

History of Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion which is based on the teachings of **Siddhartha Gautama**, the son of a king born in Kapilavastu, Nepal, around 560 B.C. In order to achieve spiritual peace, Siddhartha renounced his worldly advantages and became known as **Buddha**, or "the enlightened one". He preached his religious views his entire life throughout South Asia.

The story of Siddhartha's path to enlightenment has a mythological quality. The son of a ruler, a prophecy at the time of his birth said that he would be a great king if he stayed at home, but would become a savior for mankind if he were to leave home. Therefore, his father kept him at home and surrounded him with all the worldly pleasures a boy could want, and kept all painful and ugly things out of his sight.

Siddhartha eventually married and fathered a son, but still had not left his father's palace. One day, he told his father that he wished to see the world. This excursion would change his life, for during this journey, he saw the "four passing sights" He saw an old man, and learned for the first time that everyone someday becomes old. Next, he met a sick man, who taught him that people are liable to sickness and suffering. He saw a funeral procession which taught him that people die. Lastly, he saw a monk begging for food. He longed for the tranquility which he saw on the monk's face and decided this was the lifestyle for him. He left his father, wife, and son to wander and learn the path to salvation.

During his wanderings, Siddhartha rested under a fig tree (which would later be called the bodhi or bo tree, meaning a tree of wisdom) for seven days. While in meditation, he reached the highest degree of **Nirvana** or perfect peace of mind. During this time, he learned truths which he, Buddha, would teach to the world until his death at age 80.

Buddhism became a strong force in India before the Buddha's death. Buddhism became established in China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, where it is most practiced today. Though Hinduism is now the predominant Indian religion, Buddhism is widely practiced elsewhere. One of the most popular religious leaders in the world today is the **Dalai Lama**, who is the leader of the Tibetan Buddhist monks.

Basic Beliefs of Buddhism

The basic beliefs of Buddhism can be demonstrated in the following concepts and doctrines:

The Four Noble Truths

The First Noble Truth is the existence of suffering. Birth is painful and death is painful; disease and old age are painful. Not having what we desire is painful and having what we do not desire is also painful.

The Second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering. It is the craving desire for the pleasures of the senses, which seeks satisfaction now here, now there; the craving for happiness and prosperity in this life and in future lives.

The Third Noble Truth is the ending of suffering. To be free of suffering one must give up, get rid of, extinguish this very craving, so that no passion and no desire remain.

The Fourth Noble Truth leads to the ending of all pain by way of the Eightfold Path (which in summary, is to actually live a morally perfect life free)

Buddhist Precepts (commandments)

There are **five precepts** taught by Buddhism that all Buddhists should follow:

1. Kill no living thing.
2. Do not steal.
3. Do not commit adultery.
4. Tell no lies.
5. Do not drink intoxicants or take drugs.