

Buddhism Introduction Part I pp. 727-733

Consider the following quote: Among all the world religions, Buddhism enjoys a particularly positive reputation, widely respected for its teachings of love and compassion, its promotion of nonviolence and commitment to a vegetarian diet, and its renunciation of war. To what extent is this true and an accurate reflection of your understanding of the religion?

This is true to an extent; however, the extent to which the Buddha had an effect on the current ideas of Buddhism is overestimated. In fact, "the Buddha himself ate meat and he did not forbid his monks from doing so. (727)". The promotion of nonviolence should also not be overestimated, since "wars have been fought by Buddhist in the name of Buddhism. (727)".

Define what makes someone a Buddhist.

According to scripture, the answer is that a Buddhist is someone who takes refuge in the three jewels -- Buddha, dharma (the Buddha's teachings), and the sangha (the community of practicing Buddhists). The Buddhist takes refuge from daily sufferings in the Three Jewels.

Explain the importance of the different stories about how Buddhism made its way to various Asian countries & the west. Deduce what this says about the cultural significance of Buddhism.

Buddhism was interpreted in different ways based on the region it was introduced in. In Tibet, Buddhism was interpreted as a savior (since Tibet itself was actually a demoness in the myth), while in places like China and Burma, the Buddha was seen as a benevolent force.

Identify, investigate and evaluate the issues with writing, sourcing, and early Buddhist scripture.

Early Buddhist scripture was written on palm leaves, which don't last very long. Additionally, instead of writing what the Buddha said, his teachings were usually transmitted through the generations orally, which devotees felt had more power than simple writing.

Discuss the *sangha* and its social, historical, and cultural importance to Buddhism.

In the early stages of Buddhism, anybody was allowed to enter the *sangha*. When people in the sangha screwed up, the Buddha made rules to prevent that from happening again; through this, 253 rules for being part of the sangha were created through his life. Mahayana Buddhism believes that a devotee can reach enlightenment through Buddha's teachings and dharma, and strive to stay in samsara to help more people. However, Theravada Buddhists strive to leave samsara and attain enlightenment to leave the cycle of reincarnation.