

BUDDHISM: Basic Teachings

SIDDHATTHA GAUTAMA (ca. 446 – 366 B.C.E.)

The historic Buddha (= “The Enlightened One,” “The Awakened One”)
Also known as Sakyamuni (“Sage of the Sakya Clan”)
Also Tathagata (“Thus Gone One”)

PRE-BUDDHIST CONCEPTS & PRACTICES

Samsara (“stream of existence”)

Karma (“deeds,” “actions,” “destiny,” “causality,” “fate”)

Nirvana (“transcending samsara”)

Yoga practices (asceticism; meditation aimed at attaining union between the self and supreme truth or being)

BASIC BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Four Noble Truths:

1. All existence is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by desire
3. Extinction of desire leads to extinction of suffering
4. The way to the extinction of suffering is the Eightfold Noble Path

Eightfold Noble Path:

1. Right Views
2. Right Intentions (renunciation, good will, harmlessness)
3. Right Speech (no lies, slander, harsh words, idle chatter)
4. Right Conduct (no taking life, stealing, sexual misconduct)
5. Right Livelihood (no dealing with weapons, living beings, meat production/butchery and alcohol/drugs)

6. Right Effort (prevent unwholesome states)
7. Right Mindfulness (contemplation of body, feeling, state of mind, phenomena)
8. Right Consciousness (meditation)

- Three Fundamental Principles:
1. All is transitory
 2. All is suffering
 3. All is egoless

EARLY BUDDHISM

Theravada Buddhism >> India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Southeast Asia
 “Hinayana” (“Lesser Vehicle”)—a generally pejorative title

Focus on becoming a “worthy,” a “perfected disciple” (arhat or arahat)
 Reliance on one’s “own power” (jiriki in Japanese) for salvation
 Gautama Buddha seen as a great teacher

Compilation of the *Tripitika* (“Three Baskets”) around 1st cen. B.C.E.
 (containing Buddha stories revealing disciplinary rules, sermons attributed to Gautama, and interpretations by later devotees)

Veneration of the “Three Jewels” (Buddha, Doctrine, Monastic Order)

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM (“Greater Vehicle”) >> to China, Korea, Japan

1. Theism—the deification of Gautama
2. Polytheism—the emergence of a pantheon of many Buddhas or Bodhisattvas

Bodhisattva = “wisdom being”; “destined Buddha”
 = Kannon, Jizō, Miroku, Amida, et al.

The Four Great Vows of the Bodhisattva:

1. To save all beings
 2. To destroy all evil passions
 3. To learn the Truth and teach it to others
 4. To lead all beings toward Buddhahood
3. Afterlife—Heaven / Paradise / “Pure Land” (and also Hell)
 4. Faith & Salvation through the grace of the gods

- = tariki (in Japanese): reliance on the “other power” of the gods
- = Nembutsu invocation (*Namu Amida Butsu*, or “Praise be to Amida”)

5. Metaphysics—concepts of “Emptiness,” “Void,” etc.

- = jiriki (“self power”; self-reliance)
- = *this-worldly* (as well as “otherworldly”) focus >> Zen

6. Esoteric (or “symbolic”) transmissions

- = *mantra* (verbal), *mandala* (pictorial), and *mudra* (hand gestures)