

BUDDHISM

Description:

Buddhism follows the teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha, born Siddhartha, an Indian prince who lived circa 560–480 BCE. His mother had dreamed before his birth that he would either become a great king or renounce everything to become a holy man. His father, King Suddodana, wanted to make sure that Siddhartha did not renounce everything, so he raised him within the palace walls, to avoid the influence of holy men. However, after Siddhartha was married and had a child, his restless nature caused him to venture outside the palace. There he discovered that humans age, get sick, and die and that all humans are subject to this kind of suffering. He encountered a monk who had found peace through meditation, and he decided to renounce everything to seek enlightenment. For several years, he lived his life as a monk, but he did not succeed in his quest for enlightenment until, one day, he sat meditating under a bodhi tree, refusing to leave until he became enlightened. When he reached the state of enlightenment, he became the *Buddha*, or “enlightened one,” and he devoted his life to teaching others how to escape suffering.

All forms of Buddhism agree with the basic teachings of Lord Buddha, which can be found in the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth is that ordinary existence is a state of suffering, or *dukkah*. There are three types of suffering: physical suffering, impermanence, and mental suffering. Physical suffering includes birth, sickness, old age, and death. Impermanence causes suffering because all things are impermanent. Finally, mental suffering, which is the worst kind, is a result of conditioned states and causes negative thinking that affects all aspects of life. The result of negative thinking can be seen in the body, speech, and mind. The body may be affected by killing, stealing, and sexual exploitation. Speech is affected by lies, abusive words, and gossip. The mind is affected by ignorance, greed, and anger.

The Second Noble Truth describes the cause of suffering, or the arising of *dukkah*. Culture has bred an ignorant state of mind that does not agree with the teachings of Lord Buddha. As a result, humans are bound to a false reality.

The Third Noble Truth describes the end of suffering, or the cessation of *dukkah*. Renouncing the negative mind and embracing a love for all beings, as well as, compassion and escaping ignorance to gain understanding of the true nature of reality constitute the path for escaping *dukkah*.

The Fourth Noble Truth shows that the only way to escape from suffering is to embrace the teachings of Lord Buddha. To undertake the escape, one must have a strong mental discipline and take on several lifetimes’ worth of practicing the teachings of the Buddha. The Eightfold Noble Path and the Five Precepts are the keys to following these teachings and are discussed in the section on morals.

Religious Elements:

Scriptural and Doctrinal Sources

There are three principal sources of spiritual guidance recognized by Buddhists as scriptural or doctrinal authorities:

- **Theravada Buddhism:** *Tripitaka* — The Tripitaka is a canon of the southern schools of Buddhism written in India within 500 years of the time of the Buddha. It is divided into three sections: the *Sutra*, a study of concentration and a guide for monastic life; the *Vinaya Pitaka*, a study of precepts, doctrine, and ethics; and the *Abhidharma Pitaka* or *Shastra*, a study of wisdom.
- **Mahayana Buddhism:** *Sutra* — The Sutras are written compositions that originated in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. In the Buddhist Sutras, some points of doctrine are discussed at length. The Sutras also contain records of conversations held with the Buddha and *bodhisattvas*.
- **Vajrayana Buddhism:** *Gsung-bum* — The Gsung-bum is a collection of writings of Tibetan and Mongolian lamas on monastic discipline, the perfection of wisdom, Buddhist practices and other subjects, including the nature and origin of human knowledge, ritual, and meditation.

Rituals

- Some forms of Buddhism may have a vow-taking ceremony for laypeople.
- In baby-naming ceremonies, the child is given a *Dharma* name. (*Dharma* is the doctrine or teaching of Buddhism, the universal truth common to all people at all times, and proclaimed by the Buddha.)
- *Bodhisattvas* have vow-taking ceremonies.
- Pre-death rituals ensure that the soul moves easily into the next life.

Moral Code

The Eightfold Noble Path and the Five Precepts form the core of the Buddhist moral code. The Eightfold Noble Path is comprised of three groups of moral guidelines: wisdom, ethical discipline, and mental discipline.

- **Wisdom:** One must have right views about the four holy truths, a proper mental outlook, and right thoughts (renouncing thoughts of hatred and harm). The results are a pure mind and pure intentions.
- **Ethical discipline:** In right speech, the Buddhist avoids lying and gossiping. In right conduct, stealing, killing, and sexual exploitation are avoided. By pursuing a right livelihood, the devout Buddhist avoids an unwholesome way of life.
- **Mental discipline:** Buddhists make the right effort to think, say and do what is proper, carefully avoiding what is inappropriate; to maintain right mindfulness by being mindful of the Buddha’s teachings (for example, by not putting oneself before others); and to practice right concentration by avoiding deviant thinking.

The Five Precepts involve the taking of vows, one for each precept. Vows are taken only if they can be kept. The precepts apply to body, speech, and mind. The precepts of the body oblige the adherent to abstain from (a) killing, (b) stealing,

and (c) sexual exploitation. The precept of speech (d) implies abstention from lying, while the precept of the mind (e) requires abstention from mind-altering drugs and intoxicants.

Houses of Worship

- Temples are common places of worship for Buddhists. They usually have a shrine with a statue of Buddha, in front of which meditation may take place.
- Some Buddhist groups also maintain refuges with a temple and individual accommodations nearby for retreats.
- Buddhists commonly maintain small shrines in the home.

Devotional Practices and Services

Buddhist sects may differ in specific practices. The following are general examples:

- Group meetings may involve sitting meditation, walking meditation, *Dhamma* (*Dharma*) talks from guest speakers, or readings from Buddhist Scriptures at a local temple.
- Ordained monks and nuns may provide teachings, based on Buddhist Scriptures, for laypeople.
- Personal meditation may take place daily at one's shrine or at an altar to the Buddha. Forms of yoga are also used.

Clergy, Organization, and Government

There is no single organization or church governing the Buddhist religion. Each Buddhist sect may have its own structure; however, some generalizations can be made:

- The foundation of organization is the Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the teacher; *Dharma*, the teaching; and *Sangha*, the community.
- There are four main streams, or denominations, of Buddhism: the Theravada, the Mahayana, the Hinayana, and the Vajrayana. There are also numerous other Buddhist sects and modes of practice particular to countries and regions, such as Zen Buddhism and Tendai.
- Buddhist practitioners include monks and nuns, who have been ordained. Their monasteries and communities may have a hierarchy based on the point one has reached on the path to enlightenment.
- Advanced practitioners also include laypeople who have taken the five precepts.

Propagation of the Faith

Through teaching and practicing, Buddhism, practitioners raise awareness of its principles and create interest in new ones.

Major Celebrations and Observances:

Buddhists observe a number of holy days that are particular to countries, regions and cultures. Specific observances and dates may be determined by consulting local temples.

Days of Regular Observance

- Daily meditation is practiced.
- In Canada, Buddhist temples commonly hold services on Sundays and offer group meditation on other days.

Special Observances

- Buddha's birthday and the Buddha's day of Enlightenment is determined by the lunar calendar.
- Wesak, a celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and *Paranirvana* that is celebrated by all Buddhist groups. It may involve visiting a temple and paying homage to the Buddha with candles, flowers and incense.
- Dharma Day, celebrating the Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment, in which he explained the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Dress Requirements

- Lay people should dress modestly, in a style appropriate to the culture in which they live. Modesty reflects virtue.

Dietary Requirements

Different schools of Buddhism may have different dietary requirements, so these observations are general:

- Individuals and sects may practice vegetarianism.
- It is recommended that Buddhists eat food that is grown in their own part of the world.
- Buddhists, even those who are expected to be vegetarians, should eat food that meets their individual health requirements, even if the food is not vegetarian.
- Buddhists commonly abstain from mind-altering drugs, including alcohol.

Medical and Health Requirements:

An ordained monk or nun should be notified as soon as it becomes evident that death is a possibility; this is done so that the appropriate rituals may take place at the time of death.

Buddhism does not approve of the practice of abortion. Some exceptions may be authorized; for example when medical authorities determine that the infant has a handicap so severe that it would cause the infant great suffering.

Buddhists are guided by the belief that all life is sacred.

Death and Burial:

For Buddhists, who believe in reincarnation, death is the end of one life and the beginning of the next. Although death is not final, a person's passing should be marked by compassion for survivors and prayer for the next life of the deceased.

Cremation of remains is preferred, and temples may retain the ashes for a certain period after the death.

All information is extracted from the following sources:

Religions in Canada. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/pub/rc/index-eng.asp>