

1 ☐ Lecture 6

Early Indian Buddhism

2 ☐ A Story

- Three princes – Mahaveda, Mahapranada, and Mahasattva -- walking through a park
- They wander into a thicket of bamboo
- and find a tigress surrounded by five cubs – all exhausted and weak
- What will they do?

3 ☐ A Story

- There are some remarks about the tigress's predicament
- Mahasattva sends his brothers away
- Out of compassion, he throws himself in front of the tigress
- The tigress is too weak to move; she does nothing
- But that's not the end of the story...

4 ☐ A Story

- The prince had no sword with him
- So he cut his throat with a sharp piece of bamboo and fell down near the tigress
- She ate everything except the bones ... yum!
- Mahasattva was the Buddha (in one of his lives)

5 ☐ A Story

- 1 • The story contains elements from Indian philosophy
 - path of pleasure (kama) vs. path of joy
 - samsara & moksha
 - 2 • But there are also new elements
 - focus on compassion
 - the idea of enlightenment
- and a puzzle
 - Why not acquire animals other than himself to feed to the tigress?

6 ☐ Names of the Buddha

- Siddharta Gotama
 - born *circa* 485 BCE
 - prince in Shakya clan
- **Shakyamuni**
 - "the prophetic sage of the Shakyas"
- **Tathagata**
 - "He who has fully come through"
- **Buddha**
 - "the awakened one"

7 ☐ Life & Times of the Buddha

- 1 • Raised in Hindu culture
 - Shares many presuppositions of Indian philosophy
 - e.g. samsara & moksha
 - But altered them to fit results of his critique of Indian philosophy
- 2 • Prophesied to become a great leader
 - Sheltered as a youth
 - Three excursions and three visions
 - Meets a religious ascetic

- Finds **nirvana** = "extinction"

8 ☐ Four Noble Truths

1. Ordinary human life is characterized by and permeated with **dukkha**
 - things don't "fit"
 - life is full of anxiety and unsatisfactoriness
 - "annoying bumps on the road of life"
 - impermanence

9 ☐ Four Noble Truths

2. The cause of dukkha is **trishna**
 - "craving thirst"
 - our desire for things to be other than they are
 - not wanting what we have & wanting what we don't have
 - *NB*: not every desire is a cause of dukkha

10 ☐ Four Noble Truths

3. To treat the symptom definitively, eliminate its cause.
 - cessation of dukkha = **nirvana** ("blowing out")

11 ☐ Four Noble Truths

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12 ☐ Four Noble Truths

4. The way to attain nirvana is to follow the **Noble Eightfold Path**
 - 8-step method for reprogramming oneself
 - NOT to be accepted on faith

13 ☐ Noble Eightfold Path

- 1) Correct **Knowledge**
 - Be aware of your problem.
 - Realize the true nature of reality.
 - Everything is fleeting
 - Nothing is permanent

14 ☐ Noble Eightfold Path

- 2) Correct **Aspiration**
 - Aspire to fix your problem.
 - Follow the therapy.

15 ☐ Noble Eightfold Path

- 4) Correct **Behavior**
 - Act in ways that do not encourage trishna.

16 ☐ Noble Eightfold Path

- 1) 5) Correct **Livelihood**
 - Choose a job that doesn't encourage trishna (if you can).
 - Be honorable, helpful, useful.
- 6) Correct **Effort**
 - Make the effort to sustain your vow.
- 2) 7) Correct **Mindfulness**
 - Be mindful / aware.

- Keep your consciousness alive to the present moment.

8) Correct **Concentration**

- Meditate in order to identify habits that lead to trishna.

17 ☐ Where's the *Philosophy*?

- The Four Noble Truths are like psychotherapy ...
 - ... but it is at odds with the *Upanishads*
- This generates debates ...
 - ... and debates lead to reflections on the "philosophical underpinnings" of Buddhism ...
 - ... mainly about the nature of the "self"
 - But the underpinnings need not be understood in order for the therapy to work.

18 ☐ Buddhist Understanding of the Self

1. There is no self that is independent of connections to the rest of the world.
 - The self is ...

2

- *Practical Upshot*: Don't act as if we are separate from everyone (and everything) else. [Correct Behavior]
- *NOT* a denial of the existence of a self
- Aside: Incompatible with existentialist understanding of the self

19 ☐ Buddhist Understanding of the Self

2. **Anatman**: there is no *Atman*.

- *Nothing* is permanent: there is only ...
- Processes are ...
 - Importance of Correct Speech
- No immutable soul, no *Atman*, and no God

20 ☐ Buddhist Understanding of the Self

3. What there is, is **pratitya samutpada**.

- "dependent origination" or (better) "conditioned coproduction"
- Everything is an interdependent process: nothing occurs independently of conditioning factors
- Everything is change: there is nothing that *undergoes* change

21 ☐ Buddhist Understanding of the Self

4. Everything appears just how it is: fluctuant.

- We never experience ...
- Our problems are due to desiring permanence ...
- *Hence*: our problems are due to ...
- *So*: ...

22 ☐ Buddhist Understanding of the Self

5. Experiences are the result of an overlapping of five processes called **skandhas** (heaps).

- Material composition
- Sensation
- Perception
- **Samskara** (mental tendencies)
- Discriminating Consciousness

23 ☐ Skandhas and the Self

- The five skandhas give rise to one's self.
 - Analogy: A chariot is the pieces of a chariot all put together
 - Likewise: ...

24 ☐ Skandhas and the Self

- There is no "real you" that exists apart from what you do
- Our names do not correspond to anything permanent
- The difference between "you" and "someone else" is arbitrary
 - whence the value of compassion

25 ☐ Samskara and Dukkha

6. Dukkha arises because ...
 - The world presents itself as it really is
 - Hence, any misperception must be due to ...
 - Since the root of our problems is ..., we require therapy in order to ...

26 ☐ *Contra Atman*

- 1) If the self is merely a collection of processes (like a chariot is a collection of chariot parts), then ...
- 2) And there is no experience of anything permanent in the world: not in dreamless sleep, or in meditation, or ...
- 3) So, there is no need to postulate the existence of an unchanging *Atman*.

27 ☐

Readings for next time:

Kupperman, Chapter 2

Gita, Journal 1 due next Thursday: one entry on Buddhism on *Upanishads*, one on *Bhagavad*