

# Buddhism

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There are three major Buddhist traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Theravada Buddhism is mainly practiced in the Southeast Asian countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma). Mahayana Buddhism is primarily practiced in China, Korea, and Japan. Vajrayana Buddhism is practiced in the Central Asian areas of Tibet and Mongolia, and in the Shingon school in Japan. The Dalai Lama is representative of this tradition. In addition, many independent Buddhist groups have formed following the teachings of a specific leader. This is especially true of Buddhism in the United States.

To do no evil,  
To cultivate the good,  
To purify one's mind.  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.  
Dhammapada, 183

## RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

**Required Daily Observances.** Although differences may be seen among the Buddhist traditions, most observe the following: acts of devotion (bowing, making offerings of incense and food, and honoring sacred objects); upholding the precepts and the six *paramitas* through meditation; and the study and chanting of sacred writings in developing wisdom, compassion, and the attainment of Buddhahood. These practices are usually conducted daily on an individual basis.

**Required Weekly Observances.** Many Buddhist groups in America have adopted the practice of meeting weekly. The daily practices are done together as group observances. Some Buddhist traditions may meet on the full-moon day of each month.

**Required Occasional Observances.** Each tradition honors a significant date in the life of its founder and may also honor significant dates in the lives of other notable persons. Other days of significance include New Year's Day, Spring and Autumn Equinox, and ancestor memorial days. These are not necessarily days free from work.

In Japan, Obon is observed. It is held during summer and consists of a festival with folk dancing and services honoring one's ancestors. Other Buddhist traditions, especially from countries influenced by Confucianism, conduct memorial services for deceased family members.

Pilgrimages to sacred sites, such as sites where the Buddha became enlightened, and *stupas*, monuments housing ashes or relics of the Buddha or popular disciples, are also important in many traditions.

## Holy Days

- February 15, *Parinirvana Day* - commemorates the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.
- April 8, Buddha Day - celebrates the birth of the Buddha.
- December 8, Bodhi Day - a celebration of the enlightenment of the Buddha when he set out on quest of the Middle Way.

**Buddhist inmates may select either the three above-listed dates or Vesak Day, but not all four.**

- Vesak Day, the full-moon day in May - a celebration of the birth and the day of enlightenment, and a commemoration of the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Note:** Generally, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists observe the first three holy days separately; Theravada Buddhists observe all three events on Vesak Day. Participating inmates may request either Vesak Day or the three dates as dates of work proscription. These dates may vary slightly depending on the inmate's country of origin. If a question arises concerning actual dates of observance, contact the Regional Chaplaincy Administrator.

In some Asian countries where Buddhism is the predominant religion, the celebration on January 1 has taken on great religious significance. It has been the experience in the Bureau that inmates of those countries may ask for program time in the Chapel. This day is not a day of work proscription.

## RELIGIOUS ITEMS

### Personal Religious Items

- Religious Medallion and chain.
- \*Prayer beads, called *mala*, *juzu*, or *nenju (Japanese)*, consisting of 108 beads.
- \*Small picture or scroll of the Buddha or object of worship.

<b>Security note:</b> Only plastic prayer beads are permitted in the institutions.
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### Congregate Religious Items

- \*Altar.
- \*Image of the Buddha.
- \*Bell and *dorje*.
- Incense and burner.
- \**Zafu* (small cushion).
- \**Zabuton* (meditation mat).
- \*Singing bowls.
- Candles.

- Candle holders.
- Cup.
- \**Tingshas* (clappers).
- \*Silver bowls.
- \*Prayer wheel.
- Flowers, usually made of silk as a substitute for fresh flowers.

**Note:** Pictures of items marked with an asterisk (\*) and a description of their uses are provided in the section on Religious Accouterments.

**Searches.** Personal property should be respectfully handled while items are being examined or searched. There are no restrictions on searching religious property. However, items should not be placed on or come in contact with unclean or unsanitary places such as floors, toilets, or basins. Religious items should be returned to the same place after the search. When packing property, wrap items in a clean cloth or towel.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Requirements (including Rites of Conversion).** There are different requirements for membership, depending on which tradition a person desires to join. All traditions honor the threefold refuge; some require a person to formally declare taking refuge in its three treasures (the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and upholding the precepts held by the monks, nuns, or laity. Some Buddhist traditions no longer have monks or nuns, but are composed solely of laity.

The formula found in *Going to the Threefold Refuge* must be recited three times. The utterance need not be public, but could be self-administered as long as the individual has a clear understanding of what the Dhamma of the Buddha is. The formula is:

I take refuge in the Buddha;  
I take refuge in the Dhamma;  
I take refuge in the Sangha.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the incomparably honored one;  
I take refuge in the Dhamma, honorable for its purity;  
I take refuge in the Sangha, honorable for its harmonious life.

I have finished taking refuge in the Buddha;  
I have finished taking refuge in the Dhamma;  
I have finished taking refuge in the Sangha.

**Total Membership.** It is estimated that there are about 500 million Buddhists in the world today, and 4 to 6 million in the U.S. American Buddhism is a very diversified movement, since different immigrant groups practice their traditional form. In addition, many Americans strive to practice Buddhism, following the teachings of different leaders.

## MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS

There are no medical prohibitions in most Buddhist traditions. Some traditions may have medical issues addressed in their precepts, such as the taking of drugs. These concerns will be reviewed on an individual basis.

## DIETARY STANDARDS

Most Buddhists follow a vegetarian diet even though this is not a precept of the faith. The precept concerning not eating after noon may be followed by some. The sixth precept is "to refrain from eating at the forbidden time (i.e., after noon)." Self-selection from the mainline, which includes the no-flesh option, is recommended.

## BURIAL RITUALS

There are no restrictions on autopsies. Most Buddhist traditions place high importance on funeral rituals, although they can vary greatly. A Buddhist funeral generally includes a procession, ritual prayers, a water-pouring ritual, cremation, final prayers, and a communal meal. In cultures where wood is expensive, burial in the ground is an acceptable alternative.

Memorial services may be held in the weeks following the funeral. Yearly memorial services are held on the anniversary date of death.

## SACRED WRITINGS

The modern Buddhist Canons are primarily derived from two ancient sources: the Buddhist Canon written in Pali and the Buddhist Canon written in Sanskrit. The Buddha's writings were translated into many different languages, but three - in the Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan languages - are more thorough and complete than others and are the bases for the Buddhist Canons.

The **Pali Canon** or ***Tripitaka*** is a collection of Pali-language texts that form the doctrinal basis of Theravada Buddhism. The three divisions of the *Tripitaka* are:

- **Vinaya Pitaka:** A collection of texts describing rules of conduct primarily for the community of ordained monks and nuns.
- **Sutta Pitaka:** A collection of discourses, attributed to the Buddha and several of his closest disciples, which form the basis of Theravada Buddhism.
- **Abidhamma Pitaka:** A collection of texts in which the underlying principles found in the *Sutta Pitaka* are systematized. This collection is an analytical and methodological elaboration of the *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Sutta Pitaka*.

Perhaps the best known work in the Pali Canon is the ***Dhammapada***, an anthology of maxims arranged in 423 stanzas.

The **Tibetan Canon** describes the teachings and understanding of the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism. The longest of the three Canons, the Tibetan Canon has two major divisions:

- **Kanjur.** This collection of 98 volumes is said to consist of the words or sayings of the Buddha and has six subdivisions.
- **Tanjur.** This collection of 224 volumes (3,626 texts) is a supplement to the *Kanjur*. Among the works is a collection of stories and commentaries on the tantra section of the *Kanjur*.

The **Chinese Canon.** The now standard modern edition is known as the ***Taisho Shinsu Daizokyo*** (its Japanese name), containing 55 volumes with 2,184 texts, along with a supplement of 45 additional volumes. One of these volumes could contain the entire Pali Canon in terms of length. These volumes contain records of the Buddha's teachings as accepted by the Mahayana tradition.

There is some overlap of content in the three Canons. The length of each Canon allows for differences among the Buddhist traditions.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since Buddhist traditions in America are independent, there is no central organization or administration. Each tradition will have its own organizational structure.

**Location of Headquarters.** Each chaplain is encouraged to develop local contacts.

**Contact Office/Person.** No one religious leader exists who can speak for all of Buddhism. Contact with local Buddhist leaders is encouraged. The Internet is a good source for information on Buddhism and the locations of different Buddhist temples and spiritual leaders.

## HISTORY

**The Life of Shakyamuni Buddha.** No biography was written of Shakyamuni Buddha, the tradition's historical founder, until 400 years after his death. Some biographies are straightforward, while others interweave religious myths and literary invention. The stories about the Buddha are not important for their historical accuracy, but rather as an ideal model for later generations. Existing stories differ at times, but the following account highlights generally accepted important moments of his life.

A prince named Siddhartha was born to Suddhodana Gautama, King of the Shakya clan, and Queen Maya in Lumbini Garden in the southern foothills of the Himalayan mountains around 560 B.C.E. His mother died a few days after his birth, so her sister, Siddhartha's aunt, his father's second wife, raised him. Due to his father's position, Siddhartha enjoyed a life of wealth and luxury and was protected from the sufferings of life. He married a beautiful princess, Yasodhara, and soon had a son, Rahula. However, he became more and more concerned with religious considerations. On trips outside the palace, he saw a very old man, a very ill man, a corpse, and a religious mendicant; he began to reflect on the suffering all people faced. As a result Gautama decided to abandon his life in the palace and become a mendicant. This became known as the Great Renunciation and occurred when he was 29 years old.

The prince followed some of the spiritual teachers of the time, but after mastering their disciplines and relentlessly practicing asceticism, he found himself no closer to overcoming the suffering he had witnessed. After six years of such practices, with his body and mind weak from severe self-mortification, he gave up on these paths to seek his own. He was 35 years old when he reportedly sat under a bodhi tree in meditation for a period of seven weeks and realized enlightenment - true insight into reality - and overcame suffering. For the next 45 years, until his death at age 80, he traveled around India teaching all classes of people what he had experienced and gained many disciples. He became known as a Buddha, an Enlightened One, and was revered as Shakyamuni, the Sage of the Shakya clan.

After Shakyamuni Buddha's death, the history of Buddhism can be roughly divided into four major periods. The first three lasted about 500 years each and marked major developments in the religion.

**Early Buddhist Developments (500 B.C.E. - 0 C.E.).** During Shakyamuni Buddha's life, he formed a Sangha, a community of followers, consisting of four groups: monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. To join the Sangha, a person had to proclaim that he or she would take refuge in the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dhamma (both the Buddha's teachings and the truth they conveyed), and the Sangha. The practice centered on what became known as the Three Trainings.

The first of the trainings was learning the precepts or rules governing the Sangha. The different groups that made up the Sangha had different sets of precepts. Of special importance for the monks and nuns were the sets known as the Ten Precepts, although the full list contained well over 200 precepts and was slightly different for each group. The Ten Precepts involved abstention from taking life, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying, drinking liquor, eating after noon, watching dancing, singing, and shows, adorning oneself with garlands, perfume, and ointments, using a high bed, and receiving gold and silver. The first five were emphasized as having special significance for the laity. The laity were also asked to financially support monks and nuns.

Overall, the precepts were not viewed as commandments set forth from the Buddha but as rules to help the Sangha reach enlightenment, with detailed procedures on how to deal with those accused of breaking the precepts. The Buddha said that the Sangha had the power to change "minor" rules, although he did not explicitly list which rules were minor.

The second of the trainings was meditation. During this period, meditation became the practice of mental development. There were two basic types. One, widely practiced throughout India before the Buddha, involved focusing on one point to enter higher mental states. The second, called *Vipassana* or insight meditation, was more unique to the Buddha. It developed insight into the basic nature of life and led to the liberation of the mind into *nirvana*. Due to the time needed to develop this practice, laity

were not expected to become skilled in meditation.

The third of the trainings was wisdom - a product of the first two trainings. It represented the highest stage of spiritual cultivation and progress. The laity, due to lack of skill in meditation, were not expected to reach the same depth of wisdom as monks or nuns, but could work towards a good rebirth, through which an individual could eventually reach enlightenment.

The Buddha also directed many of his followers to spread the Dhamma to benefit others. They spread Buddhism throughout India and surrounding parts of Asia. However, during the three-month rainy season they gathered at retreats, which later became the origin of Buddhist monasteries.

Another important practice that developed was devotion towards sacred sites, such as sites where the Buddha became enlightened, and *stupas*, monuments housing ashes or relics of the Buddha or popular disciples. In addition, objects of worship were developed. Statues of the Buddha were not generally used until after 100 C.E. Instead, more abstract representations appeared. One common object was a pair of footprints, representing the Buddha's time on earth and the path he set forth. A lotus symbolized Buddhism, as the Buddha urged his followers to be like the lotus, which rises from the mud and murky water to bloom beautifully. Still others included a wheel with eight spokes, representing the Wheel of Life and the Eightfold Path.

During this first period of Buddhism, divisions appeared based on differing interpretations of teachings and precepts compiled upon the Buddha's death. In each of these, monastic communities most fully expressed the Buddha's teaching, but large lay communities also emerged in which Buddhism was practiced in rituals, prayers, and chants by monks and nuns, practices that continue among laity today. One of these early traditions, Theravada or the Way of the Elders, is practiced primarily in the Southeast Asian countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma).

**The Development of Mahayana Buddhism (0 C.E. - 500 C.E.).** Around 100 B.C.E., a reformulation of the teachings occurred as Buddhism encountered new cultures, ideas, and changing social forces in India. Within the Buddhist community, the laity began to exert more influence in the Sangha. These reformulations also included new literature attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha. Gradually, the historical person Shakyamuni was replaced by a description of a cosmic Buddha who became the embodiment of Truth.

About 200 years after these new texts appeared, this trend was systematized and began a new movement within Buddhism, called Mahayana, the Greater Vehicle, as its teaching became the means by which all people could reach enlightenment. The older forms, including Theravada, were called Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle by Mahayanists, who dismissed these groups because they did not emphasize that enlightenment could be achieved by both monastics and laity.

Reformulations during this period can be summarized under three headings:

- A shift from psychological to metaphysical. As Buddhism came into contact with other cultures and ideas, it began to look beyond its emphasis on the development of mind and nature to the understanding of universal truths not limited by culture. The central idea of Mahayana, based on the teachings of impermanence and interdependence, is often called "Emptiness" or "Oneness" or "Suchness." "Emptiness" means that all things are without permanence, since everything changes as it influences and is influenced by everything else. There are no truly separate objects, only an ever-changing Oneness. When the mind catalogs objects into separate groups, these objects are not reality and do not reflect what they ultimately are. Thus, the usual way of thinking of the world has no validity. One must transcend this and truly experience the world, its "Suchness," without this limited, ultimately false labeling. To truly understand emptiness, wisdom became emphasized. Given the world's interdependent nature, one is compelled to act with compassion to end all human suffering.
- A shift in the goal of Buddhism. In the early stages of Buddhism the goal was to become an *Arhat*, a "worthy one" or saint, someone who had realized the ideal of spiritual perfection and had attained *nirvana*. However, in the reformulation process, along with the laity gaining greater influence, a new goal of gaining wisdom and practicing compassion was developed. The original goal of becoming an

*Arhat* oneself was seen as self-centered. The new goal was to achieve the status of a *Bodhisattva*, a person who worked to perfect his or her own wisdom, achieves enlightenment, but then forgoes *nirvana* to help those who are suffering.

With this new goal, a new set of practices was laid out, called the Six *Paramitas* or Perfections, methods that the *Bodhisattva* worked to bring to perfection: selfless giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom.

To bring individuals to enlightenment, given that their levels of understanding may be limited, the *Bodhisattva* employed "skillful means," teaching methods designed to speak to a person's level of development. For example, people were compared to different plants in a garden, with different needs and speeds of growth. More deeply, all teachings, descriptions, and concepts were in the end only skillful methods of teaching; ultimate reality was beyond such forms.

- A lessening of the centrality of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. The Mahayana texts began to describe cosmic Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* as ways of depicting Ultimate Reality and the ideals of the Mahayana Path. Many such Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* were named in Mahayana texts and became part of devotional practices. Some popular *Bodhisattvas* were Maitreya, the *Bodhisattva* who would become the next Buddha on Earth like Shakyamuni; Avalokiteshvara, the *Bodhisattva* of compassion who was known in China as Kuan-yin, Japan as Kannon, Korea as Kwanum, and Vietnam as Quan-an; and Mahasthamaprapta, the *bodhisattva* of wisdom. Some popular Buddhas were Akshobhya, "Imperturbable"; Amida, "Infinite Light and Life"; and Vairochana, "Shining Out," known in Japan as Dainichi, "Great Sun."

Forms of devotion began to spread within the laity; the next historical period of Buddhism witnessed the development of distinct schools and large lay followings. These were called Pure Land schools, as it was believed that each Buddha presided over a land free from defilements. In particular, Amida Buddha became a popular object of devotion. Maitreya *Bodhisattva* also developed a sizable following, as well as Avalokiteshvara *Bodhisattva*. These Buddha and *Bodhisattvas* became very popular to invoke in filling any type of need.

The relationship between these Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha was described by the concept of the three bodies of the Buddha. The first body was *Dharmakaya* or Dharma-body - reality in its absolute aspect, true Emptiness beyond any conceptual formulation. The next body was *Sambhogakaya*, Enjoyment-body or Glorious-body. This included the cosmic Buddha and *Bodhisattvas*, which allowed people to get insight into *Dharmakaya*. The third body was *Nirmanakaya* or Manifested-body - people or beings who appeared on Earth to express *Dharmakaya*, including Shakyamuni Buddha.

During this second period, Mahayana Buddhism spread into Central Asia and China. Its attraction was partly due to its freer interpretation of its teachings and practices. Today, Mahayana Buddhism is practiced mainly in China, Korea, and Japan. Both Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism are practiced in Vietnam, although the former is predominant.

**Tantra and Ch'an (500 C.E.-1000 C.E.).** Around 500 C.E., a new movement began to form, which became known as Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism or Vajrayana, the Diamond (i.e., Unbreakable, Adamantine) Vehicle. It began in India and was influenced by new ideas within and outside India. The movement began to develop new magical practices and teachings, including *mantras* (sacred words), *mudras* (sacred postures), *mandalas* (sacred art), and new deities. Generally, these practices were kept hidden until the master deemed the student ready to manage them, unlike previous teachings, which were accessible to any interested follower. However, the purpose of these practices remained the same as Mahayana's Six Perfections: realizing ultimate wisdom and compassion.

With this new development, as during the Mahayana movement, many new writings appeared. These were not attributed to Shakyamuni but to a mythical Buddha. A new ideal also came into being: the goal was to become a Siddha, a person who attained Buddhahood in this body, here and now,

through magical practices, and who was so cosmically tuned to reality that no restraints existed. Such a person could manipulate cosmic forces at will. These new practices and philosophies took many years to become systematized.

Although these teachings and practices were very popular and spread to all areas where Buddhism existed, they are mainly practiced today in Central Asia, in Tibet and Mongolia, along with the Shingon school in Japan. The Dalai Lama is a practitioner of this type of Buddhism.

Another major stream developed in China and was known as Ch'an, which means "Meditation." It was later established in Japan where it became known as Zen. Historically, the tradition was formulated by Hui-neng around 700 C.E., although it traced back through a master-and-disciple lineage directly to Shakyamuni Buddha. Ch'an began as a tradition specializing in meditation but developed into a philosophy uncompromisingly focused on practical realization. It did not discard all forms, for it kept the monastic system and scriptural study, but clearly designated them secondary to meditation and a direct spiritual realization, described as "sudden enlightenment," that went beyond words. Many of this tradition's revered practitioners were noted for their deliberate breaking of traditional Buddhist etiquette, bringing a do-or-die intensity to meditation practice, along with a "formless" meditation described as "wall gazing" or in Japan as "just sitting," in which one attempted to directly encounter, without words or concepts, one's "fundamental mind."

There are many similarities between the developments of this period. Like Tantra, and unlike Theravada and Mahayana, which saw becoming a Buddha as a goal that took many rebirths to fulfill, Ch'an saw Buddhahood as achievable in this life. Ch'an also emphasized the master-disciple relationship, since only a person who had achieved enlightenment could lead another down a valid path and verify that person's realization. Ch'an was seen as a direct transmission from the master's mind to the mind of the student.

Many new writings were composed. Hui-neng's treatise, *The Diamond-Cutter Discourse*, was seen as being on the same level as Shakyamuni Buddha's words. This tradition collected many of its masters' words to aid in the focus of meditative practice. Famous among these were seemingly nonsensical or paradoxical statements that helped a practitioner experience that which was beyond words - known in Chinese as *kung-an*, or in Japanese *koan*. One of the most famous was developed by a Japanese Zen master named Hakuin who asked, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

From China, this development spread to large areas of Asia. Today it is found in Japan as Zen, in Korea as Son, and as one component of Chinese and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist practice.

**The Fourth Period (1000 C.E. - present).** The last period was notable for historical developments in different areas of the world rather than for new doctrinal developments. In the last century, Buddhists around the world have increasingly brought their convictions to bear on major issues, from war and peace to social and economic justice.

In India, Buddhism declined and started to disappear from many areas around 1200 C.E. and had completely disappeared around 1500. This was due to many factors, such as the Muslim invasions, the decline of support for Buddhist monasteries by society, and a lack of renewal that led to Buddhism's incorporation into Hinduism. However, after India gained independence from England, Bhirnrao Ramji Ambedkar led a mass conversion (estimated at 600,000) of many Untouchables - outcasts who did not belong to any of the four classes of India's caste system - to Buddhism. This was as much for political purposes and equal rights as for religious reasons.

In other parts of Southeast Asia, Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism spread, but were later replaced by Theravada Buddhism - still the form practiced today.

In China, although encountering periods of persecution, Buddhism permeated the culture to a degree that, along with Confucianism and Taoism, it is considered one of the three great Chinese religious traditions. During the last 50 years, an exodus of Buddhist clergy in China and Tibet occurred as a result of the policies of the Communist regime. Some monasteries still operate in these areas today.



Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the late 6th century from Korea and China. Early in this fourth period, many of today's popular forms of Buddhism developed in Japan. These were characterized by focusing on one particular practice to attain enlightenment in a more direct manner, just as in the Tantric and Ch'an developments in the third period. Many Japanese Pure Land Schools developed, the most popular today being *Jodo Shinshu*, "True Pure Land Sect," also known as Shin Buddhism in the West. One major Shin tradition is the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA), an important institution in the Japanese American community.

A point of disagreement between Pure Land Schools in Japan was whether true devotion to Amida Buddha occurred through practice or faith. Shinran, the founder of Shin Buddhism, held that he lived in a time so far removed from Shakyamuni Buddha's life that he was not able to adequately perform any devotional practice or have a sincere faith in Shakyamuni Buddha. Instead he taught that the ability to exercise faith was based on the work of Amida Buddha, who lived much closer to Shinran's time. He also taught that the devotional practice of repeating Amida's Sacred Name, *Namo Amida Butsu*, was a response of gratitude to Amida's saving grace, which expressed the Infinite Wisdom and Compassion of Ultimate Reality.

Different forms of Zen Buddhism appeared in Japan. In particular, a school known as *Soto Zen* was founded by Dogen. He taught *zazen* or "sitting meditation" and was widely admired outside Zen circles for his writings and practice. The other main type of Zen was known as *Rinzai*. This placed more emphasis on *koan* and characterized enlightenment as a sudden experience that an individual may have more than once, while Soto Zen described it as a gradual attainment.

A monk named Nichiren founded another tradition in Japan during this period. His teaching emphasized one particular Mahayana scripture, the *Lotus Sutra*. He held that chanting the phrase "*Namu myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo*" (Salutation to the Lotus Sutra) was sufficient to achieve salvation. Three large groups in the U.S. today acknowledge Nichiren as their founder: the Nichiren Buddhist Church of America, the Nichiren Shoshu, and the Soka Gakkai International-USA.

In the U.S., different immigrant groups continue to practice their countries' forms of Buddhism. As Americans have become interested in Buddhism, many additional groups have begun. Three types in particular are finding popularity: Zen, Tibetan, and the *Vipassana* meditation of the Theravada tradition. The Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai International-USA groups have been very successful in attracting members who are not Japanese. Almost all forms, however, have undergone changes as they adapt to American culture. Some groups are very politically and socially engaged, while others understand Buddhism exclusively in spiritual terms. Many people consider themselves Buddhists but do not have any long-term affiliation with any group, having gained their philosophy and practice from books or other media.

There are many different Buddhist traditions today; given the developments in the religion, it is difficult to make a doctrinal statement that would hold true for all traditions. For example, although all traditions would probably agree that the ultimate goal for followers is to become Buddha, how this is accomplished, what scriptures are essential, what practices are important, and even what it means to become a Buddha may differ, sometimes radically.

## THEOLOGY

"Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future; it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity." **Albert Einstein**

**Buddhism and Common Beliefs in India.** In India at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, the belief was already present that there were six realms of existence into which a person could be reborn after death: the realm of gods or heavenly beings; demigods, beings of a slightly lower order than gods; human beings; animals, which also exist in the human realm; hungry ghosts, which also exist in

the human realm but are undetectable and tormented by an insatiable hunger; and hell, the realm of extreme torture and pain. An individual's rebirth was determined by his or her actions. If the person's actions ultimately were deemed good, rebirth would take place in the first three realms. The second three were for those whose actions ultimately were bad. However, the six realms were not permanent states; people would be reborn into the realm determined by their actions in the previous realm. This cycle of birth and death was known as *samsara*.

In Buddhist cosmology the assumption is that numerous gods preside in numerous heavenly realms over human beings. Shakyamuni Buddha, however, considered being born as a human being to be ultimately superior to being a god, because only human beings possessed all of the conditions necessary to enter *nirvana* and achieve Buddhahood.

Shakyamuni Buddha, in examining this cycle of birth and death, taught that *nirvana* transcended and ended *samsara*. When one became enlightened, that person would no longer be subject to *samsara*. The Buddha said the human realm was the best for attainment of nirvana, since in the other five realms an individual would be caught up in the conditions of the realm and could not be introspective. If a person could not be introspective, no change would take place and the cycle of *samsara* could not be broken.

Today, different Buddhist traditions have degrees of how literally this "Wheel of Life" is understood. Some see the six realms as metaphors of how in life individuals experience times of heavenly pleasure (like the heavenly beings), great strength and ambition (demigods), introspection (humans), instinctual reaction (animals), great desire (hungry ghosts), and extreme pain (hell). For them, attaining *nirvana* meant escaping a roller-coaster existence for one of lasting serenity.

Indian society was separated into four distinct classes or *castes*, determined by birth. A person born into a class remained there throughout his or her life. However, the Buddha preached that actions, not birth, determined a person's status, and so judged those who joined his order, regardless of which class they were born into. He taught that all people have a Buddha-nature or the potential to become a Buddha.

### **The Four Noble Truths.**

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of pain:  
birth is painful; old age is painful;  
sickness is painful; death is painful;  
sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful.  
Contact with unpleasant things is painful;  
not getting what one wishes is painful.  
In short, the five groups of grasping are painful.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain:  
the craving, which leads to rebirth,  
combined with pleasure and lust,  
finding pleasure here and there,  
namely the craving for passion,  
the craving for existence,  
and the craving for non-existence.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth  
of the cessation of pain:  
the cessation without a remainder of craving,  
the abandonment, forsaking, release, and non-attachment.

Now this, monks, is the noble truth  
of the way that leads to the cessation of pain:  
this is the noble eightfold way, namely,

correct understanding, correct intention,  
 correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood,  
 correct attention, correct concentration,  
 and correct meditation.

Samyutta Nikaya, 5:420

Many accounts of Shakyamuni Buddha's life state that in his first sermon he taught what became known as the Four Noble Truths. The first is that life is *dukkha*, often translated as "suffering," but also including feelings of frustration, anxiety, and irritation. It can be summed up as the experience of life that does not go the way people want it to go - from tragedy to minor inconveniences. The second noble truth states that the cause of *dukkha* is self-centered, blind desire. Since people desire to have life go their way and life doesn't revolve around their wishes, they experience *dukkha*. The third noble truth states that since self-centered, blind desire is the cause of *dukkha*, a person must eliminate this desire to be free from *dukkha*.

The fourth noble truth provides the means to accomplish this, called the Noble Eightfold Path for its eight components: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Meditation. To fully understand the Four Noble Truths and walk the Noble Eightfold Path is to extinguish *dukkha*, attain *nirvana*, and become enlightened.

The Buddha also called this process of overcoming *dukkha* following the Middle Path. In the Buddha's life he, as a prince, experienced extreme self-indulgence, and as an ascetic tried extreme self-mortification. Both, he found, were unspiritual and useless; thus he promoted a way between the extremes.

**The Noble Eight-fold Path.** The fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eight-fold Path. Of its eight components, the first two are generally grouped under wisdom, the next three under morality, and the last three under mental development. The *dharma wheel* is a symbol of the eight-fold path. The components, in the traditional order, can be described as follows:



*The dharma wheel.*

- **Right View (Understanding).** The correct way of interpreting and viewing the world, including the abandonment of dogmatically held wrong views.
- **Right Intention (Thought).** The Buddha argued that human thought and action come from basic intentions, dispositions, or roots that are capable of deliberate cultivation, training, and control. The roots of wrong action are greed, aversion, and delusion. Right Intention is to be free from these roots.
- **Right Speech.** Since speech is the means of communication, the Buddha emphasizes the cultivation of right modes of speech - the first principle of ethical conduct in the Eight-fold Path. The Buddha explained right speech as follows: to abstain from false speech, especially not to tell deliberate lies; to abstain from slanderous speech and not to use words maliciously; to abstain from harsh words that offend or hurt; and to abstain from idle chatter that lacks purpose or depth.
- **Right Action.** This involves the body as a natural means of expression, since it refers to deeds that involve bodily actions. It is also explained in terms of abstinence: to abstain from harming sentient beings; to abstain from taking what is not given; and to abstain from sexual misconduct.
- **Right Livelihood.** A person should earn a living in a righteous way and wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. Four specific activities harm people and should be avoided: dealing in weapons; dealing in living beings; working in meat production and butchery; and selling intoxicants and poisons.

- **Right Effort.** A prerequisite for the other principles of mental development. Without effort - itself an act of will - nothing can be achieved. Mental energy is the force behind right effort and can be used either for unwholesome or wholesome activities.

- **Right Mindfulness.** This involves precision and clarity - the mental ability to see things as they are, with a clear conscience. Usually the cognitive process begins with an impression induced by perception. The impression is conceptualized almost immediately and interpreted in the light of other thoughts and experiences. The potential of providing a wrong conception is inherent in the process. Right mindfulness enables people to be aware of this process of conceptualization in a way that permits active observation and control.

- **Right Concentration.** The development of a mental force that occurs in natural consciousness. Right concentration means that people are completely absorbed in "Now-ness," in things as they are.

**Concept of Deity.** Buddhism does not have a God-concept that involves a deity or supreme being who created the universe and has a relationship with human beings. Nor did Buddhism incorporate the notion that God is an abstract principle or ground of being, as is true in Hinduism, for example. In the Hindu *Upanishads*, God is equated with *Brahman*, the ultimate reality and ground and source of everything that is. In Buddhist cosmology, the gods are viewed as mortal, having extremely long lifespans and being only minor players in the lives of Buddhists.

The path followed in Buddhism depends on one's own efforts and not upon the saving grace of a god or goddess. A spiritual master is viewed as the pathmaker who goes ahead, but disciples must walk the path themselves. The *Dhammapada* states, "Striving should be done by yourselves; the *Tathagatas* are only teachers. The meditative ones who enter the way are delivered from the bonds of *Mara* [death]" (Maxim 276).

**The Three Marks of Existence.** Much of the philosophy of Buddhism is based on three marks, or attributes: impermanence, no-soul, and suffering. The first mark is impermanence: nothing has a permanent, ever-lasting form or essence since all things are constantly changing. This change, however, is not random but is determined by the circumstances that preceded it. This characteristic of change is labeled co-dependent origination, since things in the present are a product of the actions and situations of all things before. The second mark follows from the first; if all things are constantly changing and affecting each other, then all things, including human beings, have no permanent or individual nature or ego. Things do not exist separately from each other but are interdependent in their appearance and disappearance. The third mark, which follows from the first two, states that there is *dukkha* and *nirvana*. To live believing that things and people do not change and are independent from one another is to live with self-centered, blind desire and thus with *dukkha*. To live with a true understanding of the first two marks of existence is to experience *nirvana*.

**The Nature of the Buddha's Teachings.** Although he identified himself as enlightened, the Buddha emphasized that people should not follow his teachings just because he said so, but rely on their own experiences to verify their validity. One group of villagers, having been visited by several different religious figures who preached different and sometimes contradictory views, asked the Buddha who to believe. The Buddha advised that they should not be led by reports, tradition, hearsay, religious texts, logic, appearances, speculative opinions, seeming possibilities, or the idea that a certain person is their teacher. Instead, they should learn for themselves - give up teachings that led to unwholesome living or were wrong and follow those that led to wholesome living and were good. The Buddha included his own teachings as those that should be examined.

The Buddha, therefore, did not center his disciples around himself personally. He encouraged each to be their own refuge and work toward their own enlightenment. The Buddha was also very tolerant and respectful of other religions and religious leaders. The tradition holds that a person could become enlightened without having encountered the Buddha or his teachings.

The Buddha steered the focus of his disciples to ways of overcoming *dukkha* rather than metaphysical questions. He likened such endeavors to a person who was shot by a poisoned arrow, and tried to find out who shot the arrow, what the person's background was, and what equipment was used instead of first having a doctor treat the wound. The Buddha said that a person's spiritual life and attainment of *nirvana* do not depend on the answers to such questions.

**The *Paramitas*.** This is the practice based on unsurpassable wisdom. Literally the word means “to have reached the other shore.” Six *paramitas* are generally identified as behaviors demonstrated by a person who has reached the other shore: giving, discipline, patience, effort, meditation, and wisdom. Each *paramita* or perfection has an opposite: desire, immorality, anger, laziness, mental distractions, and stupidity or ignorance. The daily meditation on the *paramitas* is:

*Dana Paramita*: May I be generous and helpful.

*Sila Paramita*: May I be pure and virtuous.

*Ksanti Paramita*: May I be patient! May I be able to bear and forbear the wrongs of others.

*Virya Paramita*: May I be strenuous, energetic, and persevering.

*Dhyana Paramita*: May I practice meditation and attain concentration and oneness to serve all beings.

*Prajna Paramita*: May I gain wisdom and be able to give the benefit of my wisdom to others.

## GLOSSARY OF BUDDHIST TERMS

**Arhat:** Literally, a “worthy one” or saint, someone who has realized the ideal of spiritual perfection and has attained *nirvana*. Upon death, the *arhat* will become extinguished. Primarily used in Theravada Buddhism.

**Bodhi:** The Sanskrit word for “enlightenment,” achieved by following the Eight-fold Path, which constitutes freedom from all desires. *Bodhi* gives the individual the wisdom of perceiving ultimate reality, which entails the power and ability to work to change that reality in certain ways – especially to help people in need.

**Bodhisattva:** In Theravada Buddhism, this refers to a person who is on the way to enlightenment but has not yet fully entered that state. In Mahayana Buddhism it refers to a person who has achieved enlightenment, but who forgoes *nirvana* to help those who are suffering.

**Ch'an:** A Buddhist tradition involving meditative practice and the teaching that ultimate reality is not expressible in words or logic, but is to be grasped through direct intuition, either gradual or sudden. The Chinese name for Zen Buddhism.

**Dana:** A “giving” ritual, characteristic in Theravada Buddhist family homes, involving gifts of food to the monks who conduct chanting, especially at the death of a loved one. One of the six *paramitas* or perfections.

**Dhamma:** Truth, reality, or that which truly exists. The word *Dharma* is also used and has the same meaning. *Dhamma* also means principles of behavior that people ought to follow to fit in with the right order of things. *Dhamma* is the Pali term; *dharma* is the Sanskrit term.

**Dukkha:** Suffering that characterizes human life, from both physical and psychological causes.

**Emptiness:** Usually the description of the state of enlightenment. The Buddhist way of saying that ultimate reality is incapable of being described. Emptiness should not be seen as another “place” - it is identical to the world or universe people experience in this life.

**Kamma/karma:** The moral law of cause and effect. People build up *kamma* (both good and bad) as a result of their actions; this determines the state of existence to which an individual is reborn - on any of the six levels of existence. *Kamma* is the Pali term; *karma* is the Sanskrit term.

**Kanjur:** Tibetan scriptural collection of texts with sayings and words attributed to the Buddha. The corresponding Tibetan collection of traditional commentaries on the *Kanjur* is termed the *Tanjur*.

**Kung-an/koan:** Paradoxical thought exercise in the Ch'an/Zen tradition aimed at impressing on the disciple that religious insight goes beyond the limitations of verbal formulations and logic.

**Mahayana Buddhism:** Form of Buddhism that emerged around the first century in northwestern India and spread from there to China and later to Korea and Japan. Also known as the "Greater Vehicle," it is the largest and most influential of the three main forms of Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism holds that there are five Buddha who have or will manifest themselves in the earthly realm. The fifth Buddha who will come in the future is known as *Maitreya*.

**Mara:** Refers to death or the Lord of Death, the personification of evil and temptation.

**Marks of Existence:** The three marks of existence are suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence, and no-soul.

**Middle Way:** The way to enlightenment espoused by the Buddha. He discovered that the life of extreme indulgence and the life of extreme asceticism do not lead to *nirvana*; a middle way between the extremes leads to enlightenment.

**Nirvana:** State of absolute bliss associated with final enlightenment - the goal towards which all Buddhists strive. Enlightenment is the step immediately before it. A person becomes aware of ultimate reality in enlightenment and becomes unified with that reality in *nirvana*.

**Paramita:** Literally, "to have reached the other shore." It means perfection of virtues. Of early Buddhism's list of six perfections, Mahayana Buddhism emphasized the perfection of wisdom (*prajna*). The other *paramitas* are: giving, discipline, patience, effort, and meditation.

**Parinirvana:** Ultimate state of bliss and perfection, which can only be achieved when a person (*arhat*) has departed this life. Different from *nirvana*, which is achievable in this life.

**Precepts:** Moral rules for Buddhists. Five are followed by both lay people and monks of the Sangha; an additional five are followed by monks and nuns. The full list of precepts numbers over 200, with slight variations, although the ten mentioned are the most significant.

**Puja:** Honor, respect, or devotional observance. Most commonly refers to daily devotional observances at monasteries. Today, includes devotional observances conducted either in public or at home.

**Pure Land:** The form of Buddhism focused on the Buddha Amida. Pure Land is aimed at the average person in its recognition that most people cannot achieve enlightenment and are doomed to stay in *samsara*. Amida Buddha set up a "Pure Land" in the west, a paradise, to which people can go when they die. To gain entrance, people simply call on the power of Amida Buddha.

**Sakyamuni:** Title given to Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, sage of the Sakya clan of which his father was the ruler.

**Samsara:** Cycle of death and rebirth. This death and rebirth is *dukkha* and is viewed negatively as suffering.

**Sanga:** Community of Buddhist monks and nuns. Can also refer to the monks as a whole group.

**Stupa:** Hemispherical mound built to mark or contain a Buddhist relic. In time, tall, spired monuments were added to or developed out of *stupas*.

**Sutra:** Discourse attributed to Sakyamuni or an important disciple. More than 10,000 *sutras* were collected in the *Sutta Pitaka*, one of the three parts of the Pali Canon.

**Taisho Shinsu Daizokyo:** Chinese Buddhist canon, which contains 55 volumes along with a supplement of 45 volumes.

**Tanjur:** Tibetan collection of commentaries on the *Kanjur*, the collection of the sayings attributed to the Buddha.

**Theravada Buddhism:** One of the earliest forms of Buddhism, today practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Refers to the “teaching of the elders.” Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the individual over the group, believing that individuals must reach *nirvana* on their own. Its central virtue is wisdom, which the *arhat* achieves in this life and reaches *nirvana* upon death.

**Tripitaka:** Collection of early Buddhist sacred writings in the Pali language. The word means “three baskets” and has three sections: rules of monastic discipline, discourses by the Buddha, and treatises on doctrines and abstract philosophy.

**Vajrayana Buddhism:** *Tantric* branch of Buddhism that became established in Tibet, Mongolia, and the Shingon school in Japan. A *vajra* is a diamond; the term means “The Diamond Way.” This form of Buddhism claims that individuals can reach *nirvana* in a single lifetime when a person uses all of the powers available, including those of the body.

**Vesak Day:** Theravada Buddhist festival celebrated on the full-moon day in May, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha.

**Vipassana:** Form of meditation in Theravada Buddhism. Its goal is to realize the three marks of existence and the true character of emptiness. Considered a prerequisite for attaining *nirvana*.

**Wheel of Life:** Symbol consisting of three concentric circles; signifies *samsara*. Each of the rings has symbolic meaning.

**Zazen:** Practice of extended periods of meditation. Monks sit quietly for long periods in the lotus position. This form is unique to Zen and involves the study of the self.

## RELIGIOUS ACCOUTERMENTS



**Bell and Dorje (striker):** A *dorje* can have nine, five, or three spokes. The spokes of a peaceful *dorje* meet at the tip, whereas the spokes of a wrathful *dorje* are slightly splayed at the end. When paired with a bell, they can be of various lengths.

The hollow of the bell symbolizes wisdom **cognizing** emptiness. The clapper represents the sound of emptiness. The eight lotus petals are the four mothers and four goddesses; the vase represents the nectar of accomplishment.

Paired with a *dorje*, the bell represents wisdom; wisdom and method are an undivided unit, so the *dorje* and bell are never parted or used separately.



**Statues of the Buddha:** These are representative of many different types and varieties available. Depending on the inmates' tradition, a different statue may be requested.



**Picture of the Buddha:** This is a sample picture of the Buddha, which the inmate may keep in his or her possession as personal property. Again, depending on which Buddhist tradition(s) are represented by the inmates, the pictures may vary significantly.



**Mali - prayer beads:** Used for many purposes, they may be used for counting mantras as well as other prayers. Several



types are shown; the number of beads ranges from 7 to 108. Only plastic prayer beads are permitted in the institution.



**Home altar and altar cloth:** The home altar has an image of the Buddha, candle holder, flower, vase, and incense or water bowl. The altar cloth may be placed in front of the altar; other sacred objects may be placed on it.



**Silver water bowls:** The traditional set of offerings is derived from the customary offerings presented to an honored guest. The first bowl contains clear water for the guest to drink. The second has water for the guest to wash his or her feet. In the third bowl are flowers. In the fourth is an offering of incense to please the sense of smell. The fifth offering is a bright light that illuminates the darkness. The sixth contains scented water. In the seventh bowl, an offering of food is traditionally presented.



**Zafu - small cushion**

**Zabuton - meditation mat:** Meditation cushions and benches are simple furniture that assist in “autonomous”

sitting without back support. This way of sitting lengthens the spine and allows correct alignment. A state of relaxation is easily attained through the deepening of breathing, increased circulation, and flexibility.



**Prayer Wheel:** Prayer wheels were developed as a way to symbolically read the words of the Buddha. They contain the words of Buddha condensed into mantras - syllables with deep symbolic meaning. It is believed that turning the wheel is equivalent to reciting all the text found inside of the wheel. For example, if a wheel contains ten million texts, the entire text has been symbolically read

by turning the wheel.

There are four types of prayer wheels: earth, fire, wind, and water. Each has symbolic significance. An earth wheel is often used in healing. The fire wheel “burns” away negative karma. The wind wheel serves the same purpose. The water touched by the water wheel becomes blessed and purifies all who come into contact with it.



**Meditation Gong or Singing Bowls:** Used to remind practitioners to be fully present in the moment. The bowls ring out a warm, mellow, sustained tone and are used to begin or end a meditation session. The striker is used to make the sound and the gong is placed on the cushion. Some singing gongs can be quite old.

A bowl can be used in different ways, such as tapping it with the striker and letting it ring. Another way the bowl is made to “sing” is by placing it in the hand and rubbing the rim with the striker in a circular motion. Find the pressure and speed needed to make the bowl sing and keep that pressure constant. The vibrations of the bowl as it “sings” can be felt in the hand holding the bowl.



**Dharma Wheel:** Symbolizes the wheel of Buddhist law, the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Wheels come with either four or eight spokes. The four spokes symbolize the four “moments” in the life of the Buddha; the eight spokes symbolize the Noble Eight-fold Path. Sometimes, the spokes extend beyond the circle and end in points. The Dharma wheel is universally recognized as a symbol for Buddhism.



**Tingshas:** Used as sound offerings or as a way to clear space prior to meditation. They usually make a clear, long sustaining note.