Japan, 804 A.D.: No Internet. No phones. No electricity. No running water. The sun comes up and sets every day, though. The seasons change. There is an empire ruled by an Emperor Kammu. His subjects live by the teachings of Buddha, a great teacher who lived in India almost 1,000 years before Kammu, whose ideas were spread to China and eventually Japan.

In Kammu's court there is a great deal of disagreement over how best to follow the Buddha's teachings. Part of the problem is that the court has very few texts with which to study the Buddha's lessons. The Emperor decides that he might be able to settle his people’s difference of opinions by sending a group of his brightest monks to China to study with the Buddhist masters and bring new texts back to Japan.

Of the four ships the Emperor sent to China, only two succeeded in making the trip. Of the many monks who tried to study Buddhism in China, only two came back to Japan with new teachings that helped the empire better understand the Buddha's lessons.
The first monk to return was Saichō, who had already been running a school in Japan before he left. He spent almost a year studying from a master of the Matrix teachings. The Matrix teachings focus on learning from what's around you. In the Matrix teachings, students can also learn from texts without needing the guidance of a master teacher.

Before he left China, Saichō was initiated as a master teacher of the Matrix approach, which meant he could initiate his own students in Japan into the tradition as well. He also copied many important texts from his Chinese teachers and brought them back to Japan for others to study.

The Emperor was delighted with Saichō’s successful mission. He made Saichō the head master of a new school that would be devoted to teaching the Matrix approach to Buddhism, and allowed Saichō to give the initiation ceremony to many of the empire’s leading citizens.

The second monk to return from China was Kūkai. Before leaving on his mission to China, Kūkai was not very well known in China. However, Kūkai spent over two years studying with Buddhist masters in Japan. There he was initiated into the Diamond tradition as well as the Matrix tradition. He also brought back twice as many sacred texts as Saichō.

The difference between the Diamond and Matrix teachings is that the Diamond teachings can only be passed on within the physical presence of a master teacher. That means a student cannot become a master, initiate other students, or read the Diamond tradition’s most secret texts through his own study.

Almost as soon as Kūkai returned to Japan, Saichō wanted to study his wealth of texts. Saichō asked Kūkai to borrow many of the texts in order to make copies and share them with his school. Kūkai agreed.

Meanwhile the old emperor had died, and one of his sons had taken the throne of Japan. Saichō, who was now considered one of the great teachers in the court, helped Kūkai win approval from the new emperor to open a school of his own.

After several years of studying Kūkai’s texts, Saichō began trying to teach his students both the Matrix teachings and the Diamond teachings. From his understanding, the two traditions were different ways of teaching the same thing.
Soon, though, some of Saichō’s students began to disagree with their master. They began to feel that perhaps Saichō didn’t have enough information about the Diamond teachings to be mixing them with the Matrix teachings. They became so unsure of his approach they decided to leave Saichō’s school and instead joined Kūkai’s.

Soon Kūkai’s school was thriving, while Saichō’s was in a crisis.

Saichō decided the best way to save his school was to study with Kūkai in person. Kūkai eagerly granted him permission. They made plans for Saichō and the remainder of his students to receive the Diamond initiation ceremonies he had never been able to receive while in China.

After months of planning, Saichō arrived at Kūkai’s school prepared with all his students. Saichō believed that the Diamond initiation could be done in three days, but Kūkai revealed that learning the Diamond teachings would take close to two years. There had been a major miscommunication in their correspondence!

As desperately as he wanted to finish his training in the Diamond tradition, Saichō knew he couldn’t stay away from his school for so long. So he instructed his best students to stay for the complete training, and went home.

Though the miscommunication over the length of study strained the relationship between Saichō and Kūkai, the visit was not a total failure. Saichō had received some direct training in the Diamond tradition from Kūkai over the three days, and was also able to go back to his own school with more of the sacred texts he had yet to study. As he read the new texts, Saichō became even more convinced that the Matrix and Diamond teachings could be learned together.

However, when he asked Kūkai to borrow another round of texts, this time Kūkai refused.

Kūkai believed the texts Saichō was asking for this time were secret, except for masters who had been fully initiated into the Diamond teachings. He feared that if these texts were read by the uninitiated or without the guidance of a master, they could easily be misinterpreted.

Instead of sending the texts, Kūkai invited Saichō to return and finish his official initiation into the Diamond teachings. Saichō knew that if he went back it would mean his entire school would be considered a failure.
After Saichō refused to return to Kūkai’s school, the two powerful teachers never spoke again.

Both Saichō and Kūkai’s schools used their masters’ experiences from China to revolutionize Japan’s understanding of Buddhism. Though they were never able to bridge their own philosophical disagreements, they each founded unique traditions in Japanese Buddhism that still have millions of followers today.

In many ways the differences in their views are what have helped their schools remain successful over the centuries.
1. Emperor Kammu’s subjects lived by the teachings of a great teacher who lived in India almost 1,000 years before Kammu. Who was this great teacher?

A Ghandi  
B Confucius  
C Buddha  
D Dōgen

2. The passage compares the Matrix teachings of Buddhism with the Diamond teachings of Buddhism. What is the main difference between these two teachings of Buddhism?

A Saichō founded the Matrix teachings whereas Kūkai founded the Diamond teachings.  
B Matrix teachings originate from the teachings of the Buddha but Diamond teachings do not.  
C Matrix teachings can only be passed on within the physical presence of a master teacher. However, students of the Diamond teachings can learn from texts without the guidance of a master teacher.  
D Diamond teachings can only be passed on within the physical presence of a master teacher. However, students of the Matrix teachings can learn from texts without the guidance of a master teacher.

3. It is possible for people to practice the religion of Buddhism in different ways. What information from the text support this conclusion?

A Emperor Kammu sent a group of his brightest monks to China to study with the Buddhist masters.  
B Kūkai’s school was thriving while Saichō’s was in a crisis when many of Saichō’s students decided to join Kūkai’s school.  
C Saichō and Kūkai founded unique traditions in Japanese Buddhism that still have millions of followers today.  
D Saichō never became a Diamond master.

4. Why were the schools of Saichō and Kūkai important?

A They allowed Saichō and Kūkai to become masters of both the Matrix and Diamond teachings.  
B They allowed Saichō and Kūkai to pass on the teachings of Buddhism in their own traditions.  
C They allowed Saichō and Kūkai to compete with the other schools of Buddhism in China.  
D They made the religion of Buddhism spread to both China and in Japan.
5. What is the main idea of this passage?

A It is impossible for different interpretations of the same religion to coexist.
B Buddhism originated in India and spread to China and Japan.
C Saichō and Kūkai were bitter rivals who prevented Buddhism from spreading throughout Japan.
D The Matrix and Diamond schools of Buddhism differ in how they teach Buddhism.

6. Review this following passage from the essay: “However, Kūkai spent over two years studying with Buddhist masters in China. There he was initiated into the Diamond tradition as well as the Matrix tradition. He also brought back twice as many sacred texts as Saichō.”

What does the word “initiated” most nearly mean?

A was celebrated by the Japanese Buddhists when he returned home
B was officially accepted as a master
C was chosen as the most knowledgeable Buddhist master in Japan
D was considered a better master than Saichō

7. Choose the word that best completes the thought below.

Saichō could not leave his school to study for two years at Kūkai’s school. ___________, Saichō could not become initiated as a master of the Diamond school of Buddhism.

A On the contrary
B Consequently
C Above all
D However

8. After Saichō returned from China, the Emperor made Saichō the head master of a new school. Describe this school.

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__________________________________________________________________
9. Why did some of Saichō’s students leave his school to study with Kūkai?

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10. The passage states that from Saichō’s understanding, the traditions of the Matrix and the Diamond were different ways of teaching the same thing. Using information from the text, explain how the two traditions were different ways of teaching the same thing.

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8. After Saichō returned from China, the Emperor made Saichō the head master of a new school. Describe this school.

Suggested answer: Saichō’s school was devoted to teaching the Matrix approach to Buddhism and allowed Saichō to give the initiation ceremony to many of the empire’s leading citizens.

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Suggested answer: They began to feel that perhaps Saichō didn’t have enough information about the Diamond teachings to be mixing them with the Matrix teachings. They became so unsure of his approach they decided to leave Saichō’s school and instead joined Kūkai’s.

10. The passage states that from Saichō’s understanding, the traditions of the Matrix and the Diamond were different ways of teaching the same thing. Using information from the text, explain how the two traditions were different ways of teaching the same thing.

Suggested answer: Students should explain that both of the teachings are rooted in the teachings of the Buddha. However, the teachings differ in how Buddhism can be learned and taught. Diamond teachings can only be passed on within the physical presence of a master teacher. That means a student cannot become a master, initiate other students, or read the Diamond tradition’s most secret texts through his own study. On the other hand, students of the Matrix teachings can learn from texts without the guidance of a master teacher. The Matrix teachings focus on learning from what’s around you.