

Section 6

What is Buddhism?

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. What are the various beliefs of the five major world religions?
2. How does geography play a role in the development and spread of religion?
3. What effect does religion have on economic, political, and social institutions?
4. What effect does religion have on art, language, and literature?

TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

Siddhartha Gautama

Buddha

Buddhism

Enlightenment

Nirvana

Middle Way

Four Noble Truths

Eightfold Path

Bodhi

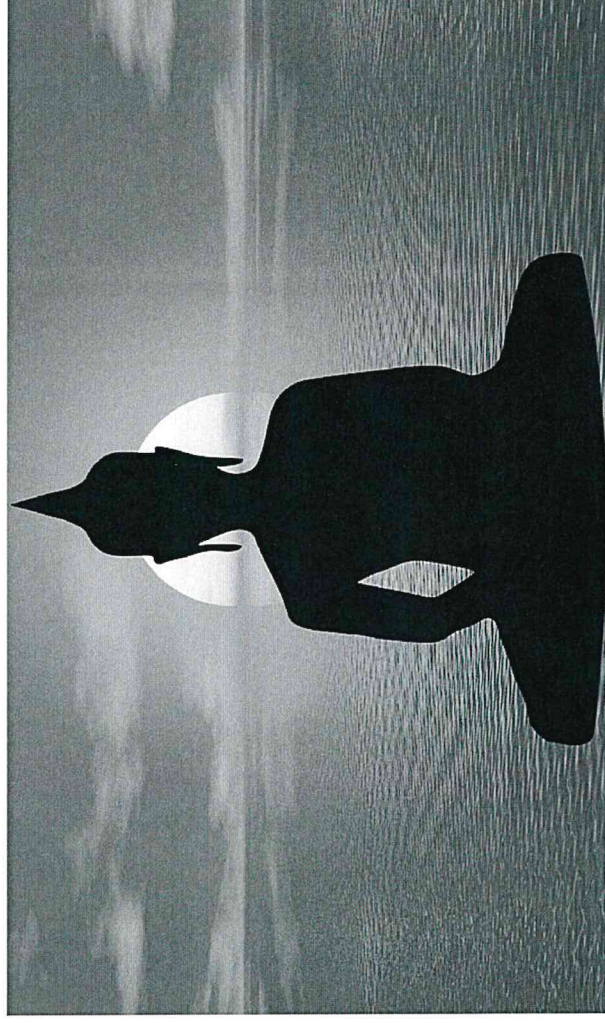
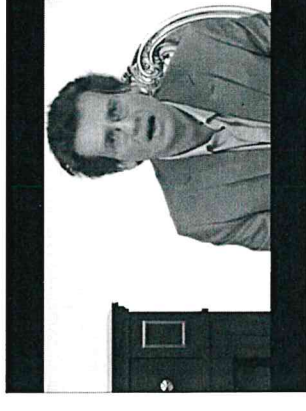
Karma

Meditation

Introduction

“What are you?” A question not normally asked of people. “Who are you?” is a much more common approach to get to know someone’s name, origin, ancestry, but never “What are you?” Buddha was asked this question, and his answer gives us a look at his identity and therefore the identity of an entire religion: “I am awake.”

Interactive 5.9 Crash Course - Buddhism



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How can a religion not be based on an idea of a god or gods? If a religion follows more a way of life or philosophy is it still a “religion”? Many have asked these same questions about the religion of Buddhism. Buddhism is not based on the following or idea of a god-it is a way of life. Buddhism focuses on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. Buddhism is the 4th largest religion in the world, having about 376 million followers worldwide.

Origins/History

Buddhism is the dominant world religion in the Eastern part of the world. The religion began in India about 2,500 years ago. Buddhism is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama who was born around 563 BCE in what is now Nepal, close to the Indian border. Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakyas was born into a wealthy family. His father was a king; as a result Siddharthas upbringing was luxurious. At the age of 29, the prince left his royal life in search of spiritual truth. As he journeyed, he believed he learned great truths that would ultimately change his life. These truths would be shared with others and become the foundation for the religion of Buddhism.

Prince Siddhartha was born about 566 BCE in the village of Lumbini, located in present-day Nepal. King Suddhodana and Queen Maya were devout Hindu followers. According to Buddhist tradition, just prior to the prince’s birth, his mother had a dream. In the queen’s dream, she saw a huge white elephant come into a room carrying a lotus flower. The elephant trumpeted, walked around her and pierced her right side with one of its tusks.

The king and queen asked the Hindu priests to explain the dream. The priests declared that the king and queen would give birth to a great and noble son. The child would have two paths to choose from. As prince, he could be a good and powerful ruler. But if he left the royal life to see the suffering of the world, he would become one who is enlightened.

The prince’s father wanted his son to grow up and be a great and powerful ruler, not a holy man. This led to the decision to keep his son protected from the world. The prince enjoyed a life filled with all the lavishes of being royalty. Eventually he grew up, married, and had a son of his own. At this point in his life, the king felt that it was time to give Siddhartha more freedom. The prince was



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddhartha_Gautama#/media/

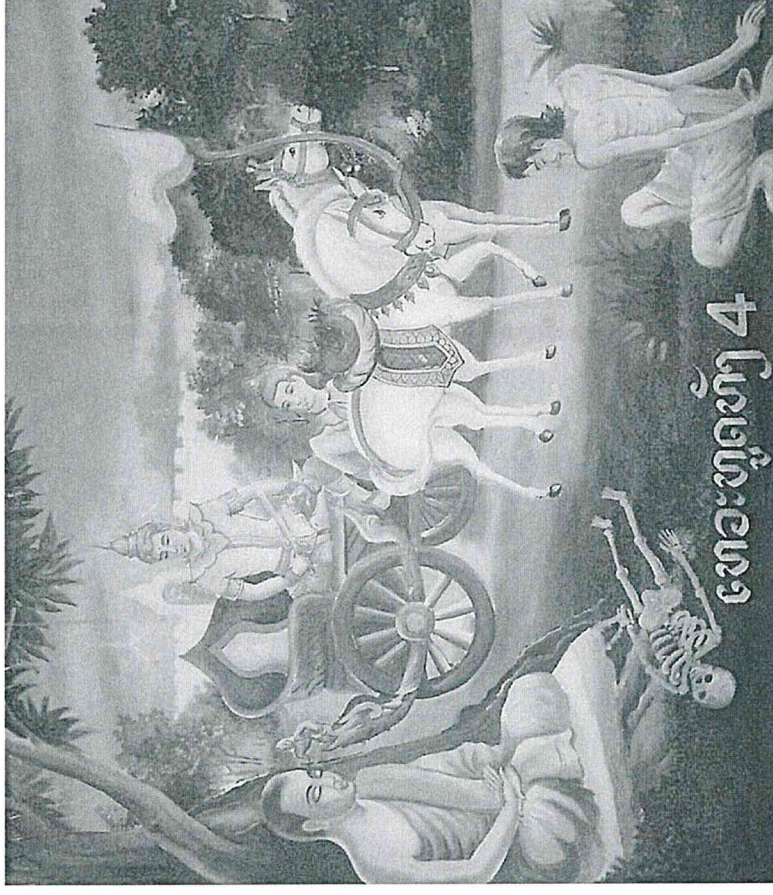
File:Buddha_meditating.jpg

now able to travel outside the royal palaces.

One day, according to traditions, Siddhartha decided to travel outside the protection of the royal enclosure. It was during these travels that he first discovered what he would call the three forms of suffering. First he encountered an older man walking with the aid of a stick. Next he came upon a sick man lying on the ground, crying out in pain. Finally, the prince encountered a group of people walking down the road. They carried with them a man wrapped in a white cloth. It was Siddhartha's first experience with death. All of this suffering greatly disturbed him. Siddhartha came to believe he had learned a great truth: sickness, age, and death were the inevitable fate of all human beings, something no one could avoid.

On his travels, Siddhartha also encountered a Hindu monk. He decided that this was a sign for him to leave the royal life and pursue the life of a holy man. He began to search for a way to escape suffering. Siddhartha later would encounter an Indian ascetic who encouraged him to follow a life of extreme self-denial and discipline. For six years he followed this way, but it didn't satisfy him, he still could not escape from the suffering of the world.

Finally, he abandoned the lifestyle of self-denial, however, he did not return to the pampered life of royalty. He instead followed the Middle Way; a life of neither luxury nor poverty. Around his 35th birthday, Siddhartha had a strong feeling that he would soon gain



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_sights#/media/File:Four_Heavenly_Messengers.jpg

enlightenment. As the day wore on, he walked until reaching a tree that would become known as the Bodhi tree, or tree of awakening. Siddhartha sat beneath the tree and fell into a deep meditation. He reflected on all his life experiences and was determined to find the truth.

Buddhist tradition tells that Siddhartha was then tempted by a wicked god named Mara. Her three daughters -Discontent, Delight, and Desire all tried to tempt Siddhartha, but he resisted

them all. At this point, the Buddha continued to meditate through the night about the nature of reality and a way to reach nirvana, or true happiness and peace. He saw the past lives he lived and the importance of karma. Eventually, he saw the way to gain freedom from the cycle of rebirth, ending all suffering. Here he finally achieved enlightenment, a state of spiritual insight and became the Buddha. He would have been happy to dwell in the state of enlightenment. But Brahma, the king of the gods (Hinduism), asked him to share his understanding with others.

The truths that the prince discovered under the Bodhi tree would become the founding principles of Buddhism. They are often referred to as the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha would spend the remainder of his life sharing these teachings with the rest of the world.

Central Teachings

Buddhism is more a way of life than the typical “religion”. This is not to mean that Buddhism isn’t a religion and religious beliefs aren’t important to all Buddhists. Depending on the sect, beliefs may include gods, ancestors, and the afterlife. However, the most important of the Buddhist beliefs are about suffering and how to escape it. After becoming enlightened, the Buddha taught that the way to escape suffering begins with an understanding of the true nature of the world. He urged his followers to focus on the Four Noble Truths; by following this path they can free themselves from suffering.

Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are the essence of the Buddha’s teachings. These four principles are what he came to understand while gaining enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. The Buddha would spend the rest of his life sharing the truths with people all over India.

1. The truth of suffering (Dukkha)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha)
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Magga)

The essence of the Four Noble Truths is the idea that things change. To change the pattern of suffering, a Buddhist should travel the Eightfold Path. This path follows the “middle way”, the way to achieve a release from suffering.

Eightfold Path The Fourth Noble Truth, the path to cessation of suffering, is the set of principles called the Eightfold Path. This “middle way” avoids both indulgence and extreme self-denial. The eight “paths” are not to be done in order or to be considered a list, but rather support and reinforce each other. As a connection to the basis of Hinduism, the wheel of **Dharma** is seen as a symbol of the Eightfold path

1. Right Understanding- Accepting the Buddhist teachings, followers are to develop a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

2. Right Intention- Living a life of selflessness, love, and nonviolence. It is a commitment to having a right attitude.

3. Right Speech- Speaking truthfully, avoiding things like slander, gossip, and abusive speech.

4. Right Action- Be honest, behave peacefully and refrain from stealing, killing, lying, or overindulgence in sensual pleasure.

5. Right Livelihood- Do no work at a job that causes harm to people or other living beings.

6. Right Effort- Promote good actions and prevent evil actions

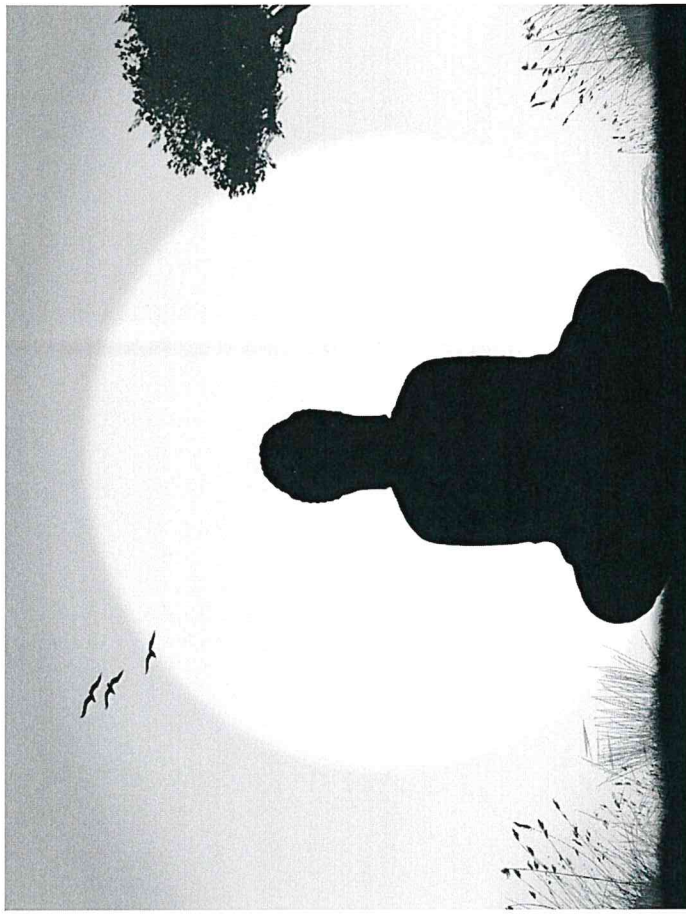
7. Right Mindfulness- Be aware of your emotions, thoughts, and feelings. Avoid attachments to these things.

8. Right Concentration- through meditation, developing the mental focus necessary to follow the path.

Other Beliefs

Karma is a concept that is seen in several Eastern religions, not exclusive to Buddhism. As in Hinduism, karma in Buddhism explains that our past actions will affect us in either a positive or negative way. For Buddhists, the effects of good and bad

decisions can have implications beyond this life. Bad actions will cause bad effects on a person in their next life, as good actions will have good effects on the next life. Even after receiving enlightenment, one is not exempt from the effects of past karma. Karma will also determine where a person will be reborn and their status in the next life.



<http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/view-image.php?image=76367&picture=>

Meditation

Meditation plays a large role in virtually all religions, although many don't use the word "meditation" to describe their

contemplative practice. Meditation is the process of spending quiet time in deep thought or contemplation. The goal of Buddhist meditation is not to reach a hypnotic state or in creating a connection with a supernatural entity. The Buddhist goal is to separate the body and the mind. Meditation is a way of making the mind peaceful and focused. This way the person meditating can become more aware of themselves and the world around them. This practice is used to stop the mind from rushing around in aimless thoughts. The goal is that a person can begin to reach the truths of enlightenment through meditation.

Nirvana

When someone gains the undertaking of the world's reality, they have received enlightenment and all of his or her suffering will end. If a person has gained this enlightenment, they will reach Nirvana. Nirvana is the end of all desire, ignorance, and sorrow; it is the end of all suffering. There, the spirit is free and there is the realization that the desires of all humans are pointless. This is also the end of the cycle of reincarnation.

Buddhism Today

Buddhism consists of many different types depending on the why it is practiced and the country that it exists in. Today, two main subdivisions dominate; they are Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. The more traditional of the two, Theravada is strongest in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Burma

(Myanmar). This school of thought believes that it has remained the closest to the first teachings of the Buddha and that those teachings are more a set of tools to help people find truth. They follow the primary beliefs of a Buddhist while accepting fewer historical people as Buddhas and having less adapting views. Mahayana Buddhism is found in many countries; however, it carries the strongest presence in Tibet, China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Mongolia. Mahayana, in fact, is not just one single group but a collection of many different traditions. These include Zen Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism . Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism are rooted in the same basic teachings. Followers of both wish to achieve the end of suffering (Nirvana).

Holidays and Festivals

Most holidays and festivals in Buddhism celebrate important events in the life of the Buddha. Holidays are joyful occasions. Many begin with visits to a local temple where food will be offered to the monks. The Buddhists will then stay to listen to a talk on various topics, such as Dharma. The remaining time will consist of giving food to the poor, visiting temples, participating in chants, and singing and meditation. The dates of the holidays are based on a lunar calendar and will often be different depending on the country and tradition of the follower.

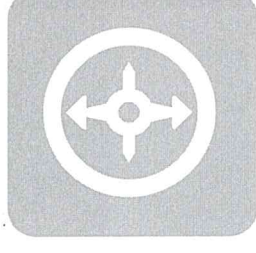
Some of the holidays and festivals are:

Buddha Day- Also known as Vesak, this day is the most important festival in Buddhism. This is the celebration of the birthday of the Buddha. Celebrated on the first full moon day in May, followers celebrate the birth, death, and enlightenment of the Buddha.

Buddhist New Year- Depending on the location, the new year is celebrated on different days. In Theravadin countries, the new year falls three days from the first full moon in April. In Mahayana countries, the celebration starts with the first full moon in January and for Tibetan Buddhists it is celebrated in March.

With many different traditions encompassing the religion, there are many different festivals depending on which tradition is followed and where the Buddhist lives. More information can be found at Religion Facts and the BBC's Religions page

Interactive 5.10 Comparing Religions



Use the graphic organizer located here to do a quick compare and contrast between two of the five religions presented above. Then use the information to complete the writing frame.

Interactive 5.11 Buddhism Calendar



Learn more about important dates here!