
BUDDHISM — An Overview

Inception: Gautama Siddhartha (563-483 BCE) in an effort to penetrate the mysteries for final Truth. Buddhism began as a reform movement in Hinduism.

Adherents: 376 Million [EBI Estimate]

Primary Value Proposition: Hinayana (Lesser Vehicle) sees man as entirely dependent on self-effort. Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) teaches compassion as the key virtue. This combination, in practice, yields a Peaceful, Ethical Self-culture

The Word of (about and/or attributed to) God:

- Out of a pure heart shall gladness spring forth to the Infinite.
- My soul is filled with content, and my heart overflows with the bliss of peaceful trust.
- Faith is man's true wealth; it is the endowment of virtue and glory.
- Leave no fault unconfessed to the Noble One.
- Cheerfulness and gladness are the rewards of deeds well done and to the glory of the Immortal.
- When faith has emancipated your heart, when the mind, like a mountain, is settled and immovable, then shall the peace of the soul flow tranquilly like a river of waters.
- Cultivate the assurance of the heart which springs from within and thus come to enjoy the ecstasy of eternal salvation.
- The wise man is a noble soul who is friendly in the midst of his enemies, tranquil among the turbulent, and generous among the grasping.
- The tamed mind yields happiness. He is the greatest of warriors who overcomes and subdues himself.
- A righteous soul is more to be desired than the sovereignty of all the earth.

Core Beliefs: The Four Noble Truths were the first teaching of Gautama Buddha after attaining Nirvana. They are sometimes considered to contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings and, while these may presuppose a benevolent Deity, they do not retain the Hindu emphasis on a personal relationship with God:

1. Life is often estranged from reality which ultimately leads to an uneasy and unhappy state (dukkha).
2. Suffering is the result when indulging certain insatiable appetites. A deluded clinging to self-interest, to selfhood, or to selfish desire leads to anxiety, dislocation and despair.
3. Suffering ends when craving ends. This is achieved by embracing reality thereby eliminating delusion and reaching a state of enlightened self-mastery (bodhi);
4. Reaching this liberated state of enlightenment is achieved by following the correct path as laid out by the Buddha.

The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to ending suffering. It has eight sections, each starting with the word "samyak" (Sanskrit, meaning "correctly", or "properly"), and presented in three groups known as the three higher trainings:

◇ Prajñā is the wisdom that purifies the mind, allowing it to attain spiritual insight into the true nature of all things. It includes:

1. dṛṣṭi: viewing reality as it is with fact based understandings, principles, and values.
2. saṃkalpa: intention of renunciation, freedom and harmlessness. Workable and worthwhile goals and aspirations.

◇ Śīla is the ethics or morality, or abstention from unwholesome deeds. It includes:

3. vāc: thinking and speaking in a truthful, charitable fashion.
4. karman: engagement in beneficial behavior. Acting in a truly helpful way that harms no one.
5. ājivana: serving in a role that benefits individuals and society, a non-harmful livelihood.

◇ Samādhi is the mental discipline required to develop mastery over one's own mind. This is done through the practice of various contemplative and meditative practices, and includes:

6. vyāyāma: making an effort to improve through steady striving, meaningful advancement and spiritual growth.
7. smṛti: awareness to see things for what they are with clear consciousness, assessing the present reality within oneself and making wise choices.
8. samādhi: focus and persistence embracing supreme values thereby transcending any preoccupation with things, desires and suffering.

The scripture of Buddhism is the Tripitaka (Three Baskets of Wisdom), made up of the Vinaya Pitaka (Discipline Basket), the Sutta Pitaka (Teaching Basket), and the Abhidhamma Pitaka (Higher Doctrine Basket).