



Christ in the light of the Holy Spirit

**A comparison between the eastern teaching
and Christianity**

Peter Bengtsson

Cover art: Ann Chapin

Contents

My background	2
The eastern teaching	3
Sin or suffering?	3
To do good or evil	5
Peace in emptiness or peace in the Holy Spirit?	6
Christ consciousness or the person Christ?	7
Eternity and the purpose of life	9
Afterword	11

My background

I grew up in a family where we never really talked about God. Sure there was a general belief in God or something bigger. You can say I was raised in a "normal" cultural Christian family. I was spiritual as a kid and sometimes things happened, that I couldn't explain away by chance or logic.

When I got unemployed at the age of 20, some friends introduced me to New Age. I was given books that explained why we are here and what was the meaning of life. At that time I wasn't very interested in those books, but after trying yoga, and noticing how strong an affect it had on me, I got very interested in New Age. I started reading all kinds of books about it, and I also searched the net for information. I added eastern meditation to my spiritual practice, thinking that if yoga felt good, then meditation must be even better. I joined a Buddhist community.

In the beginning everything seemed to go well, I was feeling fine and had peace, but somewhere something went wrong. I got more and more into spirituality, and I travelled to England, France and Denmark to meet gurus and spiritual masters. My goal was now to reach the state that Buddha attained 2500 years ago, called "Buddha consciousness", "Christ consciousness" or simply "enlightenment". A few year into my search I found myself in a deep darkness, I felt emptiness, and everything appeared to be meaningless. I got into depression, anxiety, had suicidal thoughts and got sick-listed. Soon I had a psychosis and was put on pharmaceutical drugs.

When I was in my biggest life crisis, something happend that would change everything. I met a Saviour that would remove my emptiness and give my life a new meaning. In this essay I will, as I have experienced it, compare the eastern teaching to the Christian teaching of Jesus.

God bless you,

Peter

The eastern teaching?

The difference between Buddhism, Hinduism and New Age may be big, but these teachings may also be very much alike. Buddhism is a religion with strict rules, while New Age is an open teaching where almost everything goes, spirits, chakras, auras, angels, reincarnation, gods, foretelling, astrology, healing and ghosts. I would say that Hinduism is between those two groups, it's more open than Buddhism but still hasn't the same width and variations as New Age.

When I talk about the "eastern teaching" in this essay, I mean the common ground in Buddhism, Hinduism and also for those that are true seekers in New Age. What I think of is the state called enlightenment. Enlightenment is attained through various spiritual practices, where the master is said to be permanently free from the suffering of this world. On the deepest level, this is the aim of all these three groups, and I will compare this central teaching with Christianity.

Sin or suffering?

The enlightened guru is said to experience the world without filters, as it really is. This state is often described as felicity and peace. My own idea about enlightenment was like most seekers, that you, in this state, live through love and goodness. It's easy to draw parallels between Christ and Buddha, they both lived through love and that their main message was the same. The purpose was to reach the higher state of consciousness, the "Christ or Buddha consciousness".

This was really appealing to me, but as a seeker of truth, I wanted to know for sure what this was, before I entered into this state. Most spiritual teachers didn't want to talk much about this. They would say that this was something that could only be understood through experience. But I found out a few things while being in contact with these masters. It turned out

that they had a very different view of what goodness is than I had. For them it was all about setting oneself and the world free from suffering. So suffering was the "evil" that the world needed to be freed from, and then earth would be a paradise.

I didn't fully know how to understand this, so I kept looking for the answer. Was suffering the cause of evil in this world? What I found out made me confused. Feelings we normally consider good, like guilt and regret, came into the sphere of suffering, which meant that this was something we had to be free from, according to the eastern teaching. Then I realized that the end of suffering couldn't be the answer, since suffering can be both of good and of evil. Of course we all know that suffering from a disease is something bad, but good suffering is a feeling, that for a moment is unpleasant, but leads us to something good. If I steal a CD from a store and feel guilt, that can lead me to going back the store and returning the CD. This is an example of good suffering. What would the Earth look like without the good suffering?

Christianity doesn't talk about suffering as the cause of all the problems in the world, rather Christians point to sin as the real problem. Evil in this world is caused by sin, and sin had its beginning from rebellion against God. Christians believe that God is the measure of good, and He is the highest good, and through him we see how good or how bad our deeds are. To do something against God's will is therefore called evil or sin.

In eastern teaching, you want to overcome the problems in the world through enlightenment and freedom from suffering; in Christianity you want to overcome evil in the world through freedom from sin and sinful living. At first appearance, the purpose looks much the same in both teachings, but in reality, it's different things we want to free the world from. Sure, most Buddhists and Christians want peace in the world, but the methods to reach this, and the view of what peace really is, is very different.

To do good or evil

To do good and renounce evil is being taught as well in eastern religion as in Christianity. It's good to do good! But there is a clear difference. According to eastern teaching, for a person to be really good and live real good, he must first attain enlightenment. Only then is the person fully free from egotistic motives. In Christianity, to do good is not only to do something that is good for the world, but also something that is good in the eyes of God. So Christians got another way to measure good. A Christian gets the strength to do good through the relationship with God, while the eastern seeker believes he becomes more good the closer he is to the state of enlightenment.

In the eastern teaching you talk about karma, which means that the evil or good you do, will come back to you in this life or the next. But at the same time the belief is that once being enlightened you are free from karma, have attained nirvana and will no longer be reborn.

Jesus also talks about things that to some degree, can be compared to karma. He says: *"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure-- reseeded down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return"*¹. The difference is that God will give the reward as He see fit, while karma is like a cosmic, mathematical law. As much bad as I do, just as much bad will come back to me, or just as much good must I do to cancel the effect of the bad karma.

The central teaching in Christianity is the teaching of forgiveness, which means that if you regret what you have done and ask for God's forgiveness, you will be forgiven and you can start anew. Even forgiveness is free according to Christianity, evil deeds may still have consequences, but before God you are forgiven. True regret demands the will to, if possible, repair the damage one has done. There is no similarity in the eastern teaching where forgiveness is like any other good deed that leads to good karma. Instead of forgiving someone you could do another good deed that is just as "weighty" to neutralize the bad karma.

¹ New American Standard Bible 1995, Luke 6:38

Peace in emptiness or peace in the Holy Spirit?

Eastern teaching and Christianity, both have the common factor that one seek peace. Eastern practice is about finding peace within oneself, and in Christianity it's about finding peace outside oneself, in a personal God. All of us know that when we have been worried about something and when the problem is solved we get peace, temporary peace. Is it possible to let go of a problem before the problem is solved? Yes, that is more or less possible. This is the eastern way of finding peace, to let go. In Christianity it's different. Sure you can use your mind, but peace is received not through "letting go of" but from "holding on to" the solution to the problem.

Eastern seekers don't have a fixed point to hold on to, rather a fixed point would be an obstacle to attain enlightenment. You are to hand over your life fully to emptiness, and that is how you are to find peace. Christians, on the other hand, hold firm to Christ as the fixed point, as the real solution to all problems. The Christian is to hand over his whole life to Jesus to find peace in Him.

Isn't it true that both paths lead to peace? Well, yes and no! If a person sincerely seeks through eastern methods, that person will sooner or later reach the conclusion that everything is empty and meaningless, because that is the way this teaching describes the core reality, as utterly meaningless. Sure you can find peace through the eastern path, to say something else would be wrong, but at the same time the ground it is resting on says that everything is meaningless.

The peace found on the eastern path comes from giving up to nothing. The seeker doesn't look for peace in something or someone. He has given up that way of thinking. Instead he seeks peace independent of any object, like for an example a personal God. In Christianity you give up everything to the person Jesus. There is the similarity in both teachings of giving up, but when looking closer they are more like two opposites. To surrender to Jesus is to repent from sinful life and with the whole heart follow and trust in him.

Christianity holds the belief that peace comes through the Holy Spirit, who

operates in the heart of the believer. The Spirit grants us both faith and hope in life, which clears away emptiness and pointlessness. It's described like the Christian gets new values and a new joy in life. *"It's like I have been born again"*², many Christians would say, and that is exactly what the Bible calls it when a person has given his life to Jesus.

Christ consciousness or the person Christ?

What is it that human beings are missing? Why does she live like she does? Many spiritual seekers would say, that what is missing, is Christ consciousness (enlightenment): *"If we attain the same state as Christ, nothing will be lacking and everything will be perfect."* That is of course not a view shared among Christians. They believe that what is missing, is the relationship with the person Christ. Sure, there is almost an endless row of gurus and masters who have inner peace. You can't deny that, but have they really conquered the darkness?

You can compare enlightenment with becoming one with God or even becoming God. This is sometimes called oneness, "one-ness". The teaching says that not only he who becomes enlightened is God, but that everyone in essence is God. This teaching is called pantheism³. Christianity teaches atonement, "at-one-ment", which means being "at one with", in agreement with God, or redeemed. On the surface oneness and atonement can look alike, but in reality it's more like comparing the moon to the sun. Oneness is becoming God. Atonement is being atoned to God.

When I had been in contact with enlightened masters for a few years, the image became clearer. These people that were so loving, they didn't live the holy life I expected from a guru. What I had been seeking in eastern religion, turned out more and more to be an illusion. I got to know many things that I never ever would have believed before, about enlightened masters. It turned out that they were much like "everyone else", the could

² New American Standard Bible 1995, John 3:3

³ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/pantheism>

lie, be greedy or live promiscuous lives. The difference between them and the common man was that they seemed to live in a deep peace, not matter what happened.

It was explained to me that enlightened people live in a "forgiven" state. That means that when they do something wrong, they forgive themselves automatically. This kind of forgiveness gives peace, but didn't change the darkness in the heart of the guru, and what Christians would call sin remained. Jesus Christ, who is called the light of the world⁴, had no darkness within, was holy and free from sin⁵. Jesus of the Bible was clearly someone else than those gurus, still their state is called Christ consciousness.

Christians teach that when a person repents from one's old life to God, God forgives the person and a change takes place in the inner heart. Light comes into the heart and darkness and sin disappear. That is how salvation is described, and from there on the journey begins to become more and more like Christ. That is called sanctification, where the heart gets purer from sinful thoughts, feelings and evil desires. According to Christians total cleansing from sins occurs after death when we are resurrected like Christ was⁶, after he had been crucified and placed in the tomb.

The enlightened guru is said to have attained a godlike condition where he, from his own heart, decides what is right and wrong. This state is not dependent on something outside himself, rather this state is dependant on absolutely nothing. He is his own lord. I know this may sound weird, but it's the best way I can describe this. To the Christian the saved state or salvation is dependent on God sending his Son Jesus to carry the sins of the world on the cross⁷. He was sacrificed to conquer sin, death and all evil for our sake⁸. Christianity teaches that through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, all mankind can be forgiven of their sins and have a saving relationship with God, which leads to eternal life.

4 New American Standard Bible 1995, John 9:5

5 New American Standard Bible 1995, 1 John 3:5

6 New American Standard Bible 1995, Philippians 3:20-21

7 New American Standard Bible 1995, 1 Peter 2:24

8 New American Standard Bible 1995, Hebrews 2:14-15

Eternity and the purpose of life

When the enlightened guru has reached nirvana there will be no more rebirths. Nirvana means quenching. The journeys of life have ended, but in eastern teaching that is something good because it means the end of suffering. As you probably remember, suffering was the cause of all evil in the world. Christians have another view, believing they will enter the paradise with God. Paradise is maybe the best word to describe heaven, because there is no word that fully can encompass the joy and wonders of heaven, which in the Bible is referred to as the new earth⁹. Sin and darkness will be gone, everything and everyone will be holy and we all will live in fellowship with each other and God.

Now then, what would the enlightened guru say about the meaning of life? *"No meaning at all"*, he would probably say. *"The universe begins with zero and ends with zero ..."* like one of my spiritual teachers said, *"in between both fun things and less fun things happen, but no one is keeping count. Live like life is a dance and enjoy yourself!"*

"Ok?", I remember thinking: *"Mustn't there be some reason for life?"*

What would then Jesus say about the meaning of life? Fortunately we can easily find the answer to that question, because His own words are printed in the bible: *"I am the way, and the truth and the life."*¹⁰ Before you read any further you may stop and think about what Jesus really means by this. He says he is the meaning of life. Through him we get meaning, life, light, love, joy, holiness and everything else that makes life complete.

Is it then the meaning that Christians are to be boring and never have fun? Christians would answer: *"Not, at all! Through living a good life and follow the will of God, everything will always turn out for the best."* Christians have understood that worldly power or wealth will never fully satisfy man. The early Christians lived humble lives. They ate simple meals, wore simple clothes and never worked so much that they didn't have time for God. They had joy in faith and communion with other Christians¹¹. It's easy to think that one will be happier living out one's desires, but it seems that a healthy abstinence makes life much better.

⁹ New American Standard Bible 1995, Revelation 21:1

¹⁰ New American Standard Bible 1995, John 14:6

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Nw7lmdYbiw>

Dalai Lama says the meaning of life is happiness. He doesn't mean that in any outermost sense, rather the meaning life can give us right now. Because there is no other meaning in the eastern teaching. To the Christian, the meaning is linked to God and the creation. To know that someone is watching over His creation gives a sense of meaning. A Christian would say that nothing that is of goodness is meaningless because goodness itself has a value in relationship to God. Fellowship with Jesus gives meaning and joy in life and it leads to true happiness and peace. I will end this essay with a quote from the Saviour Jesus Christ:

*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."*¹²

¹² New American Standard Bible 1995, John 14:27

Afterword

I hope you have found the essay interesting and that you have gotten a deeper understanding of the differences between Christianity and the eastern teaching. The essay can be read and downloaded (in Swedish or English) from my blog. Feel free to share it with friends, family and strangers.

Christ love,

Peter

www.kristnabetraktelser.se



www.fineartamerica.com/featured/crucifixion-ann-chapin.html