

Buddhists

Origins

Traditionally, Buddhism began with a prince called Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in the sixth century B.C. in Lumbini, in modern-day Nepal. His father ruled the small kingdom of the Sakyas. He lived in luxury, his father keeping him from the outside world. Eventually, Gautama persuaded somebody to take him on trips to see the local town. During the first three trips he witnessed for the first time an old man, a sick man and a dead body. These trips led him to think deeply about the problem of suffering. Later he met an ascetic monk, and decided to follow his example in order to try and find an answer to suffering. He left the palace and set off to lead a life of abstinence. He later abandoned his ascetic lifestyle and chose what Buddhists call the Middle Way, a lifestyle halfway between poverty and luxury. On one occasion he sat down under a Bodhi tree and determined not to move until he found the answers he was seeking by meditation. Legend says that he eventually achieved Enlightenment and was told by the god Brahma to spread his findings to others. Following this enlightenment he became known as Buddha (the Awakened One). From then on he began to gain numerous disciples.

Today

Buddhism continues to benefit from the upsurge in interest in eastern religion from the 1960s onwards. There are around 376 million Buddhists worldwide. There are many sects, but the two main ones are Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana. Some Buddhists worship at temples, others worship in their homes at a homemade shrine. Two Buddhists of particular renown in recent years have been the exiled head of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, and Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master.

What the mainstream says

There is a Triple Gem consisting of:

- The Buddha—The self-awakened one. The original nature of the Heart.
- The Dhamma—The Teaching. The nature of reality.
- The Sangha—The Awakened Community, any harmonious assembly or All Beings.

There are Three Marks of Existence:

- Pain, impermanence and egolessness.

There are Four Noble Truths:

- Life is frustrating and painful.
- Suffering has a cause.
- The cause of suffering can be ended.
- The way to *nirvana*, to end the cause of suffering, centres on meditation.

The Goal of life:

- The Goal of life is *nirvana*, which is the cessation of passion, aggression and ignorance, and of the struggle to prove one's existence to the world.

(Source: <http://www.buddhanet.net>)

Suggested initial Scriptural approach

It is useful to show from the outset that the Bible speaks of a time when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4). In the meantime, it can be shown that, yes, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22), but Paul said also that the believer is "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (v. 23).