

FLJ 342 -- 2010.02.02 -- Some Basic Concepts of Buddhism:

~500-400bc: Siddhartha / =Gautama / =**Sakyamuni** (J: *shaka*) becomes enlightened Buddha.

~380 Kumarajiva organizes project to translation sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese.

sutras (J: kyô 経): the basic texts of Buddhism (an enormous collection!): The Lotus Sutra and Diamond Sutra are of particular importance in Japan.

Buddhism: The basic tenet in all Buddhism is that human suffering is a psychological (=sentient, spiritual) condition that arises from attachment: one can achieve salvation by overcoming attachment (but how to get there varies from teaching to teaching).

suffering: The canonical causes of suffering are: sickness, old age, death; also childbirth, poverty, etc. People suffer because they 'feel' the suffering: suffering is a psychological condition.

attachment: People are 'attached' to possessions, lifestyles, life itself. Attachment is a psychological condition: it would not exist without sentience.

salvation: A (provisional or ultimate) goal of Buddhism is *detachment*, referred to in terms of buddhahood, the Pure Land, nirvana, satori, enlightenment, etc. But what is this detachment? Is it detachment from the "material" world (in Greek philosophy, the *noumenon*)? That would land one entirely in the realm of the psyche. Detachment must be more than that...

exoteric Buddhism: An interpretation in which salvation requires the 'external' assistance of spiritual beings like Amida. This includes evangelical teachings (speak the name of Amida, and you will be saved). Also includes the idea that one goal of salvation is so that we can offer salvation to others.

Amida: The reigning spirit (often neutral gender) of the Western Paradise, who vowed to admit anyone who calls on the name 'Amida'.

bodhisattva: A being who -- to assist others -- has renounced the final stage.

esoteric Buddhism: By practicing the correct rituals (postures, incantations, etc.), we can achieve salvation 'internally' (i.e., without divine intervention). This may involve the assistance of selective priests, secret rituals, magic, etc.

hierarchy of living things: In accordance with their state of enlightenment, from animals to humans to buddhahood.

rokudô (the six realms): Hell; the realm of starving demons; beasts (animals); the realm of eternal warrior fighting (Asura); humanity; heavenly spirits.

reincarnation: Death is accompanied by rebirth somewhere in the hierarchy.

karma (J: *innen*): The score-keeping of virtue or sin across the lifetime(s) of a being; manifested by reincarnation at a higher or lower point in the hierarchy of living things (or, at times, paid back in this life). Karma can also include 'connections' between individuals: lovers in this life may be seen as having been connected in a previous life.

hōben: A "convenient means" such as an anecdote or allegorical story told in worldly terms, which points the way toward enlightenment.

mujō: The "impermanence of all things": Because all material forms will decay, all attachments will end in suffering.

mappō: The "final phase of the Law," used to describe the decay of the world order. Often used to refer to nostalgic recollections of the 'good old days' of previous imperial administrations, etc.

funī (non-duality): a sophisticated, philosophical approach to attachment.

- a. all perceived phenomena involve dualism (e.g., 'light' requires 'darkness').
- b. perception requires a comprehending subject (e.g., the human mind).
- c. dualism is thus a figment of the mind: it is the mind that creates it.
- d. understanding this, the mind can be free of its illusions.
- e. once free, the mind can return to worldly reality.

syncretism: values philosophical 'incorporation' instead of opposition.

yosutebito: a person who has renounced worldly lifestyles to seek salvation.

shukke ("leaving the house"): taking a vow to adhere to Buddhist clerical regulations.

Tendai sect: (from late 8c in Japan) all people can be saved, via understanding.

Shingon sect: (from early 9c in Japan) advocated magical incantations, postures.

Pure Land sect: (from late 12c in Japan) advocated *nembutsu* (calling on Amida).

Zen sect: (mainly from 13c in Japan) advocated meditation, *koan* (conundrums).