

Buddhism: Extinguishing the Flame of Desire

I. Gautama Siddhārtha (in Sanskrit)

A. Various dates of historical Buddha's (Sakyamuni's) birth and death

1. Southern Buddhists follow Ceylonese tradition (d. 544 B.C.)
2. Japanese Buddhists accept a Northern tradition (d. 568 B.C.)
3. Jōdo, Shin and Nishin sects adopted legend (d. 949 B.C.)
4. Hakuju Ui, Buddhist scholar in Japan compared legends (466–386 B.C.)
5. Western scholarly consensus of the moment (566–486 B.C. or 563–483 B.C.)

B. Buddha's Discovery of Suffering

1. old man
2. sick person
3. corpse
4. beggar

C. Buddha's Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree

II. Tenets of Buddhism

A. Four Noble Truths

1. Everything is suffering (*dukha*)
2. Desire causes suffering
3. To eliminate suffering, one must eliminate desire
4. The way to eliminate desire is through the Noble Eightfold Path

B. The Noble Eightfold Path

Trust

1. Right Belief
2. Right Attitude

Ethical Conduct

3. Right Speech
4. Right Behavior
5. Right Livelihood

Self-Discipline

6. Right Effort
7. Right Self-Awareness (Mindfulness)
8. Right Meditation

C. Objective: *Nirvana* = “emptiness” or “blowing out the flame”

1. Three Characteristics of Existence

- a. impermanence (*anicca*) – everything is changing
- b. suffering (*dukkha*) – craving is the source of suffering
- c. not-self (*anatta*) – living being: composite of 5 aggregates
 - (1) physical forms (*rupa*)
 - (2) feelings or sensations (*vedana*)
 - (3) perceptions (*sanna*)
 - (4) mental formations (*sankhara*)
 - (5) consciousness (*vinnana*)

D. Middle Path — rejecting the extremes of luxury and denial

III. Three Paradoxical Influences (both positive and negative)

A. Brahmanic literature (*Upanishads*)

- 1. accepted: concept of *samsāra* (cycle of rebirths)
- 2. rejected: concept of *ātman* (self)
 - idea that only Brahmins could escape *samsāra*
 - authority of Brahmanic literature
 - animal sacrifice

B. Yoga (Yogic texts: *Mahābhārata*)

- 1. accepted: introspection and meditation techniques
- 2. rejected: self-mortification and extreme contorted postures
meditative planes as goal

C. Asceticism (e.g., Jainism of Mahāvira)

- 1. accepted: *ahimsa* = non-violence (harmlessness)
idea of non-attachment
- 2. rejected: extreme self-denial (asceticism)

IV. Types of Buddhism

A. Theravāda, or Hinayana (“Lesser Vehicle”) — Southern Buddhism (Sri Lanka, S.E. Asia)

- 1. extraordinary but not supernatural

B. Mahāyāna (“Greater Vehicle”) — Northern Buddhism (China, Japan)

- 1. Mantras
- 2. Charms, Spells, Incantations
- 3. Zen

C. Vajrayāna (“Diamond Vehicle”) — Tibet

- 1. Sacraments and rituals

- Stories of the Buddha's previous lives, called Jataka Tales. Story of an elephant, monkey and partridge.
- The Nirvana simile: Tadpoles trying to get a better grasp of dry land from a frog.

Word List:

bhikkhu = monk, disciple

bodhisattva = Buddha in the making who turns back to help others

Buddha = Enlightened One

Dhamma (Dharma) = Teaching of the Buddha, which leads to liberation

Dhyāna (Jhāna) = Meditation, usually in eight stages of ascending purity of consciousness

Sangha = order of monks and nuns

Stūpa = mound for containing relics, central feature of temples and pagodas