The Split In Buddhism Essay, Research Paper

In the very beginning of Buddhism s growth there was a split into to major groups: Mahayana and Theravada. The split began almost three to five hundred years after the death of the Buddha. Most historians are unsure why the split occurred. The major difference between the two is whom Buddhism identifies with the common man or the monk. Mahayana is the form of Buddhism will help make Buddhism spread because it is more acceptable to the common man. The differences of the two show how they can develop and evolve.

There are many major differences between Mahayana and Theravada. Some differences are more important in explaining why the common man is more inclined to be a Mahayanaist Those differences through by understanding the answers will enable you to see why Mahayana is more acceptable to the common man.

Who is the Buddha? The Theravada school believes that the Buddha is the first and foremost Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism from the sixth century bce.

The Mahayana school believes that the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama is just one of innumerable manifestations of the eternal Buddha who is timeless and is manifested in some throughout history.

The essential teachings of each emphasize different things. The Theravada scriptures stress the teachings given by the historical Buddha about the Way and its practice as the essential teachings. While the Mahayana regard the Theravada teachings as authentic, they place greater importance on Buddha s teaching by example. His efforts to alleviate the suffering of others through compassion after his enlightenment. The Mahayana saw the teachings differently. They differentiate from individual to individual, and time to time. This is the primary reason that so many people found Mahayana Buddhism accessible. It can evolve because the central teachings allow it to evolve and adapt. By being a school of thinking that is open to different interpretation, Mahayana can expand since each individual can reach the goals of Buddhism but through reasoning applicable to them.

The Theravada believes that the Buddhist community is primarily for monks and nuns. Laypersons are considered inferior and incapable of reaching enlightenment. The Mahayana though gave the layperson greater significance in their school. They believed that everyone regardless of stature had the potential to reach enlightenment. The Theravada by their position only on laypersons shut out most of the population. In turn Mahayana became the best outlet for many to practice because it did believe in the potential of all.

The Theravada and the Mahayana both agreed to the basic teachings of Buddha except the Mahayana added elements to their Buddhism to becoming more Buddha-like or in Buddha s nature. Monks for themselves designed the Theravada school. While the Mahayana school was able to evolve to meet the common man s needs by giving him as chance not just the monk. This facet of Mahayana gave it more potential to grow. Through that growth Buddhism has spread throughout the world. That Buddhism is mostly Mahayana in essence but different because it has evolved to fit the ideals and philosophies of the people who adopt it. Being able to evolve is what makes Mahayana Buddhism better for the common man.