

### Buddhism in India

Siddhartha Gautama was young man who had everything. He was a prince and was very wealthy. His wife was beautiful, and his son was very handsome. But at age twenty-nine, Siddhartha was still not satisfied with his life. He felt that he was missing something. He did not know what it was, but he left home to find it.

For six years, the prince roamed India. For the first time in his life, he came face to face with misery and suffering. They seemed to be on every hand. Was this, the real meaning of life? Was life on earth intended to be bitter? The prince searched Hinduism for an answer but found none. At last he decided that the answer lay within himself. To find it, he would have to search the depths of his own being. For forty-nine days, Siddhartha sat beneath a tree, facing the bank of a river. With all his strength, he forced himself to think long and deeply. Was man born to suffer? Were men forever doomed to lead short, unhappy lives? Somewhere there must be answers to these questions.

At last, quite suddenly, Siddhartha seemed to see life clearly. He felt that he had discovered the reason for all human suffering. More important, he felt that he found a cure for the problems of mankind. Four great truths stood out clearly in his mind. Eight clear and simple rules took shape as guideposts to meaningful living. Siddhartha left the shelter of his tree. He went forth to share with others the truths he had discovered. From that time on, he was known as Buddha, “the enlightened one.” The Buddha’s words were eventually copied in *The Three Baskets of Wisdom*.

1. Who was Siddhartha Gautama?
2. How did he become the Buddha?

#### The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path

From his teachings the Buddha was able to find the secret of life’s meaning and it was found in the basic doctrine of the Four Nobles Truths.

- a. Life is full of pain and suffering. To live means to suffer, because the human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in.
- b. The immediate cause of suffering is desire. The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, ardor, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in short: *craving* and *clinging*.
- c. Suffering can be ended by putting aside desire and want. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Attaining this ultimately results in the state of *Nirvana*. Nirvana means freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, and ideas.
- d. There is a path to the end of suffering - a gradual path of self-improvement, which is described more detailed in the Eightfold Path. It is the way to achieve peace; and it leads to the end of the cycle of rebirth. The way to guarantee positive rebirth is by obeying *dharma* and not having bad *karma*. Both of these principles are shared with Hinduism. The Eightfold Path consists of the eight steps to end suffering: a) Right views, b) Right aspirations or intentions, c) Right speech, d) Right action or conduct, e) Right livelihood, f) Right effort, g) Right mindfulness; and h) Right concentration. The Buddha believed that the eightfold path would lead to nirvana, or the state ultimate peace.

1. What are the Four Noble Truths?
2. What is the cause of suffering? How can we get rid of suffering?
3. What is the eightfold path? What is the purpose?

### The Four Noble Truths

From his teachings the Buddha was able to find the secret of life's meaning and it was found in the basic doctrine of the Four Nobles Truths.

Life is full of pain and suffering. To live means to suffer, because the human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in. During our lifetime, we inevitably have to endure physical suffering such as pain, sickness, injury, tiredness, old age, and eventually death; and we have to endure psychological suffering like sadness, fear, frustration, disappointment, and depression. Although there are different degrees of suffering and there are also positive experiences in life that we perceive as the opposite of suffering, such as ease, comfort and happiness, life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete.

The immediate cause of suffering is desire. The origin of suffering is attachment to transient things and the ignorance thereof. Transient things do not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas, and all objects of our perception. The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, ardor, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in short: *craving* and *clinging*. Because the objects of our attachment are short-lived, their loss is inevitable, thus suffering will necessarily follow.

There is a way to dispel ignorance and relieve suffering, and by putting an end to desire man can end suffering. Suffering can be ended by attaining detachment from desire and want. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Attaining and perfecting dispassion is a process of many levels that ultimately results in the state of *Nirvana*. Nirvana means freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, fabrications and ideas. Nirvana is not comprehensible for those who have not attained it.

There is a path to the end of suffering - a gradual path of self-improvement, which is described more detailed in the Eightfold Path. It is the way to achieve peace; and it leads to the end of the cycle of rebirth. The path to the end of suffering can extend over many lifetimes, throughout which every individual rebirth is subject to karmic conditioning. Craving, ignorance, delusions, and its effects will disappear gradually, as progress is made on the path.

1. What is the first noble truth?
2. What is the cause of the suffering according to the second noble truth?
3. What is the third noble truth and how can one end desire?
4. Explain the fourth noble truth and how can one end the suffering?

### The Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path describes the way to the end of suffering, as Siddhartha Gautama laid it out. It is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions; and it finally leads to understanding the truth about all things. Together with the Four Noble Truths it constitutes the gist of Buddhism. Great emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of existence and finally reach Nirvana. The eight aspects of the path are not to be understood as a sequence of single steps, instead they are highly interdependent principles that have to be seen in relationship with each other.

The Eightfold Path consists of the eight steps to end suffering:

1. Right views
2. Right aspirations or intentions
3. Right speech
4. Right action or conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness; and
8. Right concentration.

Right view is the beginning and the end of the path, it simply means to see and to understand things as they really are and to realize the Four Noble Truth. Right intention can be described best as *commitment* to ethical and mental self-improvement.

Right speech is the first principle of ethical conduct in the eightfold path. Ethical conduct is viewed as a guideline to *moral discipline*, which supports the other principles of the path. The second ethical principle, right action, involves the body as natural means of expression, as it refers to deeds that involve bodily actions.

Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. Right effort can be seen as a prerequisite for the other principles of the path. Mental energy is the force behind right effort; it can occur in either wholesome or unwholesome states. Right mindfulness is the controlled and perfected faculty of cognition. It is the mental ability to see things as they are, with clear consciousness. The eighth principle of the path, right concentration, refers to the development of a mental force that occurs in natural consciousness, although at a relatively low level of intensity, namely concentration. Concentration in this context is described as one-pointed state of mind, meaning a state where all mental faculties are unified and directed onto one particular object.

1. What is the Eightfold Path?
2. List the eight steps of the Eightfold Path.
3. Why must one follow the Eightfold Path?

Comparing Hinduism and Buddhism

Fill out the chart below and analyze the similarities and differences of Hinduism and Buddhism.

	Founder	Sacred books	Teachings/ Beliefs	Afterlife
Hinduism				
Buddhism				

1. What are some similarities of Hinduism and Buddhism?
  
2. What are some differences between Hinduism and Buddhism?