

FIRESIDE STUDY

A gentle study of a family's philosophy

Film: **Buddhists**

Director: Philip Bloom

Introduction:

Buddhists is one in a series made for Britain's Channel Five in the lead-up to Christmas 2007. If you're looking for a thorough examination of a religion, this is not it. Instead, this 3½ minute documentary paints a gentle, visually-rich portrait of one family and the general workings of their faith.



Key issues:

The issues raised by this short documentary may not be particularly challenging or confronting, but they do give some insight into what Buddhist family life looks like in the warm south of England.

A long-term relationship

The man and the woman value a stable, committed relationship, but don't adhere to this rigidly. "There's nothing wrong with sex, and there's nothing wrong with having more than one partner," says the man. We are not told about their understanding of any Buddhist teachings on marriage, commitment or sexual relations, only that they themselves are "unusual" for having been in a relationship for 20 years. It is the flexibility of this relationship that has allowed for a number of things.

For starters, the man has been living in residential communities he describes as 'semi-monastic'. He also reveals a past with various partners, with one resulting in a son whom he now lives with. Likewise, the woman describes her fondness for the man as no more important than her relationships with others, nor more important than her love and practise of Buddhist spirituality.

Raising a teenager

Buddhists is a story told through the eyes of parents. For these parents it is clear that, despite the obvious love that exists in the home, there are also challenges and inconveniences living with an adolescent.

For Dad, he does not want to impose Buddhist faith onto his son. The son is not convinced about Buddhism – nor anything for that matter. Dad refers to him throughout as a child. The 'child' has a look which speaks volumes as he says, "What'd you put in it (the dinner) – some herbs?" And in the hands of master craftsman Philip Bloom, the camera here doesn't lie about the son's inner thoughts.

For the woman, there's a sense of longing for this time of 'playing Mum' to be over so she can once again go on retreats of several months, rather than just weeks in length. These are honest admissions.

Buddhism in England at Christmas

Buddhism at Christmas is not about religious celebration, but a time of joining in and sharing; "just a nice family thing, really" says the young man of the house. As part of a religious minority, the parents see their own celebration as an act of kindness towards their son.

Finally, *Buddhists* allows *some* room for basic statements of faith, primarily around the concept of awareness; "raising people's awareness of each other, of the environment, of themselves." The closing remark ties it all together, "whatever we do... think... say, kicks off a consequence. If we could each live our lives with a tiny little bit more awareness of this, the general standard of life would improve.

Suggested questions:

- What do *you* believe about value of marriage or long-term committed relationships?
- What does Buddhism bring to this family's life? What does your faith (or ideology) do for your life?
- Do you agree with the man's reluctance to teach his son about his faith? Why or why not?
- Retreat and solitude is re-energising for one's own spiritual well-being. Can you sympathise with the woman's longing for more of these times? How does your faith 'fit' in the mundaneness of life?
- What does Christmas-time mean to you?
- The man talks about "awareness" as a central tenant of his faith. What do you think he means?