

Buddhism: Who is the Buddha and what are the key Buddhist teachings?

Key Facts/Beliefs

The Buddhist tradition is founded on and inspired by the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama. He was called the Buddha and lived in the 4th or 5th century B.C. in India.

The religion is 2,500 years old and is followed by 350 million Buddhists worldwide. Buddhism is the main religion in many Asian countries.

It is a religion about suffering and the need to get rid of it. A key concept of Buddhism is Nirvana, the most enlightened and blissful state that one can achieve. A state without suffering.

Buddhism is different from many other faiths because it is not centred on the relationship between humanity and God. Buddhists do not believe in a personal creator God.

Who is the Buddha?

Siddhartha Gautama is known as the Buddha.

He was born into a royal family and for many years lived within the palace walls away from the sufferings of life, such as, sickness, age and death.

One day, after marrying and having a child, Siddhartha left the royal palace and saw for the first time: an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a monk. These are known as the four sightings. He learned that these things were inevitable to human life.

Siddhartha left his protected royal life and lived as a homeless Holy Man. This showed him much more of the world's suffering.



Artefacts and symbols

The wheel of life	Symbolises the cycle of life, death and rebirth. The eight spokes remind people that the Buddha taught about eight ways of life.
Lotus flower	Symbolises purity and divine birth. The lotus flower grows in the mud at the bottom of the water but rises to the surface to become a beautiful flower. Buddhists say this is how people should rise above everything which is dukkha.
Tripitaka	The sacred book of Buddhism.

Worship

Buddhists worship at home or at a temple. Worshippers may sit on the floor barefoot facing an image of Buddha and chant. They listen to monks chanting from religious texts and take part in prayers.

Buddhists will often have a shrine at home. There will be a statue of Buddha, candles and an incense burner.

Buddhist worship is called puja. People chant to show their love for the Buddha. They make offerings of flowers, candles, incense and pure water at a shrine. People thank Buddha for his teachings.

When Buddhists worship alone, they usually meditate and read from the Buddhist holy books.

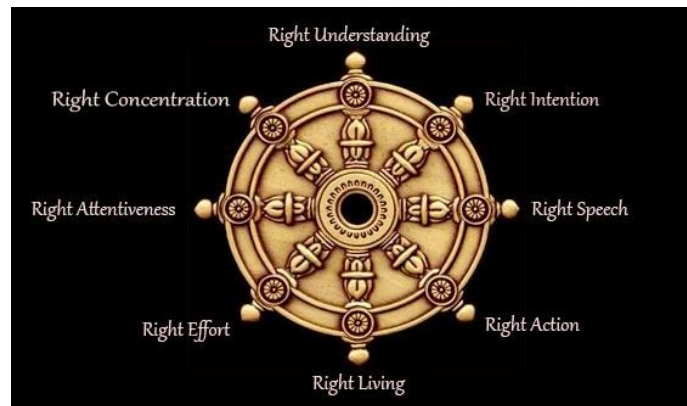
Every month, most Buddhists have special religious days. These are often days when it is a full moon. Many Buddhists go to temples to worship on these special days.

Important Buddhist festivals

The main Buddhist festival of the year is Buddha day or Wesak, the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

Key Vocabulary

Nirvana	The most enlightened and blissful state that one can achieve. A state without suffering.
enlightenment	When a Buddhist finds the truth about life and stops being reborn because they have reached Nirvana.
precepts	A moral or general rule. Buddhists have 5 precepts that they live by.



The Three Signs of Being

dukkha	Nothing in life is perfect. Life does not necessarily provide people with what they want, which causes them to be dissatisfied.
anicca	Things in life are always changing.
anatta	People have no soul.