

Three Rafts to Cross the River: Divisions of Buddhism

Theravada (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Kampuchea)

- means "*The way of the Elders.*"
- follows earliest texts and tends to agree with original teachings of the Buddha whose teachings are central (not the Buddha himself)
 - cultivating wisdom through the Four Noble Truths
 - practising the Noble Eightfold Path, esp. meditation
- ideal type is the *arhats* (like saints)
- focus on monastic life
- hierarchy among monks and nuns (monks outnumber and are higher up)
- becoming a monk temporarily may be a step toward adulthood

Mahayana (China, Korea, Japan)

- means "*The Great Vehicle*"
- largest division of Buddhists (over half)
- focuses on Buddha himself (divine saviour)
- appeals to the masses because it opens the doors to devotion and prayer
- salvation offered through the infinite grace of the compassionate Buddha as well as all the Buddhas of the past
- reveres *bodhisattvas* or "*Buddhas in the making*" – people who can enter Nirvana but are waiting in order to help others achieve it
- they are the ideal type – compassionate, which is the supreme virtue
- some bodhisattvas take on mythical qualities and reside in Buddhist heavens, providing assistance to their worshippers

Vajrayana : Fighting Fire With Fire

- Vehicle of the Diamond* – teachings resemble the energetic rigor and strength of a diamond
- small minority – homeland Tibet (taken over by communist China)
- many have been killed or exiled to India and elsewhere
- "*Fighting Fire With Fire*" means shutting off the energy of desire to end suffering and using that energy against it to move toward enlightenment
- Use sense energies in meditation for spiritual enhancement:
 - mandalas** – patterned icons that visually excite
 - mudras** – choreographed hand movements
 - mantras** – phrases or syllables chanted in order to harness the spiritual potency of sound or to invoke a deity
- Tantrism- is the harnessing of the basic energy of sexuality for the purpose of enhancing spiritual energy rather than for a desire for pleasure
- Dali Lama** head of the institution of lamas (clergy)
- succession through rebirth (reincarnation)