

## BUDDHISM

**Buddha** lived around the period from 563 to 483 BC. He was born in Kapilavastu, India. This is now in the area of the city of Nepal. Buddha was taught to be a warrior and a ruler. He married at an early age and participated in the life of the court. Buddha found this worldly, carefree existence dull and self-indulgent. He had an early inclination toward meditation. He began wandering in search of enlightenment.

While wandering in Northern India, he first investigated Hinduism and took instruction with Brahman teachers. Hinduism has some extremely rigid exercises in religious duties and austerities toward worldly desires. Buddha, whose family name was Gautama, found the Hindu caste system repellant, and ascetic way of life futile. About 526 BC in a place that is now Buddha Gaya in the state of Bihar, he was sitting under a tree and experienced the great enlightenment he sought. This enlightenment revealed the way of salvation from suffering. The name Buddha means 'Enlightened One.' His name was Siddhartha Gautama Buddha.

Soon afterward he preached a sermon that is still preserved today, which contains many elements of Buddhism.

Tradition has it that in the year 533 he encountered a sick man, and aged man, and a dead man. Suddenly he noticed and deeply realized that suffering is the common lot of mankind. He then determined to live as a begging man devoting himself exclusively to a religious life, living a calm and serene life, forsaking wealth, family, and power in a quest for truth. Being far from the land of Israel, it was not likely that he would know what God was doing to preserve the seed of Abraham, and having descended from people who had already rejected God, he would not know that truth that leads to life with God; but it is always a good idea to seek truth. His decision to change his life is known to Buddhism as the Great Renunciation.

He gathered disciples and traveled through the Ganges River valley teaching his doctrines, gathering more followers. He then established monastic communities that admitted anyone, regardless of caste. He returned for a brief time to his home town and while there, converted his father, his wife, and other family members to his beliefs. He spent about 45 years converting people to his teachings. He began a new religion during this time. His teachings have influenced many people for nearly 2500 years. He died at age 80. All of the surviving accounts of his life were written many years after his death by his followers.

His teaching against self-indulgence, the caste system, and extremes of spiritualism and asceticism also influenced the Hindu religion.

**Buddhism** was a monastic movement within the dominant Brahman tradition of Hinduism. It quickly developed its own direction. Rejecting significant aspects of Hindu philosophy, the authority of its priesthood, and the Vedic scriptures, while denying that a person's spiritual worth depended on his birth status.

Buddhism has been significant in Asia, from India east through Burma.

Four Noble Truths are the core of Buddha's enlightenment:

1. Life is suffering, human existence is essentially painful from birth to death. There is no relief in death as life is a cycle. Leading to rebirth.
2. Suffering is caused by ignorance of the nature of reality and the attachment and grasping to life.
3. Suffering can be ended by overcoming ignorance and attachment.
4. There is an eight-fold path to suppressing suffering consisting of the right views, intentions, speech, actions, livelihood, efforts, right mindedness, and right contemplation. These eight are in three categories that form the Buddhist faith; Morality, Wisdom, and Concentration.

Buddha taught the denial of a permanent soul. Existence being characterized as having no soul, no permanence, but with suffering. He taught a doctrine of dependent origination. Ignorance in a previous life creates a tendency for the mind and senses to lead to craving and clinging to existence. This condition triggers a process of becoming once again in a renewed cycle of birth, old age, death, and a connection between one life and the next, in a stream of existences. These renewed existences are not permanent life, but a passing of the soul from one life to another.

Closely related to this belief of recycled life is the teaching of 'Karma'. Karma consists of the ethical consequences of a person's acts. There is a universal justice in that good deeds are rewarded and evil deeds are punished in the actions leading to rebirth. This karmic process operates through a moral law rather than a divine judgment. The karma determined your species, beauty, longevity, wealth, intelligence, and social status. According to the Buddha, karma of varying types can lead to your rebirth as a human, a ghost, an animal, or even a devil or a Hindu god.

Buddhism does not assign the gods any special significance as they are in the same process as all other creatures. While they are gods they are living in heaven in a long and pleasurable condition. Even the gods are subject to death and a rebirth of some other, maybe a lower state of existence. Gods are not in control of human destiny, nor were they the creators of it. **There is no value in offering sacrifices or prayers to them.** Human existence is to be preferred, as enlightenment is only possible for humans.

The ultimate goal in the Buddhist cycle is to be released from existence with its inherent suffering. To achieve this is called Nirvana. Nirvana is the enlightened condition where greed, hatred, and ignorance are gone. This would not be a condition of total annihilation but of a state that is indescribable.

Over time there have been changes and divisions of Buddhism too. Zen and Pure Land were the most important of these Zen was developed in China and later in Japan. Zen advocates the practice of meditation as the way a sudden, intuitive realization of the inner Buddha nature in you. Zen was founded by an Indian monk named Bodhidharma who went to China in the year 520 AD. Zen emphasizes practice and personal enlightenment rather than a study of doctrine or scripture.

Pure Land stresses faith and devotion to the Buddha of infinite light. This is the means to a rebirth in an eternal paradise known as Pure Land.

There is also a Japanese Buddhism named after its founder, Nichiren. From the 13th century AD this sect believed that the Lotus Sutra contains the essence of Buddhist teaching. By repeating a formula "*Homage to the Lotus Sutra*" the devotee may gain enlightenment.

Worship in Buddhism is individual rather than congregational. An expression of faith has been the reciting of the three refuges. "*I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the dharma (doctrine), and I take refuge in the Sangra.*" The Sangra is the monastic community of various orders. Some honor Buddha by walking around a dome-like sacred structure carrying flowers and incense. For some, images and temple altars serve as a focus for worship. Prayer and chanting are common acts of devotion as are offerings of fruit, flowers, and incense.

Buddhism has the ability to adapt to changing conditions and cultures, but always opposed too materialism.

Is Buddhism as good as Hinduism? Is Buddhism as good as the religion of the ancient Egyptians or the Chaldeans? Is one religion as good as the another? Does Buddhism connect to our origins? Did we ever have an origin or has recycling been forever? Does it provide forgiveness from sin, or just relief from suffering? Does Buddhism ever give promise of eternal life with the God of creation, or just a temporary existence with some gods.

Would a person of the Buddhist or Hindu persuasion finding themselves as a human now, living in the Christian age, be able to trust Jesus Christ who suffered for mankind, pass through their personal suffering; obey the principles of the New Covenant in Christ, and have the hope of a permanent life with God, as the Christians do? Would this end the cycle of rebirths? Would this belief in Christ end the cycle of existence that Buddha believed in, and that the Hindus teach?

## ZEN BUDDHISM

**Zen** is a Chinese way of accomplishing the Buddhist goal of seeing the world just as it is, with an attitude, or state of consciousness which grasps no thought or feelings, where thoughts leave no trace. This attitude is called 'no mind'. Zen students it in meditation, while they simply observe without mental comment, whatever may be happening.

Zen is not a religion or philosophy in the usual sense. It has little to teach and has no rituals. It is a method of discipline of the mind.

Zen or Ch'an is a Buddhist school that developed in China and later in Japan by combining the Mahayana form of Buddhism originating in India and the Chinese philosophy of Taoism. Zen and Ch'an are respectively, the Japanese and Chinese ways, which designate a state of mind roughly equivalent to contemplation or meditation. This is a state of consciousness of a Buddha, one whose mind is free from the assumption that the distinct individuality of oneself and other things is real. Buddhism holds that separate things exist only in relation to one another. Reality is that the world is 'just as it is' apart from any specific thought about it.

Zen was introduced into China by the Indian monk Bodhidharma. Zen has had a strong influence upon the arts and crafts in Far Eastern countries because its point of view is connected with action rather than theory and with direct vision of nature rather than interpretation. Chinese black ink painting during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) became one of the finest artistic expressions of the Zen school. Zen is studied in semi-monastic communities to which students are admitted for limited periods. The Zen monastery is a training school combining meditation with manual labor, with special attention to the arts and crafts.

The two main sects of Zen were brought to Japan by Japanese who studied in China. The Buddhist monk, Eisai introduced Rinzaï Zen in 1191. and the Buddhist monk Dogen introduced Soto Zen in 1227. Both sects of Zen continue to flourish in Japan. Under the influence of Zen, the Japanese brought the art of ceremonial tea drinking to refinement and developed a distinctive kind of poetry, a brief verse form called Haiku.

After World War Two and the occupation of Japan an interest developed in Europe and the United States in Zen, especially among artists, philosophers, and psychologists.

Is Zen Buddhism as good as Buddhism? Is Zen Buddhism an improvement over Buddhism? Does Zen Buddhism connect to our origins? Does it provide forgiveness from sins against God, our creator? Does Zen Buddhism ever give a promise of eternal life with God or connect us to the promise of a Savior as the religions of Judaism and Christianity do? Is this religion as good as any other?