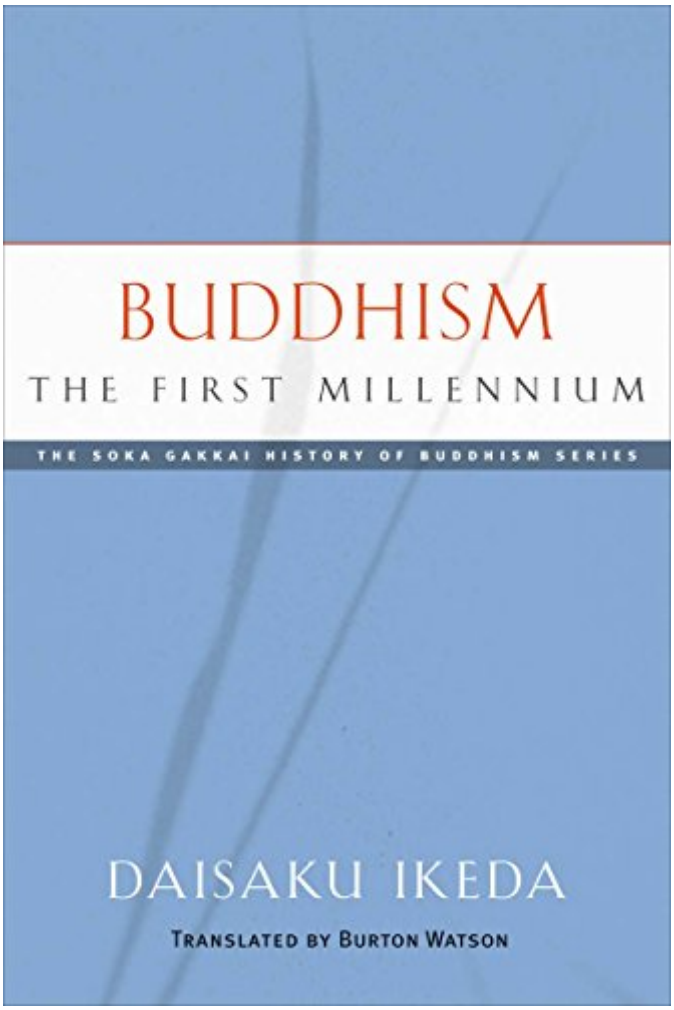
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Buddhism, The First Millennium



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Synopsis

After ShakyamuniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s death, his followers were able to establish the foundation of Buddhism and spread it beyond India, transcending national boundaries. How did they succeed in doing so? Ikeda offers his insight into the period of uncertainty in which doubt and dissention arose among his followers and discrepancies over the interpretation of ShakyamuniÃ¢â ¬â„¢s teachings were brought to the surface. Despite these problematic challenges, his disciples continuously endeavored to seek the realm of enlightenment Shakyamuni had attained and made Buddhism grow into one of the major world religions. Ikeda vividly describes how Buddhism was handed down from one disciple to another and was spread from India to other areas, shedding light on the formation of the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra in particular, and such well-known figures as King Ashoka, King Milinda and Nagarjuna, who practiced and developed Buddhism.

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Customer Reviews

People often talk about "karma’ and usually with a negative connotation; but they seldom ask or wonder what karma is and how is it produced. People when asked what they think of when they

hear the word "Buddha", often say what generally comes to mind "is the statue of the little fat man with the bald head". This book and the others that I have listed, clarifies the examples I mentioned and much, much more. Buddhism: The First Millenium offers a concise and informative explanation that reveals how Buddhism spread and became a teaching followed by millions of individuals the world over; after the passing of it's founder. Daisaku Ikeda, the author writes in a manner that is scholarly but in terms that are easy to understand and comprehend. This particular book is the second in a series of three that take into account a historical overview as to how Buddhism came into being. The first book, The Living Buddha; the second book that I am commenting on now and the third book, The Flower of Chinese Buddhism allows the reader to access Buddhism from what I believe is an objective viewpoint from the author. The writing appears to be geared towards informing and bringing to light a teaching or religion that is often talked about but not really understood.

Very good reading!

A bit too didactic for me

arrived promptly and as promised. was in excellent condition and well packaged. a thoroughly satisfactory transaction. five stars to the vendor and my thanks!

This book is an excellent summary of the history of buddhism with a focus upon the practices of Nichiren Daishonin. Ikeda has a wonderful writing style with emphasis upon historical facts and schools of buddhism.

A 1977 overview translated in 1982 (to be reprinted in August 2009), this welcome history summarizes early Buddhist attempts to formulate a canon, institute practices, and solve disputes. Ikeda constantly laments the tendency of monks towards argument, but he reminds us how, unlike most religions or ideologies, debates ensued rather than for those who refused to compromise or submit to authority. For, Buddhism departs from centralized, external rulers by encouraging the seeker to look within to find the same teaching that the historical Buddha insisted can be found that leads to freedom.A freedom based more on interior realization rather than social revolution has unfairly caused Westerners to stereotype Buddhism as nihilistic, passive, and disengaged from life. While the monastic tendencies early on strove to control the dharma's compilation and interpretation

as it passed from oral to written form, their understandable worry about the dilution of the original message did push much of the control over the dharma out of the reach of lay people. Ikeda, as a leader of Soka Gakkai, a Japanese movement determined to bring the dharma into everyday, non-clerical dissemination, seeks the same tolerance and respect within the Buddhists who, in the Mahasamghika and later the Mahayana version, followed their reformist zeal.The saga reminded me often of how St Francis of Assisi late in his life struggled against those followers who bickered over how the Rule was to be practiced; analogies to the Reformation certainly also will emerge for readers studying the dogmatist vs. revisionist tensions that may have led to schisms, but at least bloodless ones rather than burning alive heretics. This lesson teaches us all!Ikeda, speaking of Christian parallels, considers suggestive if largely unverifiable ones that show how the spread of Aramaic throughout the Persian empire may have allowed influences to travel from India to Palestine at the time of Jesus. Even if indirectly, common conclusions about lofty wisdom, "doctrinal breadth and depth, and this invariable rejection of class distinctions and narrow racial and national concepts" can "qualify Buddhism and Christianity as world religions." (75) As in the previous volume (also reviewed by me) "The Living Buddha: An Interpretative Biography" in this newly launched (2008-9) series, Ikeda in Burton Watson's efficient translation employs "religion" for the non-theistic philosophy of Buddhism, but this does correspond to common if not technically precise usage among Westerners.With the stories of King Ashoka, great reformer and disseminator of the dharma to even the West within Alexander's heirs in Hellenistic Asia Minor, Ikeda makes a subtle argument. Those familiar with Soka Gakkai in its Japanese manifestation as not only a social movement but a political party may recognize what's alluded to only here. Ikeda uses Ashoka's example to show how a leader can embody the dharma while still allowing others within a polity to follow freedom of religion; the dharma's universality remains untainted by reform, rather it is perfected as people bring Buddhist ethics into the world beyond the monasteries.Naganesa's dialogue with the Greek-rooted King Menander of Bactria, in the "Questions of King Milinda," shows the power of dialogue between Eastern wisdom and Western reason as standards by which we judge truth. (A recent comparison: see my review of Jean-Francois Revel & Matthieu Ricard's "The Monk & the Philosopher.") Still, the question of how "transmigration" differs from rebirth or reincarnation deserved more elucidation.Another interpretative crux, raised in my review of Ikeda's Buddha biography, also enters this sequel. The Therevada version of Buddhism favored monasticism, inward direction, a negative view of what keeps the person from freedom, and a liking for the pattern of earlier Hinduism repeated in the "arhat," the realized-one who as a "voice-hearer" finds enlightenment, if of a lower level. The Mahayana encourage the outward direction, the goal of a bodhisattva that after being

freed stays in future incarnations to help others towards "salvation" (another word taken in this translation that may need caution for a Westerner's understanding within Buddhism).The move from the Therevada's negatively tinged escape from this life's snares into a Mahayana embrace of the possibility of perfection by not individual endurance and renunciation so much as collective advancement may reflect again Ikeda's perspective. The Japanese title, after all's, "My View of Buddhism." Actively overcoming obstacles, bettering society, and enacting suffering as a means to rid one's self of its drawbacks give Ikeda's view energy and impact. Later chapters may flag somewhat by comparison with the historical ones about the dharma's spread, but the sincerity with which Ikeda carefully sifts legend from fact, textual claims from enduring revelation in the Lotus Sutra, do reveal the passion and the clarity of his encounter with the roots of his practice.The book's appended with a helpful glossary and throughly cross-referenced index. Nearly all of the sources, however, are documented only in Japanese; I'd have loved to be able to read some of these that suggest fascinating research about earlier East-West contacts. In the meantime, those of us lacking Japanese can learn about the often overlooked attempts to widen the message of Shakyamuni's dharma to Asia and even beyond, as gleaned from scraps of chronicles, recovered carvings, and massive heaps of textual compendiums.

The history of the Buddhist religion during the centuries following the death of its founder, Shakyamuni, is as fascinating and important as it is problematic. Little documentary evidence remains, but it was in this period that the religion split into its two major branches, the Maha sanghika and the Theravada, and spread beyond India to Central Asia and China in the north and Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia to the south.In Buddhism, The First Millennium, the author pieces together the fabric of events from the distant past with insightful conjecture to bring to the surface the basic pattern of how and why Buddhism came to be a major world religion--spreading into Southeast Asia, China, Korea and Japan--helped along by exceptional rulers like the Indian king Ashoka and the Greek philosopher-king Menander and monks and lay believers like Vimalakirti, Nargarjuna and Vasubandu.The author shows the relevance of the teaching and spirit of the Buddha, not only to Indian society as it was then, but to the world and humankind as they are now.

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