

Vocabulary

Abhidharma (uh-bee-DAHR-muh)

- Commentary or doctrine. Part of the Three Baskets, an early form of Buddhist texts

Amitabha (ah-mee-TAH-bah)

- A Buddha who, as a Bodhisattva, created a paradise state. Entrance into this heavenly existence (Pure Land) is by means of Amitabha alone.

Anatman

- The radical, difficult Buddhist view of the self which sees it as a false, imaginary belief. There is no independent, autonomous soul, self or identity. The Buddhist view that everything is transient and insubstantial, being without underlying reality or...continuing substrate

Arhats (AHR-huht--worthy ones)

- 1,250 original members of the first Sangha, meeting in Rajagriha in northern India. Now the term refers to those who have achieved the final stage of enlightenment in

Ashoka (uh-SHOH-kuh)

- Emperor under whom Buddhist teaching and practice entered Sri Lanka (third century B.C.) and other parts of Southeast Asia. Ashoka ruled India from 272 - 236 B.C. He converted to Buddhism, advocated religious tolerance, common ethical observance, and ended violence with demonstrable social concern.

Bodhi Tree (BOH-dee)

- Type of tree under which the historical Buddha received his first enlightenment.

Bodhicittas

- Thoughts of enlightenment which may result in a conversion like experience, leading to emancipation

Bodhidharma (boh-dee-DAHR-muh)

- A late fifth century patriarch who introduced Ch'an Buddhism into China

Bodhisattvas (boh-dee-SAHT-vah)

- Those who have experienced enlightenment (bodhi) but who have taken a special vow to continue being reborn into samsara (rather than entering nirvana). By this compassionate act, they deliver others from suffering and aid them in their attainment of enlightenment.

Buddha (BOO duh)

- Title meaning "enlightened, awakened one," and refers to those who attain the enlightenment goal of Buddhist religious life.

Concentration (Samadhi, 'suh-MAH-dee')

- Threefold Training classification grouping together cultivation of meditative calm and single-minded focus, thus categorizing Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration

Compassion

- This is the key concept in Buddhism. To demonstrate compassion--love, charity, kindness, tolerance and other such noble qualities--follows the Bodhisattva example of someone who renounces entry into Nirvana in order to help the living obtain release from suffering, rebirth and death

Dharma (DHAR-muh)

- Teaching--the proper course of conduct, norm, ultimate principles, of Buddhism.

Five Precepts

- Standards of ethical conduct which encompass the minimum moral obligations of a lay Buddhist. The Five Precepts ([1] not to destroy life, [2] not to steal, [3] not to commit adultery, [4] not to tell lies, [5] not to take intoxicating drinks) are not commandments as such, but rules of training, and ideals to live up to.

Four Noble Truths

- Four Holy or Noble Truths enable humankind to find peace with themselves and the world. (1) There is suffering; (2) Desire is the cause of suffering; (3) Humankind can bring an end to suffering; (4) The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to achieve Nirvana and end suffering.

Four sights

- When a young man, Buddha took a trip outside his father's palace. On this visit, he saw the four sights--an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a wandering ascetic--which prompted Gautama to retire from the world, undergo the great struggle, and attain enlightenment.

Ghost Festival

- Taoist, Buddhist, Chinese festival to kwei (gway), hungry ghosts. These souls of the restless must be appeased through offerings of food and prayers.

Guru (G00-roo)

- Personal Tantric guide who serves as a mentor and leader to enlightenment

Karma (KAHR-muh)

- Action/intention/deed. Forms the basis for the law of karma--every action, every deed, has a result-- both in the short term and over the long haul.

Kathina Festival

- Observance which marks the end of the monsoon rain retreats. The Sangha receives new robes and wishing trees from village members on this occasion.

Koans

- Part of the literary tradition of Ch'an. These public document sayings and dialogues of the masters, are short, pithy, apparently nonsensical verses which can aid enlightenment.

Kwei (gway)

- Hungry ghosts. These harmful spirits--souls which are restless due to violent and untimely deaths, ill placed burial sites or neglect by descendants--must be appeased. The Ghost Festival fulfills this function.

Relics

- Items (tooth, finger bone) thought to originate from the historical Buddha. These items become objects of great veneration.

Sangha (SAHN-guh)

- Buddhist monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen.

Hinayana (hin-ah-YAH-nah, lesser)

- A pejorative term, sometimes describing Theravada. Southeast Asia--specifically the countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea--and Sri Lanka are home to this practice.

Mahasiddhas (mah-hah-SI-dah)

- Unconventional, enlightened, wandering about, compassionate masters who serve as Tantric gurus

Mahayana (mah-hah-YAH-nah)

- Means the 'great vehicle or course,' and is associated with Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Also called northern Buddhism, it includes the Pure Land, Ch'an (chahn [Zen]) and Tantra (TUHN-truh) trends of thought.

Mantras (MAHN-truh)

- Liturgic meditational devices serving as instruments of the mind

Merit.

- Related to the concept of karma, merit making is a basic Buddhist practice. Good deeds (meritorious ones) effect positive results in either this life or a future one. Bad deeds bring negative results.

Morality (Sila)

- Classification of the Threefold Training which describes moral rules to purify and begin transformation of one's nature, increasing self-insight and mindfulness. Sila groups together Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood.

Namu amida butsu

- Chant of praise and homage to Amitabha Buddha. Practitioners can attain rebirth in the land of bliss by repeating this phrase near the hour of death.

Nikayas (nee-KAH-yuh)

- Texts which begin with "Thus have I heard..." are early sayings of Ananda, one of Buddha's disciples. They are the earliest forms of Buddhist scripture and part of the Pali canon.

Nirvana (nihr-VAH-nuh)

- Term difficult to translate, meaning something akin to unalloyed bliss, pure and simple; fully passed away, fully blown out or fully extinct.

Noble Eightfold Path

- Right Views, or acceptance of the Buddha's teaching; Right Thought, or aspirations leading to purity and charity; Right Speech; Right Conduct; Right Livelihood; Right Effort, or avoidance of lapses into frailty; Right Mindfulness, or constant awareness of the truth of the doctrine; and Right Concentration, or spiritual exercise leading to an awakening

Pali (pah-lee)

- An Indo-Aryan language related to the ancient languages of India...used for Theravada Buddhist liturgical and scholarly purposes Pali Canon Oldest collection of Buddhist texts, arranged into "Three Baskets"--discourse, discipline and commentary

Pure Land

- Mahayana Buddhist practice. The most popular form of Buddhism in the world, identifies a goal for rebirth, the land of bliss (Pure Land or Western Paradise)

Sakyamuni

- Refers to Buddha's clan (his being a "sage of the Sakya clan").

Samsara (sahm-SAH-ruh)

- Sanskrit term, referring to the cycle of rebirth and redeath--a turning around continually-- experienced by all life

Sangha (SHANG huh)

- Specialists in the spiritual life. These monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, follow rules of the codified monastic discipline (Vinaya).

Shen-hui

- (Shen-hway, 668-760) A Buddhist monk who became the seventh patriarch, promoting the Ch'an school

Shinran (shin-rahn, 1173-1262)

- Practitioner of the True Pure Land school who saw the compassionate Amitabha Buddha as a savior figure, carrying awakened ones to the Pure Land.

Siddhartha Gautama (sid-HAHR-tah GOW-tuh-muh, 566 - 486 B.C.)

- Historical figure known as the first Buddha. Gautama is his family name (as "Smith" in John Smith), while Siddhartha is his personal name (as "Mary" in Mary Smith.)

Sutras (SOO-trahs)

- Discourses or scriptures. Part of the Three Baskets an early form of Buddhist scripture.

Tantra (THUN-truh)

- Buddhist Mahayana practice followed by adherent now residing in the area of Tibet. Duality is central to understanding Tantra texts (the word Tantra is taken from "taut thread" or "woof"), which are a network of teachings, incantations and esoteric sayings.

Tantrism

- rather than ridding self of desire (samudaya) through avoidance--advocates the use of the very troubling desire to eliminate it.

Theravada (thai-ruh-VAH-duh)

- The most conservative, traditional school of Buddhism. Also called the southern social movement, this tradition goes back to one of the original 18 schools--the tradition of the elders. It is the basis for all other movements within Buddhism.

Three Treasures

- To avoid pain, Buddhist adherents take refuge in the Three Treasures (Three Jewels), (1) the Buddha, (2) Dharma (the law, truth or doctrine), and (3) the Sangha.

Threefold Training

- Classifies practices of the Eightfold Path under headings of morality, wisdom and concentration

Transmigration

- A more precise term for reincarnation. It occurs when one's soul takes on rebirth in successive life forms.

Tripataka (Three Baskets)

- Buddhist texts composed of (1) Sutras (SOO-trahs--discourses, scriptures), (2) Vinaya (VI-nuh-yuh, discipline for the Sangha) and (3) Abhidharma (uh-bee-DAHR- muh, commentary or doctrine.)

Vajrayana (vuhj-ruh-YAH-nuh)

- Tantric literature, contrasting masculine diamond/sword/thunderbolt images with feminine lotus flower depictions. Physical, philosophical, ironic, sexual, meditational and virtuous interpretations--all can apply to tantras.

Vinaya (VI-nuh-yuh)

- Discipline texts for the Sangha. Part of the Three Baskets, an early form of Buddhist texts.

Wisdom (Prajna, PRAHJ-nah)

- Threefold Training classification which groups together Right Views and Right Thought (intention) Zen Ch'an (chahn, Japanese Zen) school of Buddhist thought and practice. Ch'an nevertheless advocates a sudden, speedy, unmediated enlightenment. The innate Buddha nature within allows all to have the potential to achieve this awakening.