

Series: Born To Believe

Lesson 3: The Polytheistic Religions

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Identify two key components of polytheistic faiths.
- Discover ways to dialogue with Buddhist and Hindu people in a Christian way.

Materials Needed:

- ☐ Copies of page A-49 (polygram)
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Prizes (if desired)
- ☐ Copies of page A-50, cut along the lines to make puzzle pieces
- ☐ Envelopes
- ☐ Overhead projector
- ☐ Overhead copy of page A-50 (puzzle)

Lead In:

Ask the students if they remember what monotheism means (the belief that there is only one God).

Now ask the students if they can guess what polytheism means (the belief that there is more than one God). Once they know, tell them that you are going to give them a pop quiz on the polytheistic religions, the religions that believe there is more than one God, but that they can cheat on the quiz because you are going to leave the room or turn around. Tell them it's a break from the tests they take at school where they can't cheat. Hand out copies of page A-49 and pens. Leave the room or get distracted with something else. When you come back, have students take up the test together with you. The answers are as follows:

- | | |
|------|-----------|
| 1. C | 6. D |
| 2. F | 7. G |
| 3. B | 8. A |
| 4. E | 9. A or D |
| 5. A | 10. D |

Find the students with the highest scores. Award prizes if desired.

Task One:

Say something like, *Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Taoism and Sikhism are often referred to as Eastern religions because they predominately originate in China and India. Although these Eastern religions vary tremendously in terms of beliefs and worship practices there are a few commonalities that we can highlight. Today we are going to concentrate mostly on Buddhism and Hinduism because they are the two largest Eastern religions, but most of the Eastern religions have two things in common. Can anyone guess what these two things are?* Solicit answers. The two things are as follows:

First, generally the Eastern religions do not believe that there is one God. Hinduism has two big ideas or mantras that summarize the core ideas of Hinduism: “all is One” and “all is God.” Buddhism does not emphasize gods or goddesses but rather teaches that each person needs to reach a higher level. For Buddhists little importance is placed on the divine so establishing a relationship with God or becoming aware of God’s existence is not important.

Second, another key component of Eastern religions is that they typically emphasize the cyclical nature of life on earth. For example, the doctrine of reincarnation is one the students may have heard of. Hindus believe that one’s soul must become one with the Universal Soul (*Brahman*) and that this can only be accomplished by going through many birth and death cycles (*samsara*). Good *karma* will help you beat the wheel of misfortune sooner. Bad *karma* will keep you in the fray. Buddhism also teaches that people need to break free from the cycle of *samsara* to attain the state of *nirvana*, a state of inner purity and freedom.

Task Two:

Say something like, *Each week we have looked at The Four Big Questions that people are looking for answers to. We are going to do that again with Buddhism and Hinduism. You are going to divide yourselves into groups of no more than four. I am going to give each group an envelope with a little puzzle in it. The puzzle forms a chart, with columns going up and down and rows going across. Work together to sort out how the chart goes together. Give one envelope to each group, with the puzzle pieces (page A-50) inside.*

When they are done put the overhead copy of the completed chart puzzle on the overhead. Have students look at their work and compare it to the overhead to see if they need to make any changes. Find out if there are any questions. Of course, you may not

know the answers to questions about other religions and it's okay to tell your students so. Other students may even be able to answer the questions and that's great too.

Task Three:

Ask the whole group if they can identify any similarities between Christianity and Buddhism, either from the chart or from what they already know about these religions. How about between Christianity and Hinduism? Possibly they will identify the desire to overcome suffering, the desire to live ethical lives, the practice of mastering selfish desires, the focus on prayer and meditation, and so on.

Ask them to identify some principles for dialoguing with Buddhist and Hindu people. Push them beyond the obvious answers of love and kindness. Push them to consider ways that they could find common ground with people of these faiths, as they have in the previous question and in ways that they could highlight some of their own key beliefs.

Closing:

Conclude the evening with prayer for people of all faiths to come to know truth and for Christians to interact with people of all faiths in ways that are Christ-like.