

Buddhism

Buddhism has been a dominant religious, cultural, and social force throughout Asia. Today, most Buddhists live in Sri Lanka, East and Southeast Asia, and Japan.

The founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Guatama, who lived in India from approximately 563 to 483 B.C. As a young man, Siddhartha achieved an understanding of the cause of suffering. From then on, he was known as the Buddha, meaning “the enlightened one.”



Worship

Statues of the Buddha, such as this one in Japan, appear in many forms and sizes throughout Asia. The Buddha preached that the key to happiness was detachment from all worldly goods and desires. This was achieved by following the Eightfold Path and the Middle Way, a life between earthly desires and extreme forms of self-denial.



Leadership

Those who dedicate their entire life to the teachings of the Buddha are known as Buddhist monks and nuns. In many Buddhist sects, monks are expected to lead a life of poverty, meditation, and study. Here, Buddhist monks in Thailand carry what are known as begging bowls. To learn humility, monks must beg for food and money. They are not allowed to speak to or notice their donors. Any communication with donors is believed to lessen the spirituality of the act.



Ritual

Women in Rangoon, Myanmar, sweep the ground so that monks can avoid stepping on and killing any insects. Many Buddhists believe in rebirth. Rebirth is the notion that human beings, after death, are reborn and continue to exist in one form or another. This also applies to animals, birds, fish, and insects. Buddhists believe that all living beings possess the potential for spiritual growth—and the possibility of rebirth as humans. Because of this, Buddhists take special care not to kill any living being.

Major Buddhist Sects

Mahayana

(the Wide Way)

Believed that many people could become Buddhas. The Mahayana ideal is the bodhisattva, who delays entering nirvana in order to return to the world and help others attain nirvana.

Buddhism*

Theravada

(the Narrow Way)

Held to the Buddha's stricter, original teachings.

*Buddhism consists of two major sects. A religious sect is a group within a religion that distinguishes itself by one or more unique beliefs.

Teachings

In his sermons, Siddhartha taught the four main ideas that he had understood in his enlightenment. He called those ideas the Four Noble Truths.

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| First Noble Truth | Everything in life is suffering and sorrow. | | | | | | | | |
| Second Noble Truth | The cause of all suffering is people's selfish desire for the temporary pleasures of this world. | | | | | | | | |
| Third Noble Truth | The way to end all suffering is to end all desires. | | | | | | | | |
| Fourth Noble Truth | The way to overcome such desires and attain enlightenment is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, which is called the Middle Way between desires and self-denial. Following this path could lead to nirvana, release from selfishness and pain. The Noble Eightfold Path is made up of the following: <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Right views;</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Right livelihood;</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Right aspirations;</td> <td>Right endeavor;</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Right speech;</td> <td>Right mindfulness;</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Right conduct;</td> <td>Right meditation.</td> </tr> </table> | Right views; | Right livelihood; | Right aspirations; | Right endeavor; | Right speech; | Right mindfulness; | Right conduct; | Right meditation. |
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| Right conduct; | Right meditation. | | | | | | | | |

ICONS, TEXTS & SYMBOLS



Wheel of the Law

The Buddha is said to have “set in motion the wheel of the dharma” during his first sermon. His teaching often is symbolized by a wheel.



The Three Cardinal Faults

This image depicts what Buddhists consider the three cardinal faults of humanity: greed (the pig); hatred (the snake); and delusion (the rooster).



Sacred Writings

This palm leaf is part of an 11th-century text called the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, which contains some 8,000 verses. The text, written in Sanskrit, relates the life and teachings of the Buddha.