

# Buddhism in other countries

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



Buddhism began about 2, 500 years ago, when young prince Siddhartha Gautama tried to understand the causes of suffering in the world. Siddhartha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, about five hundred years before Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of Christianity, and twelve hundred years before Muhammad, the founder of Islam. He lived for eighty years sometime between 563 and 400 BC. As Harvey writes, until he was twenty-nine years old, the prince lived a life of luxury in his palace within sight of the Himalayan mountains. Then, on several trips he made outside his palace, he saw for the first time people who suffered.

Among them were an old man, a sick man, someone who had recently died, and a wandering monk. Following this sudden awakening to the suffering in the world, Siddhartha decided to leave his family and the safety of his palace to seek out the causes of suffering. He spent many years meditating, praying, and fasting. One day he became aware that people suffer when they want to hold on to material things. He realized that we should not become attached to possessions because nothing is permanent: eventually everything dies or becomes worn out. If we think anything will last forever, we are bound to suffer.

The process of gaining Enlightenment took Gautama six years. At the age of thirty-five, Siddhartha Gautama, now the Buddha or Awakened One, began his lengthy teaching career of forty-five years. During this time he traversed Northern India with his band of disciples, discussing his teachings and practices freely with laypeople, religious leaders and officials of all kinds. He passed away at the age of eighty in 483 BCE. Schools of Buddhism The

moment Siddhartha recognized the cause of suffering, he attained enlightenment, or the great awakening.

From that point on, Siddhartha was known as the Buddha, the “enlightened one.” He spent the rest of his life teaching in India. As the teachings of the Buddha spread from India to other parts of Asia, two major schools of Buddhism developed: • Theravada, the “Teaching of Elders” is a surviving school of the older branch of Buddhism and focuses to this day on preserving and perpetuating verbatim the original words of the historical Buddha. The Four Noble Truths, which were emphasized as the main teaching of the Buddha, are an aspect of self-benefit.

Theravada extended in a southeastern direction and can be found today in Burma, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Bangladesh and Indonesia. In Theravada Buddhism, the Buddha is considered a great teacher, and each individual is responsible for his or her own journey towards enlightenment • Mahayana, the “Greater Vehicle” takes the broader approach to spread the teaching of the Buddha, following the heart or intention of the Buddha. The emphasis is on “upaya” or skilful means. Mahayana, traveled from India in a north easterly direction to China, Korea, and Japan.

This tradition not only recognizes the Buddha as a godlike figure but also involves devotion to other enlightened being called bodhisattvas. In Mahayana Buddhism, we find different schools of Buddhism such as Zen, Pure Land, Nichiren etc. Each school has developed its unique teachings, but we always find a common basic foundation of Buddhist teachings, as the entire Buddhist sects are based upon the Buddhist sutras or scriptures, which reveal the world of Enlightenment. One important difference between

the Mahayana and Theravada schools is in their understanding of the concept of the Bodhisattva.

A Bodhisattva is an individual who foregoes enlightenment to help other beings. In the Theravada tradition, a Bodhisattva is considered a preliminary step to a Buddha, a point illustrated in the Jataka tales (tales of the Buddha's prior births), many of which contain stories of individuals who sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others. In the Mahayana tradition, however, the Bodhisattva represents the highest ideal. A Bodhisattva is a person who has attained the highest enlightenment, which is expressed in service to other beings.

According to the Mahayana tradition, a person who pursues his own individual enlightenment becomes trapped in an inferior kind of enlightenment like a prison. As they attempt to escape suffering in the world of illusion, they tend to take this world more seriously; they take this illusion as real. Followers of the Mahayana, who understand emptiness, learn to pursue enlightenment within the world of illusion. By doing this, they can experience emptiness directly. Less emphasis is placed on spiritual practice aimed at individual enlightenment and more on the expression of compassion in daily life. Enlightenment

All schools of Buddhism believe that every living beings experiences repeated lives on earth and has the opportunity to improve its next birth by performing good deeds in a current life. They also teach that after death, a being can be reborn into another form, such as an animal or insect, and will continue to be reborn until enlightenment is achieved. Enlightenment brings the ultimate goal of nirvana, the final death, which marks release from the

cycle of rebirth and suffering. Buddhists believe that by following the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path, freedom from the endless cycle of rebirth is possible.

Powers write about the central teachings of Buddhism which include: The Middle Way: You must reject extremes of either wanting everything or renouncing everything and seek the balance of the Middle Way. The Four Noble Truths: 1. Suffering – Existence is a realm of suffering, from birth to growing old, becoming sick and dying, all life is suffering. 2. The Source of Suffering – Suffering arises from desire, wanting selfish pleasures, continued life, power and material possessions all lead to suffering. 3. Stopping Suffering – One must completely stop wanting things in order to control desire.

Only when no desire remains is enlightenment possible. 4. The Way to Stop Suffering – The only way to stop suffering and attain enlightenment is to follow the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path If a person follows these eight rules, the world will become a place where all people can live in harmony: 1. Right Understanding-It is only when one understands the four noble truths and follows the Eightfold path can one find true happiness 2. Right Aims – One should always love and help others and not cheat or want things that other people have 3.

Right Speech – One should always tell the truth, and listen and communicate in order to understand others 4. Right Action – One should never kill, steal or be jealous of others. One should only perform good deeds for the sake of others benefits and not for ones own reward. 5. Right Work – One should only do work that will not harm other living creatures 6. Right Thinking – One

should focus thoughts on positive in order to overcome difficulties. 7. Proper Awareness – One should never let ones' body control the mind and should know when to say no. 8.

Meditation – One should train one's mind to concentrate and think deeply, to be inwardly attentive and reflective in order to find peace within ourselves.

Buddhism in India As an independent spiritual tradition in India, Buddhism diverged from Hinduism (traditional Indian thought) in several major areas, though both aim at the common goal of emancipation. Consonant with Indian tradition, Buddha accepted the general world view and interpretation of existence current in the Upanishad tradition. He looked upon existence as a series of transmigrations or in Buddhist terms rebirths.

Life is suffering within the confines of samsara. The law of cause and effect in the moral realm -- karma -- is the arbiter of destiny, and the ultimate goal is that of release into an ineffable and indefinable experience called Nirvana. Buddha accepted, with qualification, the Indian principle of meditation and concentration as the central means for breaking through the veil of delusion and gaining liberation. It is also clear that the development of Buddhism as a religious system depended on Indian reverence for the sage.

This also led to the attempt to preserve his words, and the creation of a distinctive and independent religious tradition. After abandoning his life as a prince and reaching an understanding of the suffering in the world, the Buddha, or Enlightened One, spent the remaining forty years of his life teaching people about his Middle Way, that those who follow the middle path reject the extremes of luxury and poverty, and pursue a life of good

intentions and actions. The rise of Buddhism is closely connected to the prevalent practices in the Brahmanical religion (Early Hinduism).

As Weber writes the Brahmanical religion had become increasingly intolerant (of the lower classes) and exclusive (open only to Brahmins and the aristocracy). The emphasis on conducting rituals (with the help of priests) was gradually alienating the masses. Sanskrit was the prerogative of the Brahmins and the aristocracy. In such an environment, Buddha's teaching offered an alternative to the mainstream religion. The majority of its early followers were the merchants and the Sudras (untouchables). Buddhism provided a path to reach God.

The tenets and rules of Buddhism were very simple to understand, appealing to the mass population. Buddha also preached in the local language, Prakrit. The practice of conducting rituals was seen as superfluous to reaching salvation. Buddha set up monasteries known as Sanghas. In his life, Buddha travelled throughout the whole of northern India spreading his message and setting up monastic orders. Since these monastic orders had to beg for their living, they were generally located near settlements, often on hillsides, etc.

Often the monasteries were located on trade routes frequented by merchant caravans. They offered shelter to the merchants, who in return made generous donations. After the Buddha's death, his cremated remains were placed within mounds called stupas. These burial mounds eventually became the focus of Buddhist monasteries and attracted pilgrims from far and wide. In the earliest Buddhist art in India, the Buddha is not represented in human form. Instead, his presence is indicated by a footprint, an empty seat, a parasol, or another sign such as the stupa.

Buddhism in China Buddhism entered China perhaps as early as the first century BCE through the first century CE. It was carried by monks and merchants who made their way along trade routes from India through Central Asia to China. The history of Buddhism in China is a complex story of how a foreign religion was imported and transformed into a Chinese system of beliefs. Though Buddhism reached China from India by the first century, it did not flourish until the political and economic upheavals of the Six Dynasties period (220–589).

In those troubling times, Buddhism emphasis on personal salvation and rejection of worldly ties attracted believers from every walk of life. At other times, Buddhism prospered when an emperor chose it as his official religion, but its foreign origin led other rulers to persecute believers. Buddhism survived these periodic challenges and continues to flourish in China today. At first, Chinese Buddhist beliefs and temple art were quite similar to the ideas and images brought from India. These ideas traveled to China from India along the Silk Road and via a southern sea route.

Many Indian Buddhist concepts were somewhat changed to better mesh with the existing Chinese traditions, such as Confucianism and Daoism. For example, unlike the Indian emphasis on personal salvation acquired by living a celibate life, Chinese Buddhists encouraged filial piety to complement the Chinese tradition of ancestor worship. Buddhist teachings flowed unsystematically into China from India. As a result, their diverse tendencies gave rise to a variety of schools and interpretations. The history of the formation of Buddhist schools divides into two periods.



The initial period was known as the age of the " Six Schools and Seven Branches. " During the second stage, the encouragement and support of Buddhist scholarship by the Sui and T'ang emperors led to the formation of more distinct and well-defined systems of Buddhist teaching which had enduring significance. This age marks the zenith of Buddhist intellectual leadership, influencing Chinese culture deeply and reflecting the gradual assimilation of Buddhism to the Chinese mind. Buddhism in Japan

By the time Buddhism arrived in Japan from Korea and China in the mid-sixth century, nearly a thousand years had passed since the Buddha lived on earth. The religion had grown, evolved, and spread throughout Asia, developing a rich diversity of imagery and beliefs. The Japanese continued this process of modifying Buddhism to fit their particular cultural preferences. Skilton write about the two main stages which marked the development of Buddhism in Japan. First, from the sixth through the twelfth century, the governing regime used Buddhism as part of a strategy to centralize control.

Within one generation of its introduction into Japan, Buddhism became the official state religion. It took a few more centuries for the Buddhist belief system to permeate society and truly coexist with native Shinto beliefs. By the eighth century, the two religions existed in relative integrated harmony. At this initial stage, imagery used in both Buddhist painting and sculpture reflected the tastes of the social elite. The majestic and awe-inspiring images tended to focus on divine hierarchies, meditative paths to enlightenment, perceptions of afterlife and similar themes.

The development of Japanese Buddhist culture and art was also greatly influenced by the Tang dynasty (618-907) China, which was in the midst of a golden age. The second major stage in the development of Japanese Buddhism occurred in the late twelfth century, when political control shifted from the imperial court to a rising warrior class. During this period of unrest, two major Buddhist movements gained prominence: popular forms of Buddhism adopted by ordinary people and Zen Buddhism (Chan, in Chinese), which had been imported from China

When Buddhism reached Japan in the sixth century from Korea and China, its sophisticated philosophical message was difficult for most Japanese to understand. A small elite was then learning Chinese (Japan's first written language) and some of them began to study Chinese Buddhist texts, as scholars and members of the clergy do in Japan down to the present. However, most Japanese were first attracted to Buddhist art, to Buddhist magic or to the possibility of closer ties with the advanced civilization of China, where Buddhism had already spread.

Whatever the attraction, by the eighth century, when the Japanese established their first permanent capital in the city of Nara, the Japanese court had embraced Buddhism as well as Shinto. Buddhism became powerful in Japan because it met the needs of people on all levels of life. It transmitted major symbols of spiritual power in Indian tradition, while also teaching Chinese Confucian morality and aspects of religious Taoism, focusing on its utility in this life. It also stressed its importance for concerns of the afterlife, claiming that it cared for both affairs of this world and the other world.

Conclusion As Buddhism spread from India to China and Japan it has changed and assumed new forms and dimensions. In China it has been transformed by Confucianism and Taoism and evolved further in Japan. Like other religions, the Buddhist tradition and its teachings evolved, adapted, and developed in different ways as they encountered and became at home with different cultures and countries in various times and places; thus, over the centuries, there arose numerous schools of Buddhist thought and traditions of practice, emphasizing different aspects of the teachings.

Despite the incredible variation, all have the same goal of leading beings to enlightenment.

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