

Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- Preliminary comments on Buddhism
- The Buddha's biography

Admin stuff

- Remember to submit an electronic copy of your assignments to [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com) (no grade is official [read final] until they are so submitted).
- I will mark your second assignments during the exam period and have them available for pick-up in the **first week of January**. I will post your overall grades for the term, including the grade for your second assignment, **by December 23rd**.
- This afternoon's office hour is my last until the new year. If you need to talk with me, try my email account. As I'm sure you realize, I will only periodically check my email account over the holidays (so do allow for a delay in my replies to your inquiries).

Preliminary comments on Buddhism

- As is the case with Hinduism and Jainism, Buddhism holds that we are currently trapped in *samsara*, and that this cycle has no beginning or ending.
- As is the case with Hinduism and Jainism, Buddhism holds that karmic forces play a crucial role in our continuing cycle of rebirth.
- As is the case with Jainism, Buddhism, at least on the whole, does not offer a Path to liberation that depends on the intervention, or grace, of the God(s) or Goddess(es) (or an equivalent Being).

Preliminary comments on Buddhism

- As is the case with Hinduism and Jainism, self-knowledge plays a crucial role in *moksha*.
- As is the case with Hinduism and Jainism, meditation is the primary source of knowledge of that which will enable our escape from samsaric existence.
- As is the case with Hinduism and Jainism, the devote Buddhist must learn to discipline their mind, speech and body in order to achieve *moksha*.
Consequently, moral conduct is a prerequisite for enlightenment.

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- The *Buddha* was born Siddhartha Gautama sometime in the 6th Century B.C.E. (we are not actually *sure* exactly when...though Koller places it around 563 B.C.E. [this is a traditional date]) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.149).
- The term ‘*Buddha*’ is not his name, but his title. It literally means ‘Awakened One’ or “Enlightened One” (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.137).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- He was born into a *Kshatriya* family in Northern India in the town called Kapilavastu (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.149).
- His father was a tribal leader within a tribal structure along the lines of a republic (i.e. without an absolute monarch).
- This clan was known as the Shakyas.
- Thus, the *Buddha* is sometimes referred to as *Shakyamuni*, or the sage of the Shakyas (see Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.233).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Siddhartha was, of course, raised Hindu.
- We know that Siddhartha, at some point, left home, position (i.e. privilege) and family to pursue *moksha*. We also know that, at some point, he claims to reach enlightenment, and that he goes on to have a rather lengthy teaching ministry (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.137, 149, 151, 155).
- More exact details of the Buddha's biography vary depending on the source you use, and, as with sacred biographies of other religious figures (particularly founders), there is no biography that is beyond *any* historical doubt.

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Do note that I am not claiming that these biographies of Gautama Buddha are false. There may be a great deal of truth in them. However, we have good reason to believe that they are embellished.
- First, Buddha is said, by some stories, to have had a virgin birth (sounds familiar).
- Second, when he was born he walked seven steps toward the north and proclaimed “I am chief in the world, I am best in the world, I am first in the world. This is my last birth. There will be no further rebirth” (in Gethin, Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 19).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Third, during the night of his enlightenment experience he had various supernatural entities trying to entice him from his Path (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp.48-49).
- Fourth, he is said to have achieved enlightenment and, consequently, escaped *samsara* (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 49-53).
- Fifth, in some biographies, Brahma is said to have persuaded him to begin his teaching ministry.

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Sixth, he is able to decipher the needs of those he encounters and so cater his teaching in order to bring about, or hasten, their ‘awakening’ (*Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 53-57).
- Seventh, he is credited with being able to appear in various locations in order to teach the *dharma*.
- And so on.
- Even *if* Gautama Buddha’s biographies are embellished, it does not follow that they have no value in themselves. As with the sacred biographies of the saints or founders of other world religious traditions, the Buddha’s biography serves the purpose of communicating basic Buddhist teaching concerning ‘salvation’ (using the term very broadly) (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.149-55).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- **The Four Signs**, for example, prepare you for the Buddha's first sermon.
- Here's the background for these 'events': Siddhartha is raised by his father in such a way as to shelter him from the various forms of suffering that commonly befall humanity. This is in the hopes of preventing Siddhartha from becoming a Buddha and encouraging him along the path that will make him a great ruler (these choices were prophesied to be the two 'life paths' open to Siddhartha).
- The four signs are observed by Siddhartha as he temporarily escapes from his father's residence to travel about town (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.149).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- On his trips he encounters, for the first time, a person who is old, a person who is sick and a funeral for someone recently deceased.
- Each of these encounters impresses on Siddhartha that, quite irrespective of the pleasure in our lives, we must all grow old, experience illness and even die.
- He then encounters a recluse, meditating on the side of the road. The peace of this recluse greatly impresses on Siddhartha the possibility that we can, after all, escape the suffering of life (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.149-51).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Taken as a whole these four signs provide, if you like, the empirical evidence for Siddhartha's claims about the character of samsaric existence (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.151).
- Do note: The claim that *duhkha* characterizes samsaric existence is never really in question. This observation is shared among all of those traditions competing against Buddhism in the relevant spiritual market (e.g. devotional Hinduism and Jainism). Indeed you have already encountered this claim in the *Gita* (see 2:51 or page 55 of Mitchell's *Gita* or 8:15-16 or page 109 of Mitchell's *Gita*) and it, at least in part, motivates all of those seeking *moksha* in the sub-continent (see pages 7-8, 10 of your *Asian Philosophies*).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- The stories of his pursuit of *moksha* that lead up to the ‘night of enlightenment’ seem to be an intentional contrast with the self-indulgence of Siddhartha’s younger years.
- For several years Siddhartha learns and masters two yogic meditative practices, in the hopes of transcending *duhkha*. He finds, however, that these practices only yield temporary relief from the vicissitudes of life.
- He then turns to ascetic practice. But even though he succeeds in emaciating his body, he does not find release from *duhkha* (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.152).

Buddhism: the *Buddha*

- Arguably, the purpose of these stories is to ‘show’ that the Buddha tasted *completely* of both indulgence and asceticism before choosing a ‘middle way’ between these *perceived* extremes (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.153-55).
- What is the Middle Way of Siddhartha?
- Using meditation to quiet his mind, Siddhartha *draws conclusions* from his meditative experience about the nature of *duhkha*, its origins and its dissolution, and *using this knowledge* eliminates the origins of *duhkha* in his own life (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, pp.153-54).
- The teaching that encapsulates this Middle Way is contained in the Four Noble Truths (Koller, *Asian Philosophies*, p.154). And we’ll start here in the New Year.

Happy Holidays and
be safe ... remember
to really take a break.