

Chapter 1 : Buddhism in China, Chinese Buddhism Facts and History

It is often asked if there are gods in Buddhism. The short answer is no, but also yes, depending on what you mean by "gods." It also is often asked if it is all right for a Buddhist to believe in God, meaning the creator God as celebrated in Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other philosophies of monotheism.

Mythology Myth in Buddhism is used at various intellectual levels in order to give symbolic and sometimes quasi-historical expression to religious teachings. Accepted on its own terms, Buddhism is a supernatural religion in the sense that, without a buddha to reveal them, the truths remain unknown. Thus, the comparatively simple mythology of the great Buddha myth developed into the far more elaborate tradition of Mahayana. The acceptance of the mythology, whether early or fully developed, has been a crucial factor in the development of Buddhism. It was therefore the extraordinary combination of the historical Shakyamuni and the mythology that became associated with him that set the great religion known as Buddhism on its historical course. In Buddhism myth is continually used at second or even third remove to bolster the primary Buddha myth. Some Buddhist traditions take these subsidiary myths more seriously than others, and in each tradition there are also variations among individual adherents. But, even for those Buddhists who are most skeptical, the myths associated with the Buddha and his saving activity remain central and useful. Shakyamuni in literature and art Traditional literary accounts The traditional biographies of the Buddha Shakyamuni all derive ultimately from early Indian extracanonical rearrangements of the still-earlier scattered canonical accounts of his great acts. These early works grew out of earlier traditions, and ascertaining the dates of their final versions helps in no way to estimate the actual age or reliability of much of the material they contain. The Koreans and Japanese derived their accounts directly from the Chinese, who in turn derived their traditions, via Central Asia, from Indian sources. The Tibetans developed their versions from the same earlier Indian versions. Although other buddhas were recognized from a very early date, the attention of the early community was focused almost exclusively on the person and activities of Shakyamuni. There are no textual indications that he was ever regarded by his followers as a kind of Socratic sage; on the contrary, he was thought to be a perfected yogi who possessed miraculous powers and divine insight, combined with an extraordinary concern for the spiritual advancement of others. As a Great Man, he could have become a universal monarch, but he chose instead the even higher career for which a Great Man was also preparedâ€”the career of a universal religious teacher. According to one very important early text, Shakyamuni was accepted as the seventh in a series of previous buddhas. His contemporary Mahavira, leader of the Jains, was linked to a similar series of 24 great religious figures. The essential mythical idea consists not in the numbers but in the notion of a necessary soteriological lineage. Had it not been for his utter confidence in his achievement, his religious movement would doubtless have died with him. Not only do buddhas appear at more or less regular intervals, but the final appearance of any buddha is the culmination of a whole series of previous lives, characterized by gradual advancement toward enlightenment. The belief accords well with the worldview of the region in which Buddhism originated, and it may be supposed that Shakyamuni believed this of himself. In any case, the earliest-known Buddhist tradition most certainly presented him as so believing. Building on this basis, many stories of events in his previous lives became very popular, some drawn from various folk traditions, others having a more distinctively Buddhist flavour. These stories have played an extraordinarily important role in Buddhist teaching and art. The fundamental myth, however, was sometimes supplemented by later additions. One such addition concerns Mara, who represented the force of spiritual evil that Shakyamuni was conscious of having confronted and overcome. Mara is explicitly identified as Concupiscence and as Death, the twin foes of all those who strive toward the tranquil and immortal state of nirvana. At the same time, Mara is identified with various demons and evil spirits, and the texts usually describe him in these terms. The definitive victory over Mara, on whatever spiritual or popular level it may be understood, remains an inalienable element of the myth. It is just as important as the belief, universally attested in the earliest traditions of all Buddhists, in the omniscience and the miraculous powers of Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni in art and archaeology The primary Buddhist monument, both in early

and present-day Buddhism, is the stupa , originally a reliquary mound or tumulus. Mythologically, the stupa is the supreme symbol of the Buddha in his fully realized state beyond the bonds of mortality. Carved stonework preserved from the 2nd century bce onward, especially from the ancient stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi in India, reveals the great Buddha myth in visual form. Buddha assaulted by Mara and his demon horde, high-relief sculpture from Gandhara; in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands. Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Netherlands In the earliest period symbols were used to represent the figure of the Buddha in scenes from his life as Shakyamuniâ€”a tree indicating his enlightenment, a wheel his first preaching, and a miniature stupa his final nirvanaâ€”because the sanctity of his being was thought to be too great to be portrayed physically. The tree cult involved ancient pre-Buddhist traditions that coalesced with the act of the enlightenment as performed beneath the pipal or bodhi tree *Ficus religiosa*. The wheel was the symbol both of the universal monarch and of the Buddha as universal guide and teacher. The stupa cult, with its extraordinary preoccupation with human relics , may have been a special Buddhist development related to the belief in nirvana as a supramundane state. It is in marked contrast to the usual Hindu Brahmanic horror of mortal remains as unclean. ShakyamuniShakyamuni, wood sculpture with lacquer, inlaid glass, and gilding, from Myanmar Burma , 18thâ€”19th century; in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photograph by Beesnest McClain. Photograph by Howard Cheng. Famous examples are Amaravati in South India, dating from about the 3rd century ce some of its stone carvings are preserved in the British Museum , and Borobudur , which was built in Java between and ce and embodies Mahayana and perhaps Vajrayana components in its symbolic structure. It also displays the close association between later developments and the great Buddha myth of Shakyamuni. Photograph by Katie Chao. Diba; Mary Smith Dorward Fund, Early cave monasteries, famous for their temples with internal stupas set in a kind of sanctuary, are Bhaja, Bhedsa, and Karli , all within reach of Mumbai Bombay. Other cave monasteries famous for the development of the iconography of the Buddha are Kanheri near Mumbai , Nasik, Ellora , and, especially, Ajanta , which contains fine murals dating from the 1st century bce to the 9th century ce. These mainly represent Shakyamuni in his last life and in his previous lives as a compassionate bodhisattva. Magnificent cave temples and monasteries were established in many other Buddhist areas, especially in China. The iconographic traditions of Shakyamuni thrive to this day chiefly in Sri Lanka and the Southeast Asian countries where Theravada Buddhism prevails. In the Mahayana countries of Nepal , Tibet , China , Japan , Mongolia , and Korea , the same iconographic traditions are observed whenever an image or painting of Shakyamuni is required. So long as Buddhism remains, the visual representations of Shakyamuni will continue to be meaningful. Shakyamuni attended by animalsBuddha Shakyamuni attended by animals in the Parileyaka forest, metal sculpture of gilt copper alloy with lacquer, from Thailand, late 19th century; in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The early idea of a series of buddhas in time, first 7 and later 24, soon allowed for the idea of a future buddha Maitreya , whose cult became popular throughout the Buddhist world. Next came the tendency to focus attention on other buddhas in buddha lands distributed through endless space. In the Indian context the most important of the new buddhas that came to be recognized were gradually systematized into a set of five Celestial or Dhyani Buddhas. The buddha who was usually placed at the centre of the group was Vairochana , the Illuminator, the universal sage or chakravartin buddha. He is often depicted using the gesture of preaching or by the symbol of the wheel of dharma. Amitabha was the buddha of the western paradise, around whom an important devotional cult developed. These five celestial buddhas seemâ€”in the early stages of their developmentâ€”to have been celestial manifestations of various aspects of Shakyamuni. Ratnasambhava, the Dhyani Buddha of the south, surrounded by the eight mahabodhisattvas, Nepalese painting. Holle Verlag Two of these buddhas developed an important mythology and cult of their own quite apart from their role in the group of five Dhyani Buddhas. The first of these was Amitabha, the great buddha who presided over the western paradise and became the central figure in the traditions of Pure Land Buddhism. The Pure Land tradition, which probably began in northwestern India about the beginning of the Common Era, was most successful in China and Japan, where it became the dominant Buddhist tradition. The second of the five great buddha figures with a very important independent history was Vairochana. The Dhyani Buddhas prepared the way for the psychophysical theories of the tantras. The five were associated with the centre and four compass points, namely, the

macrocosm, conceived as a unity of the Five Great Elements. They were also identified with the microcosm of the human personality understood in terms of the Five Components skandhas – rupa materiality or form , vedana feelings of pleasure or pain or the absence of either , samjna cognitive perception , samskara the forces that condition the psychic activity of an individual , and vijnana consciousness – and with the Five Great Evils ignorance, wrath, desire, malignity, and envy , typifying normal phenomenal existence. At this stage mythology and psychological symbolization are inextricably bound together. In the tantras, Buddhist mythology overlapped with Hindu mythology. Akshobhya , for example, acquires a fierce Tantric form that is reminiscent of the fierce form of the Hindu god Shiva ; in this form he became known by the Buddhist names Heruka , Hevajra , or Samvara. The Indian god Bhairava, a fierce bull-headed divinity, was adopted by Tantric Buddhists as Vajrabhairava. The bodhisattvas also developed manifold forms. Maitreya , the buddha-yet-to-come, was already known prior to the beginning of the Common Era and became the focus of a major devotional cult that spread across Asia. This early cult seems to have prepared the way for the Pure Land traditions involving Amitabha, which gradually superseded it. From the 1st century ce onward, a number of other celestial bodhisattvas were recognized, and cults of various kinds developed around them. Avalokiteshvara , the lord of compassion, first appeared in India and subsequently became an important figure in virtually every Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. He was recognized as the great patron of Tibet, who is believed to reincarnate in each of the Dalai Lamas. As Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, and Kwansium in Korea, this bodhisattva coalesced with his feminine counterpart, Tara , and became a kindly madonna. Kshitigarbha and his cult spread to China and other areas of eastern Asia. The main points of departure for this mythology were northwestern India and the Bay of Bengal , especially the port of Tamralipti. In Java and Sumatra there is iconographic evidence of the popularity of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and fierce quasi-buddha figures mentioned above. There are even traces in Myanmar, Thailand , and Cambodia of images and paintings of late Mahayana and Vajrayana divinities. Paintings and figures unearthed during the 20th century in Central Asia Chinese Turkistan revealed the manner in which Buddhist architecture, iconography, and painting passed from northwestern India to China and East Asia. Especially important are the paintings of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the caves of Dunhuang 4th to 10th century ce. Bodhisattva, detail of a painted mural, mid-5th century, Bei Northern Wei dynasty, in cave , Dunhuang, Gansu province, China. Until the communist takeover of , the Tibetans preserved and developed Indian Pala styles of iconography. They also preserved ancient techniques and styles of Indian Buddhist painting that were modified and enriched in some schools by much later influence from China. Recurrent mythic themes Mythic figures in the Three Worlds cosmology In the early Buddhist tradition, Gautama is represented as denying the importance of questions concerning the nature of the universe. It was enough to realize that normal existence consists of a process of continual birth, death, and rebirth, a process from which, by following the path the Buddha discovered, one might achieve release. The cosmology, as it was systematized in the Buddhist tradition, included an infinite number of cosmos, all of which have the same structure. Each cosmos has three different realms, each of which is within the confines of samsara the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and is regulated more or less strictly by the law of karma , according to which good and pious deeds are rewarded while evil and impious deeds are punished. At the top of the cosmos is the arupa-loka Pali and Sanskrit: The brahma deities who are associated with the next-lower level, called rupa-loka Pali and Sanskrit: According to an influential version of the primary creation myth , found in the Agganna-sutta, certain brahma deities whose abode was above the destruction begin – as the waters that are left from the old cataclysm start to coagulate below them – to savour the taste of the matter that constitutes these lower strata. As the strata take form, these brahma deities gradually descend into the lower realms and eventually become the first inhabitants of the new earth, from whom all humans descend. Below the realms of the brahma deities is the kama-loka Pali and Sanskrit: The highest of these six destinies is that of the devata s though both gods and goddesses are included among the devatas, the goddesses generally have a secondary role.

Chapter 2 : Buddhism - ReligionFacts

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The statue is considered a great treasure of early Japanese Buddhism. The statue was, according to legend, thereupon pitched into the river. The discarded statue, it is said, was later fished out of the river following the victory temporary of the Soga clan, and is currently installed at Asuka Dera Nara. By the Nara period see below , Buddhism becomes the state creed. The early missionaries and artisans also brought their arts and techniques for reproducing Buddhist icons and sutras. Gilt bronze statues see Asuka Art of the Buddhist deities appeared in great number. It is not until the late Nara and early Heian periods that wood gains supremacy. Buddhist artwork from this early period and henceforth belongs mostly to the Mahayana tradition, although artwork from Theravada and Vajrayana Esoteric traditions is still plentiful. These were called the "Three Scriptures Protecting the State. Buddhist ceremonies at the time were organized predominantly for the court to ensure the welfare of the country, to expel demons of disease , and to ensure rain and thus abundant harvests. Jump to Artwork of Asuka Period , featuring a lengthy overview of Asuka art and numerous photos. Buddhism won the day, but its subsequent success owed much to its tolerance and absorption of the older deities of the indigenous Shinto mountain cults. Before Buddhism, Shinto shamanism and mountain worship were the predominant forms of native faith. Shinto in those days was predominantly based on mountain worship, shamanistic practices, age-old rituals, and festivals that differed widely among various localities. These documents were not disseminated until the subsequent Nara period. For a few more details, click here. Like much about Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, his legend is riddled with folklore. He was a diviner at Mt. Katsuragi on the border between Nara and Osaka. Popular lore says he climbed and consecrated numerous sacred mountains. Bronze and clay were the most popular materials for sculpting. Wood statues were mostly imported or copied from Korean and Chinese models. The emperor turned especially to the teachings of the Kegon School one of the Six Schools of Nara to serve as the basis of government. The scriptural authority of the Kegon school is the Garland Sutra Skt. At the time, it was considered the largest statue of its kind in the world. This, in my mind, is not correct. The great apogee of Japanese Buddhist art occurs later, during the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. Artwork from the Nara period is mostly a reflection of Chinese influences, aristocratic tastes, and the reproduction of imported sculptural models from China and less so from Korea. Wood although highly prized was not yet the dominate material used to make Buddhist imagery. See Making Buddha Statues for details on carving and production techniques. Clay and dry lacquer flourished in the Nara period , but were subsequently overcome by the popularity of wooden sculpture. This allowed Japan to experiment with the casting of giant bronze images, and many examples are still extant. In the prior Asuka period, metal was mostly imported.

Chapter 3 : Lists of deities - Wikipedia

God(s) in Early Buddhism. The Buddha himself rejected metaphysical speculation as a matter of principle, and his teachings focused entirely on the practical ways to end suffering. On the other hand, the Buddha did not explicitly rule out the existence of a God or gods. Shortly after the Buddha's death, a devotional element formed within Buddhism.

See Deceased People below for more. Those who die happily among their family become revered ancestors. Curiously, in Japan, funerals and graveyards are handled entirely by the Buddhist temples, not by the shrines. Inari shrines, however, are guarded by two foxes. Collectively they are called Henge, or shape-shifters, for they can transform into human or inanimate shapes to trick humans. There are hundreds of legends and stories about human encounters with these magical creatures, who can do both good or evil. Michizane courtier in the Heian period was deified after death, for his demise was followed shortly by a plague in Kyoto, said to be his revenge for being exiled. Michizane is worshipped as the god of calligraphy and learning, and every year on the 2nd of January, students go to his shrines to ask for help in the school entrance exams or to offer their first calligraphy of the year. These are families who select a temple based on their own individual convictions, and thereafter they rely on the temple for funeral and memorial services in exchange for monetary donations to the temple.

Deities of Roads and Borders. Also called Sai no Kami or Dorokujin in some areas. These deities reside in stone markers found at village boundaries, in mountain passes, and along country byways. These stone markers may bear only inscriptions, but often they depict human forms, in particular the images of a man and woman -- the latter manifestation is revered as the kami of marriage and fertility. Shrine decorations, talismans, and other shrine ornaments used during the local New-Year holiday are gathered together and burned in bonfires. They are typically piled onto bamboo, tree branches, and straw, and set on fire to wish for good health and a rich harvest in the coming year. The practice of burning shrine decorations has many names, including Sai-no-Kami, Sagicho, and Dondo Yaki. According to some, the crackling sound of the burning bamboo tells the listener whether the year will be lucky or not. Children throw their calligraphy into the bonfires -- and if it flies high into the sky, it means they will become good at calligraphy. But precedents are ample in the Buddhist world. In the early centuries following the birth of Buddhism in India around BC, Jizo became known as the guardian of travelers and pilgrims, and statues of his image could be found along pilgrimage routes and mountain passes in India and Southeast Asia. Buddhism was introduced to Japan much later, in the 6th century AD. The tradition of stone markers was also eagerly adopted by Japan, where even today one can find groupings of six Jizo statues standing guard on the high roads or at busy intersections. Among the many trails zigzagging the foothills of Kamakura, and elsewhere throughout Japan, one can also find solitary figures of Jizo guarding the way. These objects are not symbols of the spirits -- rather they are the abodes in which the spirits reside. The abode of the kami is considered sacred, and is usually encircled with a shimenawa rope festooned with sacred white paper. For photos and further details, please visit the Shrine Guide. The Japanese believe this world is inhabited by myriad kami -- nature spirits that can do either good or evil. The noted Japanese scholar Motoori Norinaga defined kami as anything that was "superlatively awe-inspiring," either noble or base, good or evil, rough or gentle, strong or weak, lofty or submerged -- there is no definitive standard of good and evil, there is no moral code. Things are as they are. Even the evil bloodsucking Kappa has some redeeming qualities -- i. Nature Spirits, Earth Elements, and Powerful Forces Sun, wind, rivers, lakes, trees, rocks, mountains, agriculture, war. The most important kami is the Sun Goddess Amaterasu. To the Japanese, Mt. Tour groups and individuals climb it regularly as an act of worship. Agriculture itself is deemed a powerful force. Inari, the kami of agriculture, has shrines all over Japan. Hachiman, the god of war, is also highly revered at Hachimangu shrines throughout Japan. One of the most predominant is Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, located in Kamakura. It was founded by the military lord Minamoto Yoritomo, who established the Kamakura shogunate, and a sub-shrine dedicated to the Minamoto clan is within its compound. These creatures of Shinto mythology are found near irrigation waterways, in lakes, ponds, springs and wells. They can be depicted as a serpent, an eel, a fish, or a kappa. According to the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics Kokugakuin University, women have played an important role in

the history of Suijin worship in Japan. For reasons unknown to me, Shinto does not deal with death and funerals. In modern Japan, funerals and graveyards are handled by Buddhist temples. Nonetheless, Shinto asserts that all people are endowed with a spirit or a soul, called reikon, and when we die, we all become kami. Those who die peacefully and happily among their family members become revered ancestors. Those who die unhappily, or violently, or without a family to care for their departed spirit, or without the correct funeral and post-funeral rites, become hungry ghosts one of the lowest states of existence in Buddhism; click here for details. These hungry ghosts wander about causing trouble; they are typically called yurei tormented ghosts.

Shinto Kami Deities For a more comprehensive deity list, click here. Widely believed to be a goddess, and to grant abundant catches if worshiped when catches are poor. Umi no kami God of the sea. The deity ruling the ocean, in fact considered to be three deities called Watatsumi no Kami. Among groups with ocean-related occupations, many taboos are placed on words i. Below text from Kokugakuin University [http:](http://) Believed to live in the sea or the "other world" at the bottom of the sea, the umi no kami is a nature deity believed to have dominion over ocean winds and waves, the tides, and rains. It was anciently believed that if the sea kami were angered, it would bring high winds and disturb the activity of fishing, but if properly placated, it would assure fishermen safe passage for their boats, and bountiful catches of fish. The sea was called wata or wata no hara the ocean plain, with the result that the sea kami was commonly referred to as Watatsumi. According to the myths of the Nihongi and Kojiki, the sea kami Watatsumi appears as the offspring of Izanagi and Izanami. The ocean tutelaries worshipped at the shrines Sumiyoshi Jinja and Munakata Taisha are believed to be related to this same Watatsumi of myth. The kami Ebisu is likewise worshiped as a sea kami by fishermen who believe the deity is responsible for "luck" in fishing. In Kojiki and Nihongi, sea kami are portrayed as living in another world called Tokoyo or Watatsumi, while in Okinawa such kami are thought to live in palaces in paradisaical lands called Nirai and Kanai, located far beyond or under the sea. Such lands are viewed as being accessible to human beings, and legends can be found widely throughout Japan relating stories of individuals led to undersea dragon palace in return for aiding sea turtles or fish, who were considered servants of the sea kami.

Chapter 4 : Shinto Deities in Japan, Japanese Shinto-Buddhist Syncretic Deities

Gods in early Buddhism: A study in their social and mythological milieu as depicted in the nikāyas of the Pāli Canon.
By M. M. J. Marasinghe. pp. xviii,

Create an Account Who are the Gods in Buddhism? Most theologians consider Buddhism as spiritual philosophy, not entirely religion. The focus in Buddhism is the practice of meditation and purification every Buddhist has to perform to attain Enlightenment. The Buddhist teachings are therefore, not a way to venerate and follow the orders of a Supreme Being in order to benefit from its power. The purpose of following the spiritual path in Buddhism is to attain such power by itself without having to follow any higher form of being that would bequeath or withdraw such graces. Although Gautama Buddha Buddhism God is venerated amongst all Buddhist order, it is not done so because of the fact that he is indeed a Higher Being. For unlike the Christian God, who is entirely separated from the realms of man, Buddhahood is achievable by any sentient being. The very essence of a Creator God is not an issue in Buddhism. Although Brahma once claimed being the Creator of heaven and earth, it is not something that the Buddhist put emphasis on because Brahma does not hold the answer to everything. In Buddhism, everything in the world is created by One cosmic truth. That is why, the greatest truth in Buddhism says that all is one, one is all. Therefore, every sentient being is worthy of being a God himself, only if he is able to annihilate oneself from himself by practicing the ways of the Buddha. Annihilation of oneself can be attained through different Buddhist practices that aim towards meditation and purification. Prostration, recitation of the names of the Buddhist Gods, creating mandalas, fasting, self-exile, Kalachakra Tantra, are only a few of the ways a sentient being can do to achieve Buddhahood which means being one with the Buddha, or being one with the God. Buddhas are therefore worshipped not because they are Supreme Beings but because they were also once bodhisattvas who attained their Buddhahood by practicing what it is to become Buddha. They are venerated because of the spiritual path they have taken which inculcates the virtues, struggles, and sacrifices they had to go through in order for them to attain the Enlightenment they now have. Buddhism therefore, emphasizes the way of life every follower should take, not on what the God has in store for his follower. It is not about the concept of the Creator Being but on the contemplation of life because life in general is part of oneself and oneself is part of life. It only goes to show that a sentient being is the creator of all things and everything creates a sentient being. Again, all is one and one is all. As Gautama Buddha himself said: With our thoughts we make the world. If you say that the world is created by God then it is a no brainer that God created both the good and the bad and thus he is the only one who can change things. In Buddhism, you are the creator of your life and thus you have the choice to change it the way you want it to be "only if you are worthy. If you will think that God makes all changes in the world then there will be no more effort to make the world work for its inhabitants. In Buddhism, it does not have to be the case. Religion therefore, should not be dependent on God and salvation but on the way of life you have to perform which is never selfish and in fact, always for the happiness of other people. This is the only way to achieve Enlightenment. Although the Buddha once proclaimed him as the god above all gods, it was never discounted that every sentient being does not have the chance to become god. But God as we speak is the highest form and nothing can be higher than that as Buddha said. The Dharmakaya is also very similar with the Christian concept of Trinity as He is part of the doctrine of Trikaya. It is the aspect of Buddha that asserts His presence in all phenomena and that He transcends all time and space, and thus, is eternal. It is also the benevolent aspect of the Buddha, being the Buddha who returns back to earth to grant salvation to those who are worthy of it. In a way, the only difference would be the teachings on how such salvation is achieved. Both Christianity and Buddhism teach a way of life to follow. The only difference is that Christianity greatly emphasizes salvation as the motivation towards following such way of life. Whereas in Buddhism, it has to be otherwise, for one to achieve salvation through Enlightenment, he has to have genuine compassion and wisdom. There should not be any thought towards rebirth and what happiness it may bring you, instead, the emphasis should be on Awakening yourself towards the wisdom, and the practice that would give you such eternal life. That is why the concept of purification is greatly

emphasized in Buddhism. Having said it, this has to be clear that Buddhism is not at all atheistic in nature. Although it teaches that anyone can attain Buddhahood , and thus can be god, it does not mean that such consciousness asserts the non-existence of a higher being. This misconception often lies on the fact that Buddhists refuse to call it God to separate it from the concept of the Christian God. The Buddhist notion of a higher being is something experiential. It is safe to say that Buddhism is pantheism, which takes the notion of God as a totality of all the things existing. In a way, veneration of God as One is veneration of All. List of Gods in Buddhism.

Chapter 5 : Do Buddhists believe in God? | calendrierdelascience.com

Buddhist thought consistently rejects the notion of a creator deity. It teaches the concept of gods, heavens and rebirths in its Saá'fsÅ•ra doctrine, but it considers none of these gods as a creator. Buddhism posits that mundane deities such as Mahabrahma are misconstrued to be a creator.

The foundations of Buddhism The cultural context Buddhism arose in northeastern India sometime between the late 6th century and the early 4th century bce, a period of great social change and intense religious activity. Many modern scholars believe that the historical Buddha lived from about 563 to about 483 bce. Many others believe that he lived about 250 years later from about 480 to about 380 bce. At this time in India, there was much discontent with Brahmanic Hindu high-caste sacrifice and ritual. In northwestern India there were ascetics who tried to create a more personal and spiritual religious experience than that found in the Vedas Hindu sacred scriptures. In the literature that grew out of this movement, the Upanishads , a new emphasis on renunciation and transcendental knowledge can be found. Northeastern India, which was less influenced by Vedic tradition, became the breeding ground of many new sects. Society in this area was troubled by the breakdown of tribal unity and the expansion of several petty kingdoms. Religiously, this was a time of doubt, turmoil, and experimentation. A proto-Samkhya group i. New sects abounded, including various skeptics e. The most important sects to arise at the time of the Buddha, however, were the Ajivikas Ajivakas , who emphasized the rule of fate niyati , and the Jains , who stressed the need to free the soul from matter. Although the Jains, like the Buddhists, have often been regarded as atheists, their beliefs are actually more complicated. Unlike early Buddhists, both the Ajivikas and the Jains believed in the permanence of the elements that constitute the universe, as well as in the existence of the soul. According to tradition, the Buddha himself was a yogiâ€”that is, a miracle-working ascetic. Buddhism, like many of the sects that developed in northeastern India at the time, was constituted by the presence of a charismatic teacher, by the teachings this leader promulgated , and by a community of adherents that was often made up of renunciant members and lay supporters. In the case of Buddhism, this pattern is reflected in the Triratna â€”i. One was called the Hinayana Sanskrit: This more conservative group, which included what is now called the Theravada Pali: The other major group, which calls itself the Mahayana Sanskrit: These supposedly more advanced teachings were expressed in sutras that the Buddha purportedly made available only to his more advanced disciples. As Buddhism spread, it encountered new currents of thought and religion. In some Mahayana communities, for example, the strict law of karma the belief that virtuous actions create pleasure in the future and nonvirtuous actions create pain was modified to accommodate new emphases on the efficacy of ritual actions and devotional practices. During the second half of the 1st millennium ce, a third major Buddhist movement, Vajrayana Sanskrit: This movement was influenced by gnostic and magical currents pervasive at that time, and its aim was to obtain spiritual liberation and purity more speedily. Despite these vicissitudes , Buddhism did not abandon its basic principles. Instead, they were reinterpreted, rethought, and reformulated in a process that led to the creation of a great body of literature. These Pali texts have served as the basis for a long and very rich tradition of commentaries that were written and preserved by adherents of the Theravada community. Consequently, from the first sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath to the most recent derivations, there is an indisputable continuityâ€”a development or metamorphosis around a central nucleusâ€”by virtue of which Buddhism is differentiated from other religions. Giuseppe Tucci Joseph M. Reynolds The life of the Buddha The teacher known as the Buddha lived in northern India sometime between the mid-6th and the mid-4th centuries before the Common Era. In ancient India the title buddha referred to an enlightened being who has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and achieved freedom from suffering. According to the various traditions of Buddhism, buddhas have existed in the past and will exist in the future. Some Buddhists believe that there is only one buddha for each historical age, others that all beings will become buddhas because they possess the buddha nature tathagatagarbha. The historical figure referred to as the Buddha whose life is known largely through legend was born on the northern edge of the Ganges River basin, an area on the periphery of the ancient civilization of North India, in what is today southern Nepal. He is said to have lived for 80 years. Scholarship in the 20th century limited that

range considerably, with opinion generally divided between those who believed he lived from about 623 BCE and those who believed he lived about a century later. Information about his life derives largely from Buddhist texts, the earliest of which were produced shortly before the beginning of the Common Era and thus several centuries after his death. According to the traditional accounts, however, the Buddha was born into the ruling Shakya clan and was a member of the Kshatriya, or warrior, caste. His mother, Maha Maya, dreamt one night that an elephant entered her womb, and 10 lunar months later, while she was strolling in the garden of Lumbini, her son emerged from under her right arm. His early life was one of luxury and comfort, and his father protected him from exposure to the ills of the world, including old age, sickness, and death. At age 16 he married the princess Yashodhara, who would eventually bear him a son. At 29, however, the prince had a profound experience when he first observed the suffering of the world while on chariot rides outside the palace. He resolved then to renounce his wealth and family and live the life of an ascetic. During the next six years, he practiced meditation with several teachers and then, with five companions, undertook a life of extreme self-mortification. One day, while bathing in a river, he fainted from weakness and therefore concluded that mortification was not the path to liberation from suffering. Abandoning the life of extreme asceticism, the prince sat in meditation under a tree and received enlightenment, sometimes identified with understanding the Four Noble Truths. For the next 45 years, the Buddha spread his message throughout northeastern India, established orders of monks and nuns, and received the patronage of kings and merchants. At the age of 80, he became seriously ill. He then met with his disciples for the last time to impart his final instructions and passed into nirvana. His body was then cremated and the relics distributed and enshrined in stupas funerary monuments that usually contained relics, where they would be venerated. Instead, he must be viewed within the context of Buddhist theories of time and history. Among these theories is the belief that the universe is the product of karma, the law of the cause and effect of actions. The beings of the universe are reborn without beginning in six realms as gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings. The means of escape remains unknown until, over the course of millions of lifetimes, a person perfects himself, ultimately gaining the power to discover the path out of samsara and then revealing that path to the world. A person who has set out to discover the path to freedom from suffering and then to teach it to others is called a bodhisattva. A person who has discovered that path, followed it to its end, and taught it to the world is called a buddha. Because buddhas appear so rarely over the course of time and because only they reveal the path to liberation from suffering, the appearance of a buddha in the world is considered a momentous event. The story of a particular buddha begins before his birth and extends beyond his death. It encompasses the millions of lives spent on the path toward enlightenment and Buddhahood and the persistence of the buddha through his teachings and his relics after he has passed into nirvana. The historical Buddha is regarded as neither the first nor the last buddha to appear in the world. According to some traditions he is the 7th buddha, according to another he is the 25th, and according to yet another he is the 4th. Although the Buddha did not leave any written works, various versions of his teachings were preserved orally by his disciples. In the centuries following his death, hundreds of texts called sutras were attributed to him and would subsequently be translated into the languages of Asia. They usually allude to the place and time they were preached and to the audience to which they were addressed. Suffering, impermanence, and no-self The Buddha based his entire teaching on the fact of human suffering and the ultimately dissatisfying character of human life. The conditions that make an individual are precisely those that also give rise to dissatisfaction and suffering. Individuality implies limitation; limitation gives rise to desire; and, inevitably, desire causes suffering, since what is desired is transitory. Living amid the impermanence of everything and being themselves impermanent, human beings search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the transitoriness of human existence—in short, for enlightenment. The Buddha departed from traditional Indian thought in not asserting an essential or ultimate reality in things. Moreover, he rejected the existence of the soul as a metaphysical substance, though he recognized the existence of the self as the subject of action in a practical and moral sense. Life is a stream of becoming, a series of manifestations and extinctions. The concept of the individual ego is a popular delusion; the objects with which people identify themselves—fortune, social position, family, body, and even mind—are not their true selves. There is nothing permanent, and, if only the

permanent deserved to be called the self, or atman, then nothing is self. To make clear the concept of no-self anatman, Buddhists set forth the theory of the five aggregates or constituents khandhas of human existence: Human existence is only a composite of the five aggregates, none of which is the self or soul. A person is in a process of continuous change, and there is no fixed underlying entity. Karma The belief in rebirth, or samsara, as a potentially endless series of worldly existences in which every being is caught up was already associated with the doctrine of karma Sanskrit: According to the doctrine, good conduct brings a pleasant and happy result and creates a tendency toward similar good acts, while bad conduct brings an evil result and creates a tendency toward similar evil acts. Some karmic acts bear fruit in the same life in which they are committed, others in the immediately succeeding one, and others in future lives that are more remote. This furnishes the basic context for the moral life. The acceptance by Buddhists of the teachings of karma and rebirth and the concept of the no-self gives rise to a difficult problem: Indian non-Buddhist philosophers attacked this point in Buddhist thought, and many modern scholars have also considered it to be an insoluble problem. The relation between existences in rebirth has been explained by the analogy of fire, which maintains itself unchanged in appearance and yet is different in every moment—what may be called the continuity of an ever-changing identity. The law of dependent origination The Buddha, according to the early texts, also discovered the law of dependent origination paticca-samuppada, whereby one condition arises out of another, which in turn arises out of prior conditions. Every mode of being presupposes another immediately preceding mode from which the subsequent mode derives, in a chain of causes. According to the classical rendering, the 12 links in the chain are: According to this law, the misery that is bound with sensate existence is accounted for by a methodical chain of causation. Despite a diversity of interpretations, the law of dependent origination of the various aspects of becoming remains fundamentally the same in all schools of Buddhism. The Eightfold Path The law of dependent origination, however, raises the question of how one may escape the continually renewed cycle of birth, suffering, and death. It is not enough to know that misery pervades all existence and to know the way in which life evolves; there must also be a means to overcome this process. The means to this end is found in the Eightfold Path, which is constituted by right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditational attainment. Nirvana The aim of Buddhist practice is to be rid of the delusion of ego and thus free oneself from the fetters of this mundane world. One who is successful in doing so is said to have overcome the round of rebirths and to have achieved enlightenment. This is the final goal in most Buddhist traditions, though in some cases particularly though not exclusively in some Pure Land schools in China and Japan the attainment of an ultimate paradise or a heavenly abode is not clearly distinguished from the attainment of release. The living process is again likened to a fire. Its remedy is the extinction of the fire of illusion, passions, and cravings. The Buddha, the Enlightened One, is one who is no longer kindled or inflamed. Many poetic terms are used to describe the state of the enlightened human being—the harbour of refuge, the cool cave, the place of bliss, the farther shore.

Get this from a library! Gods in early Buddhism: a study in their social and mythological milieu as depicted in the nikāyas of the Pali Canon. [M M J Marasinghe].

That sphere is to be realized where the ear stops and the perception of sound fades That sphere should be realized. One may take guidance from a teacher, but insightful awareness and experiential knowledge of the Dhamma are vital to progress on the path. Unlike the other major religions of the world, Buddhism is not centered on the concept of God as the upholder and sum of all or a universal supreme being, who is responsible for the creation and dissolution of the world and the existence of sentient beings. Buddhism does not even support the idea of an eternal and unchanging soul residing in the body. According to Buddhism the whole existence is in a state of flux, and there is nothing that is either permanent or unchanging. Some things may last longer, but never forever. The Buddhist scriptures do confirm the existence of devas or celestial beings, bodhisattvas or pure beings, heavens and hells and other planes of existence. They may last for eons. However, none of them are permanent entities. They are all subject to change, impermanence and evolution. It is said that the Buddha either remained silent or discouraged speculation when he was asked questions about the existence of God or a Supreme Being. He wanted his followers to remain focused upon Nirvana and the permanent resolution of suffering, without distractions and wasteful discussions. Therefore, he did his best to keep them focused upon that single and virtuous goal, without becoming distracted by theological speculation or intellectual disputation, which was the common preoccupation of many scholars and religious teachers of his time. However, his silence does not mean that he was an agnostic or he favored the notion of God as the ruler and creator of the worlds and beings. His silence was not an affirmation of the existence of an eternal creator. The Buddha did not believe in hidden causes but apparent causes, which made sense to the mind and the intellect and which were humanly relatable, experiential and explicable. One may wonder if it was so, why he accepted karma and reincarnation as governing laws, which were in some respects abstract concepts. Karma was a hidden process of cause and effect, but with mindfulness practice its working could be discerned and experienced in the world by one and all. No supernatural testimony was required to establish its universality or working. Therefore, he accepted karma as an operating principle. He believed in reincarnation because he saw his own past lives and probably those of others in contemplative states and understood their significance in attaining the Buddhahood. However, he held that the incarnating entity was not an eternal soul but a temporary formation. Seven reasons why the existence of God is unacceptable On occasions, he expressed his opinions about creation and the role of God. When Ananthapindika, a wealthy young man, met the Buddha at a bamboo grove at Rajagriha, the Buddha made a few statements before him about the existence of God and the real cause behind the creation of beings in this world. Those views are summarized as below: If God is indeed the creator of all living things, then all things here should submit to his power unquestioningly. Like the vessels produced by a potter, they should remain without any individuality of their own. If that is so, how can there be an opportunity for anyone to practice virtue? If this world is indeed created by God, then there should be no sorrow or calamity or evil in this world and no need for the existence of the principle of karma since all deeds, both pure and impure, must come from Him. If it is not so, then there must be some other cause besides God which is behind him, in which case He would not be self-existent. It is not convincing that the Absolute has created us, because that which is absolute cannot be a cause. All things here arise from different causes. Then can we say that the Absolute is the cause of all things alike? If the Absolute is pervading them, then certainly It is not their creator. If we consider the Self as the maker, why did it not make things pleasant? Why and how should it create so much sorrow and suffering for itself? It is neither God nor the self nor some causeless chance which creates us. It is our deeds which produce both good and bad results according to the law of causation. We should therefore "abandon the heresy of worshipping God and of praying to him. We should stop all speculation and vain talk about such matters and practice good so that good may result from our good deeds. For such reasons, the Buddha did not encourage speculation on the existence of Isvara, God among his disciples. He wanted them to confine themselves to what was within

their field of awareness, that is, to understand the causes of suffering and work for their mitigation. For the same reason, he discouraged speculation upon the nature of Nirvana. He preached that initially each being was a product of ignorance and illusion and subject to suffering, karma and transmigration. Life was full of suffering and it could be resolved only by overcoming desires and attraction and aversion. The Dhamma served as the lamp in the darkness of existential suffering. By knowing it and practising it one could find a way to escape from the cycle of births and deaths and from suffering itself. Therefore, for their final liberation he urged his disciples to contemplate upon the Four Noble Truths, practice the Eightfold path and lead a virtuous life by performing good deeds. He declared that by ending the transient states of having, becoming, being and changing and removing the defilements of the mind and body they could resolve suffering and enter the state of beatitude or Nirvana on a lasting basis. Thus, in Buddhism knowledge of the Dhamma has far greater significance than idle speculation in resolving suffering. One may inquire into it and contemplate upon it since it is experiential, relatable and verifiable, unlike the speculative subjects such as the nature of God or the existence of God and soul. The complex and diverse nature of Buddhism It is difficult to categorize Buddhism as atheistic, theistic or agnostic because it has aspects of them but does not particularly fit well into any of them. For example, Buddhism may not believe in God and may not be considered a theistic tradition, but it does believe in the Buddha and the Buddhahood. Indeed, it not only believes in the Buddha but also in numerous past and future Buddhas who exist in numerous higher worlds. Buddhists worship them with devotion and reverence and make them offerings just as the Hindus worship their gods. Thus, as explained in the concluding part of this discussion, Buddhism is a diverse religion, with elements of theistic, atheistic and agnostic beliefs and practices. However, it cannot conclusively be placed in any of them with enough justification because of its inherent contradictions. Although it was founded by the Buddha and its teachings are more organized, concrete and systematic, Buddhism, just as Hinduism, is a complex religion. It underwent further changes after his death, resulting in the formation of many sects, sub-sects and regional versions, which made it even more complex. Some of them made a radical departure from the original teachings of the Buddha to the extent that they stand in their own light as independent religions. Were he alive, the Buddha would have been surprised to witness the emergence of so many traditions that rely upon his name to mark their teachings and philosophy but show a marked deviation from his very teachings, doctrinal expositions and stand points. What mostly binds them to Buddhism and keeps them in its fold is their adherence to the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. While scholars may keep arguing about the essential nature of Buddhism it is the firm opinion of this writer that according to the teachings of the Buddha it is difficult to place Buddhism on the same footing as Hinduism or Christianity and consider it a theistic tradition. It is theistic only in the sense that some of its sects especially those of Mahayana believe in a deity, the Buddha, who is not God but seem to possess some attributes of God. The centrality of Dhamma rather than God The Buddha did not ascribe any role to God either in creation or in human suffering or in the liberation of beings. For the Buddha, the world was a godless world, a formation or aggregate of objects and living beings, in which both good and evil were produced by the actions of individual beings, and their fate was determined by the law of causation karma. While beings which lacked intelligence had no choice until they evolved through rebirths, human beings and those above them had a unique opportunity to exercise their discerning intellect buddhi and chose right actions and the principles of right living to escape from the law of karma and the cycle of births and deaths. Therefore, to awaken their minds to the idea of righteous living and virtuous actions, he taught the world the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, ascribing no role to God in either of them and putting the entire burden of resolving individual suffering upon the individuals themselves. In Buddhism, there is nothing like the grace of God which can resolve the karma of a devotee. An arhant enlightened master or a selfless monk may transfer his good karma to a suffering soul out of compassion, as believed in some sects, but such decisions are purely personal in which neither God nor Buddha has any role. While drawing his conclusions and formulating the principles of Dharma and the Code of Conduct Vinaya for the monks or in his teachings, the Buddha assiduously avoided to the extent possible all manners of speculation about supernatural matters and abstract concepts, keeping his focus firmly fixed upon the causes as well as solutions to the problems of human existence within the realm of the mind and its abilities, and without alluding to anything beyond them.

If he had any opinions or knowledge about transcendence or eternal realities, he kept them out of the purview of his discussion and deliberations to avoid causing confusion and delusion. Even when he was pressed for a clear answer, he remained silent, knowing that it would be a distraction for his followers in their quest for Nirvana, and for himself in his attempts to show them the right way and teach them the right knowledge. Besides, speculation would not lead to right perception, right awareness, right understanding and right knowledge. **Belief in Gods, Bodhisattvas and Primordial Buddhas** While Buddhism does not believe in the existence of an all pervading eternal God who is the cause of the causes and the soul of the souls, it does believe in the existence of Noble beings or gods of heaven. The Buddhist texts mention the names of several gods and goddesses, whose names are similar in many cases to those of the gods and goddesses of Hinduism. However, while the deities of Hinduism are immortal, those of Buddhism are not. They live for longer duration of time, but like all other beings, they are prone to decay and subject to the cycle of births and deaths. They may be even humans who evolve into gods through self-effort. Brahma figures frequently in Pali Canon, which refers to not one but several Brahmas inhabiting different planes. Brahma is the leader of the heaven. However, he is not a creator god, and in all the worlds where he presides he is also subject to change and decay as the other gods. Apart from them, Mahayana Buddhism refers to the Bodhisattvas or compassionate beings and primordial Buddhas who inhabit the higher heavens and act as the guardians of the world. The Bodhisattvas are truth beings, who are fully qualified for Nirvana. However, out of compassion they decide to postpone their liberation and work for alleviating the suffering of the sentient beings upon earth. The primordial Buddhas such as Samantabhadra, Vajradhara, Vairochana, and Adi-Buddha among others are personalized embodiments of different aspects of Buddha Nature. They are pure beings who possess dharmakayas bodies of truth. **Buddhist gods** The gods of Buddhism have greater powers than humans, but unlike the gods of Hinduism, they do not possess absolute powers. They can have an impact upon our lives and destinies, but they cannot change or alter the course of life upon earth beyond a point. Besides, the gods are not liberated beings. Their actions have consequences. Hence, just as humans they too are subject to the law of karma. If they indulge in wrong actions, they will fall down from heaven into lower worlds according to their deeds. However, the same is not true in case of the primordial Buddhas. They are not only free from decay and the law of karma but also endowed with supernatural powers. According to Buddhism life in heaven is not a class privilege, which only a few chosen ones are entitled to enjoy according to the will or at the pleasure of God. The gods are not created by a supreme God. Their divinity is the consequences of their good karma and their personal choice.

Chapter 7 : Nepal online store - Nepalese handicrafts, Buddha Statues, pashmina, Thangka Paintings

Buddhist tradition speaks about 18 schools of early Buddhism, although we know that there were more than that, probably around A Buddhist school named Sthaviravada (in Sanskrit "school of the elders") was the most powerful of the early schools of Buddhism.

There are buddhas in female form and goddesses who are bodhisattvas. There are also historical figures such as lineage founders, and they all can function as deities. There are also yidam s and dharma protectors in peaceful, semi-wrathful or wrathful form. The dakini , a special type of deity, is discussed separately. What follows is not a definitive catalogue, by any means. The best known of the female Tibetan Buddhist deities is Tara. White Tara at Tibet House. Notice the eye in her palm and in her forehead. Listen to the sadhana [ritual] of White Tara Tibetan: Dolkar by the monks of Zongcho, and hear her mantra. Tara is a Buddha who is depicted in various ways that reflect her activity. She can be peaceful or semi-wrathful; alone or surrounded by 21 manifestations or aspects. Besides Green Tara and her several aspects that are generally designated by colour, some other distinctive female deities are: The Wishful-filling Jewel form of Tara who is also a protector. Vajra Turquoise Lamp the Longchen Nyinthig lineage-protector who bears an arrow tied with five-coloured silks in her right hand and a divination mirror in her left. In the life of yogi, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, she appeared when he was starving and offered him food. Ekajati or Ekadzati Tib. Maha-pancha Devi appear in the entourage of White Vajradarana. They include the source of all earthly wealth as Pratishara Tib. Kalasiddhi was one of the consorts of Guru Rinpoche. Hrih is her seed syllable and her mantra: Om Kurukulle hri svaha! Karaikal is a town near Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, India. She was transformed into a crone to be able to devote herself completely. Kwan Yin Perceiver of Sounds [Cantonese: Goong Yam] is a Chinese form of the bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara that is considered to be female. Lamanteri is the Mongolian, 8-armed, semi-wrathful form of Green Tara who is sometimes depicted with the 21 aspects of the Praises to Tara surrounding her. White, dancing dakini, sky-clad but for her bone ornaments, holding a medium-sized drum in her raised right hand. She rides a horse, attended by animal-headed dakinis. Besides her and Yeshe Tsogyal Dechen Gyalmo who function as deities, there are other consorts. Marichi Ozer Chenma is reddish-gold with 8 arms. She is the embodiment of sunrise or dawn. As a form of Tara, she is depicted standing, one pair of hands holding a needle and thread. Her most widely found image is the one with three faces , one of which is that of a sow , in which she drives a cart pulled by seven swine. Her practice may also derive from that of the Vedic dawn goddess, Ushas. She is also comparable to the Greek goddess, Eos, who daily went out to rouse both Day and Night in her chariot drawn by a number of horses. The multiple animals might relate to the fact that in ancient times, the sun appeared rather differently, accompanied by lesser lights.

From early in the history of Buddhism, the Buddha was recognized as a fully perfected yogi who possessed great religious insight and miraculous powers. Among the Buddha's disciples, Maha Moggallana was especially known for his yogic attainments and magical powers.

The Buddha B. The fully enlightened Buddha, the Buddha of our time. Historically, the founder of Buddhism, but to Buddhists he is considered the person who rediscovered the teachings after they had died out. Photo above is from Bodh Gaya, India, 80 foot 24 meter high statue. Other types of fully enlightened people are as follows: One who attains full enlightenment, but does not teach others. All three types of buddha listed above are attained by study, meditation, morality, concentration, tranquility, hard work, and wisdom and all are fully enlightened saints who attain nibbana nirvana. Statues of the Buddha are in many different postures, but a popular choice for altars is that of the earth witness where the Buddha is seen with one hand reaching for the ground as the earth was witness to his enlightenment in B. A Chinese monk from the Chan precursor to Zen school. He may have been a buddha, such as an arahant enlightened , but not THE Buddha of our time. A common statue at Chinese restaurants and temples so that many have confused him as the founder of Buddhism, which is not the case. He is always shown with a big belly as he is said to have enjoyed candy and also passed candy out to children. In some schools of Mahayana Buddhism, an actual person who at death passed into a heavenly realm and presides over one of the heavens as a healer who can be called upon. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is believed that meditation on the Medicine Buddha can help decrease physical and mental illness and suffering. Amitabha Buddha is a semi-legendary buddha who presides over the Western Pure Land according to some schools of Mahayana Buddhism. Devotees call upon his name for entrance to this heavenly realm, where once there enlightenment will be easier to attain. Statues of Amitabha appear very similar to statues of Buddha, with the main difference being that the hands form two circles in the lap of Amitabha. Kwan Yin is the most important female figure in many Buddhist traditions. She is the goddess of compassion. In Buddhism gods are impermanent higher beings who are still subject to rebirth, they are not absolute power deities or creators, as in the western use of the term God. Kwan Yin is a rebirth of the bodhisattva Avolikiteshvara, a monk from a previous eon who was reborn in a heavenly realm and filled with compassion for all living beings. One legend states that Avolikiteshvara chose to be reborn as a beautiful woman to marry a famous king and convince him to become a Buddhist. Maya devi is the mother of the Buddha. She died 7 days after giving birth to Buddha. She was reborn to a heavenly realm and the Buddha went to that realm after enlightenment to teach her higher psychological-scientific teachings Abhidhamma. Tara is a goddess in the Mahayana tradition and is especially venerated in vajrayana Tibetan Buddhism. She is the mother of liberation, and represents the virtues of success in work and achievements. Sariputta Sariputra was the first chief male disciple of the Buddha. He was known for his caring, humility, patience, and especially his wisdom. He learned the higher teachings from the Buddha and was foremost in explaining it. Moggallana was the second of the foremost monk disciples of the Buddha. He was known for his ease at supernormal abilities including reading the mind of others, using the mind to reach heavenly realms, speaking to gods and ghosts, walking through walls, walking on water, and traveling at the speed of light. His kingdom was vast. He renounced all violence after becoming a Buddhist. Sujata is the woman who offered food rice cooked in milk to the Buddha when he was performing his ascetic practices long fasts before enlightenment. The Buddha was near death as this was before he realized and practiced the middle way. Later after enlightenment, a heavy storm came and a large cobra snake protected the Buddha. It is interesting to note that in the Judeo-Christian bible the Fall of man is blamed on a woman and a snake, but in Buddhism the world is saved by helping the Buddha from death by a woman and a snake. Sujata would later become a bhikkhuni Buddhist nun. Maha Pajapati Gotami was the aunt and step-mother of the Buddha. She became the first nun in Buddhism and became fully enlightened arahant. Khema was one of the wives of King Bimbisara and was very beautiful. One day the Buddha explained to her impermanence in a way to show her that the beauty would not last. Khema practiced and became enlightened and then decided to become a nun. She penetrated to

the truth very quickly and was the chief nun during the time of Buddha. Dhammadinna was the wife of a merchant. She and her husband became Buddhists and she decided to ordain as a bhikkhuni nun. Shortly thereafter she became enlightened arahant. Her husband progressed well, but to the stage of non-returner, which is not yet enlightened. She surpassed her husband, which became one of many examples of where women exceeded either their husbands or their teachers in spiritual progress, once again showing the gender equality in the teachings of the Buddha. On one occasion Ven. Dhammadinna was giving a Dhamma talk and the Buddha sat silently and listened. After the talk, the Buddha said that he could not have said the teachings it any better and praised her vigorously. Sanghamitta was the daughter of King Ashoka. She was a nun who spread the Order to Sri Lanka and brought with her a sapling from the original Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. This marked one of the key moments in the spread of Buddhism outside of India. His major contributions were the doctrine of emptiness which further explained the no-self teaching of Buddha and the two-truths doctrine of ultimate truth and conventional truth. Nagarjuna explained that all phenomena are without any own-nature or self-nature, and thus without any underlying essence, they are empty of being independent. Modern scientists would concur with this and have noticed the parallels in their findings and this teaching. Nagarjuna is especially venerated in the Mahayana, but since he did not teach on the bodhisattva ideal, many scholars now feel that he may have been a Theravadin. She then decided to become a Buddhist after discovering the profound teachings of Buddha. She dedicated her life to translating the discourses of the Buddha from the original Pali to English. She was the second president of the Pali Text Society. Her husband, Thomas Rhys Davids was also a Buddhist scholar and translator. Their contributions were significant because they paved the way for future translators. By making the teachings more accessible, Buddhism has spread to many western nations. Anagarika Dharmapala was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka and received a Christian education through college. He learned Buddhism from them and became very devoted as an 8 precept semi-monastic. He visited Bodh Gaya, India in and saw the dilapidated condition of the Mahabodhi temple and cried. He set up the Maha Bodhi Society to preserve and restore the temple and grounds. Today it is renovated and beautiful and attracts pilgrims from around the globe. He ordained as a bhikkhu monk in and died shortly thereafter in Sarnath, India. If you notice from this list and from your own investigation of Buddhist history, you will find that from about the year AD up until almost the year there was little activity in Buddhism as the religion and philosophy almost died out. During this time there was no bhikkhuni nuns Order and also the Mahabodhi temple complex was left in virtually ruins type condition. After the efforts of Anagarika Dharmapala and the restoration of the temple, it seems Buddhism started to once again flourish in the world. In the year there may have been about 1, western born Buddhists at best. Today there are over 10 million. Dipa Ma taught vipassana from her humble small home in India. She mastered the jhanas of Theravada meditation and taught at major retreat centers as well in India, Europe, and the U. Ajahn Chah was from Thailand and was the most famous meditation master in the Thai forest tradition of Theravada Buddhism. He had many students who went on to become famous in their own right and included many westerners, such as Ajahn Sumedho in England and Jack Kornfield, Ph. Ayya Khema was born in Germany to Jewish parents. She was one of the first western born women to receive full ordination as a bhikkhuni, reviving the Buddhist Order of nuns. She has lived in Germany, China, the U. She wrote several bestselling books and opened monasteries in Australia, Sri Lanka, and Europe. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Ph. He was the first leader of the Dalit Buddhist Movement, which calls for an end to the caste system of India and for untouchables to convert to Buddhism. Ambedkar was born into this lowest caste, but rejected this and converted to Buddhism. He was one of the first untouchables to earn a college education and he went on to earn several doctorate degrees. Goenka is perhaps the most famous lay Buddhist in modern times. He was born a Hindu in Burma of Indian descent and learned vipassana from U Ba Khin after suffering many migraine headaches and other ailments. He was healed through his meditation practice and went on to be the founder of a worldwide vipassana retreat organization centered around a 10 day vipassana technique that now has courses on every continent except Antarctica. Thich Nhat Hanh was born in Vietnam and trained in the Zen tradition. He has written over Dharma books and has opened monasteries around the world. He started the Order of Interbeing which has a special emphasis on social engagement work charities, environmentalism, anti-war. His tradition blends Zen with Theravada mindfulness and western psychology.

He was nominated for the Noble Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, Ph.

Chapter 9 : Early Japanese Buddhism - Brief History of Asuka, Nara & Heian Periods

Unlike early Buddhism, Buddha was represented in the form of big human statues like Greek gods. They carved Buddha statues all over Central Asia and in Xinjiang and China. They carved Buddha statues all over Central Asia and in Xinjiang and China.

In this most crucial sense, Buddhists do not believe in "God" as Christians would define and use that word. Of course, one can find individuals in the modern West who try to harmonize just about any two contradictory beliefs, but one cannot be meaningfully and consistently Buddhist and believe in anything like a theistic God. Buddhism and Monotheism While there is a more recent, modern trend to portray Buddhism as simply agnostic on the question of God, this is not the case if we are defining God as Christians or even as Jews and Muslims would use the word. First of all, Buddhism teaches that "nothing can be by itself alone, everything must inter-be with everything else. The impermanence of all things is, in fact, understood along with suffering and the absence of a real personal self to be one of the three marks of all existence. While some might try to equate Nirvana with God, this is a profound misunderstanding. Nirvana is not personal, is not in any sense a creator, and is not capable of action. Within that philosophical worldview, it is almost impossible to have any room for an atemporal, eternal, absolute truth. Nor is it possible to accommodate the concept of a divine Creation" 9 Buddhism and Polytheism There is a second sense, however, in which we can ask the question: Do Buddhists believe in "gods. Are there conscious things besides merely men and animals? Does Buddhism deny these entities? In one sense, yes, in the same way that Buddhism denies all individual things or persons really exist as truly distinct things with real, individual identities. But do Buddhists believe that the gods exist at least in the same sense that you or I or cows or rocks exist? The answer to that is generally yes. In early Buddhist cosmology, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth included heavenly lives as gods and demi-gods above humanity as well as torturous ghostly births on earth, considered lower than the animals. The gods are merely a part of the fleeting and ever-changing temporal world. They are in the same ultimate suffering as all else, and in the same need of Buddhist enlightenment to attain freedom in the state of Nirvana and the recognition of the absence of self and distinction. The gods may "exist" in the same tentative and qualified sense that anything can be said to exist in the Buddhist worldview, but the gods cannot help you. On strict Buddhist teaching, it is counterproductive to appeal to them in prayer and offerings or to seek anything from them. They may be there, but that fact ought to be irrelevant to religious practice. Today, of course, one can find many western Buddhists who deny that these entities exist in any sense, and this view does not conflict with the practice of Buddhism since the Buddhist is not to appeal to such entities for guidance or help anyway. One might say, then, that most Buddhists acknowledge "gods" but are not instructed to "believe in" them in the sense of any sort of faith or religious devotion though in practice this kind of religious devotion is common in many Buddhist countries. If Not God, Then What? If Buddhists do not believe in "God" in the Christian or monotheistic sense and are not to devote themselves to any "god" in the pagan or polytheistic sense, then is there anything in Buddhist doctrine and practice that might be called the Buddhist god? Yes, in a sense, but we have to be careful how we define it. It is what Buddha spoke of when he said: Were there not, there would be no deliverance from the formed, the made, the compounded" 14 While the various sects and schools of Buddhism would flesh out and apply this reality quite differently, Buddhists do speak of a pure reality of some sort that is the truth of all that is. The "limitless, vast, mysterious unconditioned" which is not a distinct thing, but rather a description of reality itself as an "inexplicable union. There is the interconnected essence of the universe which one cannot properly put into words. It simply "is" and that is all that can be said about it. It is not a specific being with a will or plan or purpose. You cannot pray to it or relate to it as if you were one thing and it was another thing. It is not at all like what a Christian would call "God" or even what an ancient polytheist would call a "god," but it is the central focus of the Buddhist religion and their hope for deliverance from the suffering of life. For many traditional Buddhists, if described directly at all, it is spoken of simply in terms of Nirvana. The idea is that there is not any distinct person that is "you. There is nothing substantially the same from the collection of materials and perceptions you call "yourself" as a child and the differing set of

materials and perceptions you call "yourself" as an adult other than a causal chain of events between them. Once you strip away all these false perceptions of yourself and the world, and there is nothing left to desire and no one left to desire it, there is only what simply "is," and this is Nirvana. The end of suffering, the ceasing of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, pure and proper being. A transcendent "bliss" without self or other. Buddhism is the religion of Nirvana. It is about this state of being, this understanding of reality. This is its only aim and object. A body may be thought of as a receptacle; then, if the receptacle is filled with enlightenment, it may be called Buddha. Even here, however, this must be understood as an impersonal expression of reality as it is, operating not by a distinct will but only through the causal relations of impermanent things and transient states of being. Keith Yandell and Harold Netland, "Buddhism: Houston Smith and Philip Novak "Buddhism: