



Religion	Buddhism
Denomination	Soto Zen
Question answered:	Why might it matter that sacred texts are often open to interpretation? (KS3 Q2)
Key concepts, questions, and outcomes:	Truth  Ultimate Truth  Different interpretations of sacred Scripture  To understand the role of individuals in helping people to understand what is true, right and wrong.
Key teaching points:	Different religions have different views on interpretation of Scripture.  Different denominations within a religion is based on different interpretations of Scripture.  The way that Scripture is interpreted, along with how they view truth, determines how someone may live their life.  Interpretation of Scripture is complex
Prior knowledge:	How to 'read' a text – interpretation, context, experience, age, culture, etc. What is considered truth? Ultimate Truth in terms of Buddhism Sacred texts

Core Vocabulary:			
Interpretation	Western thought	Translation	Ultimate Truth
Ancestral line	Scriptures	Authentic	
lineage	Lotus Sutra	limitations	

Summary of answers:
<p>The first speaker raises the issue of handling texts in translation. There are layers of translation that you have to go through before you can get to a meaning. Western thought may colour how something is interpreted so there is a danger where people might set themselves up as an authority, a Buddhist authority, based on their personal interpretation of the texts. During morning services Buddhists chant the ancestral line. This reinforces the handing down of the scriptures from the master to disciple, a very sacred relationship. This means that practice, experience and thought grow in depth over time. That is how an unbroken lineage is formed and chanting that in the mornings that brings her back to the transmission line which has authority. This helps her to navigate a routh between different practices she has investigated in other forms of Buddhism. This emphasis on the transmission line lends Soto Zen and authenticity. As the original scriptures are in a foreign language, there are a lot of different translations and that means one can study the scriptures through a lot of different translations to make a comparison as to where things are going in the scriptures.</p> <p>For the second speaker it matters that Scriptures are open to interpretation. He gives an example of one of the Buddhists Scriptures (the Lotus Sutra), which contains various stories about the Ultimate Truth. It might be possible to say this is the Ultimate but it doesn't necessarily tell someone how to get there. Sitting down to read it, without having meditated would enable a</p>



person to understand the words and the story but go away thinking the Lotus Sutra means only one thing. A longer time of reading and meditating on the Lotus Sutra reveals different meanings. This grows over time. It is only by starting where you are, including all the limitations of life that a person can start understanding the Lotus Sutra. That is why there are teachers who can suggest different ways of reading and interpreting the text, but it is still up to an individual to find their way through. However, if people act on things that they believe to be true, but aren't, then all sorts of things will happen, often unfortunate things. Interpreting text requires care. It is important, with any religious text, to ask the question, 'What is the basis of my life that is going to interpret this?'

To restate, the different interpretations are not something to worry about too much because it is an inevitability of human life. People just do the best they can in working out for themselves how a text will help them to lead a richer, fuller life.

**Next Steps:**

Consider the positives and negatives of individual interpretation of sacred texts.  
Should any sacred text be interpreted or taken at face value? Consider different interpretations by different people or different denominations.  
Who decides what is important/authoritative?  
Are sacred texts important if they are 'allowed' to be interpreted?  
How does globalisation affect the interpretation of sacred texts?  
How might a Western worldview impact on a person's understanding of an Eastern Philosophy, such as Buddhism?