

# Near a New Jersey Highway, a Large Statue of Buddha

高速道路のそばに仏像が？今回は、アメリカのニュージャージー州にあるユニークな仏像についてのニュースをご紹介します。この場所は、さまざまな宗教を持つ人々がつながりを感じられる場所として知られています。地域の人々にとって、宗教的な diversity (多様性) を象徴するだけでなく、meditation (瞑想) の場としても親しまれているようです。なぜ高速道路の近くに仏像が建てられたのか、その背景を探りながら、Hindu (ヒンドゥー教徒)、Tibetan Buddhism (チベット仏教)、Mahayana Buddhism (大乘仏教) など、世界の宗教の関連語もレッスンで覚えてみましょう。



## 1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

In the eastern American state of New Jersey, a large statue of Buddha has become a gathering place for people of many religious faiths.

The nine-meter-high statue has stood among the woods in Franklin Township since 2009. It was built under the leadership of the Venerable Hungampola Sirirathana Nayaka Thera, a Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka. He says his dream is to [unite](#) people of all faiths.

The statue is on the grounds of the New Jersey Buddhist Vihara and Meditation Center. The center has become a spiritual place for Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians.

Among those who praise the center are a Princeton University professor who grew up in a Korean Christian church and who follows Tibetan Buddhism; a leader of the local Nepali community who organizes [interfaith](#) gatherings; and a woman who became a Buddhist after living near the statue.

“It just seems to be a nexus where a lot of people connect,” said Daniel Choi. He follows Tibetan Buddhism and teaches writing at Princeton. He has been [meditating](#) in front of the Buddha statue since 2015.

Choi said that the center is open to the public. He said that is unlike most Buddhist centers in the U.S. which are run by private organizations, “where you wouldn’t be able to go in for open practice,” he said.

He also noted that the center is in an unexpected place. Thera built the statue and meditation center behind a house close to a highway.

“You hear traffic; you hear cars rushing by; you hear airplanes flying above... You hear the construction work going on,” Choi said.

The meditation center follows Theravada, the main form of Buddhism observed in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. But it welcomes all Buddhist traditions and other faiths.

When Choi first visited, he was surprised to find a statue of Kuan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of [compassion](#). The goddess is important in Mahayana Buddhism observed in Tibet, China and Korea.

“For me that was very welcoming because I thought: ‘OK, so there’s something for me as well,’” Choi said.

Local students have painted a wall in the center with images showing different world religions, from Baha’i and Christianity to Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. All of these religions are practiced in New Jersey.

Tulsi Maharjan is director of the nonprofit organization Friends of Nepal - New Jersey. He has led projects involving more than one religion, including the wall painting and a peace garden.

He said that when he first came to New Jersey 35 years ago, he had to drive almost three hours to go to a Buddhist temple. But now, people from all over the world live near the Vihara Meditation center and statue.

“Now, within ten minutes... from my home, I can go to the Buddhist temple. But there are so many others,” he said listing nearby Jain, Sikh and Hindu temples that make him proud of the religious [diversity](#) in central New Jersey.

Maharjan said that anybody who comes to the temple “feels so calm and collected once they see that big Buddha.”

Carol Kuehn is a 76-year-old retired high school teacher who lives next to the Buddhist center. Kuehn said: “It’s the first thing I look at in the morning.”

Kuehn grew up in a Christian family and became interested in Buddhism after reading Herman Hesse’s novel Siddhartha.

She became a Buddhist after the leader of the temple arrived in 2002. Buddhism, she said, helped her deal with grief after the death of her husband.

“The whole point of Buddhism is to live in the moment,” she said.

I’m Andrew Smith.

Luis Andres Henao wrote this story for The Associated Press. Andrew Smith adapted it for VOA Learning English.

**Source: Near a New Jersey Highway, a Large Statue of Buddha**

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## 2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

**1. unite (v.) to bring together and make one**

Music has the ability to unite people from different cultures.

**2. interfaith (adj.) including different religions**

The church is having an interfaith meeting next Sunday after services.

**3. meditate (v.) to calm the mind by focusing on one thing**

Tess meditates for thirty minutes every morning before she goes to work.

**4. compassion (n.) a feeling of sympathy for others in pain and a wish to help them**

The volunteer workers had a lot of compassion for the people living in the disaster area.

**5. diversity (n.) a variety; a mix**

There was a great diversity of opinions at the town hall meeting.

## 3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. Why did the the Venerable Hungampola Sirirathana Nayaka Thera have the statue of Buddha built?
2. Why is professor Daniel Choi impressed with the Buddhist center?
3. According to Tulsī Maharjan, how has the area changed in the last 35 years?
4. What do you think Carol Kuehn means when she says, “The whole point of Buddhism is to live in the moment”?
5. Is religion an important part of your life?