

An Outline Review

of

Huston Smith's

The World's Religions

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

Chapter III. Buddhism

Part One: Buddha the Man

The Man Who Woke Up. - The Silent Sage.

Born around 563 B.C.

Heir to a throne, he deserted it at age twenty-nine.

Sensing that that a breakthrough was near, he seated himself one evening vowing not to arise until enlightenment was his. At morning his mind bubble of the universe and shattered it to naught, only, wonder of world miraculously restored with effulgence of true being.

Nearly half a century followed, during which the Buddha trudged the India preaching his ego-shattering, life-redeeming message.

Part Two: Buddhism the Religion

A. The Rebel Saint.

Buddhism drew its lifeblood from Hinduism, but against its prevaili

Buddhism recoiled like a whiplash and hit back - hard.

Buddha preached a religion devoid of authority, devoid of ritual, a religion of speculation, devoid of tradition, a religion of intense self-effort, devoid of supernatural.

Original Buddhism can be characterized in the following terms:

empirical - experience was the final test of truth

scientific - quality of lived experience its final test

pragmatic - concerned with problem solving

therapeutic - "One thing I teach, suffering and the end of suffering.

psychological - begins with the human lot, its problems, and the way of coping with them

egalitarian - women as capable of enlightenment as men; rejected system's assumption that aptitudes were hereditary

directed to individuals - each should proceed toward enlightenment confronting his or her individual situation and predicaments

B. The Four Noble Truths. - the postulates from which the rest of his teaching derive

1. Life is suffering, is dislocated, something has gone wrong.

2. The cause - all forms of selfishness

Instead of linking our faith and love and destiny to the whole, we are strapping to puny burros of our separate selves, which are certain to give out eventually.

3. Since the cause of life's dislocation is selfish craving, its cure lies in overcoming of such craving.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth prescribes how the cure can be accomplished.

The way out of our captivity is through the Eightfold Path.

C. The Eightfold Path. - it is a treatment by training - by right association, associate with Truthwinners, converse with them, serve them, observe and imbibe by osmosis their spirit of love and compassion.

1. Right Views - The first step summons us to make up our minds as to what the problem basically is.

2. Right Intent - The second advises us to make up our hearts as to what we want.

3. Right Speech

first become aware of our speech

second move toward charity

4. Right Conduct

understand one's actions

change to the direction of selflessness and charity

do not drink intoxicants

5. Right Livelihood - For the lay person, Buddhism calls for engaging in activities that promote life instead of destroying it.

6. Right Effort - A low level of volition, a mere wish not accompanied by action to obtain it - won't do.

7. Right Mindfulness

This seventh step summons the seeker to steady awareness of everything taken, and every content that turns up in one's stream of consciousness.

Special times should be allotted for undistracted introspection.

8. Right Concentration

This involves substantially the techniques of Hinduism's raja yoga substantially the same goal.

The final climactic state is the state in which the human mind is completely absorbed in God.

D. Basic Buddhist Concepts. - Certain key notions in the Buddha's outlook

1. *nirvana* - Life's goal - boundless life
2. *anatta* - The human self has no soul
3. *karma* - One's acts considered as fixing one's lot in the future existence
4. *anicca* - impermanence, everything finite is transitory
5. *Arhat* - a Buddhist who has reached the stage of enlightenment

Do human beings survive bodily death? - his answer is equivocal

E. Big Raft and Little. - Two main Paths in Buddhism

Buddhism divided over three questions: are people independent or interdependent, is the universe friendly or hostile toward creatures, and what is the best part of the self, its head or its heart.

One group says "Be lamps unto your selves, work out your salvation

For the other group, human beings are more social than individual, a greatest thing in the world.

The division into the two main paths is schematized as follows:

THERAVADA	MAHAYA
Human beings are emancipated by self-effort, with out supernatural aid.	Human aspirations are supported by supernatural powers and the grace they receive.
Key virtue: wisdom	Key virtue: compassion
Attainment requires constant commitment, and is primarily for monks and nuns.	Religious practice is relevant to the secular world, and therefore to lay people.
Ideal: the <i>Arhat</i> who remains in <i>nirvana</i> after death	Ideal: the <i>bodhisattva</i>
Buddha a saint, supreme teacher, and inspirer.	Buddha a savior
Minimizes metaphysics	Elaborates metaphysics
Minimizes ritual	Emphasizes ritual
Practice centers on meditation	Includes petitionary prayer

After Buddhism split into Theravada and Mahayana, Theravada continued as a unified tradition, whereas Mahayana divided into a number of different schools. The two with the most influence in western society, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are discussed next.

F. The Secret of the Flower. - Zen Buddhism

Buddhism that Taoism profoundly influenced, *Ch'an* (*Zen* in Japan)

It makes breaking the language barrier its central concern.

Strains by every means to blast their novices out of solutions that are

Zen masters are determined that their students attain the experience in
talk to take its place.

By paradox and non sequitur Zen provokes, excites, exasperates, and
exhausts the mind until until it sees that thinking is never more than the
feeling more than feeling *for*.

It counts on a flash of sudden insight to bridge the gap between second
firsthand life.

Zen's object is to infuse the temporal *with* the eternal.

A condition in which life seems distinctly good

Also comes an objective outlook on one's relation to others.

The life of Zen does not draw one away from the world; it turns one

An attitude of generalized agreeableness

Even the dichotomy between life and death disappears.

G. The Diamond Thunderbolt. - Tibetan Buddhism

The Tibetans say that their religion is nowise distinctive in its goal.
their practice is that it enables one to reach *nervana* in a single lifetime
the speed-up is effected by utilizing all the energies latent in the humors
of the body emphatically included, and impressing them *all* into the
spiritual quest.

The energy that interests the West most is sex, but the physical energies
regularly work with are the ones that are involved with speech, vision

Tibetan Buddhism distinctiveness also includes a unique institution -

The Dalai Lama is a receiving station toward which the compassion Buddhism in all its cosmic amplitude is continuously channeled, to the Tibetan people most directly, but by extension to all sentient beings.

H. The Image of the Crossing.

Do the various Paths of Buddhism deserve to be considered aspects of a single religion?

Yes, in two ways:

(1.) They all revere a single founder from whom they claim their teaching.

(2.) All can be subsumed under a single metaphor - the image of the

Buddhism is a voyage across life's river, a transport from the near shore of ignorance, grasping, and death, to the further bank of wisdom and enlightenment.

Before the river was crossed the two shores, human and divine, were distinct from each other, different as life and death, as day and night. After crossing has been made, no dichotomy remains. The realm of the former is a distinct place. It is where the traveler stands; and if that stance changes, this world, the world itself is transmuted.

Part Three: The Confluence of Buddhism and Hinduism in India.

Today Buddhists abound in every Asian land except India, the land of their birth.

The deeper fact is that in India Buddhism was not so much defeated but accommodated within it.

Its contributions, accepted by Hindus in principle if not always practiced, renewed emphasis on kindness to all living things, on non-killing of an animal, on the elimination of caste barriers in matters religious and their reduction in their ethical emphasis generally.

