

Buddhism

Buddhism was a balance between the ways of Jainism and Hinduism. It provided people with more flexibility, hence, became popular in various parts of the world. It has more followers outside India. It ensures India's influence on other civilizations of the world.

Buddha

Early life: Buddha or the 'enlightened one' was born as **Siddhartha** in the village of Lumbini near Kapilavastu (modern Nepal) in 563 BCE. He was a *Kshatriya* prince of the Shakya clan and was born in the Gautama family. His father, Suddhodana, was the king of the tribe and ruled Kapilavastu. His mother died seven days after giving birth to him. Legends say that a sage prophesised that Siddhartha would either be a great king or military leader or he would be a great spiritual leader. Siddhartha's father raised him in great luxury in a palace built just for the boy to shelter him from the knowledge of religion and human hardship. He was married at a young age to princess Yashodhara. They had a son called Rahul.

However, all the royal luxuries and **sopulence** in which Siddhartha lived had no effect on him. Even the love and affection of his wife and son could not satisfy him as he was inclined towards spirituality.

The Great Renunciation: The realisation that he, like anyone else, could be suffer (with disease, old age and death), drove Siddhartha into personal crisis. At the age of 29 he left behind his wife and son to begin a life wandering as a holy man in search of the ultimate truth. This event is known as the 'Great Renunciation'.

The Four Great Sights

Once while in his chariot outside his palace, Siddhartha saw the four sights after which he renounced material life. These were that of:

- an **old man** who passed in front of him and was suffering because of the infirmities brought by advanced age,
- a **sick man** alongside the road who was experiencing pain and agony due to disease,
- a **dead man** and the prince had never seen a dead before and
- an **ascetic** who had devoted his life to find the cause of human suffering and in search of salvation.

While the first three sights made him sad, the fourth one inspired him.

Enlightenment

Siddhartha left his home to discover the truth of birth and death and find the ultimate peace of mind. He studied under famous teachers in Rajgriha, mastering what they taught him and then moved to Gaya.

Finally, after **meditating under a Peepal tree at Bodh Gaya for a long time, he attained enlightenment at the age of 35.** He came to be known as **Buddha** or the **Enlightened One.** Now, at this place, there is a temple called the **Mahabodhi temple** and the Peepal tree under which he sat is known as the **Bodhi Tree.**



▲ Dharmachakra at Sanchi stupa, a symbol of Buddhism

Review

1. What prediction was made about Siddhartha?
2. What realisation led Siddhartha to renounce his life of luxury?
3. Why is the Bodhi tree important to Buddhists?

After attaining enlightenment, Buddha proceeded to the **Deer Park** in Sarnath near Varanasi. He delivered his first **sermon** there to five ascetics. Buddha spoke of the **Four Noble Truths** he had discovered while struggling for enlightenment. These form the central teachings of Buddhism. They became his disciples and it led to the foundation of the **Buddhist Sangha** in Magadh area. This event is known as *dharma-chakra-pravartana* or the 'Turning the Wheel of the Dharma'.

For the next forty years he travelled all over the country spreading the message of Buddhism. He visited Varanasi, Nalanda and Pataliputra. The rulers of Magadh, Kosala and Kosambi became his followers. His disciples were from all the sections of the society. In his last years, he went to Kushinagar where he obtained *mahaparinirvana* at the age of eighty in 483 BCE. His remains were taken to eight different places where *stupas* were built by his disciples.

Doctrines of Buddhism

The doctrines of Buddhism are the following.

1. **Four Noble Truths:** The foundation of Buddha's doctrines was based on **Four Noble Truths**. These were:
 - i. The world is full of suffering.
 - ii. Suffering is caused by human desires.
 - iii. The renunciation of desires is the path to salvation.
 - iv. Salvation can be achieved by following the Eightfold Path.

The **Four Noble Truths** charts the method for attaining the end of suffering known to the Buddhists as the **Eightfold Path**.

2. **Eightfold Path:** The Eightfold Path comprises the following.
 - i. **Right understanding:** understanding that the Four Noble Truths are noble and true
 - ii. **Right thought:** determining and resolving to practise Buddhist faith
 - iii. **Right speech:** to speak the truth and avoid all forms of untrue and abusive speech
 - iv. **Right conduct:** adhering to the idea of non-violence (*ahimsa*), as well as refraining from any form of stealing or sexual impropriety
 - v. **Right means of making a living:** not slaughtering animals or working at jobs that force you to violate others
 - vi. **Right mental attitude or effort:** avoiding negative thoughts and emotions, such as anger and jealousy
 - vii. **Right mindfulness:** having a clear sense of one's mental state and bodily health and feelings
 - viii. **Right concentration:** using meditation to reach the highest level of enlightenment

The **Eightfold Path** is also known as the 'middle path' because Buddha believed in adopting a middle path avoiding two extremes – neither indulging in extreme attachment to worldly pleasures nor doing severe penance.

Other Teachings of Buddha

- **Theory of karma:** Buddha believed that the condition of a man in this and the next life depends on his deeds. He has to face the consequences of his actions.

- ✓ • Nirvana (The ultimate aim in life is to attain *nirvana* or salvation). It is a tranquil state of mind free from desires and sorrows. It makes a person free from the chain of birth and death.
- ✓ • Ahimsa: He was strongly against anyone causing harm to any living being. He emphasised the importance of **sanctity** of life.
- ✓ • No faith in caste system: He wanted people to live in peace setting aside all differences. He opposed the caste system prevalent in Hinduism. This became one of the main attractions of Buddhism for the people.
- ✓ • No belief in rituals and sacrifices: He rejected any mechanical worship of god. He said that sacrifices and rituals were empty ceremonies.
- Stress on character-building and morality: He insisted on truthfulness, compassion for others, obedience to parents, respect for elders and leading an upright life.

Jainism

1. It was established long before Mahavira and he was the twenty-fourth *tirthankara*.
2. It followed an extreme path.
3. It denied the existence of god.
4. It remained in India and still has followers here.

Buddhism

1. It was a new religion established by Buddha and his followers.
2. It followed a middle path.
3. It did not comment on the existence of god.
4. It spread to many parts of the world and does not have many followers in India.

Similarities: Jainism and Buddhism

1. Both Mahavira and Buddha belonged to *Kshatriya* families of Magadha.
2. Both the religions oppose the Brahminical system, the rituals and sacrifices and the *Vedas*.
3. Both the religions do not believe in the caste system.
4. Their aim is *moksha*, salvation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
5. Both the religions emphasise on *ahimsa* or non-violence.
6. The monks and nuns in both the religions have to renounce material life to lead an austere and chaste one.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING:

1. State the early life of Buddha.
2. Mention the four sights after which Buddha renounced material life.
3. Discuss the doctrines of Buddhism.
4. Mention the other teachings of Buddha.