

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

# A LOOK AT BUDDHISM

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# AT A GLANCE

- Buddhism is the fourth-most-practiced religion. It started between the 600s and 300s BCE.
- Siddhartha Gautama established Buddhism. He had lived a life of wealth. But then he saw how other people suffered. He searched for a way to end suffering. He is known as the Buddha.
- There are two main branches of Buddhism: Theravada and Mahayana.
- Dharma refers to the teachings of the Buddha. The dharma guides Buddhists.
- Meditation is an important part of Buddhism.
- Buddhists believe that living things are reborn many times.
- Monks are men who have dedicated themselves to Buddhism. Some live in monasteries.



- Buddhists can practice Buddhism anywhere.
- Monasteries, stupas, pagodas, and temples are four types of Buddhist structures.
- Wesak is an important festival for Buddhists. It celebrates the Buddha.



# 1

## THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

**B**uddhism began sometime between the late 600s and 300s BCE. Buddhist tradition says a prince named Siddhartha Gautama started it. He lived in what is now Nepal, near India. Gautama had everything he wanted. When he was 29 years old, he left his home and saw the world for

the first time. He found out that people were suffering. They lived in **poverty**. They struggled with illnesses and death.

Gautama realized everyone went through a cycle of birth, aging, illness, and death. He was moved by what he saw. He let go of all his belongings. He started looking for the path to enlightenment.

*People have made statues of the Buddha.*



Buddhism spread farther into Asia.


Starting in 372 CE, areas of Korea began making Buddhism the official religion. Korea introduced Buddhism to Japan. Prince Shotoku ruled Japan from 594 to 622 CE. He supported and spread Buddhism in his country.


India's Gupta Dynasty lasted from 320 to 600 CE. During this time, Buddhist educational centers were built. They were called Mahaviharas, or "great monasteries." People studied Buddhist texts there.

By the 500s CE, different branches of Buddhism had developed. The two main

# BUDDHISM TODAY



 Mahayana Buddhism

 Theravada Buddhism

*Buddhism spread throughout Asia over many centuries. Today, different branches of the religion are more widespread in certain countries. The largest branch is Mahayana. Theravada is the second-largest branch.*

branches still practiced today are Mahayana and Theravada. By the 1100s CE, Buddhism's popularity had decreased in India. It had been mostly replaced by Hinduism and Islam. However, Buddhism remained popular throughout Asia.

## **EXPANDING WEST**

Beginning around the 1600s, Europeans started taking over some Asian countries. Europeans returned home from these places. They shared what they had learned about Buddhism.



In the 1800s, books were written about Buddhism. They introduced the religion to Western nations. Some Westerners began to follow Buddhism. Some of them went to Asia and joined Buddhist monasteries. They became monks. At the same time, more Asian immigrants came to North America. As a result, Buddhism spread in Canada and the United States.

## **SKINNY AND LAUGHING BUDDHA**

Statues of Siddhartha Gautama show a thin Buddha. But there are also statues of a fat or laughing Buddha. This laughing Buddha was modeled after a Chinese monk named Budai. He is a symbol of happiness, contentment, and prosperity.

# GLOSSARY

## **asceticism**

denial of desires for a spiritual purpose

## **authoritative**

trusted to be true and accurate

## **meditate**

to sit quietly and focus one's mind

## **monasteries**

buildings where monks live and practice their religion

## **monks**

religious people in Buddhism who live under vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience

## **philosophy**

the study of reality and existence

## **poverty**

the state of being poor

## **reincarnation**

the rebirth of the soul after death

## **relics**

historical objects with religious importance

# SOURCE NOTES

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