

## Handout 1--Buddhism

### The Quest for Enlightenment: Hinduism and Buddhism - Richard Smoley

Buddhism excerpt from Mr. Montgomery's World Religions Website

[http://staff.gps.edu/montgomery/World%20Religions/Faiths/buddhism/Buddhism%20\(Huston%20Smith\).htm](http://staff.gps.edu/montgomery/World%20Religions/Faiths/buddhism/Buddhism%20(Huston%20Smith).htm)

### **Buddhism** (Huston Smith)

#### **History of Buddhism**

- the whole religion is based upon one man who was renamed: Buddha
- when asked what made him different from other men, and what he was, his one assertion was "I am Awake."
- Buddha... Buddha has a Sanskrit root meaning both "to wake up" and "to know." Thus, Buddha means "the Awakened One" or "the Enlightened One."
- Began with Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakyas
  - • Born in 560 BC
  - • his birthplace was in India, his family was royalty
  - • at birth, the king, his father, had prophets come to prophesy the future of his son; two prophesies resulted:
    - 1) if he follow the path of the world, he will be its greatest conqueror and unifier
    - 2) if he forsake the world, he will be its greatest redeemer
  - • father, naturally, pushed Siddhartha towards the worldly conqueror route
  - • raised Siddhartha in completely sheltered and luxuriated world in order to have him develop a taste for luxury without interference from the ugly
  - • by way of The Four Passing Sites, Siddhartha saw the real world...
    - knew age... saw old man on side of road
    - knew disease... saw a diseased man
    - knew death... saw a corpse
    - knew religion... saw a monk
  - • through the four passing sites, he came to realize that the luxury and state of his life was futile
  - • he abandoned his riches and kingdom and left to become a truth seeker
  - • he spent the following six years in the wilderness on a search that had three phases:
    - 1) deep study with Hindu masters... felt that he had grown to a point where they could teach him no more, so he left
    - 2) asceticism... practice of extreme denial and punishment; he felt that this was no good and rejected it.
    - 3) rigorous thought and mystic concentration... led to enlightenment
  - • enlightenment came as he sat beneath a fig tree one day and decided not to move until he was enlightened
  - • as he sat, he was tempted by Mara (the evil one)

- desire... the three goddesses
- death... the form of natural destruction
- challenge.. what right had he to do what he did (earth bore witness by voice and thunder)

- · He resisted and Mara departed and the heavenly host came to succor the victor
- · as Siddhartha continued to sit, he saw the bubble of the universe break and all became transparent to him, he became the enlightened one, the Buddha
- · fig tree is now called Bo tree, short for bodhi, which means wisdom
- · Mara returned with one final temptation
  - futility... none will see as you see or listen to what you hear
- · Siddhartha replied “There will be some who will understand.” Mara vanished forever.
- · For Buddha, Buddhism, and Buddhists, life is a pattern of withdraw and return
  - six year search followed by forty nine year ministry
  - nine months spent ministering to people, three months in seclusion with his monks
  - most of the day spent with monks and followers, three periods of solace in meditation
- · Buddha died in 480 BC from eating a poisoned mushroom at the age of 60

### **The Person of the Buddha**

-to best understand the religion of Buddhism, it is best to first understand the impact of the man Buddha

-he was an amazing combination of a “cool head and a warm heart”

-he was a cross between an amazing rationalist (dissect then reassemble) and a man of infinite compassion

-to all, without limit, he gave sympathy, enlightenment, and the power of the soul

-he “gripped the hearts of visitors and left them transformed” if not converted

-he transcended the caste system and category...

- · born of and into the circle of royalty
- · chose to ignore the surface distinction of class and caste
- · based approach to others out of respect for being a fellow creature

-though he knew he was on a plane of understanding much higher than others, he accepted that as a fact that did not justify condescension or use of leverage

-he was incredibly objective about himself and who he was...

- · readily admitted that he had temptations and weaknesses
- · admitted it was difficult for him achieve enlightenment, and that it could fail at any time
- · absolutely insisted that **HE WAS NOT A GOD**

-Buddha was gifted with tremendous insight into personal character

-he was convinced that he had a cosmic mission for the good of all mankind

-despite all we know about the facts of his life, he is still shrouded in mystery

-historians and his disciples still regard him, by in large, as a puzzle

-also called...

- · Sakyamuni (silent sage of the sakyas)
- · Tathagata (the Thus-come; the Truth-winner)

### **Development and Basics**

-to move from Buddha, the man, to Buddhism, the religion, it is important to understand the historical context of Hinduism from which it grew

-whereas Hinduism developed by a slow spiritual accretion, Buddhism arrived almost overnight with the teachings one man

-like many new religion, Buddhism was a reform movement

-Buddhism arose in protest against and as a reform for the perversion of Hinduism

-historically, there appear to be six aspects of a successful religion:

- 1)authority- presence of some enlightened or advanced person or peoples
- 2)ritual- a communal celebration of rites and practices
- 3)speculation- thought and wrestling over questions of religious philosophy
- 4)tradition- knowledge passed from generation to generation as wisdom
- 5)God's sovereignty and grace- God is only authority and only redeemer
- 6)mystery- magic, mysticism, miracle, spiritual and philosophy

-the Hinduism of Buddha's day had corrupted each of these six aspects...

- 1)Authority had become a front for the Brahmin to hold, not share, knowledge
- 2)ritual had become confining as the people had to pay the Brahmin to perform, and the Brahmin insisted that ritual was the only path
- 3)speculation had developed from intellectual pondering to argument
- 4)tradition had stopped being spread as all ritual was written in Sanskrit, a language unknown to the common man
- 5)sovereignty and grace had come to mean that nothing could be done (man had no choices) and that nothing had to be done (fatalism)
- 6)mystery had degenerated to mystification (magic, sorcery, and divination)

-Buddha destroyed both the mold and the corruption to it...

- 1)destroyed hold of authority by saying "be ye lamps unto yourselves"  
destroyed hold of Brahmins by distributing their knowledge
- 2)destroyed ritual by proclaiming it one of the ten fetters of religion  
destroyed Brahmic ritual by ridiculing it and creating a religion without ritual
- 3)destroyed speculation by refusing to discuss metaphysics and the world beyond  
destroyed Brahmic speculation by parable of "poison arrow"
- 4)destroyed tradition by encouraging followers to pay it no heed and create no new  
destroyed confines of it by teaching his observations in the vernacular
- 5)destroyed sovereign/grace by preaching religion of intense self effort to freedom  
destroyed Brahmic sovereign/grace by decrying it as perverted by fatalism
- 6)destroyed mystery by calling it a short cut to an easy answer  
destroyed Brahmic mystification by condemning soothsaying and divination

### **Basics of Buddhist Form**

-we have discussed what Buddhism is not, now we must move to what it is:

- · empirical- direct personal experience is the final test of truth

- • scientific- experience is aimed at finding the cause/effect of existence
- • pragmatic- aimed at solving immediate and present problems
- • therapeutic- deals with suffering in order to end suffering
- • psychological- has routes in man's problems and development then moves out
- • democratic- attacks the caste system
- • individualistic- directs individual to seek his way personally

### **The Four Noble Truths**

- when Buddha finally arose from under the fig tree after 56 days, he arose and began to walk towards a city called Benares
- he stopped just outside the city and delivered his first sermon (The Four Noble Truths) to a small group there
- this was the climax of his six year quest and it contains the basic postulates of all his teachings
- These things were called the four noble truths...

#### 1) The First noble truth... dukkha (suffering)

- • life is suffering
- • suffering means both physical pain and "dislocation", misalignment
- • there are six proofs to life's state of dislocation:
  - 1) pain of childbirth
  - 2) pain and fact of disease
  - 3) morbidity of decrepitude (fears of old age)
  - 4) fear of death
  - 5) tied to what you hate (inescapable martyrdom)
  - 6) separation from what one loves
    - • the five skandas (object of human love) are painful
      - body
      - senses
      - ideas
      - feelings
      - consciousness

#### 2) The Second Noble Truth... tanha (selfish desire)

- • selfish desire is the cause of pain/dislocation
- • this is so because we link love and destiny to self instead of the eternal

#### 3) The Third Noble Truth... hope

- • release from suffering is possible
- • release comes from dropping the narrow limits of self interest and following the vast expanse of the universal life

#### 4)The Fourth Noble Truth... the cure

- the way to end dukkha and to overcome tanha is the Eightfold Path

### **The Eightfold Path**

-Buddha approaches the problems of life as would a therapist confronting an illness...

- symptoms... dukkha
- diagnosis... tanha
- prognosis... overcome selfish desire
- prescription... eightfold path

-before you can begin the eightfold path, there is one unnamed step of right association

- there are two ways in life...
  - 1)unreflective- random, controlled by circumstance and impulse
  - 2)the Path- forming good habits to release from tanha
- to follow the Path and the Eightfold Path, you must have a good example to follow, this is the preliminary of right association

1)right knowledge

- man is a rational animal
- man must have convictions (4 noble truths)

2)right aspiration

- man must know what he truly wants
- man must follow the Eightfold Path with passion and intensity

3)right speech

- language is an indication of character and is a means to change it
- assess the current level of truth and charity manifest within your speech
- direct your speech towards enhanced level of truth and charity

4)right behavior

- assess current level of kindness and self-seeking manifest in behavior
- direct behavior towards increasing selflessness and charity
- base behavior on the five precepts
  - 1) do not kill
  - 2) do not steal
  - 3) do not lie
  - 4) do not be unchaste
  - 5) do not drink intoxicants

5)right livelihood

- man should pursue an occupation which promotes spiritual progress

6)right effort

- man should train his will to work constantly and in right direction
- man should “think constantly and steadily of the way.”

7)right mindfulness

- sin is prompted by ignorance
- combat ignorance and sin with continuous alertness and self examination
- thoughts should be construed intellectually, not emotionally

- • all effects should be traced to their cause
- • keep your mind in control of all of the senses
- • meditate on your fears until they are conquered
- • visualize you goal constantly
- • pervade the world with loving thoughts

#### 8)right absorption

- • a process very similar to raja yoga

### **Basic Buddhist Concepts**

-before we begin, it is important to note that Buddha's perception about life is difficult to discern for four main reasons:

- 1)he wrote nothing
- 2)others wrote a variety of somewhat contradictory stuff in abundance
- 3)Buddhist writings did not occur until partisan schools had formed
- 4)Buddha said very little if anything, touching the metaphysical

-assertions on the metaphysical come to us obliquely through reported conversations

-Buddhist concept of Nirvana

- • Nirvana means "to blow out" or "to extinguish"
- • these terms refer to the extinction of the boundaries of the finite self
- • stated negatively, reaching Nirvana is when private desire and the restrictions to boundless life are eradicated
- • stated positively, reaching Nirvana is possible because life is boundless
- • Buddha insists that Nirvana is indescribable because all consciousness disappears, this being so, description is impossible.
- • Used parable of the wind to illustrate nirvana- beyond description but there
- • "Our final ignorance is to imagine that our final destiny is presently conceivable."

-Reality of Nirvana

- • There are two possible definitions of God...
  - 1)God is a personal being who made the universe by will
  - 2)Existence is God-head, an unborn, neither created nor formed, eternal
- • Buddhists reject the idea of God, because a personal God requires definition and definition is impossible in Nirvana
- • for Buddhists, Nirvana closely resembles the God-head

-Concept of man

- • man is anatta (has no soul)
- • the soul (atman or atta) in Buddha's day had come to have two associations
  - 1)spiritual substance in the dual (bhakti) tradition where soul was an entity and it was separate from god
  - 2)it maintained its separateness throughout eternity
- • Buddha denied the existence of a spiritual substance where actual substance, through reincarnation, was passed on

- • Buddha used idea of a flame being passed from candle to candle to illustrate the idea that a chain reaction passed influence, not substance
- • Buddha insisted:
  - 1)there is a chain of causation linking past, present and future lives
  - 2)man's will is free to effect this chain
  - 3)there is no "mental substance" (soul) that is passed along the chain
- Concept of matter
  - • Buddha denied the concept of "substance" on the whole
  - • the idea of substance implied that permanence and matter existed
- Concept of Being
  - • the truth of man's being is indicated in three ways:
    - 1)impermanence of world
    - 2)suffering while in the world
    - 3)absence of a permanent soul in man
  - • Buddha stress the impermanence of life to free followers from its illusions
- Concept of life after death
  - • ordinary men leave strands of finite desire that link and chain them to other incarnations
  - • the Arhat (priests), who have extinguished desire, are and aren't reincarnate
    - the identification with the historical self disappears
    - experience remains, but is heightened, linked with all, not one
    - the universe is governed by cause and effect. The normal man is slave to cause because he identifies himself with the world and with his body; therefore, he is not free, is slave to effect, and limits himself in subsequent incarnations due to the influence of past actions. The Arhat becomes increasingly removed from cause due to his disdain for the world. He is also increasingly removed from effect because he is removed from a world whose events do not touch him.

### **Division of the Faith**

- Buddhism began to split into factions within 100 years of Buddha's death
- All religions seem to split along the lines of three questions:
  - 1)are men independent of or dependent upon each other?
  - 2)Is the universe benevolent towards man?
  - 3)Are the efforts of the mind (classicists) or the emotions (romanticist) more important?
- Along these lines, Buddhism has divided into two major schools and one key spring
  - 1)Mahayana... the big raft (romanticist)
    - • being romantic, this is based on the interpretation of the life of Buddha, not on his recorded teachings
    - • Mahayana-ists that the fate of the one is linked to the fate of the many, that your actions effect both you and those around you
    - • Mahayanists believe in grace (a limitless power resides in every soul and draws everyone to it eventually) and that the universe is caring towards men

- • for the Mahayana, the key virtue is karuna (compassion)
- • Mahayana operates with heavy influence of laymen
  - they do not feel that Buddhism was a full time job that demanded that you become a monk
  - Nirvana is accessible to all who follow it as life permits
- • the ideal person is the Bodhisattva...
  - “one whose essence (sattva) is perfected wisdom (bodhi)”
  - he gives up Nirvana in order to show the path to others
- • saw the Buddha as a savior and as God-like who is still there for us
- • developed elaborate cosmology with innumerable heavens, hells and descriptions of Nirvana
- • Mahayana had rite and ritual with supplication, petition and invocation

## 2) Theravada... Hinayana... the small raft (classicist)

- • called the way of the Elders
- • Being classicist, this is based upon the early teachings of the Buddha
- • man is an individual whose freedom is based solely upon the self
- • man is on his own in the universe and has no gods or powers to help him
- • the key virtue is bodhi (wisdom) where absence of self seeking is act of doing good, not necessarily for or with others
- • held that Buddhism was a full time job that called for the sacrifice of life through being a monk
- • the ideal person is the Arhat...
  - the perfected disciple
  - wander alone
  - makes his way unswervingly and unstopably towards Nirvana
- • Buddha was a saint who was subsumed when he reached Nirvana and was no more
- • speculation is a useless distraction and removes focus from right life
- • meditation on the goal is the only acceptable type of “prayer”

## 3) Zen Buddhism

- • one of five offshoots of Mahayana. Each has different focus...
  - 1)faith
  - 2)study
  - 3)formula
  - 4)politics
  - 5)intuition... this is Zen’s focus
- • Zen comes from the Sanskrit dhyana, translated to the Chinese ch’an, then translated to the Japanese Zen (the meditation that leads to insight)
- • claims its root from the teachings of the Buddha himself
- • the origin lies in the sermon of the golden lotus
- • seems to be based on paradox and nonsense, but has its own construct of understanding based on an aligned view
- • first basis is on a distrust of words...

- words build false world of stereotypes and titles
- word's description of experience is inadequate and diluted
- true experience transcends the reach of words
- • at its heart, Zen seeks to transcend the shackles of language and reason
- • it is described in the revolutionary terms of a "special transmission outside the scriptures"
  - radical in this aspect because all religions rely upon scripture
  - Zen does have scripture, but it is dedicated to insisting that Zen is beyond the reach of any verbal formula
- • Zen refuses to allow any creed to desecrate the sanctity and immutability of it
- • "Zen is not interested in theories about enlightenment; it wants to plunge its practitioners into enlightenment itself."
- • On Reason... "Zen logic and description make sense only from an experiential perspective radically different from the ordinary."
- • On Language... "Zen masters are determined that their students should attain the experience itself, not to allow talk to take its place."
- • Zen thought is not given by scripture, creed, or service, but by influence
- • There is a three fold approach to Zen:
  - 1) zazen... seated meditation
  - 2) koan... a meditative problem designed to transcend logic and reason
  - 3) sanzen... consultation with a master concerning right meditation
    - master will confirm a correct answer
    - master will destroy inadequate answer physically and mentally
    - master stokes the fire of meditative energy
- • Zen's concept of enlightenment
  - called satori
  - a feeling of joy, of oneness with all things, and of a heightened sense of reality
  - whereas enlightenment is the goal for other religions, it is the point of departure for Zen
  - whereas most religions use enlightenment to release man from the world, Zen uses satori to bring the eternal into the now
  - enlightenment within the world is the goal
- • Zen seeks a state of constant satori where:
  - life and awareness are experienced as distinctly good
  - the dualism of self and object disappears and is replaced by a gracious and joyous sense of responsible oneness
  - the soul is not out of the body, but you achieve a "satisfaction of awareness... as it proceeds from a bodily base." - The infinite in the finite.
  - Total acceptance and agreeableness beyond preference
  - realization of no difference between life and death

### **Image of the Crossing**

-Explains Zen by metaphor of the river crossing

-Theravada

- . the world is one shore
- . Nirvana is the goal, a distinct, separate, and different other shore
- . Buddhism is a one man raft that gets you there
- . no one, no thing will help you

-Mahayana

- . the world is one shore
- . Nirvana is the goal, a distinct, separate, and different other shore
- . Buddhism is a communal raft that gets you there
- . there is a divine spirit that hopes for and assists in crossing

-Zen

- . one shore is the world
- . the other shore is Zen
- . both are linked and co-existent, of the same territory
- . Zen is what takes you to the other side