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Competitive Exams: Buddhism

In Buddhism, the concept of liberation, Nirvana, is slightly different from Jainism and Hinduism. It occurs when the body (five aggregates) is extinguished from the cycle of rebirth (In Hinduism too, the cycle of rebirth ends on liberation.). Nirvana is a sanskrit word that literally means “to cease blowing” (as when a candle flame ceases to flicker) and/or extinguishing (that is, of the passions). It is a sramana philosophical concept, used by the Jains and the Buddhists, to describe the enlightenment and liberation of their respective teachers. Nibbana is a word used by the Buddha to describe the perfect peace of the mind that is free from craving, anger and other afflictive states (kilesa). This peace, which is in reality the fundamental nature of the mind, is revealed when the root causes of the afflictive states are dissolved. The causes themselves (see sankhara) lie deep within the mind (that part of the mind that Western psychology calls the subconscious) but their undoing is gradually achieved by living a disciplined life (see eightfold path). In Nibbana the root causes of craving and aversion have been extinguished such that one is no longer subject to human suffering (dukkha) or further states of rebirths in samsara. Buddhist scholar, Prof. Herbert Guenther, states of

Nirvana: “The notion of Nirvana is a transcendental postulate, which can only be proven psychologically/subjectively, not scientifically. Yet all highest and final goals lead towards it; indeed, it appears even to constitute the very commencement of the entire spiritual life ...With the reaching of Nirvana the Path has come to its end and reached its goal. The Self-realisation which was striven after and which here becomes Reality, signifies the ideal personality, the true human being.” (Guenther, *The Problem of the Soul in Early Buddhism*, Curt Weller Verlag, Constanz, 1949, pp. 156 – 157). The Buddha in the Dhammapada says of nirvana that it is “the highest happiness” This happiness is rather an enduring, transcendental happiness integral to the calmness attained through enlightenment or bodhi, than the happiness of blindful entertainment. The knowledge accompanying nirvana is expressed through the word bodhi. In Jainism, it means final release from the karmic bondage. When an enlightened human, such as, an Arhat or a Tirthankara extinguishes his remaining aghatiya karmas and thus ends his worldly existence, it is called nirvana. Technically, the death of an Arhat is called nirvana of Arhat, as he has ended his wordly existence and attained liberation. Moksa, that is to say, liberation follows nirvana. An Arhat becomes a siddha, the liberated one, after attaining nirvana.

The Buddha explains nirvana as “the unconditioned” (asankhata) mind, a mind that has come to a point of perfect lucidity and clarity due to the absence of volitional formations. This being is described by the Buddha as “deathlessness” (Pali: Amata or amaravati) and as the highest spiritual attainment, the natural result that accrues to one who lives a life of virtuous conduct and practise in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path. Such a life dissolves the causes for future becoming (Skt, karma; Pali, kamma) that otherwise keep beings forever wandering

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through the impermanent and suffering-generating realms of desire, form, and formlessness, termed samsara.