

A serene night landscape featuring a starry sky, a forest of evergreen trees, and a body of water reflecting the scene. The word "BUDDHISM" is centered in the image in a white, outlined font.

BUDDHISM



ORIGIN

While Hinduism has infinite creation stories, Buddhism has none

Buddhism teaches that the universe develops through four periods: creation, abiding, destruction, nothingness

There are six realms in which inhabitants of the universe live:

- Gods
- Humans (realm of potential enlightenment)
- Titans
- Ghosts
- Animals
- Hell beings



BUDDHA

The lack of interest in a creation story is made up for by a wide variety of colorful tales about the Buddha's life

Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince of the warrior caste in the Shakya tribe of modern day Nepal

Unfulfilled by a life of decadence, he sought enlightenment

He sought insight from Hindu gurus, and eventually a group of ascetics

The turning point was when he sat down one afternoon under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, India

He went deeper and deeper into a meditative trance until he became Buddha "The Awakened One" who knew the cause of endless death and rebirth and how to end it



DENOMINATIONS

Buddhism, like its parent religion Hinduism, is very diverse

There are two main traditions:

- Theravada Buddhism (“way of the elders”)
- Mahayana Buddhism (“greater vehicle”)

Theravada is the oldest, most traditional, and most conservative strand of Buddhist thought

Mahayana originated as a reaction against Theravada Buddhism, which was believed to be too strict and narrow



THERAVADA

Theravada Buddhism has the following outlook:

- **Liberation:** Achieved alone
- **View of God:** Atheistic
- **Dominant:** Thailand, Cambodia
- **Virtue:** Wisdom
- **Model:** Arhat (Monk)
- **Ritual:** Meditation and study
- **Profession:** Monk
- **Focus:** Inward
- **Buddha:** Saint

MAHAYANA

Mahayana Buddhism has the following outlook:

- **Liberation:** Aided by divine powers
- **View of God:** Pantheistic
- **Dominant:** Vietnam, Korea, Japan
- **Virtue:** Compassion
- **Model:** Bodhisattva (Savior)
- **Ritual:** Petition and Prayer
- **Profession:** Layperson
- **Focus:** Outward
- **Buddha:** Savior

MAHAYANA

Mahayana Buddhism also has three main (among many) subdivisions:

- Pure Land Buddhism (focuses on a Buddha called Amitabha that provided a heaven for average people)
- Zen Buddhism (most popular form in the Western world, focuses on meditation)
- Tibetan Buddhism (headed by the Dalai Lama, a bodhisattva that has delayed nirvana in order to help others attain enlightenment)



BELIEFS

The most important Buddhist teachings are the Four Noble Truths:

- All of life is marked by suffering
- We are trapped in samsara (continual cycle of aging, sickness, and death) because we desire things and attach ourselves to them
- When desire or craving ceases, suffering can cease as well
- Suffering is eliminated by following the Noble Eightfold Path



BELIEFS

The Noble Eightfold Path for attaining enlightenment entails:

- Seeing things as they truly are and understanding the reality and cause of suffering
- Thinking accordingly
- Speaking the truth
- Acting and doing according to this teaching
- Living in a manner that does not disrupt other life
- Spending one's time doing good things and not becoming attached to anything
- Being aware of one's thoughts at all times
- Focusing one's mind and concentrating



BELIEFS

Living beings do not really exist

Rather, they are composed of five different skandhas or aggregates:

- Matter
- Sensations
- Perceptions
- Thoughts
- Consciousness

These aggregates are held together by karma. When desire and attachment are broken, karma disbands and we cease to exist. We will be free only after we recognize and accept that self-existence is an illusion.



WRITINGS

Buddha taught often and wrote nothing

As with Jesus, his parables, lessons, and discourses were immediately memorized by his disciples and only later put into writing

The Theravada tradition looks to the Pali Canon:

- Vinaya Pitaka (rules for monks/nuns and stories about Buddha's first disciples)
- Sutta Pitaka (Sayings of the Buddha and his disciples)
- Abhidamma Pitaka (Sayings and summaries of the Buddha from his disciples)

The Mahayana tradition also affirms many sutras (additional discourses)



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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