

Buddha better

We are often told that God is:

omnipotent (all powerful)
omniscient (all knowing), and
omnipresent (everywhere).

These statements are used by God-believers as the highest possible superlatives to describe their Creator-belief. Buddhists do not use such superlatives for the Buddha, and for very important reasons: they are really problematic statements.

THE BUDDHA IS NOT ALL POWERFUL. If God were all powerful, then he has created all this world. We see evil everywhere, and the good often suffer and the evil prosper. If he is all-powerful, why does he not remove evil or, better, not create evil at all. If God is powerful enough to remove evil and does not, then he is not compassionate. If evil persists despite his efforts, then is not all-powerful. If he allows evil, then isn't it better for us to choose a teaching or way where evil *can* be removed?

For this reason, it is unwise to even think of the Buddha as being **all powerful**. For, if the Buddha were so, it is impossible for us to become Buddha. We may worship God, but we can never become God. We would not, for example, say that our father or mother (who gave birth to us) is all-powerful or that they are the most powerful parent in the world. They might not even be very strong people, but we know that they gave us human life and raised us to be humane. In time, we too can become parents, if we choose to.

Or, we can love others unconditionally as wise parents would. Indeed, the love for God cannot be the greatest love, for two reasons. The first reason is that God is only an imaginary being. Secondly, and more seriously, if we put love for God above all else, we can never love others unconditionally. Whatever love a God-believer can show us, must always be less than that for God. Yet, we know that when we are really kind to others, our overwhelming compassion places others first, even before ourselves. Indeed, religious history repeatedly reminds us how the "love of God" is often used to colonize, dominate, exploit, even exterminate, others who are seen as being lesser (for example, as pagans and heathens).

THE BUDDHA IS NOT ALL KNOWING. If God were all knowing, then he would know all that has happened, is happening now, and will happen. This usually also means (for those who believe he is the Creator) that he wills everything. In that case, all things would be predestined. That means that there is no use for us to make any effort to do good, for whatever happens is just God's will.

And if we do anything evil, we can always say, "It's God's will" or "God will forgive me." This is, in fact, often the excuse for powerful God-believers who want to control or destroy others they see as lesser or undesirable. We might come up with the best theological inspirations to show why God is good, but the weakness of the God-idea will always be exploited by those who look the other way.

The Buddha is not all knowing. But through his meditation, which gives him great wisdom and perfect memory, he is able to recall his past lives or those of others. From such wisdom and memory, we too can know why we behave as we do now or why things "happen" to us. This is a sort of "rebirth therapy." This is like replaying tapes of our own lives and those of others, and watching them carefully. If we do this, we would notice certain clear patterns of behaviour: this is called karma.

Certain behaviours would bring on pain and suffering, or increase them. Certain behaviours would lessen pain or remove suffering, or even prevent them. Certain behaviours prevent us from learning. Certain behaviours help us learn and see true reality. This is called self-awakening.

However, we cannot know everything about the future. For, if this were possible, then the future would be predetermined, then we have the same problem as with the notion of an all-powerful God. However, we can,

as the Buddha does, reasonably predict what will happen next by carefully and wisely observing past and present conditions. If we hold a burning candle or match to some fuel, we well know that there would be a fire. We can extend and apply such conditionality to our actions and those of others, so that we can reasonably say that certain things will or will not happen. Of course, as Buddhists, we would rather apply such envisioning to doing good and enjoying their fruits.

THE BUDDHA IS NOT ALL PRESENT. Buddhists who follow the Buddha's teaching know that the Buddha is not all present or always with us. In fact, he is not present in the sense you are here present and reading this. We can treat the Buddha wishfully like we treat God: giving him high-sounding names, and uttering these names, and asking for blessings or protection.

The point is that we are looking for answers from outside. We do not need the Buddha's presence for this because he has taught us that the right way is to look within, and feel our inner peace and joy. It's just like how our parents or care-givers have raised or healed us, but we do not need them any more once we are mature or healed. Even now, as we read this, we are doing this for ourselves.

So we can extend this ability to all other problems or questions that we face and work on them from within ourselves: with our hearts and our minds, by feeling and thinking, with compassion and wisdom. These are the two wings with which we can soar above these problems and questions, so we have a better and clearer view of them.

The Buddha is not **all present** because he has passed away into nirvana, like a fire that is extinguished. No more fuel, no more rebirth. No more ignorance, no more suffering. The Buddha has a human body, like us, and so he passes away. We, too, have a similar body, which means that we can, if we choose, become a buddha, too. In fact, we only need to be *like* the Buddha, and we would be free from suffering.

In other words, the Buddha has passed away into nirvana, but his teaching, the Dharma, the method of becoming buddha or buddha-like, is still with us. This is like a will our parents have left us. If we carefully study the will and carry out the instructions properly, we would gain or discover great wealth, never to suffer any lack or poverty, but to be happy and liberated.

THE BUDDHA IS BETTER THAN ALL THIS. So the Buddha is not all powerful. He's better than that, he only uses his power for good, and teaches us to do the same. He has no power to do evil. He does not punish us or send us to hell.

The Buddha is not all knowing, simply because it is really impossible to know everything about the future, and we don't need to to be happy. The Buddha knows, like a philosopher or scientist would, all there is to know about his area of expertise, and with that knowledge from his own experience and wisdom, he is able to work his own efforts to choose good, see meaning and purpose in life, and work his way to happiness and liberation.

The Buddha helps us by empowering us with self-help wisdom. If God or a saviour were a life-guard constantly watching swimmers and helping them when they are in trouble, the Buddha is like an expert swimmer who trains everyone of us to be good swimmers, to know the waters, and how to safely swim across the waters to safe shores.

The Buddha may not be all powerful, nor all knowing, nor all present, because these are simply big words, which can mean anything you want them to be. The real point is that the Buddha is better than what we can ever imagine. He is like a great coach who tells us we can do it, that is, to live, love, learn, let go of the dark and see the light. The Buddha is the best of beings: he tells us we can do it!

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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