**Seminar #2 on Buddhism A+ Answers**

 **These essays would also receive a "7" on the IBSL Exam.**

 **Notice how these essays contain all of the following:**

1. **A strong introduction and THESIS with analysis**
2. **Organized support paragraphs that support the thesis**
3. **The use of specific terminology and vocabulary specific to this religion**
4. **The use of many specific sacred texts for this religion- with specific details and analysis of each sacred text!**
5. **The use of many specific examples, practices, rituals, holidays,etc.- with specific details and analysis of each example or ritual!**
6. **Discussion of the differences in geography and how the religion is practiced differently in specific different places and countries**
7. **A strong and thoughtful conclusion with ANALYSIS**

**QUESTION #1: How would Buddhism answer Big Question #1: What is the meaning of life?**

 **A+ ESSAY EXAMPLE ONE:**

 As seen in the **8-Fold Paths**, **6 Paramitas**, and **4 Noble Truths**, the meaning of life is to achieve **Para nirvana**, whether it be through a “single raft” or a “big raft.” However, one must experience it rather than learn it through explanations as Buddhists believe it is impossible to elaborate through words. Therefore, Buddhists achieve this through various types of meditations, chanting of **sutras** and **mantras**, usage of **upaya**, visualization methods, rituals, and festivals. These acts encourage the Buddhist philosophy of **Puja, Ahimsa,** and **Karuna.** The importance of these philosophies is to embody the concept of **Annica** in order to put an end to the **dukkha. Thus while all Buddhists share a basic foundation on the meaning of life rooted in life’s impermanence and need to realize nirvana, different sects of Buddhism differ in the ‘vehicle’ or ‘raft’ used to arrive there: Theravada uses the ‘vehicle of the elders’ to attain arhatship and enter Nirvana alone; Mahayana uses the ‘great vehicle’ to become a bodhisattva perfecting compassion for others and realizing Nirvana together; and Vajrayana employs the “diamond raft” to achieve liberation immediately.**

A **Theravada** practitioner mainly follows the “way of the Elders” to achieve nirvana by following the 8-Fold Path.According to the **eight virtues**, one must always adopt the right view, thought, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The goals are to end one’s suffering in life through good intentions. These virtues relate to one another and guide one to balance their **karuna** (compassion) and **panna** (wisdom) equally. Particularly, right mindfulness and right concentration are further enhanced through mantra meditation.

As **Siddhartha** once said in the **Pali Canon**, "The non-doing of any evil, the performance of what's skillful, the cleansing of one's own mind: this is the teaching of the Awakened.” This calms the mind to focus on oneself and control distractions risen from thoughts. Many chants are used before meditation such as the Buddhabhivadana, which starts off prayers with, “Namô Tassa Bhagavatô Arahatô Sammâ-Sambuddhassa,” meaning, “Homage to the **Tiratana (Triple Gems)**, Homage to Him, the Blessed One, the Exalted One, the Fully Enlightened One.” Other chant is the **Pancasila** (five percepts)**,** in which Buddhists chant, “I observe refraining from killing any living beings…taking what does the owner not give…committing sexual misconduct…telling lies…taking any intoxicant or drugs.” During meditation, **samatha and vipassana** are practiced by focusing on the breath to achieve insight and tranquility when meditating. With the correct meditation and mindset, a Buddhist can attain nirvana naturally.

For Theravada Buddhism, the meaning of life is to also aid monks in their quest for enlightenment. For instance, in the **Kathina Ceremony,** people donate new robes to monks while requesting for spiritual guidance. In Tibet, **Lhabap** is celebrated through feasting ceremonies and visiting temples. As for monks, they celebrate **Vesak** by decorating local shrines and lamp lighting to symbolize and spread Buddha’s enlightenment.

However, **Mahayana** Buddhists utilize the **6 Perfections** to bring others toward nirvana together. They must have generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. Furthermore, the **3 bodhisattva vows** enact the perfections. The vows include, “I will allow Buddha’s wisdom to guide me. May I be a raft that embraces the world from sorrow. I will penetrate through the barriers of trouble through anonymous passion.” In fact, these can be explained in the **Heart Sutra.** According to the text, they must “Hav[e] no obstacles [and] overcome fear, liberating themselves from illusion and realizing perfect Nirvana” because “Everything is *inter-are* and related.” Another example can be seen in the **Tzu Chi** **Foundation.** Everyday volunteers display all 6 paramitas through selfless acts of kindness to help others. In doing so, they plant the “seeds” of kindness which expand and spread across the world. **Master Chen Yen**, the founder of the organization, explained that in working with others, one can learn how to activate the Dharma. Another example is the **Sand Mandalas** created by the monks. A monk must spend weeks to visualize and create mandalas out of scratch. Once finished, they then sweep away the sand to symbolize no attachments and cast it away to the ocean to spread their good energy everywhere.

As seen in **Vajrayana Buddhism**, there are also lightning-fast ways to achieve enlightenment. Some include starring at **Shyama Tara (Green Tara),** while chanting, “Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha.” In doing so, the goddess is believed to come and take over the body of the chanter to help them in their struggles. Another chant is “Om mani padme hum” for the goddess **Shadakshari,** a variant form of Avalokiteshvara. The purpose of these chants is to invoke a bodhisattva and allow them to take over to aid one’s troubles.

 All variants of Buddhism such as Therevada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana seek to attain parinirvana. Regardless of the method, they are all encompass the **4 Noble Truths.** The first and second truths that “Suffering is inherent in life” and “The cause of Suffering is desire” are both agreed upon by all Buddhists. However, the third truth, “There is a way to put an end to desire and suffering” varies among Buddhists. For Theravada monks, they meditate and chant the Pali Canon to abstain themselves from it. Mahayana believers use karuna to learn to let go of desire and help others for satisfaction instead of pleasure. Vajrayana practitioners call upon various deities to help speed the process of overcoming desire. In other words, life is a way to train oneself to deal with it.

 The beauty of Buddhism is that it ties in different **IB Ways of Knowing**, depending on the type of Buddhism. For Theravada Buddhism, the most essential Way of Knowing is **Faith.** Faith in oneself is the most important as the mantras chanted and meditations practiced help the monks from the **sangha** reach enlightenment perfectly. For Mahayana Buddhism, the Way of Knowing is **Experience and Intuition**. The more one helps others, the more information they have on how to solve harder obstacles. Compassion also opens one’s heart and enhances their good energy inside them. For Vajrayana Buddhism, the Way of Knowing is **Imagination and Art.** Imagining the different visual images of the deities helps guide them to embody the necessary ideals to solve their problems. Regardless of the methods, Buddhism focuses on the path toward achieving enlightenment rather than explaining the benefits of it since nothing is permanent.

A+ EXAMPLE ESSAY #2 on THE MEANING OF LIFE:

Buddhism originates from the Siddhartha Guatama's oral teachings to Bhikkus and Bhikumis. Siddartha was a prince of a small kingdom who became the first person to achieve nirvana becoming the Buddha. After remaining close to the site of his enlightenment, he set out to teach what he had learned. His teachings spread and later became Buddhism. As mentioned in the Pali Canon in 200BCE, Buddhist beliefs vary in mainly three different ways: Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism. Therefore, the meaning of life varies too. Theravada Buddhism believes that the ultimate goal is becoming an Arahat while Mahayana Buddhism believes that it is becoming a Boddhisattva. Contrasting to both of these teachings, Vajrayana Buddhism aims to achieve Nirvana as fast as possible. These conflicting teachings lead to different forms of practices of meditation, chanting, rituals, and celebrations.

Theravada Buddhism is mainly practiced in countries of South Easter nations such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar. As it is known as the “way of elders”, Theravada Buddhism follows the traditional teachings of Siddhartha. Thus believing the ultimate goal of life is becoming an Arhat through Hina yana or the small raft. Theravada Buddhism ultimately believes that Nirvana can only be achieved individually and must be done without any external help. Unlike most religions, the interactions between monks and people are very minimal. The only interactions they have are the daily rounds of alms where the monks walk around the streets and receive food from the people. This displays how minimal help the people get from the monks to achieve the ultimate goal. In Theravada Buddhism, monks and nuns are considered to be at the top of the social hierarchy because they are the ones who dedicate their whole lives to following the paths of prajna thus being the closest to reaching the meaning of life.

As Theravada Buddhism follows the traditional teachings of Siddartha, they mainly base their teachings on the sacred texts preserved in Pali Canon such as the Tripitaka, which includes Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, and Abhidhamma Pitaka. Vinaya Pitaka, which is the oldest and the smallest text from the Tripitaka, regulates the monastic life and the daily affairs of monks and nuns. Sutta Pitaka is the extensive body of texts constituting the basic doctrinal section of the Buddhist Cannon. This text covers the four bodies of literature called Agamas which provides paths for the ultimate goal of life. The first body, Digha Nikaya 34 long suttas talking about the legends and the moral rules of Buddhism. This includes Brahmajala Sutta which describes everyday life and the religious practices in that period. Then, the Ambattha Sutta condemns the principles of the caste system. The Mahanidana Sutta gives the fullest canonical treatment of the doctrine of dependent origination, or the chain of causation. Mahaparinibanna Sutta describes the Buddha’s death and his journey leading up to it. Finally, the Sigalovada Sutta portrays the comprehensive treatment of domestic and social ethics. The second body is called the Majjhima Nikaya which includes texts dealing with monastic life, the excesses of asceticism, the evils of the caste, Buddha’s debate with Jains, and meditation. The third body is called the Samyutta Nikaya. It includes a total of 7,762 individual suttas including the buddha’s first sermon, Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta. At last, the fourth body, Anguttara Nikaya, is a numerical arrangement for the mnemonic purpose of 9,557 terse suttas. The last sacred text of the Tripitaka is the Abdhidamma which represents a development in a rationalistic direction of summaries or numerical lists. This includes ethics, psychology, and epistemology. These three texts shape the teachings of the Theravada teachings and their way of thinking and practices which are ultimately believed to be the path to achieving the meaning of life.

Following these sacred texts, the rituals and practices of Theravada Buddhism differ from Mahayana Buddhism. The largest and the most important festival for Theravada Buddhism is the Wesak. This festival which is a national holiday for most Southeast Asian countries commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death of buddha under a full moon. Other practices for Theravada Buddhism are the rounds of alms as mentioned earlier, and practicing the right mindfulness and right concentration on a daily basis. It is believed that practicing these daily, will bring people closer to the meaning of life.

Contrasting to Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism approaches the meaning of life from a completely different way. Mahayana Buddhism believes that the meaning of life is to become a Boddhisattva through the “great raft”. Unlike Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism believes that to reach Nirvana, it is necessary for everybody including the monks, nun, and the lay community to work together. The goal is to help others to reach Nirvana before you and to develop Prajna as well as Karuna. Mahayana Buddhism believes in Trikaya, which allows a Buddha to simultaneously be one with the absolute while appearing in the relative world for the benefit of suffering beings. As it can be observed, it is crucial to help others in order to achieve nirvana and become a Bodhisattva.

The two main sacred texts that Mahayana Buddhism follows are the Heart Sutra and the Lotus Sutra. They believe that the 100s of the Buddhist texts must be changed and be centered around Boddhisattvas like the Avalokiteshvara. The Heart Sutra is a brief distillation of the essence of Prajnaparamita’s writings common in Esat and Central Asia. The text first ascribes to Avalokiteshvara and discusses the doctrine of “emptiness”, shunyata. The text describes that, Samsara, dukkha that one experiences while knowing that one may die, the effects of karma, the skandhas that constitute a sense of selfhood, the ephemeral and microscopic dharmas that constitute phenomenal reality are all revealed to be devoid of permanence. Therefore, being “empty”. It reveals that the awareness of such emptiness leads to achieving the ultimate goal of life. On the other hand, the Lotus Sutras is an Upaya calling upon Buddhism to change its traditional beliefs taught in Theravada Buddhism. This Sutra has a total of 28 chapters and contains many charms and mantras that are chanted daily amongst Buddhists. The Lotus Sutra describes the story about the Buddha who became the divine eternal Buddha, who attained perfect enlightenment endless eons ago. It describes the Hinayana goals of emancipation and sainthood that are reduced to inferior expedients where all beings are invited to become fully enlightened Buddhas through the grace of innumerable bodhisattvas. This portrayal of bodhisattvas allows not only the monks and nuns but the laypeople to achieve the ultimate goal of life, unlike Theravada Buddhism. This flexible belief of Mahayana Buddhism contradicts the traditional beliefs of Theravada Buddhism and focuses and values the present moment than achieving nirvana which is the meaning of life for Theravada Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhism is practiced in many countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, and China. Therefore, the practices and rituals differ slightly depending on the country. Taiwan, where people predominantly practice Mahayana Buddhism, contains 6 million Buddhists. Out of these 6 million, arguably the most important person is Master Cheng Yen, the founder of the Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. The Tzu Chi follows the discipline of helping others which is the main focus of Mahayana Buddhism. The foundation originated from a group of thirty housewives gathering money for needy families and the 1990s evolved to be a large organization and started major international disaster relief efforts. It is estimated that the Tzu chi foundation has helped 21,000 families across Taiwan and other countries such as the Philippines in times of disaster. This foundation outlines the Mahayana ideals as it includes 1000s of volunteers who help others from their compassion of helping others. Other than the practices of helping others led by the Tzu chi foundation, the Buddhists in Taiwan practice chantings to mainly Amitabha and Guanyin. The Taiwanese Buddhists either chant to Amitabha, the pure land sects, the great saviour Buddha, and Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion from the temple, or to statues at home. The repetition of the chanting to these gods reminds them of the appreciation of the land and to keep their compassion for helping others. As observed, these daily practices and rituals remind Taiwanese Buddhists of the core concept of Mahayana Buddhism of helping others and being in the present moment to achieve the meaning of life, the achievement of a bodhisattva.

Vajrayana Buddhism is a Tibetan Buddhism that believes that the meaning of life is to achieve nirvana as fast as possible. As it is also described as the “Dimond Thunderbolt Raft”, it aims to achieve nirvana in a flash. Similar to Theravada Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism is an advanced Buddhism for full-time monks. However, as it is considered to be sacred teaching, 75% of what is practiced Vajrayana Buddhism is a secret and only 25% of it is revealed to the public. Observed from the 25% of what is revealed, Vajrayana Buddhism combines Mahayana Buddhism and Tantric Shamanism.

As a ritual, Vajrayana Buddhists often elaborates visualizations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and often visualize themselves as these deities. It also includes the visualizations of the interior of the body in order to manipulate the energies of the body and mind to bring their souls closer to nirvana. Another very famous ritual that is practiced by the Vajrayana monks is the sand mandalas. In this ritual, the monks create a mandala with colored sands that they spent years memorizing the shapes and colors of it just to destroy right after the art is complete. This creation and destruction of the mandala symbolize the Buddhist doctrinal belief in the transitory nature of material life. These Vajrayana rituals are believed to bring the monks closer to Nirvana and to achieve the ultimate meaning of life.

In conclusion, the Buddhism meaning of life is very different depending on which Buddhist teaching one follows. Theravada Buddhism devours their whole life to monks or nuns to achieve arhat. However, Mahayana Buddhism believes that anyone can achieve the meaning of life of becoming a Bodhisattva by helping others and by maintaining the compassion to do so. Although 75% of Vajrayana Buddhism is kept a secret, it is known that the monks of this Buddhism repeat their daily practices and rituals as a monk to achieve nirvana as fast as possible, thus being the meaning of life. Despite the differences in the definition of the meaning of life, amongst these different teachings, all carry out meaningful lessons that shape the modern Buddhism that exists today.

**QUESTION #3: What is death?**

How does Buddhism answer big question #3: What is death? and How can you understand death?

The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying shares, “Death is a mirror in which the entire meaning of life is reflected.” Such a quote reflects Buddhism’s fundamental views on death. Buddhism does not see death as a taboo subject; instead, it sees death as being part of *Samsara* that naturally happens. As the Buddhist text *Prajnaparamita* says, “there is neither birth nor death.” In Buddhism, it is believed that the concept of birth and death are constructed by society; neither of these is applicable to reality. In addition, Buddhist practices such as the 8-Fold Paths, 6 Paramitas, and 4 Noble Truths, all address the meaning of life as achieving Nirvana, the ultimate reality. This reality is the nature of no-birth and no-death, a state of total freedom that allows followers to leave behind the fear connected with the idea of birth and death. Ultimately, the importance of these philosophies about death is to embody the concept of *Annica* in order to put an end to the *dukkha*.

In Theravada Buddhism, a form of Buddhism widely practiced in Thailand, practitioners follow the “way of elders” to achieve the ultimate goal of Nirvana. Theravada’s teachings are also known as *Hinaya*, “a single raft,” emphasizing the ultimate destination of Nirvana can only be reached individually. The name of the path stems from Theravada Buddhism’s characteristic of being known as the most “authentic” type of Buddhism as it strives to follow Siddhartha’s teachings as closely as possible. Since Theravadans are named the Way of Elders, they only recognize the original *Pali Canon* as the only acceptable Buddhist text. In *Pali Canon*, there is the Sutta Pitaka which encompasses the teachings and sermons of Siddharta, tracing the four stages of enlightenment in which the goal is to attain wisdom, also known as *Arhat*. The first stage is *Sotapanna*, “stream-enterer”. This stage is said to have “opened the eye of the Dharma” and is guaranteed enlightenment after no more than seven successive rebirths. Being a stream-enterer trains followers to practice the realization of annata, “no-self.” This realization begins a significant reduction in attachment and the suffering of life, encouraging Buddhists to detach themselves from the concept of life and death. The second stage is *Sakadagami*, “one who once comes.” It is believed that the once-returner will return to the human world only one more time, and will attain Nirvana in that life. The third stage is *Anagami,* meaning “one who does not come.” The non-returner does not come back into human existence after death. Instead, he or she is reborn in “Pure Abodes”, where they can attain Nirvana. It is believed that once entered this stage, all of the suffering such as hatred, greed, jealousy, and ignorance, completely drop away. Instead, the self is filled with love and compassion, leaving behind the fear that is often associated with death. Lastly, the fourth stage is that of *Arhat,* a fully enlightened human being who attained wisdom. At the stage, the self is accompanied by unimaginable bliss. The circumstances of life no longer mattered. There is nothing further to realize and no further rebirths are necessary. As an *Arhat*, death brings about *Parinirvana* and is something to look forward to as the physical connection to the realm is completely destroyed, revealing that death is seen as the bridge to Nirvana in Theravada Buddhism. Simply put, in Theravada Buddhism, followers must follow the “single-raft” of four stages of enlightenment in order to achieve nirvana, leaving little to no flexibility for the followers to personalize their journey to enlightenment. Furthermore, the biggest ritual of Theravada Buddhism is *Wesak,* the Buddha day. The festival celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and death of Siddharta, showing the importance of Siddharta in Theravada practices. In this festival, people pay respect and homage to the Buddha by the engaging in presentation of food, alms to monks, or the release of captive birds, honoring Buddha’s achievement of enlightenment.

However, for Mahayana Buddhism, a type of Buddhism widely practiced in Taiwan, the meaning of death differs slightly from the interpretation of Theravada Buddhism. Instead of being a “single-raft” like Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism prides itself on being a “great-raft”, encouraging its followers to reach nirvana altogether. The final goal is to achieve Buddhahood through prajna and karuna while helping others to do the same in their own separate journeys, demonstrating the importance of owning compassion in Mahayana Buddhism. To Mahayanans, death is not something they should be afraid of. They see death as simply a stage in the cycle of life, not as the end of one’s pursuit of Buddhahood. Compared to Theravada Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism has more varieties in terms of practices and rituals surrounding death. Based on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in Mahayana Buddhism, when a Buddhist is dying, someone whispers the name of the Buddha into their ear so that it is the last thing the person hears before they die. After death, relatives wash the dead body then place it in a coffin surrounded by wreaths and candles. The funeral often takes place a few days after the death in order to allow enough time for the first “Bardo state” to happen. The Bardo state is the liminal space between life and death, a stage that is believed to provide great learning opportunities about liberation. During this state, the dead person becomes conscious of being dead and the next form of rebirth is decided. This process can take up to 49 days after death. To Mahayana Buddhists, death is not a bad thing as they have called upon Amitabha multiple times during Nembutsu in their lives which would guarantee them access to rebirth in the Pure Lands amongst the bodhisattvas. In Mahayana Buddhism, the sacred texts are centered on the bodhisattvas, especially the most well-known one: Avalokitesvara, “the bodhisattva of compassion.” In the Heart Sutra, it celebrates Avalokitescara by establishing that the highest form of wisdom is mindfulness and compassion. In Lotus Sutra, it mentions that bodhisattva Avalokitesvara uses *upaya,* “skillful means”, to offer help where is needed. It states that Avalokitesvara is willing to help anyone who is in need: “If they need a rich man to be saved, immediately he becomes a rich man” or “If they need a householder to be saved, immediately he becomes a householder and preaches a householder,” highlighting the significance of kindness and compassion in Mahayana Buddhism. This important emotion of compassion is also emphasized in real-life rituals. For example, though *Tzu Chi* in Taiwan, the leader master Cheng Yen shows how to put compassion in action. She dedicates her life in relieving the suffering of those in need, such as building new homes, schools, hospitals, and places of worship for victims following a disaster. As a Mahayana Buddhist, Master Cheng Yen embodies the spirit of compassion to the highest extent, creating a sense of community in reaching the final goal of nirvana.

In addition, Vajrayana Buddhism, a popular form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, celebrates its practices through “diamond thunderbolt raft,” emphasizing that the best time to reach nirvana is right now. This form of Buddhism has tantric practices and radical methods of reaching their goal of self-liberation, training the mind to intermingle in the bodhisattva world. Vajrayana Buddhists are also trained to visualize the bodhisattvas such as Tara and Hayagriva; they practice their visualization through making sand mandalas. In Vajrayana Buddhism, death is simply seen as a stage in life, no fear of negative emotions are associated with it.

Ultimately, the understanding of death in Buddhism can be summed up by “nothing is created and nothing is lost.” Despite the different forms of Buddhism, one common belief is that there is neither birth nor death since it is impossible for being to become nonbeing. There is only manifestation and appearance. In society, there is a common thought that birth and death take away peace and happiness in every life. Where meditation comes into play as it helps individuals to see the heart of reality deeply. To touch the nature of interbeing is to touch the very nature of no-death and no-birth. Buddhism’s understanding of death deeply reflects ideas such as *Dukkha, Anatta, and Anicca*. Dukkha, the understanding that suffering exists, demonstrates how Buddhism peacefully accepts death as being part of the Samsara and embraces it. Anatta, the doctrine of impermanence, views individuals as having no soul because nothing is permanent. Lastly, Annica, the concept that everything is always changing, shows that Buddhists much accept that nothing can stay how it is - life is constantly changing and death is simply part of the change. In terms of the IB Ways of Knowing, Buddhism especially uses Experience and Intuition to understand the concept of death as it emphasizes the only to understand death is to accept and truly go through it yourself.

**A+ ESSAY EXAMPLE 3**

1. What is the meaning of life

 Buddhism stems from the lessons of Siddharta Gautama, the prince who became the Buddha, after he attained Nirvana and decided to share his knowledge with the five ascetics he previously trained with. As a result, the sangha was created and Gautama, now Buddha, traveled across India to spread his teachings. Similar to Hinduism, Buddhists believe in samsara and the idea of attaining liberation from it. However, while the liberation from samsara is a common goal, not all Buddhists believe enlightenment to be the ultimate goal. Mahayana Buddhists instead believe that Samyaksambuddha is the meaning of life, while Theravada Buddhists believe in arhatship to be the meaning of life. The contrasting beliefs between the two types of Buddhism lead to different actions Buddhists carry out.

 For Mahayana Buddhism, the major branches are Pureland, Vajrayana, and Zen Buddhism. For each one, there is a slightly different meaning to life. In regular Mahayana Buddhism, the goal is to achieve buddhahood through prajna and karuna while helping others in their community. Mahayana Buddhists are not supposed fear death either; as Samsara is a repeating cycle of life, death is just a stage in it and does not mean the end in one’s pursuit of buddhahood. However, Mahayana Buddhists have different practices compared to Theravada Buddhists. Instead of simply laying out a path to follow in monasteries, Mahayana Buddhism has more rituals and practices surrounding death, as Buddhism places great significance on death. As the Dalai Lama once said, everything in our lives should be done in preparation of our death. One of which is the preparation by using the Tibetan book of the dead. When the person is alive, they prepare themselves for death by imagining the forty nine illusions and experiences they will face. The creation of such a long winded process after death demonstrates how Mahayana Buddhism was more mystical and believed in the cosmologies and the divine. Another part of the Tibetan book of the dead was after death. Family members or a lama whispered in the ear of deceased for forty nine days after death so as to guide the soul safely to reincarnation. The phenomena of this existence after death is Bardo which is a liminal space between life and death. For Mahayana Buddhists, Bardo provides a great learning opportunity to  learn about liberation since transcendental insight is offered. The goal of life for Pure Land Buddhism is to reach enlightenment easily without the long meditations and rituals. They try to do so by chanting the name of Amitaha with full trust and sincerity so that they will be reborn in the Pure Land, Sukhavati, where it is easier to train to enlightenment. To them, death is not a bad thing as they have called upon Amitabha multiple times during Nembutsu in their lives which would grant them access to rebirth in the Pure Lands amongst the bodhisattvas. At this stage, it is easier for people to reach Nirvana from the closer realm of Amitabha and a Pure Land buddhist’s goal is almost complete. However, a further development of Pure Lands by a man named Shin made rebirth in the Pure Lands the entire meaning of life for Pure Land Buddhists as he believed that the Pure Land was Nirvana. Then there is Zen Buddhism, which meaning of life is a philosophical questioning of it to understand the very meaning of life it questioned. The true goal being to understand it without being misled by thoughts. In Zen Buddhism, the goal cannot be known through words but it has to be understood through experience. Zen Buddhists also believe that the answers lie within themselves, and that scriptures and worship have little impact on their search for true understanding. In this sense, though Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, it functions more like Theravada Buddhism. For Pure Land Buddhism, another branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Finally we have Vajrayana Buddhism where the goal is for the liberation of self in a single lifetime. For that, Vajrayana Buddhists have tantric practices and radical methods of reaching their goal. For Vajrayana Buddhist, they wield negative factors such as greed, desire, ego, and hate to service liberation, tackling the path to enlightenment with a use poison to deal with poison approach.  Examples are the use of taboo substances like blood, urine or semen as offerings in rituals during Vajrayana feasts. Then Vajrayana Buddhists also have different texts called tantras which are passed down from guru to student. Some rituals in theses texts include visualizing a connection with buddha and liberation during sex. The practice is called sex yoga and to Vajrayana Buddhists, sex is not just for pleasure, as it offers understanding of enlightenment because they are visualizing a mental image as opposed to a tangible one. Other practices include deity yoga, where one visualizes themselves as a deity itself as well as dream yoga, where practitioners offer up their physical vessels to be consumed but deities.

 However, Theravada Buddhism differs greatly in these aspects. Only through prajna and enlightenment regarding the illusions that life throws at us in our physical state will we be able to gain full understanding and achieve the purpose of our life. Afterwards, one would be able to escape samsara and be liberated from the cycle. But, gaining Prajna is not easy at all and most Theravadans have to dedicate their entire life to follow the path to gaining Prajna as monks or nuns. Since they are named the Way of the Elders, Theravadans only recognize the original Pali Canon as the one and only sacred Buddhist text. Inside the Pali Text, there is the Sutta Pitaka which traces the four stages of enlightenment in which it is stipulated that the meaning of life for a Theravada Buddhist would be to complete this path and become an arhat. First, Sotapanna is the initial stage, meaning stream-enterer. This is the stage where one realizes the dharma and drops Sakkaya ditthi - selfish ego, Silabbata paramasa ditthi - reliance on rites and rituals, and Vicikiccha - indecisiveness. After the first stage, the Buddhist enters the second stage, called once-returning. Here, the Sakadagami where desire towards Kamaraga - sensual craving, Byapada, and ill will disappear. Upon approaching the third stage, the become an Anagami, a non-returner because Anagamis are reborn into the Pure Abodes instead of the human world, hence the name. It is within the Pure Abodes where Anagamis attain arhatship when they reject the ten fetters: Aruparaga, auddhatya, Mana, Avidya, and Ruparaga. These become the full ten fetters after they are included with the previously mentioned five. Yet, there is still a ways to go for a Theravada Buddhist on this path. Only when the Anagami’s pure mind is empty of the ten fetters completely can they become a true arhat. Upon this entering into Nirvana, the arhat has completed their life mission and does not fear death as there are no longer obstacles in their way and they have been liberated from Samsara. Furthermore, for an Arhat, death brings about Parinirvana and is something to look forward to as their physical connection to this realm is then completely destroyed. Therefore, the only way that a Theravada Buddhist fulfills their meaning in life to become an arhat through the four stages.

 Each school of Buddhism maintains their own belief of what the meaning of life is and what opportunities death can hold.

 (NOTE: THIS ESSAY WOULD NOT GET a perfect 7 on IB because it needs a better conclusion with final analysis!)

**QUESTION #2: Compare & Contrast at least 2 Different 'Types' of Buddhism?**

Note: You may define "types" of Buddhism any way you like (such as Theravada vs. Mahayana…or Taiwan vs. Tibet…, etc.)

Note: you may use more than 2 types of Buddhism if you want (such as compare Theravada vs. Mahayana vs. Tibetan vs. Zen)

The two most distinct types of Buddhism include Theravada, “the way of the Elders,” and Mahayana, “big raft.” Theravada Buddhism focuses on the **arhat** belief that only the **sanghas** can achieve **nirvana** through meditationand concentration on the mind while Mahayana Buddhism flexibility utilizes the **Dharma** to form compassion through **bodhisattvas** and believes anyone can achieve it. In other words, Theravada Buddhism focuses on achieving Nirvana individually while Mahayana Buddhism focuses on achieving it together with others. Nevertheless, both forms of Buddhism interpret the Dharma **didactically**, in their own unique way.

In Theravada Buddhism, one essentially focuses on the **Tipitaka** (**Pali Canon)**. It contains a collection of teachings recorded from the disciples of the first Buddha. The main goal is to acquire nirvana individually. The "three baskets" from the Pali Canon include the **Vinaya Pitaka**, which entitles the rules and discipline of the Buddhist order. Monks must follow the **Mahavibhanga** and nuns must follow the **Bhikkhunvibhanga**. Furthermore, the **Khandhaka** and **Parivara** provide the stories of Siddhartha "The Blessed One" and analysis of the rules from the Vinaya Pitaka. For instance, in the third verse of the First Khandahaka Section One, it has written in it "Then the Blessed One during the middle watch of the night fixed His mind upon the chain of causation, in direct and reverse order: `From ignorance spring, the saïkharas, and such is the origination of this whole mass of suffering, and etc. such is the cessation of this whole mass of suffering.'" This quote encompasses the Theravada belief that to end suffering, one must embody the "three baskets" of the Pali Canon.

The second basket includes the **Sutta Pitaka,** where religious poetry and sutras are chanted. In countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, monks study daily about the **Digha, Maijhama, Samyutta, Anguttara, and Khuddaka Nikayas.** Each one depends on the length of the topics. The third basket includes the **Abhidhamma Pitaka**, a collection of written books about the ideals and philosophy of the Buddha. An example includes the **Dhammasangani**, which summarizes the Dharma. It covers the states of mind and classifies material form. With this, the monks and nuns can better understand how to secure their "raft" to the path of enlightenment by controlling their mind.

Some Theravada practices include meditation techniques such as **prostration**. In prostration, one must clasp his or her hands above their head and lower their body with their forehead touching the floor. Theravada Buddhists do these three times in front of the altar when entering a shrine. While doing so, they show their respect in the Three Refugees: the **Buddha, Dharma,** and **Sangha**. Another form of practice is **Vipassana Meditation** taught in meditation centers where one practices **mindful walking** and mindful **eating**. The purpose is to connect the gaps between the mind and the body.

Some Theravada festivals includes the **Magha Puja**, where Buddhists commemorate the gathering of the Buddha and his first disciples. This is also known as the **Sangha Day**, where candles are lit and temples would be filled with people. In the temples, Buddhist sermons are given, meditation is practiced, Buddhist chants are recited, and donations are given to the monks. Aside from the festivals, monks will also hold a bowl out and line up single file in the morning to accept donations from the people. The idea is to help generate good energy for the next life by helping the monks.

On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhism focuses on compassion to others to attain nirvana. Thus, **bodhisattvas** are manifestations upon the ideal of reincarnation to assist others. They take forms in celestial bliss bodies such as **Sambhogakaya**, the "subtle body of limitless form." They are created for the benefit of others. In Tibet Buddhism, they are referred to be in a separate celestial realm known as the **Pure Land.** In East Asia, these traditions emphasize on **Buddha Amitabha**. Mahayana Buddhists believe that chanting Amitabha's name allows him to come and aid one in their endeavors. Another bodhisattva is **Vairocana**, who also sought to reborn to help others after nirvana. These examples of selfless actions constitute Mahayana Buddhism's ideal of karuna.

**Bodhissatva vows** are the focus of Mahayana Buddhists. It is a vow taken to liberate all beings to enlightenment together. One becomes in service to the world. This belief is past on multiple lifetimes. In the **Avatamsaka Sutra,** it has written on it, "So will I, too, for the sake of all beings, Generate the mind of enlightenment And accomplish all stages Of the Bodhisattva training." This shows that a Bodhisattva never stops serving the people with good intentions and good deeds. This also reflects the Buddhist belief of respecting and loving all life.

Finally, the **dharmakaya**, is believed to be the truth body of Mahayana Buddhism. It is where all the energy of the universe exists. It is the highest level where "emptiness" and absolute truth surrounds the realm. It shields from ignorance and illusion and is where Mahayana Buddhists strive to be.

Mahayana practices include chanting of bodhisattva names. For example, in Fo Guang Shan, Buddhists chant, "Na Mo Ah Mi To Fu" to better focus their energy as well as seek guidance from Amitabha. Other songs about Avalokitesvara have "Om Mani Padme Hum" in them to also seek help. In the morning, nuns chant to Guanyin, "Na Mo Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa" to help them in their meditations.

Mahayana festivals include the **Higan-e Ceremony** in Japanwhere people practice good deeds during the day. They also show their gratitude to their parents and ancestors by making offerings to **Gohonzon,** create memorial **tobas** to ancestors, and have memorial services. The point of this holiday is to honor and remember impermanence as nothing is eternal. Another example is the "**Festival of the Hungry Ghosts**" in China where ancestors are offered food while monks recite sutras to bless the dead with favorable rebirths.

Both forms of Buddhism interpret Buddha's teachings didactically. Some interpret the Buddha's story as a reference to balance in the **Middle Way** through chanting, meditations, and sutras. However, some take a more active role in helping others to activate their way of nirvana. The essence is not nirvana itself but more the experience, wisdom, and path toward it that matters the most to a Buddhist.

This ties in primarily to the **faith** aspect in the IB Ways of Knowing. Faith in oneself is equally important as faith in others to achieve enlightenment. Theravada monks rely on donations from others while Mahayana practitioners must also have confidence in themselves for the Bodhisattvas to help them. It is the sense of collaboration of a community and confidence in everyone that reveals Buddhism's true potential.