

Buddhism

Buddhism originated 2,500 years ago and is considered one of the world's major religions. Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha after leaving behind his status of prince to go out and see the world. After seeing poor and dying people he realized that life is suffering. He gave up everything and became a beggar spending his time meditating and traveling. He tried all the extreme ideas of his day before reaching "the middle way" which he taught was the true way to enlightenment. Eventually he became enlightened underneath the Bodhi tree or "tree of awakening." Today there are many different traditions or schools of Buddhism, some of the main ones are: Mahayana, Theravada, Vajrayana, and Tibetan.

More info: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/buddhism/>

Core Beliefs: Buddhists believe that life is a continuous cycle of death and reincarnation. In order to progress and end the cycle of suffering one must reach enlightenment or "nirvana." In order to attain nirvana one must learn the four noble truths and follow the eightfold path.

The four noble truths:

1. **There is suffering:** there is no way to escape it. This is not a pessimistic view but a reality that we must embrace.
2. **There is a cause of suffering:** this cause is ignorance. Nothing in this world lasts. When we try to hold on to what we have and avoid what we don't want we'll be disappointed. Ignorance is the root of suffering.
3. **There is an end to suffering:** we aren't hopeless, just as our suffering exists it can also come to an end.
4. **The way out of suffering is the eightfold path:** as we follow the path we can stop the cycle of suffering.

The Eightfold Path:

1. **Right view:** we can't expect to progress without seeing clearly where we are going.
2. **Right intention:** this is our moral compass that helps keep us going forward and on track.
3. **Right speech:** what we say really matters. We should never harm others through what we say.
4. **Right action:** our actions should also never harm ourselves or others.
5. **Right livelihood:** be careful that our habits and what we do to take care of ourselves doesn't harm others.
6. **Right effort:** this is being able to focus on the task that we need to accomplish and avoid distraction.
7. **Right mindfulness:** being aware of the consequences of our actions by taking time to pause and consider.
8. **Right concentration:** keep practicing and being dedicated to the path.

More info: <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism>

Practices and Rituals: The main practice of Buddhism is meditation. This is done in a variety of ways and the object of meditation is different for every person and situation. These practices are meant to help believers to detach from the outward sensory world and start to see things as they really are. Buddhists often pay devotion towards Buddhas and other sacred objects by giving offerings, chanting, and focusing their meditations on their qualities.

More info: <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/religions/buddhism-mahayana/resources/buddhism-mahayana-rituals-and-practices>

Places of Worship: There are no essential places of worship in Buddhism, but temples and shrines exist for believers to pay their respects to the Buddha as well as meditate with other Buddhists. These temples and shrines can be found all over the world and vary in design. The first Buddhist shrines were dome shaped mounds built to hold Buddha's ashes. Many believers have shrines in their own homes today.

Holy Days and festivals: "Vesak" or "Wesak" is the most important day for Buddhists around the world. Many in the western world refer to this holiday as "Buddha day" or "Buddha's birthday". It is the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. Within the various schools of Buddhism there are also other festivals associated with the Buddha's first sermon and other life events. Many Buddhists travel to the place of enlightenment at the Mahabodhi temple complex where the Buddha first achieved nirvana to participate in these celebrations.

Symbols and Icons: The most iconic symbol of Buddhism may be the Buddha himself. The image of the Buddha represents enlightenment, and his feet symbolize the footsteps that all can follow to attain the same. The eight-spoked wheel is also an important symbol representing the eightfold path. Many Buddhist temples are built with symbolic imagery such as the spires at the top reaching above the physical world.

More info: <https://www.uri.org/kids/world-religions/buddhist-imagery>