

transfer, giving offerings to the Buddha is regarded as the same thing as offering to ancestors. The unity of the living and the dead or the bond between descendants and ancestors is assured and affirmed by participating in and observing the Buddhist ancestral rites. In Southeast Asia, ancestor worship is not as evident as in East Asia, but the continual transfer of merit through offerings to monks and the saṅgha provides the opportunity to commemorate and nourish ancestral spirits.

See also: Cosmology; Death; Lineage; Merit and Merit-Making

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ANITYA (IMPERMANENCE)

Impermanence, as the Sanskrit word *anitya* or Pāli word *anicca* are generally translated, is one of the three characteristics of the phenomenal world, or the world in which human beings live. The other two characteristics are DUḤKHA (SUFFERING) and no-self (anātman). The concept of impermanence is fundamental to all Buddhist schools: Everything that exists in this world is impermanent. No element of physical matter or any concept remains unchanged, including the SKANDHA (AGGREGATE) that make up individual persons. Things in the world change in two ways. First, they change throughout time. Second, everything in this world is influenced by other elements of the world, and thus all existence is contingent upon something else. Because of this state of interdependence, everything that exists in this world is subject to change and is thus impermanent. Impermanence is the cause of suffering, because humans attempt to hold on to things that are constantly changing, on the mistaken assumption that those things are permanent.

NIRVĀṆA is the only thing that lies beyond the reach of change, because it exists beyond the conceptual dualism of existence or nonexistence. Traditionally, Buddhist texts explain that because nirvāṇa is not dependent upon other elements in the world, it is described as “uncreated” and “transcendent.” In short, nirvāṇa is not subject to change and is therefore not impermanent. For one who pursues the path toward enlightenment, the goal is to recognize the truth of impermanence by learning how not to depend upon the notion that things exist permanently in the world. According to the THERAVĀDA school of Buddhism, the first step in knowing the nature of reality is recognizing that neither the self nor the world exist permanently. Impermanence is woven throughout all of Buddhism, from its texts to artistic representations of Buddhist concepts.

See also: Anātman/Ātman (No-Self/Self); Bodhi (Awakening); Four Noble Truths; Path; Praṭīyasa-mutpāda (Dependent Origination)