

**The Growth of Buddhism in America**

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**April 14, 2011**

**Unity Institute's Lyceum 2011**  
*Spiritual Studies from a Global Perspective:*  
*The Ongoing East-West Dialogue*

**ABSTRACT:**

Buddhism came to the West in 1860 when the monastic and lay communities in Sri Lanka brought about a major revival in Buddhism. The revival followed a period of persecution by foreign powers and since then Buddhism has flourished in the West.

Buddhism arrived in America at the World Parliament of Religion in 1893, where 12 speakers represented Buddhism. By the 1950's, most educated Westerners had at least heard of Zen Buddhism. In 1959 when the 14th Dalai Lama fled the Chinese occupation of Tibet along with about 100,000 other Tibetans, this brought a flood of Tibetan teachers to the West.

For the last 18 years, studies indicate that all denominations of the Buddhist religion have experienced an unparalleled growth in the United States of America. In the year 2008, the Pew Forum's U.S Religious Landscape Survey was published showing shifts in American religious life over the past decade. This study showed that from the years 1990 to 2001, Buddhism grew 170% and became the fourth most practiced religion in America, behind Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

It is estimated that there are five to six million Buddhists in the United States. As an emergent religion, Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness, meditation, peacefulness and social action – sometimes described as “engaged Buddhism” – is having an impact on everything from environmental justice to hospice care. It's an “out of the monastery, into the living room” experience.

## Introduction

Over the last sixty years, Buddhism has grown as a cultural phenomenon in the United States. Rarely heard of in popular culture until the 1950s, one can now see and buy Buddha statues, bracelets and other paraphernalia almost anywhere. A recent survey by the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* found that 12.6% of the U.S. population claim that Buddhism influences their daily spirituality.<sup>1</sup> That is one in eight Americans who find value in their life from Buddhist spiritual practices.

Some liberal Christians and those in the New Thought Movement have clearly adopted Buddhist concepts by referring to “Christ-nature” and “Christ consciousness” as “Buddha-nature” in worship services and prayer groups. According to the website for the Buddhist Faith Fellowship of Connecticut, a Mayahana practice center in central Connecticut, Buddhism has influenced American popular culture in a number of ways:

We have seen Hollywood Buddhist movies since the 1990s like *Little Buddha*, *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Enlightenment Guaranteed*. . . according to *Zen Abound Magazine* (online) there are many celebrities these days practicing Buddhism like Tina Turner, Orlando Bloom, Richard Gere, Steven Seagal, Keanu Reeves, Patti Smith etc. As for music, the Buddhist Beastie Boys offer many dharmic lyrics such as the song *Bodhisattva*.

Regarding American sports, Buddhist philosophy was at work in the success story of Chicago Bulls Coach Phil Jackson. On the internet Buddhism is quite a power house with countless web sites devoted to its teaching and propagation. If you Google "buddhism," you will get 33,400,000 hits. As for being a political force, there are esteemed organizations such as the *Buddhist Peace Fellowship* engaged in death penalty reform, environmental activism, and the global peace movement, and the *Buddhist Aids Project* and the *Zen Peacemaker Order*.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism has grown in number of adherents and in cultural influence. This paper will look at the roots of Buddhism and how it was spread from its birth in ancient India to twenty-first century America.

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhist Faith Fellowship of Connecticut, (from Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge. "Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 43.3 (2004): 363-380.), <http://www.bffct.net/id65.html>, (accessed October, 25, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed October 25, 2010).

## What is “Buddhism”?

Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world behind Christianity, Islam and Hinduism<sup>3</sup>. It is viewed as a philosophy, a cultural concept, sometimes as a way of life, rather than a religion. It can be difficult to recognize what is practiced in the West as the Buddhism that originated in Asia because of the melting and melding of the religion into the traditionally Christian culture of America. University of Chicago sociologist, Stephen R. Warner, told the *Religion News Service*, "The world of American religion is going through enormous change. It will be increasingly difficult to distinguish Christians and Buddhists."<sup>4</sup>

Early in its arrival in the United States, people were wondering about these same issues. In the April 1904 issue of *Unity* magazine, Kiichi Kaneko, a Japanese socialist and journalist from *The Metaphysical Magazine* is quoted for his attempt to define “Buddhist”:

Religion is not merely the worship of God. It is one’s sincere attitude toward the universe and life. . . . If a religion is merely to worship a God, Buddhism may not be called a religion, because it names no god to worship. But no historical scholar of religion would overlook it. Buddhism is, undoubtedly, a religion. One of the representative scholars on comparative religion says, summing up all definitions of religion, that religion is the worship of higher power in the sense of need. This seems to me much better and a little broader. Edward Caird wisely adds to this that a ‘man’s religion is the expression of his summed-up meaning and that purport of his whole consciousness of things.’ I think this is as nearly perfect a definition of religion as modern philosophers can give.<sup>5</sup>

Using this as helpful guidance, Buddhist practices can be seen as the conscious expression of a religious belief about how to best live one’s life.

## Before 1860

Gautama Siddhartha was born into a Hindu family in India in the sixth century BCE. He lived approximately from 560-480 BCE. According to the story told by his

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Lampman, Christian Science Monitor, September 4, 2006  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0914/p14s01-lire.html>. Accessed April 2, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Jody Veenker, Buddhism: Spirituality without Religion, *Christianity Today*, December 6, 1999, 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Unity*, April 1909, 299.

followers, Siddhartha sought spiritual wisdom beyond the teachings of Hinduism and at the moment of his realization about the true nature of suffering and the means to eliminate it completely, he became the *Buddha* (the *Enlightened One*). He established a community (Sangha) of Buddhist monks in northern India. Having lived and taught for eighty years, he left many teachings which were memorized and written down by his followers.

In approximately 250 BCE, the Indian emperor Asoka “erected Buddhist monasteries and monuments throughout the realm.”<sup>6</sup> He also “dispatched Buddhist missions to lands beyond his realm”<sup>7</sup> This is how Buddhism reached Sri Lanka, which became the stronghold of the religion. Buddhism did not survive in the Indian homeland and by 1200 CE had virtually disappeared. Invasions of “Turkish Muslims, which began in earnest in the tenth century, is often blamed for the destruction of Buddhism in India.”<sup>8</sup> Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any Buddhist nation.

In the early nineteenth century, at a time when Buddhism was in decline, the British took control of the coastal colonies that the Dutch had taken from the Portuguese, which included Sri Lanka<sup>9</sup>. The British contributed to “the development of reformed Buddhism that has great appeal in the modern, largely secularized world.”<sup>10</sup> This is due to its emphasis on the “essentially rational character of the Buddhism of the Pali canon.”<sup>11</sup>

In the 1860s, local legend claims that a young Buddhist named Gunaananda:

...challenged the Christian missionaries to meet him in open-debate. This resulted in three public controversies...the last at Panadura in 1873.

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<sup>6</sup> Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism A History* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1994), 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Reat, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Reat, 94.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 97.

The Panadura controversy, which lasted for a week, was the most important of them all. It was the culmination of his efforts and it led to a Buddhist reawakening. . . .The controversy ended with victory for the Buddhists. The Buddhist orator not only replied effectively to the fallacies of the Christian speakers, but also enlightened them on the principles and tenets of the Buddhist doctrine.<sup>12</sup>

This, according to the local lore, resulted in a revival and enthusiasm for Buddhism, leading to its spread as Sri Lankans monks began traveling to the West.

Although there may be truth in this legend, it is also likely that the British missionaries began studying Buddhism. Thus, the British campaigns in Sri Lanka had a “profound and abiding effect upon Sri Lankan Buddhism. In many ways, this effect represented a genuine revival of the essentially rational character of the Buddhism of the Pāli canon.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Buddhism Arrives in the West**

Buddhism arrived in the West in modest ways with early Asian immigrants to the United States. It arrived officially in 1893 with the opening of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where it was represented by Rinzai Zen Teacher (*roshi*) Soyen Shaku of Kamakura, Japan.”<sup>14</sup> Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faith, writes that the Parliament was “a remarkable pioneer event, and no subsequent inter-faith gathering has come near to it in size or complexity”<sup>15</sup> Myrtle and Charles Fillmore, co-founders of the Unity Movement, whose followers would later incorporate some Buddhist-like teachings into their meditation practices, traveled from Kansas City, Missouri to attend the Parliament.

There were twelve speakers at the Parliament representing Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> One was the Sri Lankan Buddhist teacher Anagarika Dharmapala, who would also travel

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<sup>12</sup> H.R. Perera, *Buddhism in Sri Lanka, A Short History*, Access to Insight, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/perera/wheel100.html#sect-02> (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Reat, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Alan Laughlin, *Getting Oriented*. (Santa Rosa, Polebridge Press, 2005), 137.

<sup>15</sup> Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology <http://people.bu.edu/wildman/bce/worldparliamentofreligions1893.htm> (accessed October 20, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed October 20, 2010).

extensively across the U.S. in the early part of the 20th century to lecture about Buddhism.

Another speaker was Soyen Shaku was a Japanese Rinzai master and leading figure in Buddhist modernism, spoke at the World Congress of Religion. (Rinzai is the line of Buddhism that teaches through the *koan*, a story whose puzzle can only be solved through intuition, not rational thought.) Shaku was asked to stay after the Parliament in the United States to translate Buddhist works.

Although unable to do so himself, he recommended his student, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, whose many books on Buddhism over the next fifty years or so helped to spread the Buddhist *Dharma* in America. Another of Soyen's students founded the Buddhist Society of America in 1931.<sup>17</sup>

Suzuki published a great deal of Buddhist literature in English on Zen and gave lectures at universities. Convinced that the United States was ready for Zen, Soen Shaku dispatched two of his students, Nyogen Senzaki and Sokatsu Shaku (stayed only briefly) to California in 1905 and 1906. Senzaki established a meditation center in San Francisco in 1927 and in Los Angeles in 1931 (the Mentorgarten Meditation Hall) and Shaku influenced Alan Watts who became a leading figure in the "beat generation" of the 1950s and the counter-culture of the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> "By the 1950's most educated Westerners had at least heard of Zen Buddhism"<sup>19</sup>

### **Immigrants, Missionaries and Converts**

Another way that Buddhism arrived was with migrating Asians who came to work on the Transcontinental Railroad between 1863 and 1869. And they came for other industries also:

In 1869 the first Japanese immigrants to North America settled near Sacramento as part of a failed scheme to cultivate silkworms. By 1900 there were over 24,000 Japanese immigrants in the United States, mostly in California. Unlike the first Chinese immigrants, these Japanese were mostly skilled workers and students.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Laughlin, 137.

<sup>18</sup> Reat, 285.

<sup>19</sup> James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1994), 283.

Other migrations of Buddhists to the West occurred with the return of American troops with their Japanese brides, following the American occupation of Japan after World War II.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by those arriving after the Korean War in the 1950s and the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. “A general reform of United States immigration law in 1965 and special exception designed for people displaced during the Vietnam War opened up a new era in the history of migration to the United States.”<sup>22</sup>

Every wave of immigration resulted in an increased awareness of and interest in Buddhism. Noble Ross Reat, in *Buddhism: A History*, notes that many soldiers returning from duty had a deep respect for the courage and skill of their adversaries, often with training in oriental martial arts. And many Westerners gained their first experience of meditation and Eastern culture in martial arts classes.<sup>23</sup>

In 1959 the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1959 and dispersed the Buddhist Tibetan community. The Tibetan Dharma became a significant factor in American Buddhism as these refugees sought a new home. In the 1970s:

...a number of *lamas* in exile, such as Trathang Tulku, Kalu Rinpoche, and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, established teaching and practice centers. . . . Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche laid the foundations for a range of educational, arts, and practice institutions, including Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.<sup>24</sup>

Another way that Buddhism has grown in the West is through missionary movements. In 1898 the YMBA or Young Men’s Buddhist Association in San Francisco, petitioned the authorities in Japan to send Buddhist missionaries to San Francisco to counter the Methodists who were converting Buddhists to Methodism.<sup>25</sup>

The organization Soka Gakkai, which came to the United States in 1960 is a Japanese missionary movement “rooted in the concept of ‘human revolution,’ a process of inner transformation through Buddhist practice.” According to their mission statement,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002), 114.

<sup>23</sup> Reat, 287.

<sup>24</sup> Prebish and Baumann, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Reat, 284.



this practice leads to the development of character, not only for personal fulfillment but also for the betterment of society.<sup>26</sup> This group's particular emphasis on chanting practice enjoys a growing interest and membership in many parts of the world.<sup>27</sup>

### **Why Buddhism found a home in the West**

As American missionaries and travellers returned to the United States with stories about their Asian encounters with Buddhism, the accounts did not give a positive impression of the practice. It was seen as a negative religion. "It rejected the idea of God and the salvation of the individual soul and held the highest good to be total annihilation of the individual (which would be nirvana)."<sup>28</sup>

James William Coleman, Professor of Sociology and practicing Buddhist writes in *The New Buddhism*, "One Unitarian minister described the Buddhist viewpoint this way: 'God is nothing; man is nothing, life is nothing, eternity is nothing. Hence the profound sadness of Buddhism.'"<sup>29</sup>

Coleman describes the arrival of Buddhism as concurrent with the intellectual crisis that was occurring in mainline American Protestantism as religion was challenged by

...both growing scientific skepticism and the social dislocations caused by the industrial revolution and the urbanization it spawned. Darwin's theory of evolution was shaking the cosmological foundations of Christian faith, while the academic study of comparative religion and critical biblical scholarship eroded Christianity's claim to being the one true religion. Some disaffected intellectuals began to see Buddhism as an alternative to Christianity that was both more compatible with the scientific worldview and more tolerant of divergent opinions and viewpoints.<sup>30</sup>

Through their understanding of Buddhism, Westerners were finding a way to connect their new scientific thinking and religion together. Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, Buddhist scholars and authors of *Westward Dharma* write:

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<sup>26</sup> Soka Gakkai International USA, <http://www.sgi-usa.org/aboutsgi/about/aboutsgi.php>. (accessed October 21, 2010.)

<sup>27</sup> Prebish and Baumann, 52.

<sup>28</sup> Coleman, 56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Europeans encountering Buddhism in the late nineteenth century read many ideas in ancient Buddhist scriptures and philosophical texts that appeared to resonate with the modern, scientific attitude. They saw in textual Buddhism an experimental attitude, a de-emphasis on faith and belief, and a sophisticated philosophy—exquisitely rational, yet soaring beyond ordinary reason.<sup>31</sup>

The ideas that Suzuki brought to the West was a sense of spirituality that many people were seeking in the face of the materialism of the industrialization, and the new, scientific attitudes that were stripping the faithful of their beliefs of God the Almighty. Suzuki claimed that at the center of Buddhism there “was a common, universal mystical experience, an experience that transcends all cultural trappings.”<sup>32</sup> What he offered the West was the essence of spirituality. “What is important to us here is that this image, created during a crisis of intellectual and religious life in Europe and America, was crucial to Zen’s enthusiastic reception.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Different Sects of Buddhism**

What Suzuki was teaching was Zen Buddhism, a Japanese form of Buddhism that was the most portable from Asia to the West. But there are other practices and there is a great variety of practices in the West.

The two major branches of Buddhism are Theraveda and Mayahana. Theraveda (“The Teaching of the Elders”) is the more conservative practice and is based in meditation. It is a monastic practice. Vipassana is a form of meditation coming out of this tradition; it is the most secular and most Western form of Theravada Buddhism.

A greater number of Buddhists follow the Mayahana form (the “Great Vehicle”) which is an inclusive form, practiced by laypersons and is more easily adaptable to different cultures.

Mayahana is pluralistic and there are four distinct Mayahana practice communities in the United States. Three of these practices are “sitting” practices:

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<sup>31</sup> Prebish and Baumann, 219.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

- **American Zen:** Defined by the native-born successors to Suzuki and Maezumi. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese monk is a major force in American Buddhism
- **Tibetan Buddhism:** driven by the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959 and the diaspora of the Tibetan community. The Tibetan Dharma became a significant factor in American Buddhism in the 1970s. At about that time, a number of *lamas* in exile, such as Trathang Tulku, Kalu Rinpoche, and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, established teaching and practice centers. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche laid the foundations for a range of educational, arts, and practice institutions, including Naropa Institute in Boulder, CO. Taizan Maezumi Roshi founded the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi founded the San Francisco Zen Center, Dae Soen Sa Nim founded the Providence Zen Center.<sup>34</sup>
- **Pure Land:** Widely practiced in Vietnam, the central belief is in the existence of the Pure Land, a heavenly environment in which one may be reborn and achieve enlightenment. This is the most popular form of Buddhism in the world, yet it is not well known in America.

There is also one Mayahana practice that is a “chanting” practice. That is Soka Gakkai international (SGI-USA) which was founded by Nichiren Shōshū in Japan and came to the United States in the 1960s as a Japanese missionary movement.

This plurality of traditions in the United States has created a diversity that is different than what is commonly found in Asia. In Asia the different forms of Buddhism are separated by geography where in the United States you will find Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana in the same neighborhood. “Traditions previously separated by thousands of miles in Asia have become neighbors in the West.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> PBS *The Buddha*, <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/mar/17/how-buddhism-came-west-maia-duerr/> (accessed April 5, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Prebish and Baumann, 4.

## The Growth of Buddhism

To determine the growth of Buddhism, again we have to look at what defines a Buddhist. For example, individuals who self-describe as Buddhists may have little knowledge nor commitment to Buddhism as a religion or practice. On the other hand, others may be deeply involved in meditation and committed to the Dharma, but may refuse the label "Buddhist".

One way to determine a person's religious identity is to look at their beliefs and the practices they keep. For Buddhism, that might mean someone who has "one who has formally taken refuge in the Three Jewels (the Dharma, the Buddha, and the Sangha), practiced prescribed rituals at a Buddhist temple (chanting), or affirmed defining beliefs (the Four Noble Truths).<sup>36</sup> Another definition might include membership or attendance at a temple. If people self-identify as Buddhist, yet they attend the services of another religion, they are not counted as Buddhist in scholarship.

Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann, Buddhist scholars and co-editors of the *Journal of Global Buddhism*, have come up with several definitions for the different ways that people self-identify as Buddhists<sup>37</sup>:

- Cradle Buddhists—those who are born into the religion.
- Convert Buddhists—those who choose Buddhism, have perhaps migrated to Buddhism from another religion.
- Night Stand Buddhists—those who place a how-to book on Buddhist meditation on the night-stand and read it before they fall to sleep, and then rise the next morning to practice what they learned the night before (from Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen*).<sup>38</sup>
- Sympathizers—those who show signs of interest in Buddhism. For example, they might practice zazen (sitting practice), subscribe to a Buddhist periodical, read Buddhist books, attend lectures at the local University, surf Buddhist websites, and decorate their home with Buddhist artifacts.
- Lukewarm Buddhists—practice more at some times of the year than others, even though they join a temple or center.

## The Numbers

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>37</sup> Prebish and Baumann, 21-29.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 21.

Regardless of the fact that it is difficult to identify who is a Buddhist, or how exactly to define a Buddhist, for the last two decades, studies indicate that all denominations of the Buddhist religion have experienced an unparalleled growth in the United States of America. Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote that the latter half of the 20th century would be marked by "the inter-penetration of Buddhism and Christianity."<sup>39</sup>

In the year 2008, the Pew Forum's U.S Religious Landscape Survey was published. The results showed shifts in American religious life over the past decade. From the years 1990 to 2001, Buddhism grew 170%<sup>40</sup> and is the third largest religion in America behind Christianity and Judaism with Islam is a close fourth.<sup>41</sup>

According to the Pew Survey, it was found demographically that the majority of Buddhists were Gen-X'ers between the ages of thirty and forty-nine. Asians numbered only thirty percent of the surveyed population, showing that Buddhism's growth was predominantly based on the conversion of native-born Americans. Geographically, the western USA had more Buddhists than in the east coast. The Survey reports, "In sharp contrast to Islam and Hinduism, Buddhism in the U.S. is primarily made up of native-born adherents, whites and converts. Only one-in-three American Buddhists describe their race as Asian, while nearly three-in-four Buddhists say they are converts to Buddhism."<sup>42</sup>

The Survey also makes a surprising report that "...only about a third (32%) of Buddhists in the U.S. are Asian; a majority (53%) are white, and ...most are converts to Buddhism."<sup>43</sup> This shows the impact that Buddhism is having on native born Americans who are integrating Buddhism into their lifestyle.

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<sup>39</sup> Alex Smith, Buddhism on the Move, <http://www.missiology.org/EMS/bulletins/asmith.htm> (accessed October 10, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Lampman (accessed April 2, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>, (accessed March 31, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>, p 45. (accessed March 31, 2011).

The Pew Survey found there were more Buddhists than Unitarian Universalists, Hindus, Wiccans, New Agers or Bahai. But there may actually be more practicing Buddhists than reported. That is because the Survey did not include the State of Hawaii, which has a high Asian population, especially Japanese-American who tend to be Buddhist. Also, all interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish languages, but forty percent of the ten million Asians living in the United States do not speak English or Spanish (according to the U.S. Census). Therefore, the numbers of Buddhists in America could be much higher than the Pew Survey would suggest.<sup>44</sup>

### **Unparalleled Growth of the Buddhist Population in America**

Regarding national growth, the number of actual American Buddhists is still unclear but the most conservative estimate between one and half and six million people.

In the mid-1990s, Robert Thurman, a Buddhist Studies professor at Columbia University and a former Buddhist monk himself, told “ABC Nightly News with Peter Jennings that there were five to six million Buddhists in the United States.”<sup>45</sup>

“Martin Baumann wrote in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* in 1997 that he estimated from his own surveys and extensive research that there were three to four million Buddhists in America.”<sup>46</sup> That would make American Buddhism as large as many Protestant denominations.<sup>47</sup>

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University gives these estimates for the number of Buddhists in America<sup>48</sup>:

- *2004 World Almanac* gives the figure of two to three million.
- *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* estimate for 2000 was two and a half million.

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<sup>44</sup> Buddhist Faith Fellowship of Connecticut (accessed October, 25, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Coleman, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Buddhist Faith Fellowship of Connecticut (accessed October, 25, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, <http://pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php#Buddhism> (accessed March 31, 2011).

James Coleman, in *The New Buddhism* writes, “The best measure we have of this growth in North America comes from the comprehensive guide to ‘Buddhist America’ compiled by Don Morreale and his associates. The first edition of this guide, which covered the year 1987, listed 429 meditation-oriented Buddhist centers in North America. Ten years later, the listings in the guide’s new edition had more than doubled to 1,062 centers.”<sup>49</sup>

In the Pluralism Project Directory on the Pluralism Project website there were 2039 Buddhist Centers in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

### **Why it matters to know about Buddhism**

Buddhism’s emphasis on mindfulness, peacefulness and social action—sometimes described as “engaged Buddhism”—is having an impact on everything from environmental justice to hospice care. For example, scientists are studying the meditation techniques of Buddhist monks to determine what goes on to see if meditation and mindfulness actually change the way the brain works. And it is not only religious people who are meditating—business executives, prisoners and athletes are not only trying it, but also finding the benefits of the practices.

In 2005, National Geographic Magazine published an article about the rising popularity of Buddhism in the West with the subtitle, “Out of the monastery, into the living room.” That phrase describes the unparalleled path of growth of Buddhism in America. The Westernized practices have been synthesized into American landscape to the point that it is becoming commonplace in popular media. As the religion website, Religion Link, states: “Ideas such as mindfulness, simple living and the interconnection of all living things resonate with many, including increasing numbers who identify

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<sup>49</sup> Coleman, 19-20.

<sup>50</sup> The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, [http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/buddhism\\_distribution.gif](http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/buddhism_distribution.gif) (accessed March 31, 2011)

themselves as Buddhist and others who consider themselves spiritual but not religious.”<sup>51</sup> Buddhism is no longer an Asian concept, but an American reality.

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<sup>51</sup> Religion Link, Buddhism: Ancient faith experiences an explosion of growth in U.S., [http://www.religionlink.com/tip\\_060123.php](http://www.religionlink.com/tip_060123.php) (accessed April 2, 2011).



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