

Buddhism: Religion in India

I. Background

Buddhism also developed in India but later spread into other areas, such as China. Its founder, a prince named Siddhartha Gautama, was born a Hindu. Siddhartha Gautama left his wealthy home to search for the meaning of human suffering. While meditating under a sacred tree, he found the answer to his question, and he was thereafter referred to as the “Buddha” or the “Enlightened One”. Buddhism was based on a philosophy of self-denial and meditation. It was an attempt to try to discover the true meaning of life.



II. The Four Noble Truths

The central philosophy of Buddhism revolves around the “Four Noble Truths”:

1. Ordinary life is full of suffering.
2. This suffering is caused by our desire to satisfy ourselves.
3. The way to end suffering is to end desire for selfish goals.
4. The way to end desire is to follow the “Eightfold Path”

III. The Eightfold Path

The “Eightfold Path” requires people to:

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| 1. give up material things; | 5. acquire knowledge; |
| 2. control emotions; | 6. live a righteous existence; |
| 3. learn to meditate; | 7. speak truthfully; |
| 4. respect all living creatures; | 8. act in a generous manner. |

IV. Nirvana

By following the “Eightfold Path”, a person will achieve “Nirvana”, which is a state of perfect peace and harmony. Nirvana allows people to escape the endless cycle of reincarnation.

V. Comparison with Hinduism

Buddhism accepts the Hindu concepts of karma, dharma, and reincarnation. However, Buddhism rejects the many Hindu gods as well as the rituals and priesthood of Hinduism. Buddhists do, however, accept the idea of religious communities that include monks and nuns. Buddhism also rejected the caste system.

VI. Sacred Texts

After the “Buddha” died, his teachings were collected into the “Tripitaka”, or “Three Baskets of Wisdom”. This collection is made up of rules for Buddhist monks; sermons; and discussions of Buddhist beliefs. Later, other Buddhists added many more scriptures.

Questions to Answer

1. What philosophy is Buddhism based upon?
2. How do people follow the “Eightfold Path”?
3. Why is achieving “nirvana” important?
4. How does Buddhism differ from Hinduism?