

**Mr. Andrei Adaryukov**  
**Head Librarian**  
**Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)**

**Religious Perspectives – Buddhism**

**What are some misunderstood or controversial practices within your religion?**

“I will address one major point and two minor ones. The biggest problem for the Buddhism since its percolation into the West has been, especially dealing with the traditional monotheistic religions, is to shake off this perception of a religion of denial, a teaching that somehow denies vitality, a teaching of nothingness. That was perhaps the biggest accusation leveled at Buddhism for many, many years and it still happens today.

How many of you have heard the term of nirvana? Yeah, no thanks to Kurt Cobain. Nirvana is translated as extinction. And that is the ultimate goal supposedly, theoretically of the Buddhist's life. Though when you're a layman you're really not supposed to be thinking of nirvana because then you fall into the trap of getting attached again only this time you're attached to some ideal which is so away from you that it's really not helpful to do that. But again extinction, the vocabulary is very difficult to explain.

What Buddha's trying to extinguish is not attachment, not the love of others (compassion is a number one inner underlying ethical requirement or ideal for a Buddhist) what we are trying to extinguish is what's called three defilements: ignorance, hatred, and fear. So, it's not that we are supposed..., there is unfortunately in the popular mind often this idea of a Buddhist was supposed to be like – I don't care, nothing touches me, I don't feel love, I don't feel hate, I don't get anger – you know this kind of idealized almost non-human being. And, that is not that.

I don't know what nirvana is like, if I knew I'd be Buddha. Obviously I'm not. So, when somebody from outside just reads the basic description of the religion they get this Cliff notes version. And this is the biggest misunderstanding. Buddhism is not about extinguishing all psychic life. It's about making it more meaningful. It's about lining it with reality. It's about acting, trying to act as much as possible out of wisdom and compassion rather than reflective fear, anger, and so on.

The two smaller things are that all Buddhists are pacifists and vegetarians. Yes, we do take the vow of not to kill but there is a common sense. You're not supposed to take like purposefully, again out of anger, out of greed, out of those kinds of emotions. Someone runs at you with an axe you can make a choice. You can make, you can let them murder you rather than resist but someone runs at you and your family with an axe you kill them, that's the right thing to do because you are protecting other human beings. So there is no, it's not a total pacifism. Now some people interpret within, there's a huge variety, huge variation within Buddhism, so some people interpret it as a very extreme, the principal of ahimsa, nonviolence. They take it all the way. No killing of any kind, vegetarianism. But it doesn't have to be that way. Otherwise,

**Mr. Andrei Adaryukov**  
**Head Librarian**  
**Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)**

**Religious Perspectives – Buddhism**

logically how could you have a country like Sri Lanka where Buddhism is the State religion? They do have to have army, police, and so on, right? So, obviously any kind of thinking in extremes is not helpful.

And the final thing is, as I mentioned, we don't worship Buddha but you can point out, wait, there are magnificent Buddhist temples around the world. There are magnificent Buddhist statues around the world. You do prostrations when you walk into the temple. You touch, you do this gesture to your forehead to your heart and prostrate yourself three times. What is that if not worship? It is a worship in the sense that you would worship a teacher who told you, who taught you, who opened the truth about life. That's the ultimate respect and it also helps you to focus your mind on your practice, on what you need to do. It's very different than worship in a monotheistic religion where you are trying to enter into some kind of conversation, communion and with an outside entity, with a god. So, although gestures sometimes and buildings and those things can look very similar, don't assume that the content is the same."

**Disclaimer**

The preceding individual religious awareness perspective is provided by a practicing member from a religious group for the purpose of better understanding the religious practices of others. This individual perspective is designed to orient viewers to religious aspects/beliefs for a referenced group. It should not be interpreted as official or final religious doctrine or as the official views of, or endorsed by, the United States Government, the Department of Defense, or the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute.