

Themes in spring
summer fall winter
and spring philosophy
essay



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Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring directed by Kim Ki-Duk is a beautiful film about a young Buddhist monk who progresses through the four seasons of life, from childhood to old age. Buddhism is a system of doctrine and practice largely based on the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha commonly known as the Buddha 'enlightened' or 'awakened'. The four central teachings of the Buddha are known as the Four Noble Truths. According to the Buddha, the real nature of the life and universe is nothing other than suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering. The Four Noble Truths are the fundamental teachings that all Buddhists learn. In the film, three important principles of Buddhism: Samsara, Attachment and Impermanence are elucidated. Samsara is the eternal life cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Attachments are simple beliefs or delusions that becomes solidified as "truth" in our mind. Finally, Impermanence is the concept that everything changes and nothing stays the same. The film portrays the suffering of the world and the cause of our suffering is the "self". This paper will analyze how the core principles of Buddhism; Samsara, Attachment, and Impermanence, provide an intricate balance between goodness, flaws and the nature of humans in the external world.

Samsara is one of Buddhism's fundamental principles that represents the cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. There are several examples of this in the film. The changing seasons from spring, summer, fall, winter, and finally spring again represents the metaphor for how Buddhists view the life cycle of a person. Furthermore each season is represented by a different animal: A Dog in the spring, Rooster in the summer, Cat in the fall, and finally a snake

in the winter. The snake is the Old Monk who committed suicide to liberate himself from worldly attachments and is reincarnated in a different form. Buddhists believe that Samsara is driven by karma, which is a basic Buddhist theory that stands for action, work or deed. Your actions in life will determine where and how you will be reincarnated. When the boy was young, he tortures a defenseless frog, a snake and a fish, and when he is older he himself suffers from loss of his loved one and internal conflict. In the real world, the actions of a person, whether good or bad, reflect the quality of his/her life. The cycle of Samsara is broken when one reaches Nirvana. Nirvana means “ the extinction of clinging; the elimination of the atma-graha (holding to the concept of the self) and dharma-graha (holding to the concept that things are real); and the eradication of the obstacle of defilement and the obstacle of knowledge.” (Yun 1987, 50) One is freed from desire and therefore suffering. It illustrates the quiet state of mind that exists when the fire of attachment and desire are annihilated.

The Buddha’s teaching about attachment begins with the Four Noble Truths. The Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Arising of Suffering, The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering and The Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering. Absent from the monastery, the young monk returns and is consumed with rage and jealousy that forces him to commit murder. In the film the Master states “ Lust awakens the desire to possess. And that awakens the intent to murder.” This is exactly what the young boy did when his worldly delusions led to possessives. The reason for suffering, desire, and lust is because the mind becomes attached to impermanent things and that blinds or alters reality. “ Everything, and thingness itself, is inseparable from suffering in

some form, and that the false, ingrained illusion of 'I'-ness is the cause of the greater part of it." (Humphreys 1969, 50) According to the Buddha, an individual's ego and self is an illusion, meaning there is no such thing as the self, only a set of reactions. There isn't a single soul that flows through our perception that isn't changing. When the young boy fell in love with the girl, it awakens his yearnings and lust for sex; his actions established an attachment that ended with murder. We can state that he was unaware of the consequences and did not realize that he was running from one thing to next in pursuit of something that did not exist. As desire increases, our thinking tends to become impractical. We lose the sense of well-grounded reason that is so important to the spiritual path. When the young boy returns to the monastery he tries to kill himself for the wrong deeds that he committed by putting pieces of paper that says 'shut.' But in time the Old monk stops him and punishes him by making him carve the Buddhist sutras into the hermitage's deck which brings piece to one's heart. After completing the sutras, the boy is taken into custody and the Old Monk prepares a pyre funeral for himself. Here the killing of oneself is symbolized differently for each monk. The young boy uses the shutting force for inner maturity verses the old monk does it for liberation. In this scene, the concept of attachment plays after the boy completes the sutras and realizes that life is suffering and that everything that we get attached to is impermanent.

Impermanence also known as Anicca is central to Buddha's teachings that "all things arise must change and decline, and they are but false appearances without any stable essence." (Yun 2001, 27) In the film the animals and the water around the temple change every season, illustrating the growth and

the progression of time. The concept of change and impermanence is important in and of itself. Although the things in the world may seem substantial, when analyzed in detail they are essentially evanescent, an illusion which cannot be grasped. All that we can hold on to is a false appearance that is fundamentally devoid of all absolute qualities. The relationship between the young monk and the girl who visited the monastery to treat her soul is an example of impermanence. The young monk flourishes from having no desire to the worldly delusions such of lust, passion and suffering. The concept of impermanence plays when the girl leaves him for another man demonstrating that the world is subject to constant change. As the Master stated “ sometimes we have to let go of the things we like, what you like others will like as well.” The boundaries of the mind are similar to the Buddhist monastery doors as well as the doors on the “ no walls” inside the temple. We can always be conscious of our thoughts and follow the right path or we can choose to follow our desires without regards for any rules. The boy does the latter, follows his heart when the girl invites him to sleep with her. Buddhists believe that the concept of impermanence goes hand in hand with the concept of emptiness. “ Emptiness means that nothing has a permanent “ self-nature” or essence.” (Yun 2001, 28) In other words, nothing in the world has any permanence, definite or absolute fundamental nature. For example, when we face the inherent emptiness of our problems, we are better equipped to see through them and not react with passionate or violent emotions.

This story of young boy’s progression to manhood was not without its obstacles but of resolution as well. He progresses from innocence to love,

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pain, redemption, and finally Nirvana, the ultimate goal of every Buddhist. Samsara represents the interconnectedness of actions in ones life towards people and nature and their faith after death. Everything that we desire and avoid in life is a form of attachment. It means that without particular person or thing, we cannot live or the obsession to get rid of something or someone that is in our lives. Finally the principles of Impermanence can simple mean reality. Everything that we do and feel is in constant change. A person may feel empty at one moment and overtime that feeling goes away and is replaced with different set of emotions. The teachings of Buddha although may be old but are still very relevant in todays world in which people are tempted on daily basis to pleasures of forbidden and incidences that questions ones morals. They teach love, self-control, obedience, and bring people together in a community setting with other followers. A person goes through many ups and downs in life but in every case finds a way to liberate his soul through mediation, prayer, and relationships.