and almost all of the ministers in the Boston area, even the Unitarians, refused to let him preach at their churches, or to preach at his small congregation.

However, not everyone thought that Theodore's views were wrong. Parker accepted an invitation from supporters to preach in Boston in January 1845. His supporters organized the 28th Congregational Society of Boston in December and installed Parker as minister in January 1846.

His congregation came to include many famous people, including Louisa May Alcott (who wrote *Little Women* and many other famous books), Julia Ward Howe (another famous writer, and worker for peace), and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (a major leader of the movement to give women the right to vote). Before long they had to move to a bigger building for their church services, as thousands of people came every Sunday to hear Theodore preach on his new beliefs about religion. In addition to supporting rights for women, Parker also supported the abolition of slavery, at a time when the American union was beginning to split over the issue. There are stories of him writing sermons with a pistol on his desk in case he should need to defend a runaway slave who was hiding in his house.

The more traditional ministers of Boston were shocked by Parker's beliefs, and his willingness to defy the law when it came to slavery. A group of Unitarian ministers came to his home and asked him to resign from their fellowship. Parker, however, refused, saying there was no reason why he could not belong to the group of Unitarian ministers.

Boston's Unitarian leadership opposed him to the end, but younger ministers admired him for his attacks on traditional ideas, his fight for a free faith and pulpit, and his very public stances on social issues such as slavery. Now most Unitarian Universalists regard him as a hero, a brave man who stood up for his beliefs, many of which are now shared by the majority of Unitarian Universalists.

### **Activity**

I'm going to read some theological statements—sentences that state beliefs that people might have. We're going to have three places you can go in response to these statements. If you agree with the statement, and feel that it is a true statement of what you believe then walk over to \_\_\_\_\_(leader indicates location). If you disagree with the statement, and feel that it's not what you believe, but you have no problem with other people thinking that way go \_\_\_\_\_(leader indicates location). And, finally, if you think the statement is flat-out wrong, and that anybody who thinks that way is making the world a worse place, then go \_\_\_\_\_(leader indicates location). Got it?

God is inside of us.

People who do bad things are punished in hell after they die.

People who aren't saved by Jesus Christ go to hell after they die.

Plants and animals and people all have God inside them.

God is up in the sky.

The world was created by God about 5000 years ago.

People do bad things because the Devil directs their actions.

When you die, that's it, you're just plain gone.

People should do whatever feels good, no matter what the cost to someone else.

All religions have part of the truth, but nobody has the absolute right answers.

People are happiest when they feel like they are making the world a better place for everyone.

There is no such thing as God.

It is important to share what you have with the poor.

It is important to follow the rules set out in the Bible.

There are many gods and goddesses, but they are all ways of understanding the big idea of God which is beyond anything we can describe.

All the people of the world are family.

### **Discussion**

Are you ever in situations where your religious beliefs are different from those of your friends or others around you? Does anyone ever give you a hard time about your religion? What do you do if that happens?

### **Closing**

Have each person share one statement from the earlier game they thought was true.

**Theology**  
**Section 1: September**  
**Week Three**  
**Worship: Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – Jewish High Holy Days**

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**Supplies needed:** computer or mp3 player, story, apples and honey or dough for challah

**Call to Worship**

If you have access to playing mp3 files on the computer or generally audible mp3 player in your worship space, play the sound of the Shofar, a ram's horn which is blown like a trumpet, which marks the beginning of Jewish services leading up to and including Rosh Hashana. You can get the sound of the Shofar at <http://www.piney.com/Shofar.html>. Clicking on "Tekiah Gedolah" will get you the full range of sounds.

**Opening Words/Chalice Lighting**

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime;

Therefore we are saved by hope....

Nothing we do, however good, can be accomplished alone;

Therefore we are saved by love.

No good act is quite as good from the standpoint of our friend or enemy as from our own;

Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

--Reinhold Neibuhr (adapted)

**Check-in (see week one)**

**Centering**

Song "Hineh Ma Tov" (#392 in the UU hymnbook, *Singing the Living Tradition*)

[Hi-neh ma toy](#) u-ma-na-im

She-vet a-chim gam ya-chad (4x)

Click on highlighted phrase for tune or go to <http://clf.uua.org/music/>.

**Introduction**

Rosh Hashana is a holiday that celebrates the Jewish New Year. (The Jewish calendar is different from the one most of us are used to, based on the moon rather than the sun.) In addition to marking the beginning of the year, Rosh Hashana is a very special time for Jews, because they believe it is the moment in the year when God writes down the names of people who deserve to have a good upcoming year. Each year Rosh Hashana is celebrated on a different date. However, the book isn't closed for another ten days, until Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which happens ten days later. Those ten days

between, then, are a time when Jewish people think about all the things they've done wrong in the past year that they might need to fix, the relationships that might need healing, or the people that they might need to apologize to. If they make things right with the people in their lives during those ten days, then they can still be written in the Book of Life for a good year before God closes the book at the end of Yom Kippur. Those ten days when people try and fix relationships, when they apologize and forgive, are called the Days of Turning, because they are a special time for turning toward living a better life.

### **Story**

Here is a story by UU Barbara Marshman that takes a look at just how important that process of fixing things and forgiving can be. It is called "What if Nobody Forgave?" (You can find it at [http://www.uuneedham.org/sermons/2002-2003/20030323\\_What\\_If\\_Nobody\\_Forgave.pdf](http://www.uuneedham.org/sermons/2002-2003/20030323_What_If_Nobody_Forgave.pdf)).

### **Reflection and Ritual**

Take just a minute to think about whether there is anyone in your life who you have not forgiven, and whether there is anyone who is mad at you. Is there anything you can do in the next few days to fix those relationships?

The Yom Kippur service, which is considered the most important service of the year that a Jewish community celebrates, has a part where everyone in the congregation confesses together to a long list of bad actions that anyone in the group might have done. We are going to have a similar ritual, which is adapted from a similar ritual written by UU minister Rob Eller-Isaacs. After each statement, you are going to say "We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love." Let's practice that together first: "We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference:

"We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

For each time that our fears have kept us from staying open to others:

"We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

For each time that we have struck out in anger without just cause:

"We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

For each time our greed has blinded us to the needs of others:

"We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

For the selfishness which sets us apart and alone:

“We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.”

For being less than our spirits call us to be:

“We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.”

For those and for so many acts which have made us think that we are separate and disconnected from the rest of the world:

“We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love.”

### **Activity**

It is traditional to eat something sweet on Rosh Hashana, to bring a sweet new year. Apples dipped in honey are a traditional, and easy, treat. If you are more ambitious, however, you can make challah bread dough, which for Rosh Hashana is not made in the usual braided shape, but is shaped in a circle by making a “snake” and then curling it into a tight spiral. You can do this activity at the end of your RE session, and then come back to the “session” after the dough has had a chance to rise and bake. Don’t forget the honey for the bread! You can get recipes for Rosh Hashana challah at <http://www.holidays.net/highholydays/sweets.htm>.

### **Closing**

Everyone says to each other “L’shanah tovah,” (luh sha-náh toe-váh) which means “Have a good new year.”

## **Theology**

### **Section 1: September**

#### **Week Four**

### **Where do I look for the Truth? — The story of Buddha**

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**See week one for opening/chalice lighting, check-in and centering**

**Supplies Needed:** Story, props if desired, slips of paper with four noble truths and the eight-fold path printed on them (hidden before session starts)

### **Introduction**

We’ve been talking about theology – asking the big questions of life. But where do we go to look for answers for those big questions? This week we have a story about one of the great theological searchers, a man named Gautama, who was born over 500 years before Jesus.

### **Story**

**Note:** there are several versions of this story available online. You can simply read the story at [http://clf.uua.org/betweensundays/middlechildhood/Buddha\\_story.html](http://clf.uua.org/betweensundays/middlechildhood/Buddha_story.html), or read it below. If you read this version, leave out the list of the four noble truths and eightfold path, which we will get to for our activity.

You can use the outline at <http://clf.uua.org/betweensundays/earlychildhood/BuddahStory1.html>, or read it below, to have kids act out the story. Or if you have computer access in your RE space or want to print out a version with pictures, you can use the version at <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/001bio.htm>.

## **The Story of Buddha**

Stories about the lives of those who founded the world's great religions tend to be magical and fantastic. The story of Siddhartha called the Buddha, is no exception to this rule. Sit back and relax while I tell you the wonderful story of Siddhartha, who founded the religion known as Buddhism.

Long, long ago in a small kingdom in the foothills of the Himalayas, a great mountain range that runs along India's northern border, a queen named Maya had a startling dream. She dreamed that a white elephant with six tusks came down from heaven and touched her on her side.

The dream seemed more real to her than any other dream she had ever had, and she awoke instantly. She woke up her husband, King Suddhodana, and told him what had happened. He agreed that it was a most unusual dream, and the next morning they told a wise, old man who was able to interpret dreams.

The wise man said the dream meant that Queen Maya was going to have a child who would be a great leader of humankind. He would either be the greatest king or the greatest saint who had ever lived.

Queen Maya and King Suddhodana were very happy with this news at first because they had been wishing for a child who would be heir to their throne. But on second thought they felt uneasy about the wise man's suggestion that their child could become a holy man. Such a person would probably be the opposite of what they were asking for: a wandering teacher, like the holy men and women of India, uninterested in ruling a kingdom.

When the time came for the Queen to have her child, she was journeying to visit her parents in a neighboring kingdom. With her attendants, she stepped into a garden along the roadside, grabbed onto the limb of a tree, and gave birth to a magnificent baby boy.

The gods and goddesses of heaven appeared in the sky to watch the special birth. The baby stepped out of his mother's side and took seven steps in all four directions to claim

dominion over the earth. The trees and shrubs of the garden burst immediately into bloom, and a rainbow appeared across the sky.

The King and Queen decided to name their child Siddhartha, which means "the one who brings much good."

As Prince Siddhartha grew up, many events in his life indicated his potential greatness. He not only was able to win games of strength and courage easily, but he seemed more sensitive than most children.

One day a swan fell from the sky at his feet. The swan had an arrow through its wing. Siddhartha removed the arrow and gently rubbed the swan's wing with medicine.

The Prince's cousin, Devadatta, appeared from the woods with his bow and arrows and said, "Give me that swan. It's mine. I shot it. I will have it for supper."

Siddhartha said, "No the swan is only wounded, and it can be nursed back to health."

The two boys argued and finally went before the King and Queen with their problem. The King and Queen were uncertain about what to do and asked the advice of the oldest person in the court. That person was respected by all and said, "Everyone values one's life more than anything else. Let the swan be given to the person who tried to save its life, not to the person who tried to take its life."

Devadatta was furious that Siddhartha got the swan. Through the years his hatred for Siddhartha continued, and there are many adventure stories about his attempts to beat Siddhartha in various ways.

When Siddhartha grew up, the time came for him to be married. His father and mother invited princesses from various neighboring kingdoms to come and be introduced to their son. As each princess was introduced, Siddhartha gave her a present from a pile of special gifts his parents had provided for the occasion. The King and Queen watched their handsome son carefully, but he did not seem interested in any of the princesses as they came one by one before him.

Finally, the last princess, Yasodhara, stood before him. His eyes suddenly lit up, and he leaned forward to greet her with special attention. But all the gifts were gone! Yasodhara asked, "O Prince, where is the gift you have for me?"

Siddhartha was startled as if awakened from a dream. The table was empty. He did something unheard of in those days. He took off his own royal ring and gave it to her.

Siddhartha and Yasodhara were married after a series of contests sponsored by her father. Princes from many lands competed in them, and Siddhartha's chief rival was always his cousin, Devadatta. In the final contests, Siddhartha strung a bow too difficult for anyone else to string and shot an arrow through the center of the target, pushing Devadatta's

arrow through the target and out the other side. The arrow continued through the air and out of sight.

All through the years of Siddhartha's youth, his parents remembered the wise man's prediction that their child would either become a great king or a great saint. They were afraid that the latter might come true and did everything to make him happy in the palace. In fact, they prevented him from seeing any unhappy sights. They kept any sick or injured people away from him and discouraged him from going outside the palace grounds.

Siddhartha became curious about the world beyond the palace walls and secretly arranged to ride outside with one of the royal charioteers. On the first trip, he saw an old person bent over in pain and walking with the support of a cane. He asked his charioteer about this, and the charioteer replied, "This is an old person, bent over by age. Everyone has to grow old some day."

On the second trip, Siddhartha saw a person crouched down on the ground, crying in agony. He asked why the person was crying, and the charioteer said, "This is a person suffering from a serious disease. Anyone may get ill at any time. All of us suffer some sicknesses during our lives." On the third trip, Siddhartha saw a funeral procession going by and asked what it meant. His charioteer answered, "Here is a person who has died and is being brought to the place of cremation. Everyone must die some day. We usually do not know when it will happen, but just as each of us is born, so each of us must die."

On the fourth trip outside the palace, Siddhartha saw a man sitting under a tree. He had a peaceful, radiant expression on his face, and Siddhartha was struck by it. The charioteer told him, "There is a saint who has given up the usual ways of living to wander from place to place searching for the meaning of existence."

Siddhartha was deeply moved by these four experiences. He thought for days about them, and somehow all the pleasures and riches of the palace lost their importance for him. Even the recent birth of a son did not alter his mood.

One question kept burning in his mind: why is there suffering in human life? After much soul-searching, he resolved to leave the palace and become a wandering monk like the man he had seen on his last journey, so he could search for the answer to his question.

He knew that his family would oppose his leaving, so he secretly arranged with his charioteer to leave one night after everyone had gone to sleep. Before he left, he took one last look at his beautiful wife and son. He was sure that they would be well taken care of, but he knew he would miss them. Then he mounted his horse and rode outside of the palace walls unnoticed. He gave his horse and expensive jewelry to his charioteer and sent him back to the palace.

Siddhartha joined a small group of holy men in the forest and began to experiment with various kinds of yoga and meditation. He heard that the strict control of one's eating

might help one meditate, and he began to eat less and less food. At one point, he lived on one grain of rice a day for several weeks and lost so much weight that he looked like a living skeleton.

One day he fell to the ground unconscious. The other monks thought he had died, but later he awakened and continued his meditation. Just at that moment, a young herdsman found him while she was looking for one of her animals that had gone into the forest. She took pity on him and brought him a bowl of food. Siddhartha realized that he might die before finding the answer to his question, so he began to eat. The other monks rejected him because they thought he had given up his serious quest. Siddhartha told them that he was convinced that starving himself would not help him reach the truth.

Siddhartha's search continued for several years, but he still had not found the answer to his question about suffering. Finally, on his birthday, during the month of May when the moon was full, he resolved to sit under a great Bodhi tree until he found the answer or died trying.

The gods in the heavens rejoiced at his decision, but the demon Mara was terrified and angry. Mara symbolizes greed, hatred, ignorance, and jealousy.

Mara caused a great thunderstorm to crash down on Siddhartha, but he would not move. Mara then brought before him visions of beautiful dancers, gold and jewels, and delicious foods. He still kept to his meditation. Finally, Mara sent an army of monsters to attack Siddhartha from all sides with wild, blood-curdling screams. But when they came near him, they all magically turned into flower petals.

Mara realized his defeat and faded away like a bad dream. Soon a bright glow came from every part of Siddhartha's being. He had his answer! He arose to his feet and went to find the other monks with whom he had spent so much time. He found them camped in a deer park near the sacred river Ganges. When he walked up to them, they saw by the expression on his face that he had become enlightened. He then told them of the answer he had found, what are now called the Four Noble Truths:

- I. Everything and everyone in existence suffers.
- II. Suffering is caused by selfishness, greed, and desire.
- III. Selfishness, greed, and desire can be stopped.
- IV. They can be stopped by following these eight steps:
  1. Believe only what is true, or right belief.
  2. Live in a loving, nonviolent way, or right purpose.
  3. Learn to speak well to others, or right speech.
  4. Treat yourself well but do not overindulge, or right conduct.
  5. Choose a good vocation, or right vocation.
  6. Be alert and sensitive about life, or right effort.
  7. Train your mind to think clearly, or right thought.
  8. Meditate regularly on the meaning of life, or right meditation.

"By these eight steps one can go beyond all forms of suffering and achieve that indefinable state called Nirvana, when one will be enlightened." said Siddhartha.

Siddhartha's friends accepted him as their leader, and they resolved to follow the eight-fold path he recommended. They came to call him "Buddha" which means "the enlightened one."

Buddha accepted everyone into his new movement at a time when lower classes of people and women of any class were not allowed to join most religious orders. In time, he returned to the palace of his family and taught them about his great discovery. They joined his movement, and his son became a monk under his guidance. Even his cousin, Devadatta, joined the movement, but not before some jealous attempts to destroy Buddha.

Buddha lived to a ripe old age and died after eating spoiled food that was unknowingly served to him when he was a guest in a person's home. It is written that he knew of the bad food and forbade his followers to eat it. He ate it to honor the hospitality extended to him and not offend his host. Before he died, he assured his host that he was not to blame because he did not realize the condition of the food.

After his death, the followers of Buddha came to be called Buddhists and their religion, Buddhism. At one time most of India was Buddhist, and the religion eventually spread to most other Asian countries. Today, Buddhism has almost totally disappeared in India but remains the major religion of many other countries of eastern Asia.

## **The Story of Buddha**

compiled from *Holidays and Holy Days*, by Brotman Marshfield and *Buddhism* by Madhu Bazaz Wangu.

### **Characters:**

Siddhartha Guatama

Queen Maya

An elephant

A charioteer (Channa)

A sick man, an old man and a dead man (one person)

A monk

Siddhartha's wife and child

A large tree

Mara, the evil spirit

### **Props:**

an umbrella

a large tree

a belt with sword

paper flowers

cane

bathrobe

**Scene 1:** Buddha's birth, 563 BCE in India

**Characters:** Queen Maya, elephant, Siddhartha

**Props:** paper flowers

One night Queen Maya had a wonderful dream in which an elephant with six tusks, carrying a lotus flower in its trunk, touched her right side. At that moment a child was miraculously conceived. When Queen Maya told her husband of this dream he called the Brahmins (or wise men) to interpret it. They predicted that a son would be born who would become either a great king or a great religious leader. His name would be Siddhartha, which means "he whose aim is accomplished." According to legend, Siddhartha later emerged as an infant from his mother's right side, walked seven steps in the four directions of the compass and said, "No further births have I to endure, for this is my last body. Now shall I destroy and pluck out by the roots the sorrow that is caused by birth and death." According to tradition, it rained flowers at the time of Siddhartha's birth.

**Scene 2:** Siddhartha grows up

**Characters:** Siddhartha

**Props:** umbrella

The King very much wanted Siddhartha to grow up to become a great king, not a religious leader. So he decided to give him everything he desired and protect him from all sorrows and trouble, so he would never want to leave the palace. The prince was never allowed to go alone outside the palace grounds. He never saw sick, injured, or old people, and he was never told of death. He learned all the arts of royalty: to shoot with a bow and arrow, drive a chariot and ride a horse. He wore silk clothes and always carried an umbrella over his head to protect him from the sun and dust. At age 16 he married a beautiful princess. In time they had a child and were very happy together.

**Scene 3:** The "Four Sights" that changed Siddhartha's life

**Characters:** Siddhartha, Channa (charioteer), old man, monk

**Props:** cane, bathrobe

At age 29, Siddhartha called his faithful charioteer, Channa, to take him for a secret ride outside the palace grounds. As they drove through the city, Siddhartha saw three things he had never seen before. One was an old man lying on the road, groaning with pain. "What is the matter with this man?" he asked Channa. "He is sick and in pain," Channa answered. "But why should anyone have to suffer such pain?" Siddhartha asked. Channa shrugged his shoulders, "It is the way of life." And they traveled on. Soon they came to another man, all bent over and hobbling: along with a cane. "What is the matter with that man?" Siddhartha again asked. "He is old" answered Channa. "It is something that comes to all people who live a long time. Bodies become tired and weak." Finally, they came on a man in rags, lying beside the road as if he were asleep. "What is wrong with this man?" asked Siddhartha. "He is dead," came the answer. "What does 'dead' mean?" Channa answered, "I cannot tell you, but it happens to all people, rich or poor."

Later that same night, when Channa and Siddhartha returned to the city, they saw a man dressed in a yellow robe with a shaven head, begging for food. Siddhartha stopped the chariot and questioned the man, "I am a monk," he replied, "I have adopted a homeless life to win salvation. I search for the most blessed state in which suffering, old age, and death are unknown."

**Scene 4:** Siddhartha leaves the palace

**Characters:** Siddhartha, Channa, Siddhartha's wife and child,

**Props:** belt with sword, bathrobe

Shocked, Siddhartha returned to the palace and thought about what he had seen. For the first time he was aware of suffering in life, and he felt he could no longer enjoy his own life of ease and riches. That very night Siddhartha decided to leave the palace. "If I were to live like one of these monks, perhaps I could learn the truth about suffering and how to end it." Silently kissing his wife and child goodbye, he asked Channa to drive him to the outskirts of the city. There he took off his jeweled sword and cut off his hair and beard. He took off his Princely clothes, put on the yellow robe of a monk, and told Channa to take his possessions back to his father.

**Scene 5:** Siddhartha's wanderings

**Characters:** Siddhartha

For years Siddhartha wandered throughout northeast India, seeking holy men who taught him, among other things, techniques of meditation. He studied the teachings of Hinduism, the ancient religion of India. He was most interested in Samsara, or reincarnation, the idea that after death a person's soul is born again in a new body. The common Hindu belief at the time was that only by leading a highly spiritual life (or several lives) could a person break the endless cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. Siddhartha was attracted by this idea and he adopted a life of extreme self-denial, not eating or sleeping and meditating constantly. For six years he stayed along the bank of the Nairanjana River, eating and drinking only enough to stay alive. He was determined to force himself to this highest state of being through self-denial. But over time he only became extremely weak.

**Scene 6:** Under the Bo Tree

**Characters:** Siddhartha, evil spirit Mara, Siddhartha's wife and child

**Props:** large tree

One day, Siddhartha realized that his years of denial had weakened his body to the point where he could not think clearly about the world or religion. So he started to eat normally again. Refreshed by food, he sat down under a fig tree (known to Buddhists as the Bo Tree, the Tree of Enlightenment) and entered a state of very deep meditation. Buddhist scriptures say that during this meditation an evil spirit, Mara, tempted Siddhartha with all sorts of pleasures to distract him. But he was not swayed. His deep meditation continued until he had recalled all of his previous rebirths (550 previous states of existence). He gained knowledge of his cycles of births and deaths, and was able to cast off the things

that bound him to the world. He had attained enlightenment, "Nirvana," the end of suffering.

From that day on Siddhartha was known as the Buddha, "the enlightened one," or "the one who has found the light." The light that Buddha found was not the kind that you see with your eyes. It was an inward light that makes you feel peaceful and helps you to think more clearly. Tradition says that when Buddha reached Nirvana, he could have cast off his body and his existence. Instead, he turned back to the world, determined to share his enlightenment with others so that all living things could end the cycles of their own rebirth and suffering.

During his lifetime Buddha institutionalized his teachings by forming Sangha, a community of monks and nuns who practiced the religion and taught it to others. Buddha's wife and son joined him in the Sangha, as well as other relatives. Today members of the Sangha continue this tradition and provide an important link with the religion's founder.

THE END

### **Activity**

Gautama Buddha left his comfortable palace in search of the answers to his great theological questions about why there is suffering and how we can prevent it. We're going to do a search of our own, to find the truths that Buddha found. These are called the four noble truths, and the eight-fold path. They are hidden on slips of paper (give boundaries of where children are to search). Your job is to find them, and bring them back to arrange in the right order and share.

(Before lesson, print out the four truths and eight-fold path below on slips of paper, and hide them for kids to find.)

- I. Everything and everyone in existence suffers.
- II. Suffering is caused by selfishness, greed, and desire.
- III. Selfishness, greed, and desire can be stopped.
- IV. They can be stopped by following eight steps:
  1. Believe only what is true, or right belief.
  2. Live in a loving, nonviolent way, or right purpose.
  3. Learn to speak well to others, or right speech.
  4. Treat yourself well but do not overindulge, or right conduct.

5. Choose a good vocation, or right vocation.
6. Be alert and sensitive about life, or right effort.
7. Train your mind to think clearly, or right thought.
8. Meditate regularly on the meaning of life, or right meditation.

**Discussion (see below)**

Do you like Buddha's ideas? Do you think it's good to give up one's desires? Why or why not?

**Closing**

Sing "Be Ye Lamps unto Yourselves", the words for which are attributed to Gautama Buddha.

Be ye lamps unto yourselves;  
Be your own confidence;  
Hold to the truth within yourselves  
As to the only lamp.

Click on highlighted phrase for tune or go to <http://clf.uua.org/music/>.

**Theology**  
**Section 1: September**  
**Week Five**  
**What makes me *me*?**

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**Supplies needed:** notebooks with lined paper, magazines to cut up for collage pictures, paste, clear contact paper

**See week one for opening/chalice lighting, check-in and centering**

**Introduction**

Each week we've been asking questions, and we'll be asking more theological questions in the weeks to come. But who is it that is asking these questions? What makes me *me* and you *you*?

**Story**

Here is a story of a long ago king who asked just these kinds of questions:

**The Questions of King Milinda**  
***A Story from India***

Long, long ago in Bactria, there was a very unusual king. His real name was King Milinda, but far more often he was called the king-who-is-always-asking-questions.

King Milinda asked questions of his nobles. He asked questions of visitors who came to his palace. He asked questions of his queen. Sometimes he asked questions of his children. King Milinda was always asking questions. And the questions he asked were always difficult to answer. Finally, one day a courtier said:

“Your Majesty, why do you not go to see Nagasena (Nah-gah-SEN-ah) and ask your questions of him?”

“And who is this Nagasena?” said King Milinda. “I have never heard of him.” The courtier answered:

“Nagasena, your Majesty, is said to be one of the wisest men of India. Have you not heard of his famous school? Hundreds of men from all over India—and even from other lands—have gone to live with Nagasena in his school in order that they may learn from him.”

“India is many miles away,” said King Milinda. “How can I leave my people and go so far off? It would take a month to make the journey. Traveling is dangerous. Do you really think that Nagasena is wiser than all the teachers of Bactria?” The courtier answered:

“I cannot say, your Majesty. I know only what travelers from India have said.”

All day long King Milinda thought about the idea. At nighttime he dreamed about it. With each day that passed, he became more and more curious. If there was a man anywhere in the world who could answer his questions he would go to him no matter how far away the wise man might be.

So one bright morning, King Milinda and a band of his noblemen stepped into their chariots, whipped their horses, and off they went toward the wonderful land of India to see the great Nagasena. Day after day and week after week they rode. Neither cold nor heat, neither wind nor rain held them back.

Finally, one bright morning in the middle of the hot summer, they all arrived at Nagasena's school. Leaving their chariots and horses outside the gate, they entered the garden. There they found Nagasena with a large group of his students around him, sitting on the grass under the shade of a wide-spreading banyan tree.

King Milinda and his men at first stood quietly to one side and waited. But it was not long before Nagasena noticed them. Immediately he rose and greeted his guests. He invited them to sit down on the grass and join in the talk.

At this King Milinda was very happy. Before long, out came one of his questions. He said:

“Noble sir, for many months we have been talking about Nagasena. We have spoken your name a hundred times a day. Over and over we have wondered: 'Is Nagasena a real person? Or is he just a name?' Now I must ask you, are you the same as your name? Or is

your name one thing and are you something different from your name?" Then the wise man answered:

"Your Majesty, the name I am called by is Nagasena. It is the name my mother and father gave me when I was born. My friends say: 'Nagasena says this. Nagasena does that.' Yet, the truth is that my name and I are not the same." King Milinda then asked his second question.

"My noble teacher, you say you are not the same as your name. Does this mean, then, that you are not Nagasena? Is there no Nagasena? If you are not your name, who are you? Are you the same as the hair on your head?"

At this everybody laughed. What a foolish question! That is, everybody laughed except Nagasena. He liked the King Milinda. He liked him for trying so hard to think. Nagasena answered King Milinda very simply. He said:

"No, O King, I am not my hair."

"Are your bones you, then, O Nagasena?"

"No, O King, I am not my bones."

"Surely you are not your teeth and your fingernails, are you?" With this question all the men on the grass threw back their heads and roared with laughter. Nagasena waited and then answered:

"No, O King, I am not my teeth or my fingernails."

"Is your heart you, O Nagasena? Is your stomach you? Is your brain you?" To all these questions and many more like them, Nagasena answered: "No, O King, I am none of these things."

"But, Nagasena, are you not all of these parts of your body put together?"

"No, King Milinda, even all these parts of my body put together do not make me."

"Well, then," said the King, "are you something different from all these parts of your body?" Again Nagasena answered :

"No," Now King Milinda was really puzzled. He said:

"Noble teacher, I have asked you every question I can think of, but somehow I cannot find you. Where are you? Surely, you cannot mean there is no you at all. I cannot think that is the truth."

"You have spoken well, O King. I am here. I am real. I am not my name. I am not the sound of a word. Neither am I the different parts of my body. I am not the same as my whole body put together.

“King Milinda, I am not anything you can touch with your hands. You cannot see me with your eyes. Yet you know and I know that I am. But what I am is beyond our knowing.”

Then King Milinda and all the men sitting around on the grass applauded their wise teacher. They said: “It is wonderful how he answers!” And King Milinda said to his companions:

“I am glad we came. Being here is better than I had hoped for. Let us find lodgings for tonight. Tomorrow I must ask more questions.”

### **Discussion**

What makes you you? How would you describe yourself?

### **Activity**

Since we are going to be asking a lot more questions in the weeks to come, we’re going to need a place to write down the answers that we come up with. And we’ll want the place where we write down our important answers to our important questions to be something that expresses a little bit of what makes us the person that we are. So we’re each going to decorate the cover of our own notebook with pictures or words, either cut from a magazine or drawn ourselves, that shows a bit of whom we are.

(Have kids cut out pictures from magazines or draw on drawing paper and cut out those pictures. Have them lay out their design first, then paste pictures to the front of their notebook. The pictures will keep better if you then cover the front of the notebook with clear contact paper.)

### **Closing**

Have each person describe what they put on the front of their notebook and why.