

The movie *Onibaba* is based on an old Buddhist tale, “A Mask with Flesh Scared a Wife” – about a mother who tries to stop her daughter from being *virtuous* by frightening her with a mask, but the daughter is so virtuous she’s not scared. Buddha then punishes the woman by making the mask stick to her face.

Are the characters in *Onibaba* spiritual?

- Not in a high-minded or philosophical sense; more in a practical or folkloric way. The mother uses spirituality to manipulate the daughter (that is, she discusses the torments of hell with her daughter to shape the girl’s actions).

What does the pit symbolize?

- It might represent Hell; it might represent the characters’ bad deeds or all their evil.

What about sexuality in the film?

- There are positive and negative aspects to it, as it’s presented in the film; the characters certainly don’t take the Buddhist views about it seriously (they view sex as natural, rather than wrong).

And the mask?

- It’s something of an evocation of Hell.

### Background to Medieval Buddhism

Classical Buddhism:

- Tendai: everyone can become a Buddha if they do the right things - detachment, etc. – and not only humans but *anything*. This school incorporates kami and gods, as well, as all being on the path to Buddha.
- Shingon: ritualistic; “true word.”

With the economic growth and development of different social classes, people needed more religions and variations to suit these differences.

“Degenerate Age” (mappo): “we’re all going to Hell” unless we have a savior; hence Amida Buddha: a savior-type bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is someone who helps others achieve enlightenment at the expense of their own soul moving on. (Tendai).

“Pure Land”: where Amida and the saints live; a person can hear the lessons of Buddha and cultivate the way of the Buddha. It’s sort of a level of heaven.

nembutsu: a sincere chanting of the Amida Buddha's name to achieve passage to the Pure Land

Shinran was the one who asked, “Why repeat nembutsu when once, really sincerely, should be good enough.”

Zen Buddhism is mostly *stereotypically* associated with samurai; they actually practiced many kinds of religions.

Zen: this is where the tea ceremony comes in; we’ll look at its links with Zen.

Four aspects of the tea ceremony:

- harmony
- equality
- reverence
- simplicity

The tea ceremony is supposed to put you into a tranquil state of mind.

What is wabi-sabi? What’s at the heart of it?

- It’s a form of simplicity; imperfection or a flaw makes something beautiful.

wabi: subjective aspect

sabi: objective aspect

wabi-sabi: always referred to together.

asymmetry: an imperfection that lures your curiosity and causes you to think more about what you’re seeing

fox-spirits: turn into human form to seduce people to mischief; tricksters.

Oni: demons from hell

[Film: *Rikyu*]