

# Buddhism has developed in a variety of different forms

[Religion](#), [Buddhism](#)



## Introduction:

Buddhism is one of the six major religions in the world. Like other religions it has a highly developed system of beliefs, a moral code and a transcendental dimension. In simple words, it looks beyond ordinary human experience to something deeply spiritual which can be realized through leading a good moral life and religious practice. Buddhism takes its name from the Buddha, a human being whose teachings developed into what is now known as 'Buddhism'.

It has existed for about 2500 years, even older than both Christianity and Islam. For some, Buddhism is a religion, for others it is a philosophy or a culture. This religion emerged in north-eastern India in the area along what is known as the 'Ganges basin'. At that time (fifth century BCE), this area running alongside the River Ganges had become a place of civilizations, with abundance of food, rising population and increasing urbanization. Note that Buddha was not a god but a flesh-and-blood human being.

His family name was Siddhartha Gautama but later was referred to as the Buddha which means 'Enlightened One' or 'Awakened One'. Once someone asked the Buddha, 'Are you a god?' His reply was 'No, I'm not a god, I'm awake!' Although the Buddha didn't claim to be a god, he did affirm that he was a fully realized human being, that he fully understood the nature of the human condition and that he had discovered a state of being known as Nirvana. This was a state in which all selfish desire and therefore all suffering had come to an end. He taught that by following his teachings, others too could realize once and for all this blissful state.

Buddha taught that there are six realms of existence – gods, humans, jealous gods, animals, ghosts and hell-beings. The realm of the gods is one of great pleasure but it is not a place that one should aspire to particularly. This is because this world is not eternal and eventually the gods themselves will fall into the lower realms. The best of all realms is said to be the human realm. This is because the suffering we inevitably experience in life doesn't make us too complacent and consequently we are more likely to make the effort necessary for spiritual progress. The gods are too absorbed in pleasure to attempt this.

Buddhism has been described as ' a moral system without a god' and ' a faith without a god'. The essential teachings of the Buddha can be summed up in the following quotation from a Buddhist scripture." Not to do evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind". Buddhism is practiced worldwide. It started in India and from there spread to Sri Lanka, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. In the twentieth century, Buddhism has spread to the West, including Europe, the UK, and the USA. What has been distinctive about the spread of Buddhism is its ability to keep its core teachings intact but at the same time showing great flexibility in adapting to the culture that adopts it.

For the interest of this topic, the compares will be between Thailand Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. This two countries practice Buddhism but it appears quite different, but the essential teachings of the Buddha are interpreted along very similar lines. This is because over the centuries, various forms or schools of Buddhism have emerged with slightly different

practices and rituals. The earliest form of Buddhism is known as Theravada. A new form of Buddhism emerged from this which is known as Mahayana Buddhism. The latter is a broad umbrella and covers such schools of Buddhism as Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren. A third major branch of Buddhism is known as Vajrayana of which Tibetan Buddhism is the principal expression. All three traditions Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana - continue to flourish.

As mentioned above, both Thailand Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism believe in the story of prince Siddhartha reaching enlightenment. However, they vary in the role of this in the grand Buddhist cosmos. Theravada Buddhism is practiced in Thailand; it is often called Southern Buddhism because of the path it took through Southern India to Southeast Asia. This system remains true to the original teachings of Prince Siddhartha, (also known as Sakyamuni Gautama Buddha), that are found in the Pali scriptures. The Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path are the main focus of the school.

They believe that the Buddha was a man who liberated himself through meditation and contemplation. They look upon him as a teacher as opposed to a deity, and so images of the Buddha in these lands are revered or venerated, not worshipped. In this system, each individual must strive to liberate oneself through enlightened actions. Neither gods nor magic spells can assist the process.

Buddhism in Thailand:

The Thai form of Buddhism is sometimes called Lankavamsa (meaning Singhalese or Sri Lankan lineage) because it was introduced to the 13th

century Sukhothai Kingdom by monks from Sri Lanka. This form of Buddhism grew as the Sukhothai Kingdom expanded over Northern and Central Thailand. However, Ayuthaya in central Thailand grew into a powerful kingdom, and eventually annexed Sukhothai in 1376. The Thai Kings of Ayuthaya made conquests over areas of central Thailand formerly held by the Khmer Empire, which had been practicing a blend of Buddhism and Hinduism much more akin to Mahayana Buddhism than to the Sri Lankan form. The Ayuthaya kings incorporated many of these beliefs into the Buddhism they had inherited from Sukhothai.

This has had a lasting effect on Thai Buddhism to this day. It is ironic to note that during Dutch persecution in Sri Lanka during the 18th century, the ordination lineage of monks there broke down. It was Thailand (then known as Siam) that restored the Sangha (brotherhood of monks) in Sri Lanka. Hence, the main sect of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is known as Siam Nikaya (meaning Siam Sect)

Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism:

The Vajrayana system is a sect of Mahayana Buddhism, and represents the occult branch of Buddhism that is today practiced mainly in Tibet and some parts of Bhutan and Nepal. Also known as Tantric Buddhism, it owes its origin to the scholar Padmasambhava who went to Tibet from Bengal. He assimilated Hinayana and Mahayana doctrines of Buddhism with the pagan Bon religion of Tibet and the occult practices of Tantric Hinduism.

Thus beside meditation and contemplation, Vajrayana also prescribes the visualization of Buddhas passionately embracing their shaktis and the use of

ritual diagrams (mandalas), special chants (mantras), specific postures (mudras) and sexual practices (maithuna) to attain enlightenment and liberation. The idea of these practices is not to indulge the senses. The aim is to experience and understand the fleeting nature of the material world. A true adept or siddha thus becomes fully aware that material existence or 'samsara' is no different from spiritual release or 'nirvana'.

## Conclusion

As stated earlier, these two main branches of Buddhism has different practices, but they all have some fundamental similarities. They believe that Siddhartha was the son of a powerful king, and that his father brought him up surrounded by all the pleasures of the world, isolated in the palace, so that Siddhartha would never know sorrow. The prince grew up, married, and had a child, always surrounded by luxury. There are more similarities as well, but the differences in Buddhism are very significant.

## REFERENCE:

Buddhism and Buddhists Act

[www.buddhart.com](http://www.buddhart.com)

2. Cousins, L. S. (1996). " The Dating of the Historical Buddha: A Review Article". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Series 3* (6. 1): 57-63. Retrieved on 2007

3. Davidson, Ronald M. (2003). *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press. ISBN 0231126190.

<https://assignbuster.com/buddhism-has-developed-in-a-variety-of-different-forms/>

4. Gethin, Rupert (1998). Foundations of Buddhism. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-289223-1.

5. Gombrich, Richard (ed.); Heinz Bechert (ed.) (1984). The World of Buddhism. Thames ;

Hudson

Harvey, Peter 1990, An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and practices, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 148-169.

Kvaerne, Per 1984, Tibet: the rise and fall of a monistic tradition', in the world

Buddhism: Buddhist monks and nuns in society and culture, eds Heinz ; Richard Gombrich, Thames and Hudson, London, pp. 261-278

8. Morgan, Kenneth W. (ed), The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists, Ronald Press, New York, 1956; reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi; distributed by Wisdom Books