Can Siddhartha’s original teachings be seen in Zen and Pure Land? If so, how?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **ZEN** | **PURE LAND** |
| **Damien Keown:** “None of the Buddha’s early teachings is rejected by the Mahayana, although they are sometimes reinterpreted in radical ways.” | |
| **Using the concept of ‘upaya’** (as outlined in the Lotus Sutra) means that we should see the Buddha’s different teachings as being appropriate to different audiences and catering for different levels of understanding. We might use this to say that the ‘original’ teachings (i.e. those found in the Pali Canon) are actually the simplest and most accessible expression of the Dharma, not necessarily the best, right or most sophisticated. | |
| **Rupert Gethin:** “The Buddha regarded the Dharma he had found as ‘profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, sublime, beyond the sphere of mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.’ Thus knowledge of the dharma is not something that is acquired simply by being told the necessary information or by reading the appropriate texts.” | **Damien Keown:** “It is clear that with developments of this kind…the Mahayana had moved some way from the Buddha’s original teaching that salvation was an individual responsibility, and had come close to accepting that it could be attained through faith and grace.” |
| **Rupert Gethin:** “throughout the history of Buddhism there has existed a certain tension between the monk who is a great scholar and theoretician and the monk who is a realized practitioner…a tension that is indicated with the arising of the Zen school of Buddhism.” However, it is worth noting that there is still a tradition of monks and nuns in Zen, as there was in the earliest stages of Buddhism (and is, still, in Th. Buddhism). | There seems to be a move away from the idea of karmic fruitfulness which can be found in Th. Buddhism. In fact, “if a good man can be reborn in sukhavati, then how much more a bad man?” asked Shinran, suggesting karma plays absolutely no part in rebirth in Amitabha’s pure land. This seems to contradict the mechanics of karma – i.e. the 12 nidanas - as described within dependent origination. |
| **Rupert Gethin** explains that going right back to the *Abhidharma* (the first commentaries on the Buddha’s teachings), there has been a discussion over whether enlightenment is sudden or gradual at the time of enlightenment: “ultimate truth is not something one can see part of; one either sees as complete, or not at all.” – relates well to **satori.** | **Damien Keown:** “It is most likely that devotionalism was an autonomous development, which arose naturally at a certain cycle in the evolution of Buddhism as ideas implicit in the early teachings were worked out” – suggests that the notion of devotional worship (this is what the chanting and visualisation of Amitabha is) was *always* hinted at in the very earliest teachings of Buddhism. |
| **Bodhidharma's definition of Zen:**  *“A special transmission* ***outside the scriptures;***  *No dependence on words and letters;*  *Direct pointing to the mind of man;*  *Seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.”* | The **Jodoshu** school retains the notion that there can be merit (punna) in moral actions, as described by the Buddha in his Deer Park Sermon, when he explained the 4 noble truths and the 8fold path. However, **Jodo Shinshu** moves away from this and has its entire focus on the faith aspect of the Nembutsu. |
| **Satori** can be first seen in the Buddha’s own enlightenment, which demonstrates that the goal, at least, of Zen Buddhism goes back to the life of the Buddha himself. | **Damien Keown** notes that, in contrast to Indian Buddhism (e.g. Theravada), Japanese Buddhism has a strong emphasis on communities and group values and says, “influential teacher such as *Shinran* disapproved of Monasticism and encouraged monks to marry and play a full part in social life.” |
|  | The question needs analysis: what do we *mean* by the Buddha’s ‘original teachings’? the sukhavati sutras, for example, are only non-canonical to Theravadans. They are seen in Mahayana as the Buddha’s original teachings and form part of the sizeable Mahayana canon. |