

Buddhism – Human Destiny

Human Destiny and Ethical Teaching:

- arhat ideals
- rebirth
- bodhisattva ideals
- loving kindness
- buddhahood
- five precepts
- Pure Land
- Six Perfections
- karma

Key Concepts:

Anicca	the impermanent nature of all things	Anatta	no independent or permanent self
Dukkha	suffering/unsatisfactoriness	(S)kandhas	the 5 elements that make up a human being
Samatha	calmness or breathing meditation	Pratitya	everything 'exists' because of other things
Mettabhavana	the development of loving kindness, usually through meditation	Vipassana	'insight' meditation to see the true nature of things

Exam Practice:

- Explain how a Buddhist might avoid samsara. (8)

Key Connections:

How do teachings about Human Destiny and ethical teaching relate to other areas of your study?

Noble Eightfold Path, Three Poisons, tathagatagarbha, meditation, origin and value of human life, human rights, prejudice and discrimination, beliefs about death and the afterlife, crime & punishment

Key Quotes:

- 'To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind – this is the teaching of all the Buddhas.' Dhammapada 183
- Dana, sila, ksanti, virya, dhyana, prajna – the Six Perfections

Key Beliefs and Teachings:

Arhat	The ideal figure within Theravada Buddhism is the arhat , a monk who has overcome the Three Poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance. Monks follow the teachings of the Buddha (e.g. the Noble Eightfold Path), study the dharma , meditate and practice daily. Once they have perfected the Buddhist path a monk is no longer reborn at the end of his present life. The arhat is free from suffering the cycle of samsara , attains nirvana and is no longer reborn . There is no limit to how many arhats there might be at any time.
Bodhisattva	The ideal figure within Mahayana Buddhism is the bodhisattva , one who seeks enlightenment for the benefit of others rather than themselves. The bodhisattva vows not to attain nirvana until all beings attain nirvana . It is compassion that leads a bodhisattva to remain in the cycle of samsara in order to help others. For many Mahayana Buddhists, bodhisattvas are seen as supernatural figures and have become focuses of worship with the ability to save others. Examples of bodhisattvas include Manjushri (symbolising insight), Avolekitesvara (who symbolises compassion) and Maitreya (the buddha-to-be). Theravadin Buddhists accept that Gautama was a bodhisattva before he became the Buddha ; they also accept that Maitreya will be the Buddha in the future.
Buddhahood	This is the idea that all humans are buddhas in a developing form as all have the potential for enlightenment . Mahayana Buddhists teach that buddhahood can be reached by becoming a bodhisattva .
Pure Land	This form of Japanese Buddhism has a bodhisattva called Amida (Amitabha) at its centre. Pure Land Buddhists believe that Amida took a vow to become a bodhisattva after he heard the Buddha give a sermon. Followers believe that by chanting the name of Amida they gain karmic merit which allows them to enter the Pure Land (sometimes described as being like heaven) after death. It is in the Pure Land that they can attain buddhahood .
Karma and rebirth	Karma is the teaching of cause and effect. Buddhists believe that positive or negative thoughts and actions lead to positive or negative karma . By following the teachings of the Buddha (dharma) , Buddhists build up positive karma . Buddhists believe that good or bad karma leads into the next life when they are reborn into the cycle of samsara . When they stop building up negative karma , a Buddhist escapes the cycle of samsara and attains nirvana .
Loving kindness (metta)	A way Buddhists can build up positive karma is by showing loving kindness (metta) and compassion (karuna) to all living beings. Metta is about showing respect for others and being delighted for others when they are successful and happy. By developing loving kindness Buddhists believe that they can eradicate desire (tanha) and the Three Poisons . Buddhists will often meditate to develop qualities of loving kindness (metta bhavana).
Five Precepts	These are basic guidelines set out for Buddhists, in line with the Buddha's dharma . Buddhists are encouraged to try to avoid: (1) harming living beings (ahimsa), (2) taking anything that has not been given to them, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) saying harmful things, and (5) using intoxicants that lead to careless actions. Buddhist monks have a further five precepts that they should live by. The Precepts are not rules or commandments but following them minimises suffering (dukkha) and maximises happiness. They are known as Pancha Sila . They link with the morality (sila) section of the Noble Eightfold Path .
Six Perfections (paramitas)	Mahayana texts refer to the Six Paramitas that need to be perfected in order to achieve the compassion and understanding necessary to attain buddhahood . Mahayanists need to perfect (1) generosity (giving without expecting reward), (2) morality (following all aspects of the Dharma), (3) patience (being patient and accepting the truth of dukkha), (4) energy (dedication to attaining buddhahood), (5) meditation (essential for developing understanding) and (6) wisdom (understanding that everything is empty – sunyata). Theravada teachings accept the six perfections but also have four more.