

The Difference of Samsara and Nirvana

(Explain what are *Samsara* and Nirvana. Are they different or the same?)

Through analysis and documented readings I have come to the conclusion that there is a significant difference between *Samsara* and Nirvana. These concepts are taught together as one, but only for the specific reason to understand the ideals and beliefs of Buddhism. To understand the notion of Buddhism you must have an awareness of their views toward *Samsara* and Nirvana. For instance, the translation of the word *Samsara* accurately means “wandering-on”, while Nirvana is explained as the “unconditioned mind” described from Buddha’s teachings. Further view into the Buddhists’ belief of Nirvana discusses that one will eliminate all thirst and cravings that the world is full of. Without a doubt explanation of these concepts in greater detail will provide you clarity of the thoughts of many Buddhist followers.

Samsara can be viewed as a cycle of life full of rebirth followed by death. In that lifetime people are faced with cravings and suffering that plagues the world around us. These life cravings start a chain of cause and effect that will dictate on one’s life until their death. These individuals are faced with clouded judgments where only certain meditation can provide insight to the world around them. On the other hand, Nirvana can be viewed as an escape from the endless cycle of rebirth and death while gaining the understanding of the world’s endeavors. In addition, Buddhists that reach Nirvana are also free from all forms of Dukkha (the state of suffering) along with the comprehension of the false idea of self. This is why Nirvana is considered to be the Third Noble Truth in the teachings of Buddhism. In fact, further reasoning and information give proof to why these two ideas of Buddhism vary.

To fully understand the concept of escaping Dukkha, an individual must know what exactly Dukkha is. One way Dukkha can be viewed as the accumulation of distressing emotions such as death, sickness, and old age. Looking deeper into the subject, Dukkha can be the basic notion of good feelings that are never everlasting as a person will experience depressing moments in life that have not yet to come. The last way Dukkha can be viewed is the attachment to the perception of one's self. Buddhists' don't believe that there is a soul, but yet an interconnected unity of individuals throughout the world.

These two beliefs of Buddhism grow farther apart from one another when looking at the concepts from a general perspective. An individual is always placed in the life cycle known as *Samsara* unless certain choices are made within a lifetime. While this cycle is an endless wheel of suffering, people have the chance to escape and reach a higher sense of awareness. This escape is known as Nirvana and it is distinctively different from *Samsara*. In the state of Nirvana, Buddhist will view and grasp the world from a whole new perspective. When these particular individuals are in the mind state of Nirvana, all cravings will be extinct from the body and mind. Individuals that deny the existence of cravings and hold on to the concept of one's self will not be able to achieve Nirvana.

How exactly can you determine the difference from *Samsara* and Nirvana? "Gautama never gave an exact description of Nirvana, but his closest reply was this. There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill" (Zukeran, 1994). The example given by The Buddha vaguely describes the exemption of feeling undesirable cravings and suffering. In addition, people also experience

forms of karma in the life cycle of *Samsara*, which you wouldn't experience in the state of Nirvana. The basic understanding of karma is a process of cause and effects that occur during one's life cycle in *Samsara*. The concept of karma is basically the summation of all deeds that an individual has done and/or will do in a lifetime. If the two beliefs were similar then wouldn't you think that you would experience karma in both stages of life? This gives reason to believe that Buddha intended that the idea of *Samsara* and Nirvana were meant to be kept separate from one another.

There are many philosophers that do combine these two concepts together as one to describe Buddhists' beliefs. These philosophers view *Samsara* as a world of form which is comprised of perspectives that it wants you to acknowledge. In relation to Nirvana, that is the sense of perception and understanding of the entities that surround you. Philosophers' have debated that one can't have a perception of the world without being derived from certain perspectives. Furthermore, people tend to pair the two beliefs together for the main reason you need *Samsara* and Nirvana to interact between the two. "By dwelling within our 'inner essence', which the Hindus would call 'Atman', we discover a realm of peace and illumination, from which we can interact in freedom with the phenomenal world, which was not possible as long as we clung to it. Our 'inner essence' is like the eye of a storm. This is emptiness" (Jones, 2001). These are the two main concepts that arise from people that believe *Samsara* and Nirvana intertwine together.

These two basic ideas of their view of Buddhism don't relate to the teaching of Buddha, but rather make assumptions of personal experiences. It is true one does need to understand the concept of perspective to make sense of the world around us, but this doesn't explain the similarities of *Samsara* and Nirvana. These philosophers are just comparing two concepts that

are produced in the cycle of *Samsara* and relating it back to Nirvana. One does not know the feeling of perception, but only a vast knowledge of understanding and truth when in the state of nirvana. As for the other concept where it explains that you need *Samsara* and Nirvana to co-exist, or they wouldn't work as a whole, is a common mistake. It is true that *Samsara* and Nirvana are directly related in the sense of one can only reach nirvana if samsara is the cause of enlightenment. Except drawing the conclusion that since the two co-exist so they must be similar is a false statement itself. These explanations prove that the two theories of *Samsara* and Nirvana are not similar, but completely different.

Therefore these two ideas taught by Buddha have been critiqued and criticized over the years of history. While one needs *Samsara* to break away from the cycle of cravings to reach Nirvana. Once in Nirvana, there is no more suffering and you reach an enlightened state of mind that has no cause and effect. With the general knowledge of Buddhism, I have used deductive reasoning to determine that the concept of *Samsara* and Nirvana are two different thought processes.

References

Zukeran, Pat (1994). Buddhism. Retrieved February 11, 2008, from Probe Ministries Web site:

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