



# **Buddhism**

## **Part 3 Ancient India & China**



# Buddhism

## Main Idea

Buddhism, which teaches people that they can escape the suffering of the world through the Buddha's teachings, developed in India and spread to other parts of Asia and the world.

## Focus

1. How did the early life of the Buddha lead to the beginnings of Buddhism?
2. What are the major teachings of Buddhism?
3. What areas were affected by the spread of Buddhism?

## Vocabulary

- Buddhism
- Buddha
- Four Noble Truths
- Eightfold Path
- Nirvana
- Middle Way

# The Great DEPARTURE



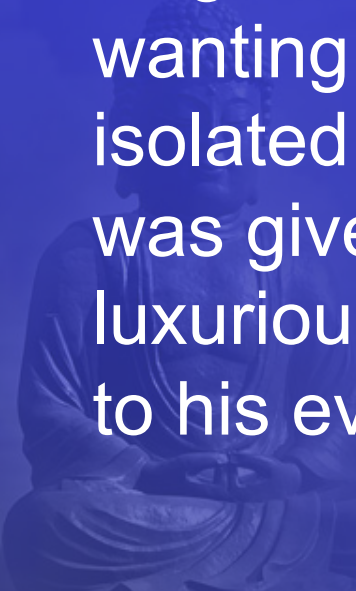
▲ In this painting of the Great Departure, spirits hold the hooves of Gautama's horse so he will not awaken anyone as he flees his father's palace.

Detail of a mural at Wat Ratchasitaram, Thailand, 1800s



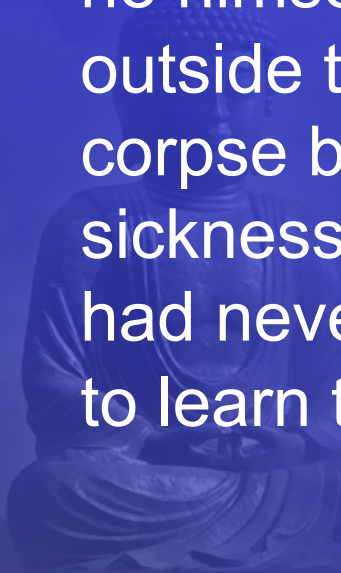
## ***Why would a prince abandon his old life and his chance to be a king?***

- According to Buddhist tradition, young prince Siddhartha Gautama led a very sheltered life. On the day he was born, a seer predicted that the young prince would grow up to be either a mighty king or a great religious leader. His father the king, wanting Gautama to follow him as king, kept him isolated from all the hardships of the world. He was given three different palaces to live in, luxurious furnishings, and dutiful servants to attend to his every need.



## ***Why would a prince abandon his old life and his chance to be a king?***

- When he was 29, Gautama asked to be taken out of the palace on a chariot ride. As he rode, he saw an old man among the crowd in the street. Never having seen the signs of old age, Gautama asked his servants what it meant. He was surprised to learn that everyone—even he himself— would eventually grow old. On later trips outside the palace, Gautama saw a sick man and a corpse being carried to its funeral. The idea of old age, sickness, and death profoundly affected him. Gautama had never known any sort of suffering and was shocked to learn that people had to endure it.



## ***Why would a prince abandon his old life and his chance to be a king?***

- On a fourth chariot ride outside his palace, Gautama observed a holy man seeking enlightenment. This man had given up all of life's comforts in order to find a way to over- come old age, disease, and death. Gautama immediately decided to follow the man's example. He asked his father for permission to leave the palace, but his father did not want him to go. Gautama left anyway, sneaking out in the night in what became known as the Great Departure, and became a monk. After years of meditation, Gautama found a path to enlightenment and became known as the Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.

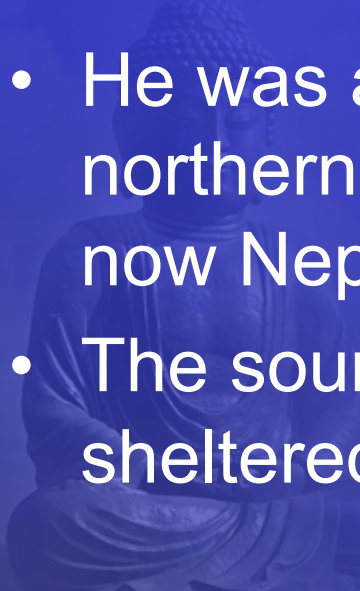
# The Life of the Buddha

- In addition to Hinduism, another of the world's major religions developed in ancient India.
- That religion was Buddhism.
- Unlike Hinduism, which evolved over thousands of years, Buddhism can be traced back to the teachings of a single founder, Siddhartha Gautama, also called the **Buddha**.



# Early Life

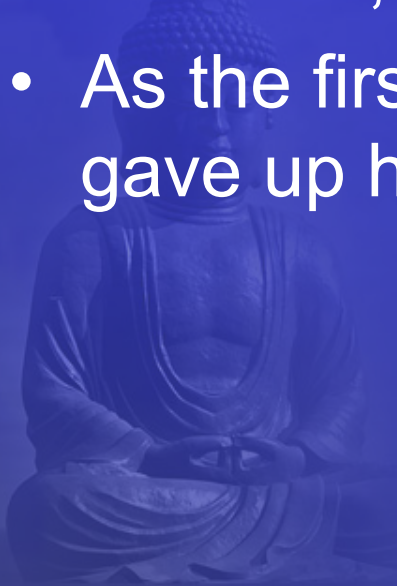
- Much of what is known about the life of the Buddha comes from accounts told in Buddhist literature, some of which were written centuries after his death.
- According to these sources, Gautama was born in the 500s BC.
- He was a prince of a small kingdom in the very northern part of the Indian subcontinent in what is now Nepal.
- The sources say that Gautama lived a very sheltered life free of any hardship or suffering.





# Early Life

- As a result, he was unaware that hardship existed in the world until he was almost 30.
- When Gautama realized that people grew old, got sick, and died, his life was changed.
- He resolved to find a way to overcome age and sickness, to keep people from having to suffer.
- As the first step toward finding this new path, he gave up his possessions and left his palace.



# The Buddha's Enlightenment

- Tradition says Gautama sought enlightenment, or spiritual understanding, for six years.
- He began his search by living in the forest and begging for food.
- He studied with teachers called gurus and with monks who denied themselves food, drink, and other necessities.
- After a time, he decided that neither the gurus nor the monks could teach him the way to enlightenment.



# The Buddha's Enlightenment

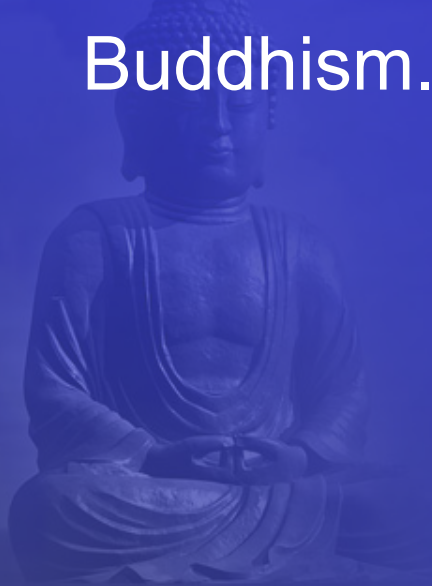
- Left alone with no teacher and no companions, Gautama sat under a tree, determined not to arise until he found the way to end human suffering.
- Stories say that he meditated all night, his resolve tested by violent storms and earthly temptations.
- When dawn broke, Gautama had been transformed.
- He had found enlightenment and became known from then on as the Buddha, or Enlightened One.
- The spot where the Buddha is believed to have sat in meditation is called Bodh Gaya. Later, a Buddhist temple was built there.
- It is one of Buddhism's most sacred places.



How did Siddhartha Gautama  
become the Buddha?

# The Teachings of Buddhism

- After he achieved enlightenment, the Buddha remained at Bodh Gaya for seven weeks, deep in meditation.
- Then he set out to spread what he had learned to other people.
- His lessons became the basic teachings of Buddhism.



# Buddhist Beliefs

- Among the ideas that the Buddha is said to have learned while meditating are four central truths.
- Together, these are called the **Four Noble Truths**:
  - Suffering is a part of human life. No one can escape from suffering while alive.
  - Suffering comes from people's desires for pleasure and material goods.
  - Overcoming these desires during life eventually brings suffering to an end.
  - Desires can be overcome by following the **Eightfold Path**.

### SACRED TEXTS

# Dhammapada

**About the Reading** Many of the sacred texts of Buddhism record the words of the Buddha. Among them is the *Dhammapada*, which is believed to include the answers to questions asked of the Buddha on various occasions. The *Dhammapada* is particularly sacred to Theravada Buddhists, but Mahayana Buddhists read it as well.

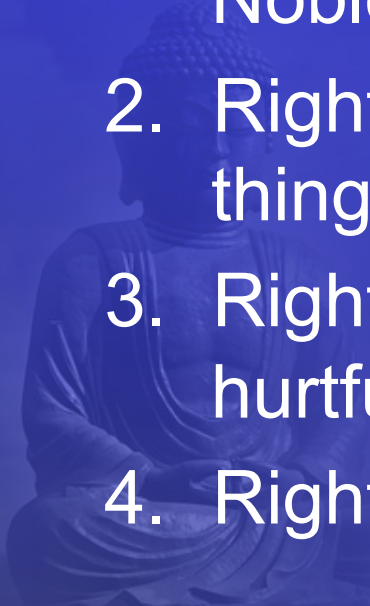
**AS YOU READ** Note the qualities the Buddha says a person should have.

Buddhist scroll painted in Japan in the 1100s ►



# Buddhist Beliefs

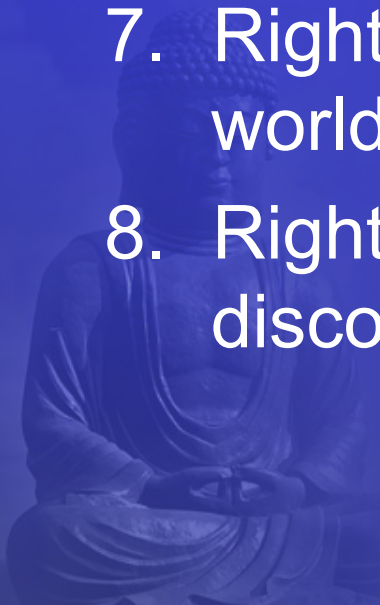
- The *Eightfold Path* is a series of steps that Buddhists believe leads to enlightenment and salvation.
- It includes the following:
  1. Right view, or accepting the reality of the Four Noble Truths
  2. Right attitude, or striving for moderation in all things
  3. Right speech, or avoiding lies, boasts, and hurtful words
  4. Right action, or treating others fairly





# Buddhist Beliefs

- It includes the following:
  5. Right livelihood, or avoiding jobs that could bring harm to others
  6. Right effort, or constantly trying to improve oneself
  7. Right mindfulness, or remaining aware of the world around one, and
  8. Right concentration, or ignoring temptation and discomfort while meditating



# Buddhist Beliefs

- The Buddha taught that those who followed the Eightfold Path could attain nirvana, a state of perfect peace in which the soul would be free from suffering forever.
- Those who do not attain nirvana will be reborn to live through the cycle of suffering again.
- The basic teachings of the Eightfold Path can also be expressed as the Middle Way.
- In its simplest form, the Middle Way advises people to live in moderation, avoiding the extremes of either comfort or discomfort in the search for nirvana:

## **HISTORY'S VOICES**

**“There are two extremes . . . which he who has given up the world ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasures, devoted to pleasures and lusts: this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble, and profitless; and a life given to mortifications: this is painful, ignoble, and profitless.”**

**—The Buddha, Sermon at Benares, c. 528 BC**

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,”—in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease.

“He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,”—in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease.

For hatred does not cease by

hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.

The world does not know that we all must come to an end here;—but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once.

He who lives looking for pleasures only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food, idle, and weak, Mâra (the tempter) will certainly overthrow him, as the wind throws down a weak tree.

He who lives without looking for pleasures, his senses well controlled, moderate in his food, faithful and strong, him Mâra will certainly not overthrow, any more than the wind throws down a rocky mountain.

—*Dhammapada*

---

**Analyze** What qualities does the Buddha say a person should try to master to find enlightenment?

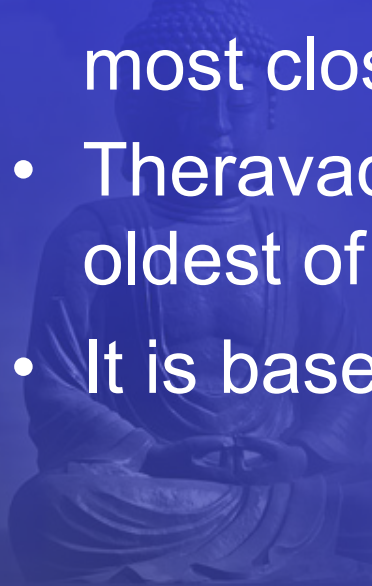


A young monk studies Buddhist scripture.



# Divisions of Buddhism

- After the Buddha's death, differing opinions arose concerning the correct teachings and practices of Buddhism.
- Eventually, three main traditions formed— Theravada, Mahayana, and Tibetan Buddhism.
- Each sect believed that its teachings and practices most closely followed the way of the Buddha.
- Theravada, meaning the Way of the Elders, is the oldest of the Buddhist traditions.
- It is based on the oldest known Buddhist writings.



# Divisions of Buddhism

- These writings are collectively called the Pali Canon, because they were written in the Pali language.
- Theravada teaches that the best way to attain nirvana is to become a monk or a nun and spend all of one's time in meditation.
- Through this meditation, each person must find his or her own path to enlightenment.
- As a result, Theravada is very much an individual religion.
- Those who do not become monks or nuns should support those who do, providing them with food and caring for temples.

# Divisions of Buddhism

- Anyone can do it, with some help.
- That help is provided by bodhisattvas, people who have found enlightenment but have not yet passed on to nirvana.
- Instead, they have remained on Earth to help others find their way.
- Because of their wisdom and compassion, bodhisattvas are worshipped by some Mahayana Buddhists.





# Divisions of Buddhism

- That help is provided by bodhisattvas, people who have found enlightenment but have not yet passed on to nirvana.
- Instead, they have remained on Earth to help others find their way.
- Because of their wisdom and compassion, bodhisattvas are worshipped by some Mahayana Buddhists.



# Divisions of Buddhism

- The third Buddhist tradition, Tibetan Buddhism, shares many teachings with Mahayana.
- In addition to these teachings, however, Tibetan Buddhists believe that they can use special techniques to harness spiritual energy and achieve nirvana in a single lifetime.





What are the fundamental teachings of Buddhism?

# The Spread of Buddhism

- Unlike Hinduism, which largely remained an Indian religion, Buddhism spread into other parts of the world.
- Today, more than 350 million people are Buddhists, most of them concentrated in Asia, but relatively few people in India are Buddhists today.



# Buddhism in India

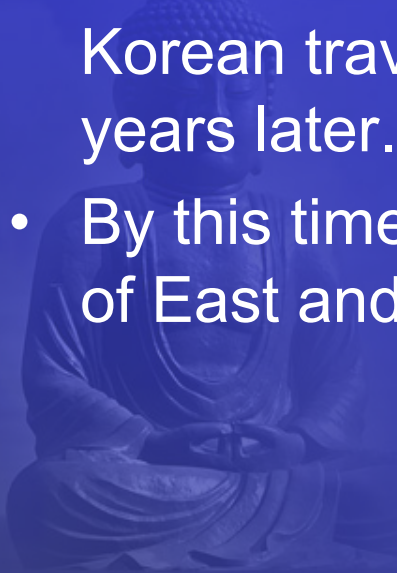
- Throughout the Buddha's life, the Buddhist community in India grew.
- After his death, the Buddha's followers spread his teachings, though they were not written down until the first century BC.
- Once they had been recorded, Buddhist writings helped to preserve and spread the teachings of the Buddha throughout India.
- Buddhism reached its peak in India in the 200s BC during the reign of the emperor Ashoka, whom you will read more about in a later chapter.
- During Ashoka's rule as emperor, he became a Buddhist and helped spread Buddhism into all parts of India.
- Ashoka also encouraged missionaries to carry the Buddha's message to lands outside of India.

# Buddhism Beyond India

- One of the lands to which Ashoka sent missionaries was Sri Lanka, the large island off India's southern coast.
- He also sent missionaries north to lands along the Himalayas and east into the lands of Southeast Asia.
- There, Buddhism took a firm hold in the kingdoms that eventually became Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- It also spread into the islands of Indonesia.
- In addition to missionary work, trade helped to spread Buddhism beyond India.
- Merchants traveling routes from India to Central Asia introduced Buddhist teachings into that region in the 200s BC, about the same time that Ashoka was sending out missionaries.

# Buddhism Beyond India

- Historians also believe that traders from both Central Asia and Southeast Asia took Buddhist teachings into China.
- In China, Buddhism slowly spread and blended with native Chinese philosophies.
- From China, Buddhism eventually diffused into Korea and Japan.
- It was first introduced to Korea during the AD 300s, and Korean travelers then took the religion to Japan about 200 years later.
- By this time, Buddhism had become the leading religion in all of East and Southeast Asia.



# Buddhism Beyond India

- As Buddhism encountered other religious traditions outside of India it continued to change and develop.
- Because of this blending, various smaller traditions developed within Theravada and Mahayana.
- For example, a branch of Mahayana known as Zen that emphasized self-discipline and meditation developed in China and spread to Japan.
- Buddhism today is a very diverse religion with a wide range of adherents and practices.

