

According to the law of *Karma*, good begets good, evil begets evil. We are what we are as a result of our past thoughts, speech and actions. What we will be in the future will be the result of our present thoughts, speech and actions. Buddhism therefore encourages personal responsibility for one's own actions.

How do I Become a Buddhist?

Formal conversion to Buddhism is not necessary, because one's label or category is less important than what one actually does. Buddhist teachings can be understood and tested by anyone because the solutions to our problems are within ourselves, not outside. The Buddha asked all his followers to test the teachings for themselves (not just taking his word). When one's faith and confidence develops, one goes for refuge in 'the Triple Gem', namely the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*.

What is Buddhist Meditation?

The term meditation often implies deep concentration or serious contemplation, but from the Buddhist perspective, meditation involves the interaction of three factors:

- Right Effort: to prevent and overcome unwholesome (negative) states of mind, and to cultivate and maintain wholesome states of mind.
- Right Mindfulness: mindful awareness of our body, feelings, mind and the *Dhamma*.
- Right Concentration: One-pointedness of a focused mind.

What is the purpose of meditation?

The purpose of meditation is to purify the mind of greed, hatred and delusion. The mind that is undeveloped and untrained has an unsteady nature and is easily distracted. It tends to dwell in the past and future, which leads to sorrow, fear, worry and anxiety - affecting the well-being of the individual.

Meditation therefore involves the development of the mind. This leads to calmness and insight, enabling one to

confront and to overcome problems, difficulties and the unsatisfactoriness of life.

Staying in the present moment

In order to maintain peace and harmony within, it is important to learn how to focus the mind in the present - the here and now. The present is nothing but the past merging into the future. So, if one is able to keep one's mind in the present, it will enable one to realise the truth of change at a deeper, experiential level.

Two basic forms of meditation

Buddhist meditation can be classified into two complimentary practices:

- *Samatha* meditation refers to the development of calmness and tranquillity.
- *Vipassanā* is the development of insight, which leads to detachment and liberation.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is essential at three levels of purification: correcting any unskillful habits by way of thought, speech and bodily actions. Mindfulness is explained as objective awareness or bare attention. One merely watches or observes the processes at work without getting involved with the reasoning, speculation and intellectual activity.

Lasting inner peace

The inner peace and blissful contentment which one experiences through meditation does not depend on material things. It does not depend on personal relationships such as parents, teachers, spouses, children or friends. Neither does it depend on wealth, fame, status and power. The enjoyment and happiness derived through these worldly ways is of a fleeting nature. They come and go. But inner peace and blissful contentment is realised through detachment and realisation of the characteristics of existence. This peace that one gets through the realisation of truth is one that lasts forever. That is why we say: "*Nirvana* is the highest bliss".

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A 5-minute introduction to Buddhism

by
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What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is one of the major world religions and has its origins more than 2,500 years ago when Siddhattha Gotama was fully awakened (enlightened) at the age of 35. He came to be known as the Buddha. The word Buddha comes from the word 'budh', meaning 'to know or to awaken'.

This leaflet gives an introduction to the Buddha's core teachings

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Who was the Buddha?

The Buddha was a fully enlightened teacher who was born into a royal family in northern India, in 563 BC. Known as Siddhattha Gotama, he realised at the age of 29 that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different teachings, religions and philosophies of the day, to find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he finally found 'the middle path' and gained enlightenment. After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the **Dhamma**, or Truth - until his passing away at the age of 80. He taught a path to enlightenment from his own experience. His teachings (the **Dhamma**) came to be known as Buddhism and is maintained by the **Sangha**, the community of monks and nuns.

How Can Buddhism Help Me?

Buddhism provides a clear sense of purpose and direction in life, it explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world, and it provides a code of practice or way of life which leads to true happiness.

Do Buddhists Worship Idols?

Buddhists sometimes pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favours. A statue of the Buddha with hands rested gently in its lap and a compassionate smile reminds us to strive to develop peace and love within ourselves. When Buddhists bow they are actually venerating or showing their respect and appreciation for the triple gem (the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha). Bowing is an expression of reverence, humility and gratitude.

Is Buddhism a Religion?

To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or way of life. It is a philosophy because philosophy means 'love of wisdom' and the Buddhist path can be summed up as follows: to lead a moral life, to be mindful and aware of thoughts, speech and actions, and to develop wisdom and understanding.

Are Other Religions Wrong?

Buddhism is also a belief system which is tolerant of all other beliefs or religions. Buddhism agrees with the moral teachings of other religions, but Buddhism goes further by providing a long term purpose within our existence, through wisdom and true understanding. Real Buddhism is very tolerant and not concerned with labels like 'Christian', 'Moslem', 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist'. Hence, no wars have been fought in the name of Buddhism. This is also why Buddhists do not preach and try to convert, but instead, explain only if an explanation is sought.

Are There Different Types of Buddhism?

There are different schools within Buddhism such as *Theravada*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*. Whilst all maintain the basic teachings, the emphasis and interpretation may vary to accommodate the needs of individual aspirants with different traditional and cultural backgrounds, and may also vary due to different levels of development and understanding.

Why is Buddhism Becoming Popular?

Buddhism is becoming popular in western countries for a number of reasons. Firstly, Buddhism has holistic answers to many of the problems in modern materialistic societies. It also includes (for those who are interested) a deep understanding of the human mind (and natural therapies) which prominent psychologists and therapists have found to be very advanced and effective.

Is Buddhism Scientific?

Science is knowledge which can be made into a system, which depends upon seeing and testing facts and stating general natural laws. The core of Buddhism fits into this definition, because the Four Noble Truths (see below) can be tested and proven by anyone. In fact the Buddha himself asked his followers to test the teaching rather than simply accept his teaching. Buddhism depends more on

understanding and practice than faith. Although Buddhism is realistic and objective, it goes beyond the limits of modern day science in its explanations.

What did the Buddha Teach?

One of core teachings of the Buddha is known as the Four Noble Truths. The first truth is that life is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), that is, life encompasses pain, old age, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness, frustrations, fear, embarrassment, disappointment, anger, etc. This is an irrefutable fact which cannot be denied. It is realistic rather than pessimistic because it views all things as transient and changing. Buddhism is also optimistic in that it explains how suffering can be avoided and how we can be truly happy.

The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving. We will suffer if we expect other people to conform to our expectations, or we do not get something we want, etc. In other words, getting what you want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what you want, try to modify your desires. Attachment and craving deprive us of contentment and happiness, and lead to physical and mental suffering. A lifetime of desires and craving, and especially the craving to continue to exist, creates a powerful energy which causes the individual to be reborn. On the other hand craving for non-existence can lead to suicide.

The third truth is that suffering and all forms of unsatisfactoriness can be overcome with the cessation of craving, which leads to the realisation of the ultimate state of *Nirvana*. In other words, if there is no craving, there is no attachment, then there is no becoming, no rebirth, no old age, no sickness and death.

The fourth truth is the way or path to the complete cessation of suffering. This is called the Noble Eight-fold Path.

What is the Noble Eight-fold Path?

The Noble Eight-fold Path can be summarised as follows: being moral in everything we say and do, focussing the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and developing wisdom by understanding the nature of existence and having compassion for others.

What Are the 5 Precepts?

The moral code within Buddhism includes the five precepts, which are ... to abstain from taking life, to abstain from taking anything not freely given, to abstain from sexual misconduct, to abstain from false and harsh speech, and to abstain from intoxicants.

What is Wisdom?

Buddhism teaches that wisdom consists of Right Thought and Right Understanding. The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality, all phenomena are inter-dependent, incomplete, impermanent and do not constitute a fixed entity. True wisdom is not simply believing what we are told, but instead experiencing and understanding truth and reality. Wisdom requires an open, objective and unbiased mind. Wisdom is knowledge with understanding of how to overcome sufferings.

What is Compassion?

Compassion is the wish for the well-being of suffering beings. This motivates us to help others with consoling speech and kind actions. Compassion includes the qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, empathy, concern and caring.

What is Karma?

Karma means volition - or an intentional action expressed in thought, speech or bodily action. *Karma* underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life, etc.