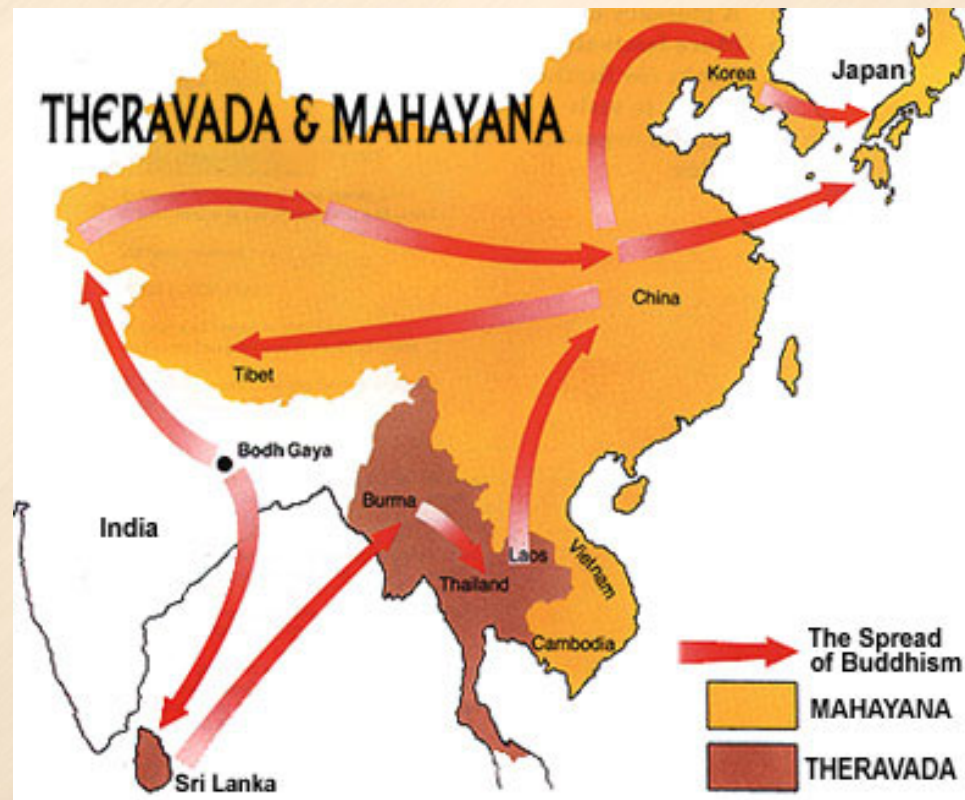


The Rise of the Mahayana





The Mahāsāṃghikas

- The Mahāsāṃghikas (great assembly)
- Arose as a liberal movement
- Provided a vehicle for the lay community
- The ‘Three Classes of Disciple’:
 - Sravaka, Pratyeka, Bodhisattva

What is the Mahāyāna?

- New interpretations of the Buddha's original teaching that emerged around the first century BCE in (in Gandhara?) in the form of texts known as the Prajñāparamitā ('Perfection of Wisdom')
- Monks and nuns of Śravakāyāna and Mahāyāna orientation practiced side by side, in same monasteries
- Question of orientation of practice rather than separate schools
- The Mahayana Sutras were composed in Sanskrit (and variations)

The Mahayana Outlook

- The universe is infinitely vast in space and time
- The Buddhas are beyond birth and death

Trikaya – Three Bodies

- In the Mahayana the ‘Buddha’ signifies the Supreme, Ultimate reality
- It is understood that ultimate reality manifests in accordance to the realisation of the Perceiver.
- This is called the doctrine of ‘trikaya’ or ‘Three bodies’

The 'Three Bodies'

- Dharmakaya – 'Truth Body'
 - The ultimate reality underlying the whole universe
- Sambhogakaya – 'Enjoyment Body'
 - The way that reality appears to the bodhisattva.
- Nirmanakaya – 'Form Body'
 - The way ordinary beings experience ultimate reality

The Four Stages of Enlightenment

The 'uninstructed worldling' is a puttujjana.

On hearing the teaching, aspirants progress through the stages:

1. Sotapanna - stream winner –free from:

Identity view, attachment to rites and rituals, and doubt

2. Sakadagami - once returner – free from:

Sensual Desire and Ill Will

3. Anāgāmi - Non returner – as above

4. Arhat - free from craving for prosperity in the material world, craving for existence in the ideal world (heaven), conceit, restlessness, ignorance

The Bodhisattva Ideal

- The Bodhisattva as the embodiment of wisdom
- Committed to the enlightenment of all sentient beings
- The great Bodhisattvas embody different aspects of enlightenment
- Manjusri embodies wisdom, Avalokitesvara embodies compassion
- But a Bodhisattva might be anyone!
- Mahāyāna as a ‘universalising religion’

The Ten Bhumis

The Mahāyāna expanded on the idea of the ‘stages of enlightenment’:

1. The Very Joyous
2. The Stainless
3. The Light-Maker
4. The Radiant Intellect
5. The Difficult to Master
6. The Manifest
7. The Gone Afar
8. The Immovable
9. The Good Intelligence
10. The Cloud of Doctrine

From the Avatamsaka Sutra

Some Mahayana Sutras

- Prajñā-paramita Sutra
- Prajñā-paramita Heart Sutra
- Vajrachedika – Diamond Sutra
- Saddharma Puṇḍarīka – The Lotus Sutra
- Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra (Longer & Shorter)
- Avataṃsaka Sutra – Hua Yen school
- Lankavatara Sutra
- Sandhinirmocana Sutra

Prajñāparamita

The name "Mother of All-the-Tathagatas" is attributed to the Prajñāpāramitā who was depicted as a beautiful female figure.

Edward Conze, in his essay 'Sophia and Prajñāparamita' says that such figures symbolise the universal feminine principle which is found in both Western gnostic movements and Mahāyāna Buddhism.



Depictions of Prajñāparamita



Prajñāparamita - Themes

Nothing to seek, and no-one seeking
The unattainable is attained by non-attainment
Knowing this, the Bodhisattvas course on!

“No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection
No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlignthenment
When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious
A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone’s wisdom!”

Prajñāparamita - Themes

The teaching of śūnyatā

‘The emptiness of all dharmas’

Associated with Nāgārjuna – the ‘Second Buddha’

‘Realising emptiness’ as the means and the end of the Way.

Prajñāparamita - Themes

All beings possess the capacity for enlightenment

Even the lowliest creatures!

All beings should be treated with compassion

The Bodhisatva Vow

Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to save them all.

Delusions are endless. I vow to cut them off.

The teachings are infinite. I vow to learn them all.

The Buddha Way is inconceivable. I vow to attain it.

Bodhicaryāvatāra

1. The benefits of bodhicitta (the wish to reach full enlightenment for others)
2. Purifying bad deeds
3. Adopting the spirit of enlightenment
4. Using conscientiousness
5. Guarding awareness
6. The practice of patience
7. The practice of joyous effort
8. The practice of meditative concentration
9. The perfection of wisdom
10. Dedication

Bodhicaryāvatāra

The Way of the Bodhisattva (excerpt)

With devotion I pay homage to the Buddhas gone to bliss
To their Dharma body, noble heirs and all worthy of respect
In accordance with the scriptures, I shall now in brief describe
The way to adopt the discipline of all the Buddhas' heirs

There is nothing here that's not been said before
And I have no skill in the art of composition
Therefore I do not expect this to be of much use to others
And write it only to acquaint it to my mind

Through this, my faith will be strengthened for a while,
And I will grow more accustomed to what is virtuous
Then should others, somehow equal to myself in fortune,
Chance upon these words, they might find them beneficial

Bodhicaryāvatāra

The Way of the Bodhisattva (excerpt)

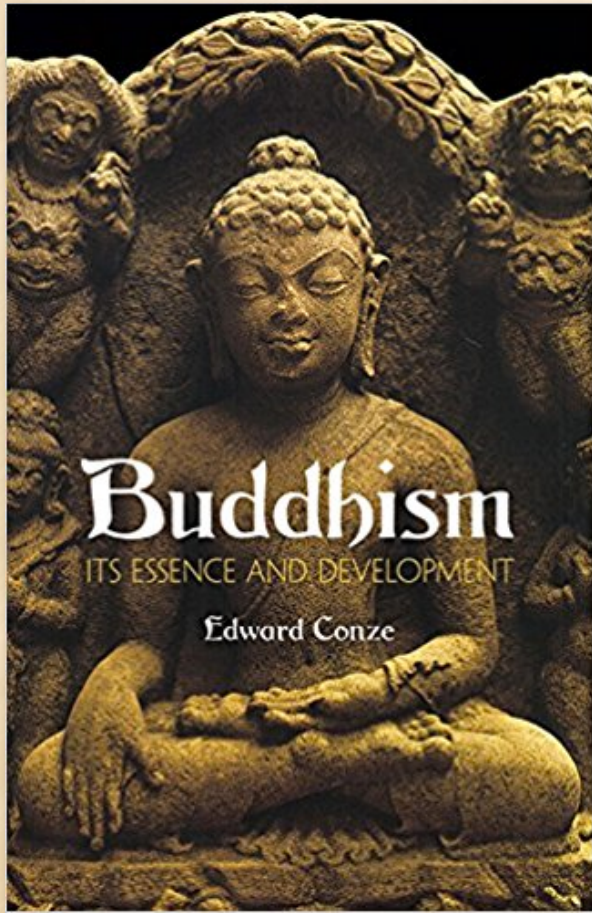
This free and well-favoured human form is difficult to obtain
Now that we have the chance to realise the full human potential
If we don't make good use of this opportunity
How could we possibly expect to have such a chance again?

Like a flash of lightning on a dark and cloudy night,
Which, for just a single instant, sheds its brilliant light
Rarely, through the buddhas' power
A mind of virtue arises, briefly, to people of the world

All ordinary virtues therefore are forever feeble,
Whilst negativity is strong and difficult to bear—
But for the mind intent on perfect buddhahood,
What other virtue could ever overcome it?

....

Recommended Books

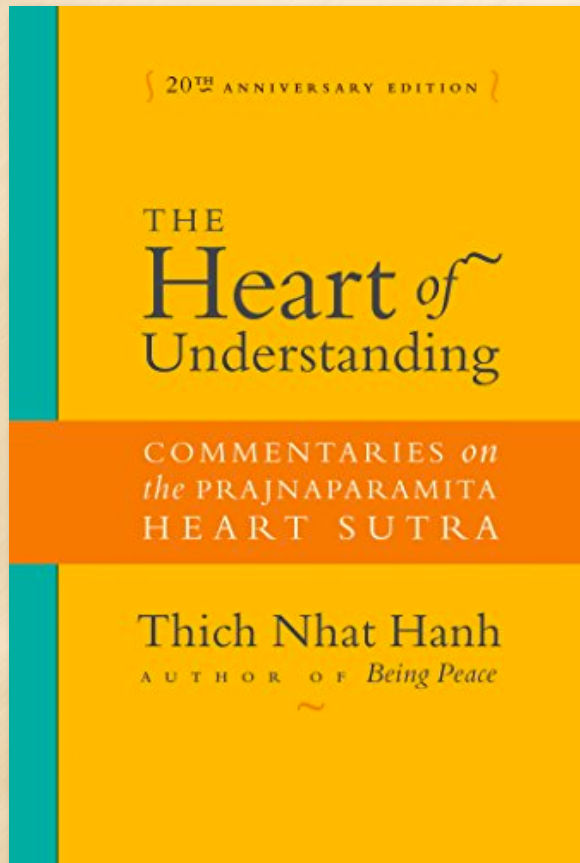


Buddhism: Its Essence and Development

by Edward Conze

<http://a.co/39G1UvZ>

Recommended Books

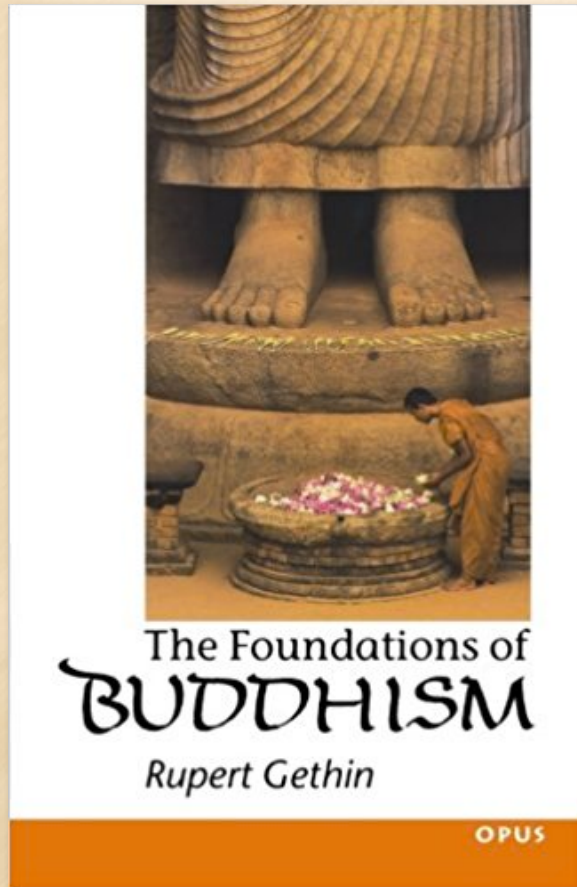


The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra

Thich Nhat Hanh

<http://a.co/9Yo7nAV>

Recommended Books

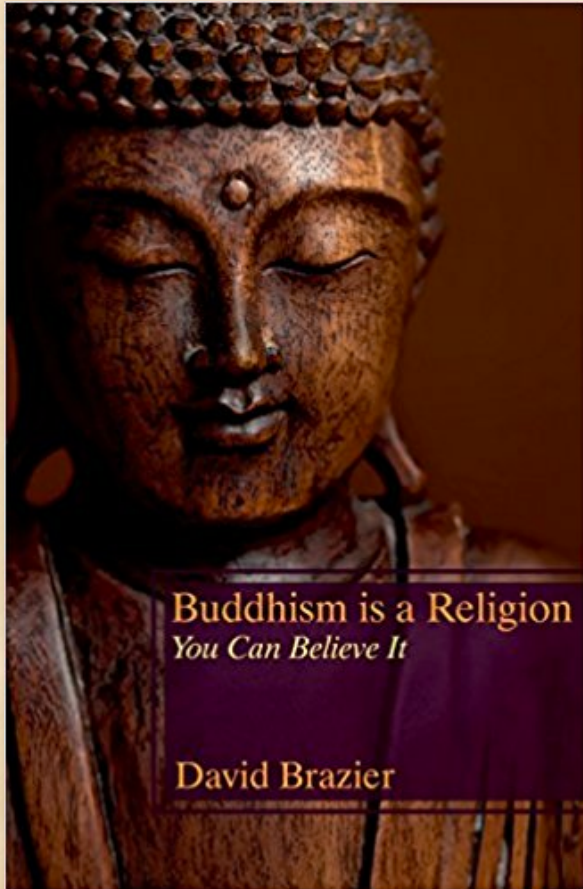


The Foundations of Buddhism

Rupert Gethin

<http://a.co/49PM8bE>

Recommended Books



Buddhism is a Religion: You Can Believe It

David Brazier

<http://a.co/fgOgoRS>