

## Teachings of Buddhism



The story of another great religion, Buddhism, begins in a small kingdom in Northern India about 2,500 years ago. The king at that time had a son named Siddhartha Gautama (*sihd DAHR tah GAW tah mah*). At the time of his birth, wise men predicted that the child would grow up to be either a great king or a great spiritual leader.

The king did not want his son to lead the life of a wandering holy man, so he tried to protect the prince from any signs of suffering. No sick, old, or poor people were allowed in the palace or in the streets near the palace.

In the end his father's efforts failed. While away from the palace one day, the young prince saw an old man. Later, he saw a sick man, and on another day, a dead man. Siddhartha realized that he, too, would grow old and die. Was there no way to escape life's sorrows?

Then the prince saw a wandering holy man who owned only a single food bowl. In spite of his great age and poverty, the holy man seemed content. Siddhartha decided to give up his riches, to leave the palace, and to search for a way to end suffering in the world.

The story of Siddhartha's birth and childhood may be legend. However, a prince by that name did live in what is now India, from about 563<sub>BCE</sub> – 483<sub>BCE</sub>. Siddhartha wandered throughout the land, seeking truth by which to live. In time, these ideas became known as **Buddhism**, a major religion of the world today.

### Siddhartha's Search

Siddhartha's search for truth took place at a time of great religious activity on the Indian subcontinent. Many others were asking similar questions: Why do people suffer? How can suffering be avoided?

On his journey, Siddhartha met great religious teachers of the day, but he found no answers. He then decided to look within himself for wisdom. Sitting in the shade of a fig tree, he vowed not to leave until he found his answers.

After 49 days of deep thought, Siddhartha discovered the truth he sought. He believed he had found a way to escape suffering. Understanding flooded his mind like a great light. From that time on, he was called the Buddha, meaning "the enlightened one." He had reached the height of understanding that Buddhists call enlightenment.

The Buddha sent his first followers in all directions to spread the Buddhist *dharma*, or law. The Buddha traveled and taught, stopping wherever people would listen. He lived his days in peace, teaching and preaching until his death at the age of 80.

### The Way of the Buddha

Following his days of deep thought beneath the fig tree, the Buddha spoke of his Four Noble Truths. These teachings give the Buddhist view on why people suffer and how suffering can be avoided.

The Buddha rejected many ideas of his day. He did not believe in *atman*, the individual soul of Hinduism, or Vedic sacrifices, which required killing animals. He also rejected the caste system, which gave people little choice about how to live their lives.

The Buddha taught that nothing in this world lasts forever. Everyone gets old, most get sick, and all die. He said that people suffer because they want what they cannot have. If they can rid themselves of their wants, he taught, then they would be free. Then they would achieve the ultimate goal of Buddhism: enlightenment.



## The Chain of Rebirth

Although they have different ideas about the soul, both Buddhists and Hindus believe in reincarnation. Good karma, collected by following Buddhism's Eightfold Path, takes a person closer to enlightenment; bad karma inflicts more suffering.

The chain of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth continues until enlightenment is gained. Once enlightened, a person is finally free from further rebirth with all its earthly suffering. Buddhists call this state nirvana. Nirvana means "blowing out", like blowing out a candle. At that moment, a person wants nothing, not even to live or to die or to be reborn.

## The Middle Way

The Buddha also taught that in order to end suffering, people should follow the Middle Way, a path between luxury (more than you need) and unnecessary poverty (not having enough). He believed that by focusing on the Middle Way, Buddhists could achieve enlightenment.

Buddhists believe that all people are equal and have a right to a better life. Every Buddhist tries to make him or herself better, based on the teachings of the Buddha. However, they do not believe that there is only one god or one Supreme Being; instead, there are many gods to worship.

## The Three Jewels

Buddhists say that their tradition is made up of three parts, called the Three Jewels. These are the Buddha; his *dharma*, or teachings; and the *sangha* (SAHN guh), or religious community. The *sangha* is made up of monks, nuns, and everyday followers.

Gradually Buddhist missionaries spread their beliefs beyond India. They first traveled to the island of Ceylon, now called Sri Lanka. By about 650<sup>CE</sup>, Buddhism had reached China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Burma, and other areas of Southeast Asia.

Although Buddhism became less popular in India over the years, it gained followers in other countries. Today, more than 300 million people throughout the world are Buddhists.



## Asoka: A Great Buddhist Ruler:

The worldwide spread of Buddhism began with the Emperor Asoka (*ah SHOH kah*). A faithful follower of Buddhism, he was the first emperor to send missionaries beyond India's borders.

Asoka belonged to a long line of conquering kings known as the Mauryas (*MOW ree uhz*), who ruled India from about 324<sup>BCE</sup> to 187<sup>BCE</sup>. They built the first great Indian Empire. It was probably the largest Indian empire in the country's history.

Soon after Asoka came to power in 273<sup>BCE</sup>, he went to war. He conquered Kalinga, an independent area in eastern India, in a series of bloody battles. The violence may have turned Asoka towards Buddhism.

## Asoka's Edicts

During the rest of his rule, Asoka sent out Buddhist missionaries. He also spelled out his beliefs in edicts, or public announcements. Asoka had these edicts carved into rocks and pillars around the empire. Beautiful carvings often decorated the tops, or capitals, of pillars.

Two of the most famous edicts are Rock Edict I and Kalinga Edict II. Rock Edict I explains Asoka's support of *ahimsa* (*uh HIHM sah*), the Buddhist belief in non-violence. It forbids harming any humans or animals.

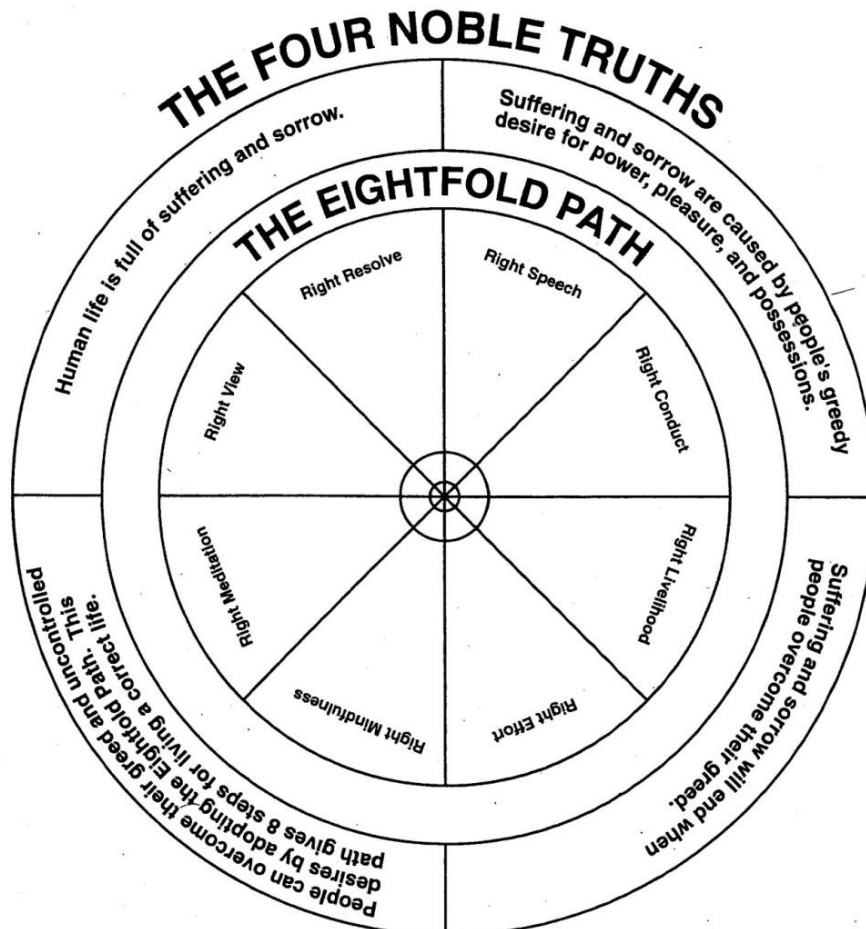


*"No living creature shall be slaughtered here...Many hundreds of thousand living creatures were formerly slaughtered every day for curries in kitchens of His Majesty. At present, when this edict on Dharma is inscribed, only three living creatures are killed daily, two peacocks and a deer...In the future, not even these three animals shall be slaughtered."*

The Kalinga Edict II in eastern India shows how Asoka felt towards his people:

*"All men are my children. Just as I seek the welfare and happiness of my own children in this world and the next, I seek the same things for all men."*

Asoka's nonviolent style of ruling did not last. After his death, the empire broke up into little warring kingdoms. In spite of this bloodshed, the peaceful message of Buddhism continued to spread.



## Teachings of Buddhism Notes

Buddhism was founded by \_\_\_\_\_

Buddha did not believe in \_\_\_\_\_ or in the \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ - To be completely free of further rebirth and earthly suffering; The  
Ultimate goal of Buddhism; complete understanding

Middle Way:

One should follow the \_\_\_\_\_, between luxury and poverty

All people are \_\_\_\_\_ and have rights to a better \_\_\_\_\_

Buddhists do not believe in one \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ Being

Three Jewels:

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_ 3) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ - Law/teachings of Buddhism

Asoka:

Asoka was the first \_\_\_\_\_ who sent missionaries beyond India's borders

Asoka belonged to the \_\_\_\_\_, a line of kings who built a great Indian Empire

Asoka supported \_\_\_\_\_ (non-violence) towards man and beast

Four Noble Truths:

1) Human life is full of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

2) Suffering and sorrow are caused by desire for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) Suffering and sorrow will end when \_\_\_\_\_ overcome their \_\_\_\_\_

4) To overcome greed, adopt the \_\_\_\_\_

Eightfold Path:

Follow the Right \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_