

Conversion in Hinduism and Buddhism

CONVERSION IN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

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'The great eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism respect all faiths. It is the western religions, Christianity and Islam, that claim absolute truth and seek to convert everyone to their beliefs.' As is the case with most popular lore, there is some truth in this, and a great deal of falsehood. Hinduism and Buddhism do preach a particular type of religious tolerance. It is also true that they have spread, often through missionary effort and military conquest, to include a fifth of the world's people, and their influence is growing in the west. What is the history of their expansion, what are their views of conversion, and what are their responses to Christian and Muslim evangelistic efforts? These are questions we need to explore in order to understand the place of conversion in them.

THE HISTORICAL EXPANSION OF HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

To understand the practice of 'conversion' in Hinduism and Buddhism, we need to look at the history of their expansion. We will then examine their teachings regarding it in their orthodox and reformed schools of thought.

The Spread of Brahmanism

Brahmanism, the early form of Hinduism, had its roots in two earlier religions. One was the religion of the Aryans, a group of pastoral tribes that conquered northern India in a series of invasions in the second millenium B.C. The other was the **deshya** or indigenous Indian religious traditions that included the worship of the household fire and fertility, the use of magic in dealing with problems of everyday life, and the belief in metempsychosis according to which the souls of the dead enter animals, plants or natural objects before being reborn in a human body.

At the center of Brahmanism were rituals performed by Aryan priests, the **brahmana**. ~~They~~^y alone knew the intricacies of the sacrifices ~~the~~^{that} summed the gods, and obtained their favors. By their chants (**mantras**) they possessed the mysterious power or entity called Brahman and thereby become Brahmins. By their primeval sacrifices they renewed the universe and the human social order. In the end, it was they who maintained cosmic order by compelling the gods by their magic. They were more powerful than any god or earthly king, for without their services the world and human society would collapse.

In time, this emphasis on ritual gave birth to a social order based on the caste system, to extensive ritual texts (Vedas and Brahmanas) and to elaborate theological systems that based corporate and individual salvation on the proper performance of sacrifices by the priests. It was the priests and their many temples and networks, not rulers and ~~states~~^{governments}, that came to dominate India. For the local populations, conversion meant accepting the religious rule of the Brahmin priests.

Brahmanism spread from North India, where it emerged after the Aryan invasions, to the south through waves of conquest, emulation and migration. Aryan warriors carved out kingdoms and brought in Brahmin priests, and local **rajahs** or petty lords often followed in their footsteps. In many cases the priests moved into villages, preaching their gospel and converting the people. By the first century A.D. Brahmanism dominated village religious life throughout north India.

The costly rituals, and the Brahminical strangle-hold on the means to salvation became unbearable for the people and rulers alike. By the ~~the~~ eighth century B.C. religious ascetics began to appear. They claimed release from the burdens of this world could be obtained by renouncing it, by practicing rigorous personal disciplines, and by experiencing **jnana** or

enlightenment. Their path, they claimed, lead straight to salvation. There was no need for gods or priests or sacrifices. Conversion meant dropping out of society and setting out on a personal inner pilgrimage.

The revolt against the priests and rituals led many to leave village life and set up camps in forests. There they lived off the gifts of villagers and food they found in nature. Their philosophical discourses, recorded in the Upanishads, were included in the Vedas. While asceticism was a rebellion against ritualism, it remained within the pale of Brahmanism, providing an alternative path to salvation.

The Spread of Buddhism

Brahmanism based on the supremacy of the priestly castes was challenged by the Kshatriyas (royal castes), and by the heterodox religions to which they gave their support, namely Buddhism and Jainism. The former was born when Siddhartha, a Kshatriya prince raised in the rituals of a court, rejected them and sought release through rigorous asceticism. When this failed, he turned to meditation and achieved enlightenment. He began to preach a new path to truth - one based not on the pursuit of pleasures or endurance of pain, but by following the Middle Way of right views, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection and right meditation. In short, he rejected rituals and extreme asceticism in favor of a moral, well-ordered life.

Buddhism was from the first a missionary religion. After his First Sermon, the Buddha sent his converts into the world with the famous exhortation, "Go forth, O Bhikkus, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion for the world. Proclaim the Doctrine glorious, preach a life of holiness, perfect and pure." Their method was preaching and discussion.

Buddha's teachings were welcome news to rulers, merchants and other upper class people oppressed by the demands of the priests. Many converted. Buddhist monks traveled constantly, carrying on vigorous propaganda among the common folk for their support, and debating sharply with Brahmans and Jains. They borrowed much from the popular beliefs of the time, including worship at **caityas** or sacred places in groves or near villages where earth-spirits and ghosts of holy-men made their abode. These were more accessible and less expensive to venerate than the great gods of the Aryans.

Within three hundred years of the Buddha's death three great councils had codified the Pāli canon (the three Piṭakas), formulated the essential Buddhist doctrines, and organized the **sungam** or community of believers.

It was the kings and merchants who were largely responsible for the spread of Buddhism throughout India and Southeast Asia. The first great patron was Asoka (269 - 232 B.C.), the greatest ruler India has known. In the early years of his reign he extended his empire throughout all except the southern tip of the subcontinent. Feeling remorse at the slaughter of his wars, he underwent a complete change of heart and became a Buddhist.

According to tradition, Asoka sent his son (or younger brother), Mahinda, as an ambassador to the court of Tissa in Sri Lanka, his vassal. The young monk's preaching and miracles persuaded Tissa to adopt the new faith, and led to the conversion of his kingdom to Buddhism.

Asoka also sent missionaries to The Golden Land, an ^apparent reference to Burma. There the love of the Buddha was mixed with the fear of the nats (nature-spirits). In the eleventh century King Anwrahta was converted by a wandering monk to the strict Theravad branch of Buddhism. Under his edict, Burma converted to that school of thought. Buddhism spread to Thailand, Cambodia and the rest of Southeast Asia through the influence of Chinese and

Burmese missionaries and traders, and through military conquests. .

It is not clear how Buddhism first entered China. According to one tradition it arrived early in the Han dynasty (first century B.C.) through traders and missionaries. There is historical evidence that in A.D. 61 Emperor Ming-ti, after a dream, sent messengers to India for Buddhist teachers. Two monks returned to Lo-yang and began to translate the **Sutra of 42 Sections** into Chinese.

The new arrivals were not received with open arms. China was an old and sophisticated civilization, second to none, and the people were followers of Confucius and Tao. ~~Moreover,~~ the esoteric metaphysical teachings of Buddhism meant little to the pragmatic materialism of the Chinese mind. Moreover, its exhortation for young men to leave their parents and families to enter ^{celibacy} and live by begging ran counter to the Chinese veneration of ancestors. It took more than three hundred years of great missionary effort before Buddhism gained widespread acceptance in the land.

Success was largely due to the extensive translation of Buddhist texts by Kumarajiva (4th and 5th centuries A.D.), which led to the conversion of the intelligentsia. The common folk were won through the efforts of Bodhidharma who rejected the speculative thought found in this elite Buddhism, and began to preach a simple message of inner meditation. From this emerged Ch'an, which in Japan became Zen.

For centuries, the fortunes of Buddhism in China rose and fell with its favor in the Emperor's court. It reached its greatest strength during the T'ang dynasty (620-907). A steady stream of Buddhist scholars from India brought the science and medicine of the day, and Chinese monks went to India to study in the great schools there. They also began to print Buddhist

texts using wood blocks. The first work to be printed was the **Diamond Sutra**.

Buddhism arrived in Korea in the fourth century A.D. through cultural diffusion from China. It found wide acceptance, but was never fully adapted to the Korean context. Korean Buddhism was important, however, because it was the bridge by which Buddhism entered Japan.

The first missionaries arrived in Japan in A.D. 552. In a half century it won the support of Regent Shotoku Taishi. It became an established religion with court support during the Shogunate, and was a major force in the development of Bushido and the samurai.

Spread of Hinduism

The challenge of Buddhism led to a reformation in Brahmanism and the emergence of Hinduism which soon recaptured the faith not only of the common people which it never really lost, but also of the kings. The strength of Hinduism lay not in the centers of political power, but in the many autonomous religious centers scattered across the land. Although Buddhism and Jainism frequently gained the backing of the state, they were unable to destroy these centers of Brahmanism that provided the core cultural identity for the largely rural population. The strength of Hinduism lay also in its tolerance for variety. This enabled it to encompass heterodox movements such as Buddhism and incorporate them as sects and castes within the society.

The reformation did, however, involve a major change for it opened the door of religious salvation to more than the Brahmins by introducing the concept of salvation by **bhakti** or devotion to the gods. If the basic rite of Brahmanism was sacrifice, in Hinduism it became worship. Gods of an almost infinite number and variety of forms were enshrined in temples. They

were wakened with music, bells and conches; bathed, dried and dressed; fed rice and fruit; offered flowers, incense and swinging lamps; and taken to their bedrooms at night to join their wives. Annually they were married, and on special occasions given tours of the village in a chariot pulled by their devotees.

Although there were significant changes in religious beliefs and practices with the emergence of Hinduism, the core values and structures of Brahmanism remained unchanged. Heterogeneity and ~~and~~ the caste system with its rituals based on concepts of purity and pollution remained central to public social life. To this was added a private path to **moksha** through inner devotion to a personal god. The Brahmins and their many religious centers remained the center of Indian civilization. Brahmanism survived as Hinduism by adaptation and assimilation.

The battle to win back the loyalty of the people, particularly the rulers, was long and difficult. For the most part kings, vassals and village lords decided the official religion of their territories, and when they converted, their subjects were expected to adopt the new religion publically. The Brahman priests never really lost their control over the villagers in the north. They had to regain the courts, and they did so in the great Gupta empire in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.

~~If~~ Brahmanism won the north through conquest and migration, as Hinduism it won the south through missionaries who converted villages and confronted Buddhist missionaries already at work there. Brahman priests, anchorites and **rishis** (ascetics) crossed the Vindya mountains and moved down the coasts converting the people to their gods and rituals. Dandekar notes (1958:210),

The Dravidian south had never been Brahmanical. Missionaries of Buddhism and Jainism established themselves in South India. Later the leaders of the Brahmanical way found that the masses of these areas can be won. The movement spread to the South and the Pallava rulers were converted to Hinduism.

There are numerous tales in the south of confrontations between Hindu missionaries, and Buddhist and Jain court priests to win the favor of local kings. Hindu missionaries would challenge the Buddhist court priests to a debate. If the local king agreed, he called a **darbar** and the whole court gathered to hear both parties, and to see who could perform the greater miracles. Then the king and his counselors decided who had won and decreed that his religious would be the religion of the kingdom. These confrontations continued until the eleventh century when Buddhism virtually died out in India.

The Brahmans won religious control by winning first the patronage of the kings and petty rajahs, and latter by allying themselves with the **zamindars** or village lords (Iyer 1961:4-5). In the process, they introduced the caste system in a form even more rigid than that in the north (Basham 1959:150). The result was a sacred religious order that included gods, temples, writings, rituals, geneologies, art and entertainment wedded to a sacred social order based on concept of purity and pollution. Rulers and merchants patronised the Brahmans with large grants of lands, villages and cattle. They, in return, assigned the rulers and merchants to high caste ranks. In many cases temples and their priests became land owners, employers and consumers of local goods and services. Those who resisted their domination were declared untouchable (Sastri 1975:654; Hanumanthan 1979:52).

TEACHINGS ON CONVERSION

In practice both Hinduism and Buddhism were missionary at the outset. The paths of conversion they preached, however, were different. Both religions have within them a great deal of diversity. This is particularly true of Hinduism in which there is no central orthodoxy. Yet in both there

are underlying views of conversion that help us understand their main schools of thought.

Hindu Theologies of Conversion

At core Hinduism is not about gods or heavens or life beyond death. These are found in its many folds. Hinduism is essentially a metaphysics. Sarma notes (1953:3),

[I]ts aim is not merely to make man a perfect human being on earth or a happy denizen of heaven singing for all time the glories of god, but to make him one with the ultimate Reality, the eternal, universal Spirit in which there are no distinctions - no cause and effect, no time and space, no good and evil, no pairs of opposites, and no categories of thought. This goal cannot be reached by merely improving human conduct or reforming human character; it can only be attained by transforming human consciousness.

There are many paths leading to this liberation (**moksha**) from the finite human consciousness that makes us see all things as discrete entities and not parts of a single whole, but all are different stages on the single journey a soul takes during the course of its many rebirths on earth until it reaches its final destination.

Karma Mārga: The Paths of Duty and Action Basically one becomes a Hindu by birth into the Hindu social order. By birth one belongs to a caste which has its socio/religious obligations, religious practices and gods. To be a good Hindu one should dutifully observe each of these.

Hinduism is rooted in the caste system, a social order designed to remove ritual pollution from the Brahmins so that they can approach the gods and so maintain order in the world. Each caste has its own obligations (**dharma**) necessary to maintain the whole system. Some are responsible for cleaning the village, others for washing cloths, barbering, carpentry, removing animal carcasses, ^{doing} ~~and~~ leatherwork, farming and so on. All perform their caste duties without complaint, and if they do, in their next lives

these will be born in higher castes.

Each caste has its own rituals that maintain its identity, and its own priests who must perform these rituals. Birth rites and funerals are important for they remove the pollution that might defile a caste and lower its status. Among the higher castes the initiation ceremony testifies^{is it?} to their superiority as the spiritually twice-born. It is the wedding, however, which is of greatest importance, for here caste purity must be preserved. Care is taken that marriages take place between people of the same caste. The astrologer calculates the most auspicious moment for a wedding, the relatives of the bride and groom are introduced to each other in a welcoming ceremony, and the caste priest performs the ceremony.

Each caste also has its own gods and often its own scriptures. These gods must be worshipped in the home daily with offerings of food, flowers and incense. On special occasions and in times of household crisis, they must propitiated with special gifts.

In addition to their caste duties, Hindus are encouraged to make offerings to the village gods in the local temple. There the temple priest (pujāri) conducts the daily ritual centering on the gods. The Hindu need only stop to place a garland around the god's neck, and to ask a boon while touching his feet. Worship is not so much an act of prayer or worship as a duty obligating the god to respond.

Finally, followers of karma mārga can make a pilgrimage to one or more of the countless holy places (tīrtha) in the country. Almost every village boasts of a sacred pond, tree, hilltop, shrine or hermitage. Of greater importance are rivers such as Mother Ganges, who leads straight to heaven anyone whose ashes ^{are sprinkled on it} receives, or the Godāvarī where Rāma hunted. Or one can go to holy cities such as Banaras where the pilgrimⁱ may visit

more than two thousand shrines, or Haridvar where the Ganges leaves the hill, or Puri famous for its festivals in honor of Jagannāth. 'Of equal importance are the mountains such as the Himalayas and Vindyas. Or one can go to the all-India temples such as Benares, Tirupati, Sri Sa~~lem~~ and Madurai.

The more daring of Hindus join the sects that worship feminine deities (śakti) using tantric rites that involve the breaking of all the usual taboos of Hinduism. Small groups of initiates, from high castes and low, meet at night and indulge in the five Ms: alcohol, meat, fish, dance gestures and sexual intercourse. Conversion into these sects requires long rites of initiation and high levels of commitment.

Bhakti: The Paths of Devotion The paths of **karma** offer a better life after death, but they are slow and burdensome. The paths of devotion offer it immediately and freely to each individual, irrespective of their social circumstances. All they need is to choose a personal deity (**ishta devata**), and to worship him or her with intense devotion. There are many gods to choose from - 330 million according to Hindu tradition, and each has its own abilities, yet all are manifestations of the one god.

Personal devotion as a path to salvation appeared in the south at least a century before Christ in small sects that worshipped manifestations of Viṣṇu and Śiva. After the eleventh century A.D., **bhakti** won the masses who ~~converted to its various denominations~~ converted to its various denominations in large numbers. Some of these denominations, such as Madhava' Śaivism, were probably influenced through the Syrian Christians who arrived in Kerala on the southwest coast of India before the third century A.D. (Basham 1959:333).

The word **bhakti** means devotion, faith, love, surrender and piety. It is closely associated with the term **pūja** which means adoration and

worship. Both words speak of a very personal relationship between the devotee and a god. By analogy this is compared to friendship, subordination to a master, parental affection, a lover's bliss.

Conversion in **bhakti** is similar to that in Christianity. A person is exhorted to beseech a god or goddess for mercy and help. The gods and goddesses, by their grace, promise to save those who call upon them, and to bring them to heaven. The first steps of a convert are to sing the praise of the Lord, to remember, salute and adore him, and to worship him as master and friend. The final step is to dedicate one's-self totally to the Lord. Fallon comments on the result (1964:243-4).

[The devotee] is at peace, intoxicated with love, yet quiet, his mind centered on the Lord. All other affections are suppressed, selfishness is transcended, all forms of activity sacred or profane being dedicated to Him. Single-heartedness, indifference to all that is an obstacle to devotion, renunciation of all other props and supports, practice of those observances and duties only that are in accord with this entire dedication, . . . pleasure taken in listening to discourses about the glory and greatness of the Lord, extreme desolation whenever the mind turns away from Him, . . . [are] more please to God than any other path because He dislikes the proud and loves the meek and humble.

Different schools of **bhakti** arose, each claiming to be the highest way to salvation. Today an estimated ninety percent of all Hindus are worshippers of Viṣṇu or Śiva. Among the latter there is a sect in the south known as Lingāyats that renounces idol worship and the caste system. Most denominations, however, encourage the use of icons and pictures of their gods, but teach that these are ritual reminders of the gods, and not the gods themselves.

The heart of **bhakti** has been devotional meetings in homes and temples. In recent years, however, it has moved onto the streets during the many Hindu festivals such as Dasara, Devali and Holi with their elaborate ceremonies and processions. These reenact the births and marriages of the gods, and recall great events in the mythological past.

Jnāna Mārga: The Paths of Wisdom The supreme paths to moksha, according to the mendicants who renounce society is jnāna or wisdom. The goal is not heaven but enlightenment. The road is metaphysical, not theological. By yoga or strict bodily and mental (disicpline) the diligent seeker can tame the uncontrolled stream of conscious thought that gives him the illusion that the external world is real. "Then," the great sage Patanjali notes (1924:1,3), "the seer stands in his own nature." In other words, he sees himself and ultimate reality as it is, namely changeless, objectless, undifferentiated consciousness. This is not mere intellectual understanding of the truth about the self as something distinct from the person. It is a direct experience - a clear realization that the self is the unborn and undying spirit that underlies everything.

Over time six major and several minor philosophical schools emerged, each charting the course to enlightenment. Sarkhy and Mimamsa, are nontheistic. Their aim is to liberate the self from bondage to the body and material world. Because it humans who are responsible for the ignorance and desires that keep them in bondage, it humans who must liberate themselves by means of penetrating insights and a clear realization of the nature of the self. These can only be achieved by the control of the passions and mind through meditation and concentration.

Nyaya-Vaiṣṇika and Dvaita, on the other hand, are theistic. They believe in a personal God who created a world of things and beings, and who relates to humankind. Both teach that it is attachment to this world that brings us pain and misery. Conversion, therefore, is to to be liberated from the bondage to the body and the material world, and from the cycle of rebirths (samsara) that bring us back into them. Then the self or spirit, which is unique, eternal, infinite and indestructible, will be pure spirit existence without consciousness or the experiences of suffering. Liberation

is a negative state of freedom from pain, not a positive experience of happiness. The path to this liberation, again, is **yoga** or mental and bodily discipline.

The philosophical schools that dominate modern Hindu thought are Ā dvaita (monism) and Viśhiṣṭādvaita (modified monism). In these the Ultimate Reality or Brahman is neither person nor nonperson, but pure existence, consciousness and bliss. It/he is perfectly characterless and indeterminate. It is impossible for finite humans to make statements about the infinite. The world and the self appear to be real to the ignorant, but the wise see it as nothing but Brahman. Liberation from this bondage is through the realization that the self (**ātman**) is indeed Brahman. The means is to study the sacred scriptures (**Vedānta**) under the direction of a guru who has himself realized Brahman. At first the teacher reasons with the disciple until all doubts are removed and conviction generated. Then he declares, "You are Brahman." The disciple must then contemplate on this truth steadfastly until he has the immediate, experiential realization "I am Brahman." This is the final step of conversion.

Today these and the lesser schools of jnana marga are associated with different monastic orders. The Paths of Wisdom are reserved primarily for males of the high clean castes. Even among these, few can abandon their responsibilities in life to become mendicants, and rare is the mendicant who claims to have reached enlightenment.

Buddhist Theologies of Conversion

Early Buddhism centered around monasteries scattered throughout the land. These served both as temples where lay people came to revere the Buddha and gain merit, and retreats where young men went to join the order (sangha). Here Buddhism borrowed and adapted much from the popular beliefs

of the time that centered around sacred spots. These were small 'groves of trees where earth-spirits lived, and tumuli (stūpas) where the ashes of chiefs were buried. Within two hundred years stūas arose up all over India containing the relics of the Buddha and other revered monks and ascetics. The number of Buddhist archaeological remains from the time of Christ far outnumber those of Brāhmaṇism, Hinduism and Jainism together.

Shortly after the death of the Buddha, various schools of thought emerged. By the second century A.D. a split developed between what came to be known as the 'Lesser Vehicle' (Hīnayāna or Theravāda) and the 'Greater Vehicle' (Mahāyāna) forms of Buddhism. The fundamental difference between these had to do with beliefs regarding the path to salvation and the nature of conversion.

Little Vehicle The basic propositions of Theravada are that suffering and sorrow are inherent in life; they can only be eliminated by giving up "desire," "ambition" or "craving" (taṇhā) which are based on the illusion that we are enduring, individual beings; to achieve this one must follow the Middle Way of right understanding, resolve, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, recollection and meditation.

In Theravada, the path to salvation is personal. A person can help another by example and advice, but no one can save another. Conversion, therefore is a process of self discipline within a monastic community. By gradually bringing the senses under control, one can finally annihilate all passions, all longings, all self-centeredness, and live a totally dispassionate life. When this is achieved, one experiences Nirvāṇa, the steady state of undifferentiated reality. In it there is no flux, no differentiation, no self-consciousness. The person who finds it never again loses it, and when he (for this is reserved mainly for men) dies, he enters

this state forever in his 'Final Blowing Out.' The person who does not find it must be reborn on earth in another life to try again. Few attain release, but we are fortunate for in our era we have had four Buddhas (the last being ~~S~~akyamuni) to show us the way, and a fifth is still to come.

Great Vehicle Theravada Buddhism's renunciation of the world and its call for radical disciplined limited its appeal to the few, particular the elite. For the masses caught in the struggles of life, this form of Buddhism was too austere. The Buddhism of self-effort (jiriki), of working out one's own salvation with diligence, was beyond the powers of the ordinary people. They were used to worshipping the many gods of Hinduism, so when sculptors began to carve images of the Buddha, they took to worshipping these images and the relics of the Buddha with flowers, incense, waving lamps and deep devotion, just as in the Hindu temples.

This tension between the atheism of Theravada and theism of popular Buddhism led to a split and the emergence of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana). Theravada denied that the Buddha was a god. Mahayana deified him, and added a great many lesser gods. The former denied that the merit of one person can be transferred to another. It held that all persons are lamps unto themselves, and must work out their own salvations. The latter taught that a person may give and receive merit from others. In time this led to the belief that ordinary people can receive merit from the Buddha, and the many Bodhisattvas or lesser Buddhas who chose to remain on earth to save others by their merit rather than to enter Nirvana. By the third century A.D. the idea of Buddha as the Suffering Saviour emerged, but this is probably due to the influence of Persian Christianity (Basham 1954:276). It is Mahayana that won the Chinese with their belief in spirits and gods.

Conversion in the Great Vehicle is not to the words but to the person of the Buddha. He is the Ultimate, the One Supreme Reality. To worship him is to win his merit and thereby to attain salvation. Those, who through profound worship and meditation, are enlightened and become buddhas, are, in turn, called to remain on earth so that they can save others by dispensing their merit. In other words, there are stages of conversion leading to buddhahood.

The Pure Land School (Jap. **Jodo**) of Buddhism emerged in China in the fourth century A.D. The Savior in this school is Amida, a king who joined Buddhism and vowed to establish a Buddha-kingdom - the Pure Land. Unlike Nirvana, this is a paradise with material delights. It was open to all who prayed the formula, "Namu Amida Butsu" (Adoration to the Buddha Amida), who strove to be worthy of his salvation, and who offer their merit for the salvation of others.

In the twelfth century A.D. Pure Land reached Japan. There works were dropped and only faith in Amida was needed to enter Paradise. Amida had earned an inexhaustible store of merit and offered it freely to all who sought his aid. Sinners only needed to believe in that store and their own access to it, and the Pure Land would be theirs. Theravadins said that Nirvana would be achieved after as many lives as are needed to lift one's consciousness to that sublime condition. Teachers of Pure Land, however, taught that anyone could be certain of Paradise after physical death.

One school of thought hard to classify is Zen. While it fits loosely into the Great Vehicle division, it is the apotheosis of Buddhism. It seeks enlightenment by a direct route without the use of gods, or of scripture, rituals or vows. It is less a religious philosophy and more of a method to break the tyranny of reason that keeps us locked into the illusion of reality

and the cycle of rebirth. It is to help a person leap from thinking to direct inner experience.

Zen uses different bridges to reach Satori, the Zen name for Enlightenment. One is **mondo**, a rapid question-answer between the Master and a pupil that aims to so speed up the thought process that it suddenly transcends human rationality. A second is **koan**, a word or phrase that confuses the intellect and so frees a person from its control (Humphreys 1951:183). An example of the latter is, 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?'

Conversion in Zen is to set out on the path to Satori. One can do this through meditation, art, poetry and love. The end of the pilgrimage is to reach the state wherein the pendulum of Opposites has come to rest - where light and darkness, good and evil, being and nonbeing are equally valued and become one. To define Satori requires the mind, but because it lies beyond the intellect, it cannot be defined. It must be experienced existentially.

Tibetan Buddhism The third major division in Buddhism is sometimes referred to as the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt or as Tantric Buddhism. Early in the history of Mahayana female deities entered the pantheon, chiefly as wives of the powerful male gods. The latter were high and aloof. The latter were the "force" or "potency" of their husbands, and active in the world. Consequently, humans could best approach the gods through the goddesses, and sexual union became the paradigm of religious experience.

In Tibet magical mysticism was added to these ideas. The goal was supernatural power. The means were meditation, hypnosis, ritual sexual unions and the breaking of all rules such as the taboos on eating of meat, drinking of alcohol and killing of animals. The deities were the Saviouresses (**Taras** - often depicted in ferocious poses), and a host of

lesser divinitie, demonesses, sorceresses and she-ghouls. Because these could not be persuaded, they had to be compelled through the uses of right formulas (**mantras**) cited in the correct manner, and powerful diagrams (**yantras**) to bestow magical power on the worshipper and lead him or her to the highest ecstasy. The six syllable **mantra** - **Om mani padme hum** ("Ah! the jewel is indeed in the lotus!") is written and repeated thousands of times daily in Tibet.

Conversion in Tibetan Buddhism has both a broad road and a narrow path. The deeper teachings are beyond the capacity of the ordinary people. For them conversion is to venerate the monks and nuns, to worship the many gods, goddesses, spirits, ferocious demons personified natural forces and saints. It is to use powerful magical chants, diagrams and hand positions to control supernatural beings for personal ends. As one lama noted,

The mind of man . . . is prone to superstition. If left to themselves ignorant people will invent their own superstitions, and it is better that they should find their superstitions prepared for them with a definite object in view. . . [I]f superstition helps the common people to a better life, why remove it (Ellam 19xx:71)?

For the select few, however, the path to becoming a bodhisattva or small Buddha is to join a monastery as a lama, and to study esoteric techniques at the hand of a guru.

MODERN REFORM MOVEMENTS IN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

The orthodox schools of Hinduism and Buddhism have been challenged in the past two centuries by the missionary outreach of Christianity and Islam, and by the spread of modernity. The result has been a revival in orthodoxy, and a series of reform movements, particularly in Hinduism.

For the most part, the reform movements are missionary and seek to convert others to their doctrines. Thus, in India the Arya Samaj and the R.S.S. actively evangelize Indian converts to Christianity, and baptise them

back into Hinduism. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Bala Yogi and other saints are believed to be new incarnations (*avatar*) and the centers of new Hindu bhakti sects. In the west teachers such as Vivekananda and Radharishnan, and gurus such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Prabhupada are winning followers from the young and disenchanted.

The greatest influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on the west, however, is through the New Age Movement, a loose agglomeration of eastern, post-modern and pop sects striving for self-realization and self-fulfillment. The core of true believers in these sects is relatively small, but their teachings are finding wide acceptance in a post-modern world increasingly disillusioned by modernity and science, and searching for personal meaning in societies increasingly fragmented by individualism.

These reform movements incorporate elements modern thought and use Christian methods of evangelism. At core, however, they, like most orthodox schools in Hinduism and Buddhism, see conversion as entering a personal pilgrimage using meditation, discipline and the guidance of a guru in order to attain self-enlightenment and merger with the ultimate One, and (with the exception of the New Age) to escape from this world, its sufferings and its illusions.

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