
BUDDHISM

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Introduction

Gautama Siddhartha known as Buddha, who was the most recent in a long series of Buddhas founded Buddhism 2500 years ago in India. There are over 300 million people through out China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Indochina, Korea, and Tibet follow Buddhism. Buddhism does not believe in God as a creator, destroyer, and survivor of the universe. However, it does believe in a Supreme, which is completely transcendent and can be described as Sunya, a void, emptiness, or state of non-being. Buddhism believes in the philosophy of karma and rebirth but rejects Soul as a immortal identity.

Goals:

The primary goal of Buddhism is Nirvana, defined as the end of change, and literally meaning, "to blow out" as one blows out a candle. The Theravada tradition describes the indescribable as peace and tranquility and the Mahayana tradition views it as emptiness and the unchanging essence of the Buddha, and ultimate reality. It is synonymous with release from the bonds of desire, ego, suffering, and rebirth.

Major Scriptures and Sects:

There are two main sects, Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana. The Theravada, or "Way of the Elders," is the more conservative of the two. It is dominant in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. The Mahayana, or "Great Vehicle," is more diverse and liberal. It is found mainly in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan, and among Tibetan peoples, where it is distinguished by its emphasis on the Buddhist Tantras. Zen Buddhism is a major sect of Mahayana. The major scripture for Theravada is Tripitaka (three baskets of wisdom), and for Mahayana is Sutras. The major Sutras are Anguttara-Nikaya, Dhammapada, Sutta-Nipatta, Samyutta-Nikaya.

Teachings:

The Buddha's essential teachings are contained in the four Noble Truths:

Suffering:

Life is suffering. Being born, growing old, sickness, and death all are suffering. Union with what we dislike is suffering, separation from what we desire is suffering. This is the essential nature of life.

Cause of Suffering:

Desire is the cause of suffering. It is the force of desire that leads to rebirth and further suffering, accompanied by delight and passion.

Cessation of Suffering:

The complete cessation of desires will end the suffering. Forsaking, relinquishing, and detaching of ourselves from desire and craving will automatically end the pain, pleasure, birth and rebirth.

The Path to end the Suffering:

By practicing the noble eight-fold path, one can end the suffering. The eight fold path consist of; right belief, right thought or aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood or occupation, right effort or endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

The Middle Path consists of living moderately and avoiding extremes of luxury and asceticism.

The greatness of self-giving love and compassion towards all creatures that life contains merit exceeding the giving of offering to the gods.

Man's true nature is divine and eternal, yet his individuality is subject to the change that affects all forms and is therefore transient, dissolving at liberation into Nirvana.

Dharma (the path), Karma (cause and effect), reincarnation, Sangh (unity of seekers), and the passage on earth as an opportunity to end the cycle of birth and death.

Religious Symbol:

The Dharma-chakra or the Wheel of the Law is the most important symbol of Buddhism. The wheel signifies the round of births and deaths due to karma, which a person himself keeps in motion through his thirst (tanha) for life. It also symbolizes a constantly changing universe, and the impermanence of everything in the world.

The hub of the wheel represents the three causes of pain: illwill, ignorance, and lust. The eight spokes of the wheel, represent the eightfold path. The wheel cannot survive without the spokes. Even so, dharma cannot be sustained without the practice of these eight virtues.