

Buddhism Notes

Buddhism is based on the teachings of Buddha, widely practiced in Asia, based on a right behavior-oriented life (Dharma) that allows one to escape the material realm of suffering (nirvana).

History

Siddhartha Gautama was born in 560 BC in Lumbini India into the Kshatriya (second highest) caste. Scholars now say he most likely was born in 400 BC.

Siddhartha's mother had a dream, and 64 Hindu priests interpreted the dream.

They said he would become the greatest ruler ever if he stayed in his palace, or he would become a great spiritual teacher if he left his palace. The latter would happen if he saw a sick man, an old man, a dead body, and a monk.

To prevent his son from becoming a spiritual leader, Siddhartha's father built a high wall around the palace and never allowed his son to leave.

Upon coming out of his mother's womb, Siddhartha immediately stood, walked seven paces, scanned in all directions, and said in a noble voice that he was the foremost being in the world, and that this would be his last rebirth.

Siddhartha's father gave him all the wealth and pleasures anyone would ever want.

Siddhartha later married Yasodhara, and she became pregnant with his child.

At age 29, he wanted to see the outside world, so his father cleaned up the city for him.

On four different trips, he saw the four things prophesied. Afterwards, Siddhartha abandoned his wife and son Rāhula ("fetter") to discover the secret to life.

He shaved his head and wandered around in an orange robe and renounced the world.

He studied under Brahmins and eventually rejected the Hindu scriptures.

He tried a life of self-denial for six years and found no answers.

At age 35, he sat under a fig tree for forty days, and at sunrise his mind was opened up, and the universe poured its knowledge into his mind.

The knowledge was the Four Noble Truths that had been forgotten by humanity.

He became known as Buddha, "the enlightened or awakened one." He began to teach the way to salvation and founded an order of monks called Sangha.

He rejected the caste system of Hinduism and accepted all people into his order. Buddha emphasized compassion for all people regardless of their position in life.

The Buddha called the religion he founded *Dhamma-vinaya* ("the doctrine and discipline.")

Buddha died at the age of 80.

After the Buddha's death, Buddhism began to spread rapidly from the Ganges Valley. But they also began to split into many different schools of thought.

Monks would shave their heads, wear orange robes, and evangelize in pairs. They were known for their acceptance of all people and compassion and politeness.

During the reign of the Emperor Aśoka (273-232 BC) of the Mauryan empire, which covered all of India, Buddhism gained royal support and began to spread more widely, reaching most of India and into Sri Lanka.

During the Indian Kushan empire (30-375 AD), Buddhism began to spread throughout Asia.

By the 600s AD, Buddhism had become the dominant belief in China, Japan, and Tibet.

Today there are between 360 and 500 million followers of Buddhism worldwide and over a million American Buddhists. It is considered the world's fourth-largest religion.

Writings

The Tripitaka (“The Three Baskets”) is authoritative and sacred.

It is divided into three sections and contains 50 volumes (11 times larger than the Bible).

Neither Buddha nor anyone around him wrote anything down.

The Tripitaka is based on oral traditions written down between 200 BC and 200 AD, 200–400 years after his death.

There is no historical evidence for their accuracy.

Even Buddhist scholars believe that the Buddhist writings have been influenced by mythological embellishments.

Beliefs about God

The existence of God is totally irrelevant and unnecessary.

Buddha rejected the indifferent gods of Hinduism.

Buddhism today totally rejects the idea of God and judgment in the afterlife.

Beliefs about the Material Realm

Buddha rejected Hinduism's idea of maya and taught that the material realm was real.

The world was not created by a god.

The origin of the world is irrelevant, but everything is the result of cause and effect.

The world operates by natural power and law, not a divine command.

Everything in creation is impermanence, suffering, and uncertainty, which is called *tilakhana*.

Beliefs about Humanity

Buddha rejected the idea of humans having an atman (“spiritual inner self or soul”). This is the doctrine of *anatta* (“no-soul”).

Humans are neither gods nor a part of god.

Humans are merely material beings and a part of the material realm.

Human existence is nothing more than a composite of five groups (khandas). These khandas come together at birth to form a human person.

- Rupa—physical forms
- Vedana—feelings or sensations
- Sanna—ideations
- Sankhara—mental formations or dispositions
- Vinnana—consciousness

A person is a “self” in that they are a true subject of moral action and karmic accumulation.

Beliefs about the Problem with the World and Humanity

Life is suffering, and happiness is an illusion.

Humanity is trapped in samsara that must be escaped.

Humans are ignorant of how to escape the material realm of suffering.

Beliefs about the Solution to the Problem

The only way to escape a life of suffering is by accepting and embracing the **Four Noble Truths**:

1. Suffering is universal, and happiness is an illusion.
2. The cause of suffering is craving (desire). It leads to frustration and bad karma.
3. The cure for suffering is to overcome ignorance and eliminate cravings.
4. One suppresses cravings by following the Middle Way (the life between luxury and poverty) to nirvana.

Nirvana (“blown out”) refers to realization of non-self and emptiness, marking the end of rebirth by stilling the fires that keep the process of rebirth going.

You are the only one who can save yourself.

“Everybody, every human being wants happiness, and Buddha, he acts like teacher. You are your own master. Future, everything depends on your own shoulder. Buddha’s responsibility is just to show the path, that’s all.” —The Dalai Lama

Buddha claimed that his mission was to help one escape samsara, not to explain what one would find after nirvana. The afterlife is non-existence.

Buddha emphasized dharma and karma as the way to escape samsara.

One must pursue a life of ending suffering in one’s own life and in the lives of others through acts of compassion.

Buddha taught that if you stop thinking about yourself, compassion will automatically arise.

The **Eightfold Path** is how one obtains and maintains a state of nirvana.

1. Right understanding: Believe in the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right aspiration: Renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty.
3. Right speech: Speak only truth and refrain from lying, slander, and arrogance.

4. Right behavior: Exercise self-control and abstain from killing, stealing, and sexual immorality.
5. Right occupation: Work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one.
6. Right efforts: Commit totally to the Middle Way.
7. Right mindfulness: Exhibit mental self-control to eliminate all emotions.
8. Right meditation: Perform meditation through yoga to obtain complete detachment.

Branches of Buddhism

Theravada (“way of the elders”) hold strictly to the teachings of Buddha and believe only a few lifelong monks can achieve nirvana. Originally named the Hinayana (“the lesser way”).

Mahayana (“the greater way”) developed the idea of passionate devotion to Bodhisattvas (savior gods) who aid you in obtaining salvation. They emerged sometime between 150 BC and 100 AD.

Zen Buddhism de-emphasizes mere knowledge of sutras and doctrine and emphasizes self-guidance through rigorous self-control and meditation. “Look within, you are the Buddha.” Originated in China as Chan Buddhism in the 700s AD.

Buddhism has gained great popularity in the western world for several reasons.

- Buddhism offers moral guidance and direction without requiring any accountability or obligation to a god.
- Buddhism emphasizes compassion towards others without accountability to a moral standard.
- Buddhism offers peace, tranquility, and enlightenment through meditation.

Symbols



The Dharmachakra represents the wheel of Dharma and the eightfold path. It is the spinning of samsara until one escapes through their good Dharma.



The Buddha Image began to appear in India around the 200s AD.



Bodhisattvas (in Mahayana Buddhism) is a person who was able to reach nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings.

Hotei, The Laughing Buddha is based on an eccentric monk who lived in the time of the Liang Dynasty (502–557 AD), and who has become associated with luck and good fortune in many Asian cultures.

Beliefs about Jesus

Jesus was a great buddha and spiritual teacher who taught just as Buddha did.

“In our interview, we devoted considerable time to the identity and integrity of Jesus. The Dalai Lama seemed at ease with the questioning, even while admitting that this was possibly the toughest area for exploration between evangelical Christians and Buddhists.

I reminded him of his belief that Jesus is ‘a fully enlightened being’ and asked, ‘If Jesus is fully enlightened, wouldn’t he be teaching the truth about himself? Therefore, if he is teaching the truth, then he is the Son of God, and there is a God, and Jesus is the Savior. If he is fully enlightened, he should teach the truth. If he is not teaching the truth, he is not that enlightened.’

As the Dalai Lama felt the momentum of the question, he laughed more than at any other time in the interview. He obviously understood the argument, borrowed from C. S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*.

‘This is a very good question,’ he said. ‘This is very, very important, very important.’ Even in Buddha’s case, he said, a distinction must always be made between teachings that ‘always remain valid’ and others that ‘we have the liberty to reject.’

He argued that the Buddha knew people were not always ready for the higher truth because it ‘wouldn’t suit, wouldn’t help.’ Therefore, lesser truths are sometimes taught because of the person’s ignorance or condition. This is known in Buddhist dharma as the doctrine of *uppayah*, or skillful means. The Dalai Lama then applied this to the question about Jesus.

‘Jesus Christ also lived previous lives,’ he said. ‘So, you see, he reached a high state, either as a Bodhisattva, or an enlightened person, through Buddhist practice or something like that. Then, at a certain period, certain era, he appeared as a new master, and then because of circumstances, he taught certain views different from Buddhism, but he also taught the same religious values as I mentioned earlier: Be patient, tolerant, compassionate. This is, you see, the real message in order to become a better human being.’ He said that there was absolutely no lying involved since Jesus’ motivation was to help people.”

—*Christianity Today* (June 11, 2001, Vol. 45, No. 8, page 64).

Witnessing to Buddhists

Pray for wisdom and pray for them.

Love them and listen to them.

Ask them what they believe.

Build a relationship with them.

Share with them your story.

Get them to think about how their worldview corresponds to reality.

Share with them how Jesus provides a better relationship, path, and future.

Questions to Ask

How do you know Buddha was right?

Is there any evidence that Buddhism is true?

How do you know you will have another life?

If humans have no soul, what gets reincarnated?