

Buddhism

Definition: A religion and philosophy that developed from the teachings of the Buddha, a teacher who lived in northern India sometime between the mid 6th and mid 4th centuries B.C., which is the dominant religion in many Asian countries.

Buddhism, like Hinduism, has many different and even contradictory forms.

Introduction

Buddhism is one of the world's major religions.

It has somewhere between 350 and 470 million followers.

Many celebrities claim to be Buddhist, including as Richard Gere, Phil Jackson, George Lucas, Mark Zuckerberg, Brad Pitt, Steven Segal, Tina Turner, Orlando Bloom, Tiger Woods, and many others.

It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama ("the Buddha"). The term "Buddha" means "enlightened." His teachings are called "dharma." The monks and nuns that followed Buddha are called the "Sangha." There is debate on when he actually lived.

The leading monk in Tibetan Buddhism is called the "Dalai Lama." He is thought to be a reincarnation of a past Dalai Lama who voluntarily has come to help humanity.

There is not only one Buddha. You can become a Buddha too if you become awakened.

History

Siddhartha Guatama was born as a prince in Nepal over 2,500 years ago to a wealthy family. His dad was an Indian warrior-king. He married at 16 and had a son. After becoming bored with a life of comfort (at about the age of 29) he began to venture out from the palace and encountered an old man, an ill man, a corpse, and an ascetic. From those experiences he discovered that suffering is the primary problem of mankind.

He renounced his life as a prince and became a monk. He first tried a life of asceticism however, it did not answer his question about human suffering. After passing out due to his harsh treatment of his body and lack of food, he decided there must be another way. One day, while meditating under a tree (called a Bodhi tree), his mind was peaceful like a lake on a windless day. However, a demon named "Mara" tempted him toward desire, fear, pride, thirst, and passion. After

overcoming the demon and retaining his peaceful mind, he found enlightenment and achieved “salvation” (inner peace and truth).

He spent the rest of his life traveling around teaching this newfound wisdom.

Beliefs

1. Buddhists do not follow any type of supreme deity. In this sense Buddhism is more of a “way of life” or “spiritual tradition” than an actual religion.
2. The goal of life is to find inner peace and wisdom through enlightenment. This state is called “nirvana.” The term “nirvana” literally means “blowing out” and it refers to getting rid of the fires of egocentrism and losing the individual into the universal.
3. Meditation is used to focus, provide peace, and find truth. It is a helpful practice in reaching nirvana.
4. Suffering is caused by desire and ignorance. Desire consists of things like wanting pleasure, material goods, and immortality. Ignorance is the inability to see the world as it really is (which leads one to vices such as greed, envy, hatred, and anger).
5. Karma: The idea that for every moral action there is a corresponding effect. If you do good you will be happy, and if you do bad you will not be happy. Also, the more you do good the more likely you are to do it again. The more you do bad the more likely you are to do that again.
6. Reincarnation: Time is cyclical and, after death, people will be reincarnated. However, you can end this cycle through reaching nirvana.

You can be reborn into one of three fortunate realms (gods, demigods, or men) or one of three unfortunate realms (animals, ghosts, or hell).
7. “The Middle Way:” A mean between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-denial.
8. Ethics: Buddhism forbids killing living things, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and using drugs or alcohol.
9. Self: There is not a permanence to humans (we do not have a permanent “soul”) or an underlying entity but are rather just a self of transition – a process of continuous change.
10. Idolatry: Though Buddha was not a “god” and was just a human, it is common to venerate, offer food to, and even worship statues of the Buddha.

Major Texts

The Four Noble Truths

1. The truth of suffering
2. The truth of the cause of suffering
3. The truth of the end of suffering
4. The truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering

Each section could be summarized as:

1. There is suffering.
2. Desire and ignorance are the cause of suffering.
3. One can end suffering through nirvana.
4. One can achieve enlightenment through following the “Noble Eightfold Path:”
 - a. Right understanding
 - b. Right thought/intention
 - c. Right speech
 - d. Right action
 - e. Right livelihood
 - f. Right effort
 - g. Right mindfulness
 - h. Right concentration

Other revered texts

Tipitaka: These texts, known as the “three baskets,” are thought to be the earliest collection of Buddhist writings.

Sutras: There are more than 2,000 sutras which are sacred teachings embraced mainly by Mahayana Buddhists.

The Book of the Dead: This Tibetan text describes the stages of death in detail.

Types of Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism: Prevalent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma

Mahayana Buddhism: Prevalent in China, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam

Mahayana Buddhists are the elite. The guy who burned himself in protest to the Vietnam War was a Mahayana Buddhist monk.

Tibetan Buddhism: Prevalent in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, and parts of Russia and northern India

(Note: Other types of Buddhism are Zen, Nirvana, Taoist, and Bon. They all consider themselves “Buddhists,” but they differ in certain practices and interpretations of Buddha’s work)

The Coolest Buddhists - Shaolin Monks

Shaolin Monks are Buddhist warrior-monks that are known for their incredible mental and physical strength. You’ve probably heard of Shaolin Kung-Fu.

They can enter the monastery at the age of 3, and they don’t originally get a master. They have to be selected by a master only if the master thinks they are worth training.

They have incredible mental focus. A study done by Harvard showed that they could control their body temperature just by meditating. They put wet sheets on the monks and the monks could make their body so hot that it dried the sheets. They have also done incredible feats of physical strength including resting their entire body on spears and throwing needles through panes of glass.

How Christians can engage with Buddhists

Where we agree

1. Something is broken in the world.
2. Suffering is bad.
3. Worldly pleasures are fleeting and cannot ultimately satisfy.
4. Moderation should be pursued in neutral matters.
5. One can change their life by reshaping their mind (Christian meditation).
6. Christians and Buddhists agree on some ethical issues. For example, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and drug use are bad, but helping others is good.

Where we disagree

1. Sin, not suffering, is the main problem.

Sin is why there even is suffering.

2. Death and reincarnation do not have the last say (resurrection is our hope and everyone can have it).

A Buddhist has no hope of how long they will have to be reincarnated before they can rest. It can take a long time to reach nirvana.

3. Karma

Sometimes good things happen even when you are bad and sometimes bad things happen when you are good. Read the book of Job.

The idea of grace goes against the idea of Karma. Grace is getting what you don't deserve.

4. We cannot achieve salvation by our own efforts – including our mental efforts.

5. We need a Savior to get rid of the suffering once and for all.

Buddhism only promises to help some *individuals* get out of suffering, but it doesn't actually end suffering.

6. Idolatry is sin.

7. The world exists because of a personal God who is Trinity.

8. Humans have a soul and we will be judged for our actions.