



Buddhism

Comparative Theology

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- **Buddhism arose out of atheistic strands of Hinduism current in India in the sixth century B.C. and remains the dominant religion in the Far East. Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha ("Enlightened One"), is said to have discovered that both the life of luxury and the life of extreme asceticism were of no use in gaining spiritual freedom; thus he promoted the "Middle Way."**

- **This “Middle Way, consisted of the Eightfold path which was the way to salvation or nirvana. To describe the Middle Way, Buddha offered 4 main principles called the 4 Noble Truths.**

Introduction

- **The problem as the Buddha saw it was not one of sin but of desire and its ensuing suffering and after he became enlightened, he taught that the way to eliminate suffering begins with understanding the true nature of the world which is not necessarily accomplished through knowledge but through meditation. His teaching, however, was to undergo many transformations.**
- **Buddhism became a great missionary religion and eventually all but died in its native India.**

- **There are three main branches of Buddhism:**
 - **The Mahayana school, which developed a grandiose cosmology and a pantheon of semi-deities, is to be found in China, Korea, and Japan. It teaches that Buddha believed that nirvana was available to all people and that he originally taught that the only one to save you is you (as he did with himself).**

Introduction

- **Savior gods or Bodhisattvas have developed (those who have found nirvana) with Buddha being the supreme Bodhisattva. Followers of this branch can call on these savior gods. Zen is a form of Mahayana Buddhism popular in the West. Zen teachers emphasize the saying of the Buddha: “Look within, you are the Buddha.” The Theravada school, which is more austere, flourishes in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Burma, and southeast Asia. It teaches that nirvana is essentially reserved for only a few monks (or those who have been reincarnated to be monks) who absolutely follow the way of Buddha. For them, Buddha is merely a teacher (as he, himself declared).**

- **The third form of Buddhism is Tantrism and is practiced officially in Tibet and extensively in Nepal. It is a blending of Mahayana Buddhism with the ancient occult practices of Tibet. It contains strong elements of animism (attributing conscious life to inanimate objects or objects in nature).**

- **There is no absolute God in Buddhism, although many have interpreted Buddhism as a search for God.**
- **The Buddha did not deny the existence of God outright but said that the question of His existence "tends not to edification." That is, those seeking enlightenment need to concentrate on their own spiritual paths themselves rather than relying on an outside support.**

- **The Buddha did not claim divinity or even a divine source for his teachings. He saw himself as only an example to fellow monks and compared his teachings to a raft that should be left behind once the other side of the river has been reached.**
- **Many Buddhists believe the existence of suffering and evil in the world is evidence against belief in God.**

- **Although belief in an ultimate God is opposed by nearly all Buddhists, the Mahayana school developed notions of the Buddha as still existing for the sake of men and promoted the existence of many semi-divine beings, which came to be represented in art and have been revered in ways very similar to worship of Hindu gods.**

Man and the Universe

- **Both the beginning and the ultimate nature of the world are left unexplained by the Buddha-
-once again, those questions are not helpful to consider.**
- **The Mahayana school speculates unsystematically about a vast series of heavens, sort of half-way houses on the road to nirvana. But in the end even those heavens are illusory. Mahayanist teaching at least implies that the powers of the universe will see to it that all creatures will eventually find salvation.**

Man and the Universe

- **Buddhism does begin with an analysis of the world of appearances and especially of man. As with Hinduism, Buddhism sees the cycle of reincarnation as shot through with pain, largely because life is characterized by impermanence.**
- **The Buddha added the notion that all creatures, including man, are fictions: there is really no soul ("self,") only a series of occurrences that appear to be individual persons and things.**

Man and the Universe

- **Once the so-called person is broken down into his component parts and his different actions and attitudes analyzed during the course of time, it is seen that there is really nothing holding it all together. (The question of how there can be both reincarnation and striving for salvation without a self has occupied Buddhist philosophy from the start.) The notion of no self is difficult, and much effort is spent trying to grasp it fully.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **Buddhism sees ignorance rather than sin as the roadblock to salvation. That is, the belief that the world and self truly exist, keeps the illusory wheel of existence rolling--only destruction of that belief will stop the mad course of the world.**

Salvation and the Afterlife: Four Noble Truths

- **Its doctrine is summed up in the Four Noble Truths:**
 - **Suffering is universal. Buddha taught that the very act of living involves suffering from birth until death. Even death brings no relief, however, because of the cycle of reincarnation, suffering and death. Salvation (nirvana) is to be released from this unending cycle of suffering.**

Salvation and the Afterlife: Four Noble Truths

- The cause of suffering is craving. People remain in this endless cycle because they are too attached to their health, wealth, status and physical comfort. This is because they are ignorant of the nature of reality and they fall victim to what Buddha called tanha (attachement, desire).**

Salvation and the Afterlife: Four Noble Truths

- The cure for suffering is to overcome ignorance and eliminate craving. Since to live is to suffer and suffering is caused by craving, if a person could remove craving from his life, suffering would end.**

Salvation and the Afterlife: Four Noble Truths

- The way to cease craving and so attain escape from continual rebirth is by following the Middle Way, known as the Noble Eightfold Path. The eightfold path consists of eight ways of right living: right viewpoint, right aspiration, right speech, right behavior, right occupation, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. ***

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **Original Buddhist teaching and the Theravada place emphasis on the individual monk working through self-control and a series of meditative practices that progressively lead him to lose a sense of his grasping self.**
- **The Mahayana school began with the insight that the ideal of the monk striving only for his own salvation was selfish and did little for the majority of men.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **Mahayanists eventually came to posit a vast number of Buddhas and bodhisettvas, "heroes of the faith" who reached the point of nirvana but refused to enter it until the rest of mankind was brought along with them. To varying degrees they can graciously grant aids to salvation to those who petition them.**

Salvation and the Afterlife

- **Nirvana literally means "blowing out," as with the flame of a candle. That is, nothing can be said about it except that it is a transcendent, permanent state of. . .nothing (?).**

Morals: Eightfold Path

- **The eightfold path defines moral living for the lay Buddhist:**
 - **Right Viewpoint-** accepting the four noble truths and the eightfold path
 - **Right Aspiration-** renouncing the pleasures of the senses; harboring no ill will toward anyone and harming no living creature
 - **Right Speech-** not lying, slandering or abusing anyone. Not indulging in idle talk
 - **Right Behavior-**not destroying any living creature; taking only what is given to you; not committing any unlawful sexual act
 - **Right Occupation-**earning your livelihood in a way that will harm no one

Morals: Eightfold Path

- **Right Effort-** resolving and striving heroically to prevent any evil qualities from arising in you and abandoning any evil qualities you may possess. Striving to acquire good qualities and encouraging those you do possess to grow, increase and be perfected
- **Right Mindfulness-**being observant, strenuous, alert, contemplative, and free of desire and of sorrow
- **Right Meditation-** Entering into the four degrees of meditation which are produced by concentration **BUT** only after abandoning all sensuous pleasures, all evil qualities, joy and sorrow **

- **In addition they are expected to support the community of monks.**
- **Monks and nuns follow a path of moderate asceticism, including strict celibacy and the repudiation of all personal property.**
- **Buddhist religious leaders often are involved in education and charity and even take part in politics; other leaders separate themselves in their monasteries, contacting the public only to gain funds.**

- **Original and Theravada teaching indicate that a Buddhist can for the most part help his fellow man only by showing him an example of dedication to meditation and self-denial.**
- **Mahayana teaching emphasizes "compassion," which involves aiding people in all areas of their lives, even though such aid does not lead directly toward nirvana.**

- **In most cases what looks like worship before a statue or image is really a sort of paying respects.**
- **The Buddha is revered as an example of a faithful life and as the one who brought the teachings of Buddhism; Buddhists are taught that they must themselves overcome the obstacle of ignorance.**

- **Meditation in Buddhism can focus on one's breathing (important because it is halfway between voluntary and involuntary action), one's own attitudes (as in Mindfulness meditation, in which one tries to be clear at all times as to one's true motives for every action), a neutral object, or a bodhisattva.**

- **In each case the purpose is to divest oneself of craving and sense of self.**
- **In some sects it is believed that a bodhisattva can transfer his merit to a supplicant and so aid him to nirvana. In those cases the Buddhist becomes very much like a worshiper petitioning God for grace and mercy.**

Conclusion

- **Buddhism does not address the point of our existence for that would necessitate a metaphysical contemplation and involve a supreme being which it denies.**
- **Because there is no God, there is no sin which is against such God which eliminates the need for forgiveness.**

Conclusion

- **Buddha promised no power to live according to the eightfold path which turns out to be a very lonely path at best.**
- **On this path, Buddha points out that everything relies on the individual's effort.**
- **Our Lord, on the other hand, offers forgiveness through His sacrifice and teaches us to turn our burdens over to Him and He will give us power to live successfully and in communion with Him.**

References

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