



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Origins of Buddhism

More than 2,500 years ago, there was a king called Suddhodana. He married a beautiful Koliyan princess named Maha Maya. The couple ruled over the Sakyas, a warrior tribe living next to the Koliya tribe, in the north of India, in what is now known as Nepal.

Today Buddhism is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest religion in the world followed by 520 million people.

One full moon night, sleeping in the palace, the queen had a vivid dream. She felt herself being carried away by four devas (spirits) to Lake Anotatta in the Himalayas. After bathing her in the lake, the devas clothed her in heavenly cloths, anointed her with perfumes, and bedecked her with divine flowers.

Soon after a white elephant, holding a white lotus flower in its trunk, appeared and went around her three times, entering her womb through her right side.

Finally, the elephant disappeared, and the queen awoke, knowing she had been delivered an important message, as the elephant is a symbol of greatness in Nepal. The next day, early in the morning, the queen told the king about the dream. The king was puzzled and sent for some wise men to discover the meaning of the dream.

The wise men said, "Your Majesty, you are very lucky. The devas have chosen our queen as the mother of the Purest-One and the child will become a very great being."

Siddhartha Gautama buddha was born 563 B.C.

According to legend, at his birth a soothsayer predicted that he might become a renouncer (withdrawing from the temporal life). To prevent this, his father provided him with many luxuries and pleasures.

But, as a young man, he once went on a series of four chariot rides where he first saw the more severe forms of human suffering:

- Old age,
- Sickness,
- Death (a corpse), and
- Monk (Self-denier).

The contrast between his life and this human suffering made him realize that all the pleasures on earth were in fact transitory and could only mask human suffering.

Leaving his wife and new son (Rahula) he took on several teachers and tried severe renunciation in the forest until the point of near starvation.

Finally, realizing that this too was only adding more suffering, he ate food and sat down beneath a tree to meditate. By morning (or some say six months later!) he had attained Nirvana (Enlightenment), which provided both the true answers to the causes of suffering and permanent release from it.

Now the Buddha ("the Enlightened or Awakened One") began to teach others these truths out of compassion for their suffering. The most important doctrines he taught included the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path.

He began teaching around Benares (at Sarnath). His era in general was one of spiritual, intellectual, and social ferment. This was the age when the Hindu ideal of renunciation of family and social life by holy persons seeking Truth first became widespread, and when the Upanishads were written. Both can be seen as moves away from the centrality of the Vedic fire sacrifice.

# The Four Noble Truths



## **Dukka:**

His first Noble Truth is that life is suffering (dukkha). Life as we normally live it is full of the pleasures and pains of the body and mind; pleasures, he said, do not represent lasting happiness. They are inevitably tied in with suffering since we suffer from wanting them, wanting them to continue, and wanting pain to go so pleasure can come.

## **Samudaya:**

The second Noble Truth is that suffering is caused by craving for sense pleasures and for things to be as they are not. We refuse to accept life as it is.

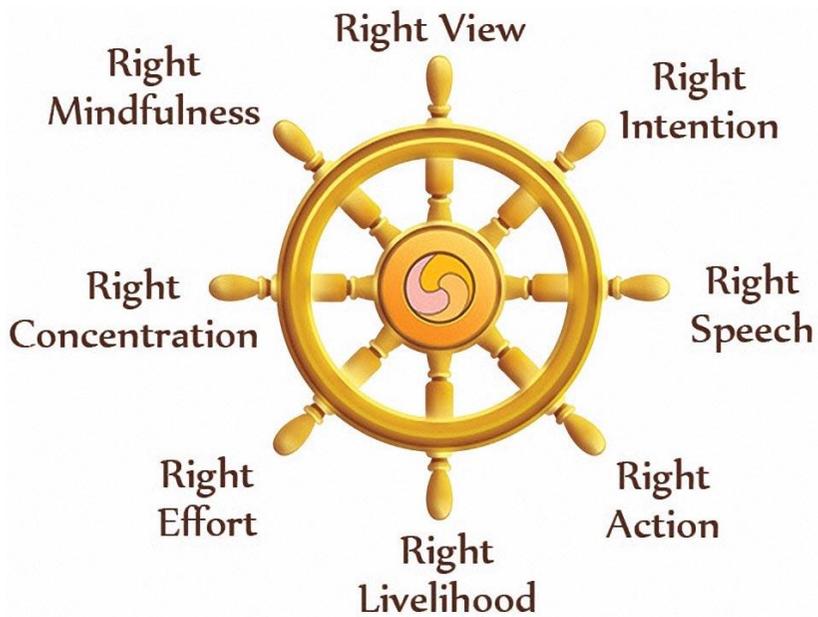
## **Nirodha:**

The third Noble Truth, however, states that suffering has an end.

### **Magga:**

The fourth offers the means to that end: the Eight-Fold Path and the Middle Way. If one follows this combined path, he or she will attain Nirvana, an indescribable state of all-knowing lucid awareness in which there is only peace and joy.

### **The Eight-Fold Path:**



Often pictorially represented by an eight-spoked wheel (the Wheel of Dhamma) includes:

1. Right Views (the Four Noble Truths),
2. Right Intention,
3. Right Speech,
4. Right Action,
5. Right Livelihood/Occupation,
6. Right Effort,
7. Right Mindfulness (total concentration in activity), and
8. Right Concentration (meditation).

The Eight-Fold Path is pervaded by the principle of the Middle Way, which characterizes the Buddha's life. The Middle Way represents a rejection of all extremes of thought, emotion, action, and lifestyle.

Rather than either severe mortification of the body or a life of indulgence in pleasures the Buddha advocated a moderate or "balanced" wandering lifestyle and the cultivation of mental and emotional equanimity through meditation and morality.

After the Buddha's death, his celibate wandering followers gradually settled down into monasteries that were provided by the married laity as merit-producing gifts. The laity were in turn taught by the monks some of the Buddha's teachings. They also engaged in such practices as visiting the Buddha's birthplace; and worshipping the tree under which he became enlightened

(bodhi tree), Buddha images in temples, and the relics of his body housed in various stupas or funeral mounds. A famous king, named Ashoka, and his son helped to spread Buddhism throughout South India and into Sri Lanka (Ceylon) (3rd century B.C.E.).

### **Buddhism History**

When Gautama passed away around 483 B.C., his followers began to organize a religious movement. Buddha's teachings became the foundation for what would develop into Buddhism.

In the 3rd century B.C., Ashoka the Great, the Mauryan Indian emperor, made Buddhism the state religion of India. Buddhist monasteries were built, and missionary work was encouraged.

Over the next few centuries, Buddhism began to spread beyond India. The thoughts and philosophies of Buddhists became diverse, with some followers interpreting ideas differently than others.

In the sixth century, the Huns invaded India and destroyed hundreds of Buddhist monasteries, but the intruders were eventually driven out of the country.

Islam began to spread quickly in the region during the Middle Ages, forcing Buddhism into the background.

## **Types of Buddhism**

Today, many forms of Buddhism exist around the world. The three main types that represent specific geographical areas include:

**Theravada Buddhism:** Prevalent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos and Burma

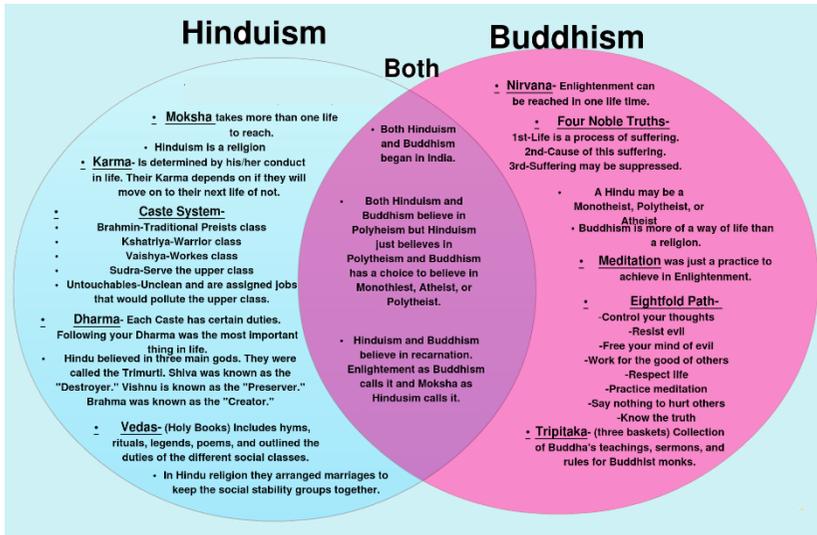
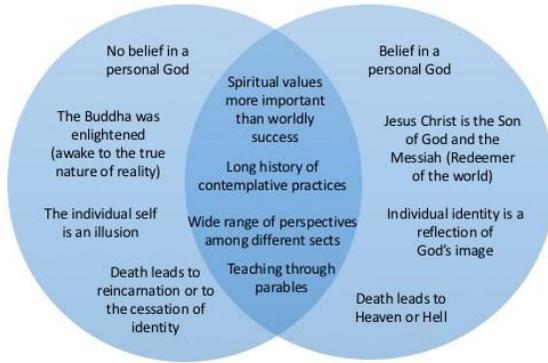
**Mahayana Buddhism:** Prevalent in China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore and Vietnam

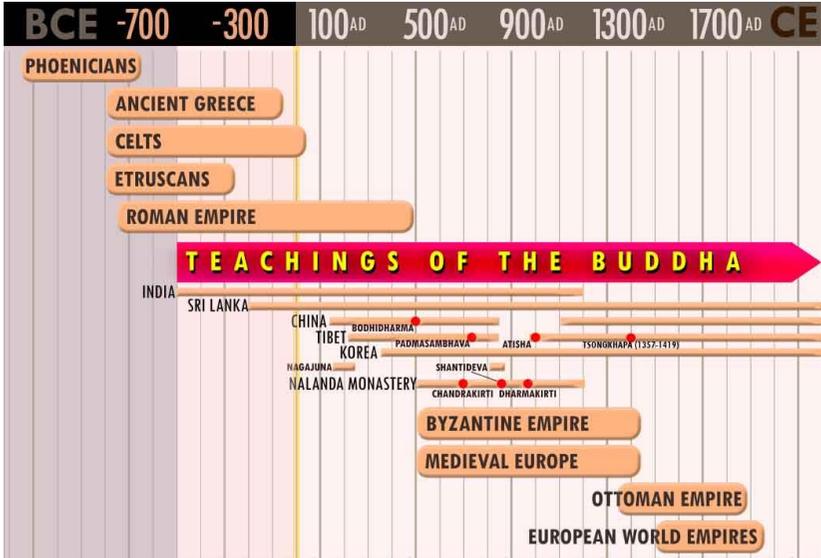
**Tibetan Buddhism:** Prevalent in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, and parts of Russia and northern India

Each of these types reveres certain texts and has slightly different interpretations of Buddha's teachings. There are also several subsects of Buddhism, including Zen Buddhism and Nirvana Buddhism.

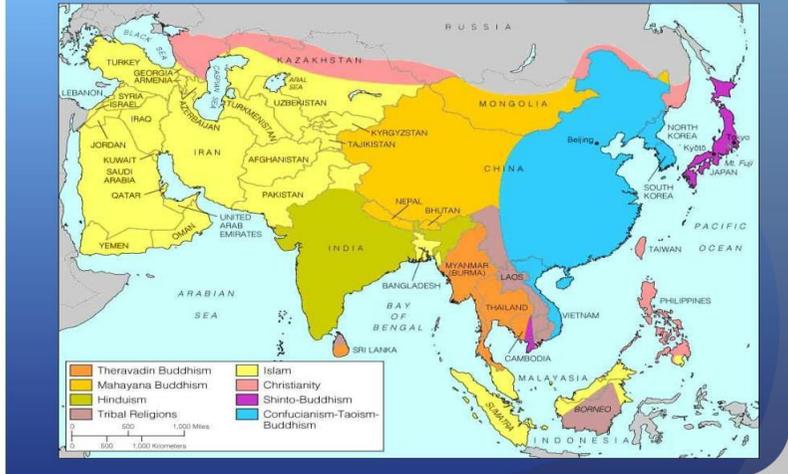
Some forms of Buddhism incorporate ideas of other religions and philosophies, such as Taoism and Bon.

Basic Similarities and Differences  
**Buddhism and Christianity**





## Where is it practiced?



About the first century C.E. a major split occurred within the Buddhist fold—that between the Mahayana and Hinayana branches.

<u>Theravada (Hinayana)</u>	<u>Mahayana</u>
◆ Teaching of the elders	Spirit of the elders
◆ Small vehicle	Large (great) vehicle
◆ Man as an individual	Man involved with others
◆ Man on his own in the universe	Man is not alone (grace is real)
◆ Key virtue: wisdom (bodhi)	Key virtue: compassion (karuna)
◆ Religion is primarily for monks	Religion is for laypersons as well
◆ Ideal: the Arhat (lonely saint)	Ideal: the Bodhisattva
◆ Nirvana- oneself	Nirvana + heavens, hells-for all
◆ Buddha is a saint or sage	Buddha is a savior
◆ Avoids metaphysics (speculation)	Elaborates metaphysics
◆ Avoids ritual	Includes ritual
◆ Conservative	Liberal
◆ Pali texts – kamma and dharma	Many later texts (Sanskrit)karma,dharma
◆ Old wisdom school	New wisdom school
◆ Escape Samsara, and reach Nirvana	Samsara <u>is</u> Nirvana (identity)
◆ Ceylon, Burma, etc. (Southern Bism)	China, Korea, Japan (N Bism)

Of the Hinayana ("the Lesser Vehicle") branch of schools, only

Although Buddhism became virtually extinct in India (ca. 12th century C.E.)—perhaps because of the all-embracing nature of Hinduism, Muslim invasions, or too great a stress on the monk's way of life—as a religion it has more than proved its viability and practical spirituality in the countries of Asia to which it has been carried. The many forms and practices that have been developed within the Buddhist fold have also allowed many different types of people to satisfy their spiritual needs through this great religion.