

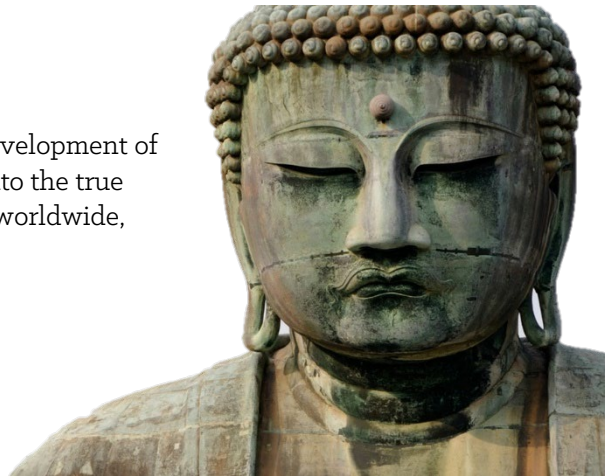


worlds apart

UNDERSTANDING BUDDHISM

Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion that focuses on the personal development of one's spirit to attain enlightenment – a deep insight into the true nature of life. Buddhism claims 376 million followers worldwide, though this group is very diverse.

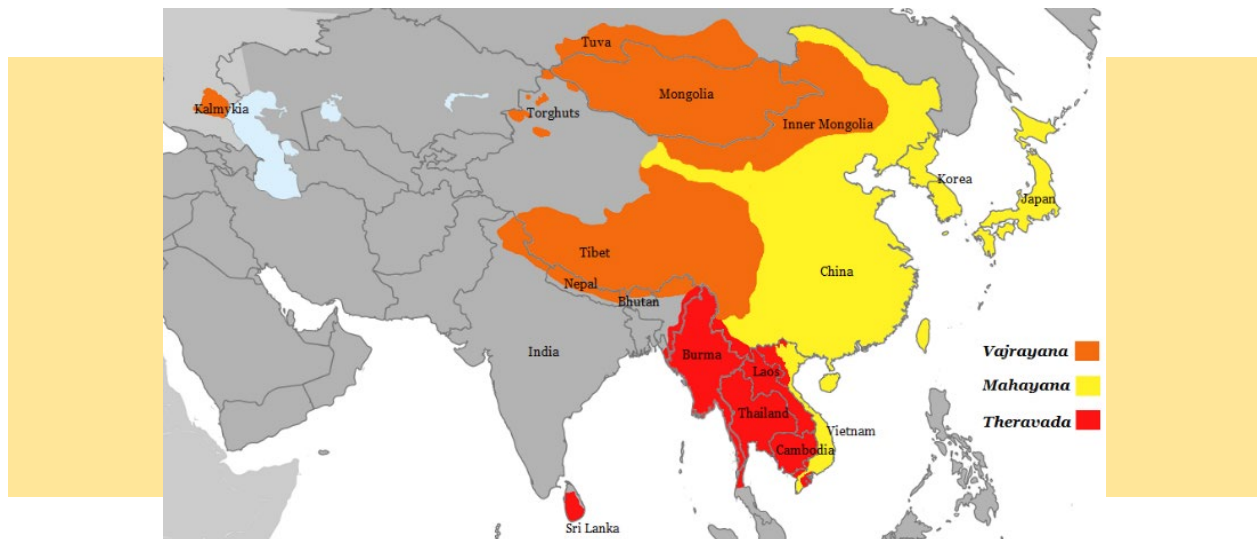


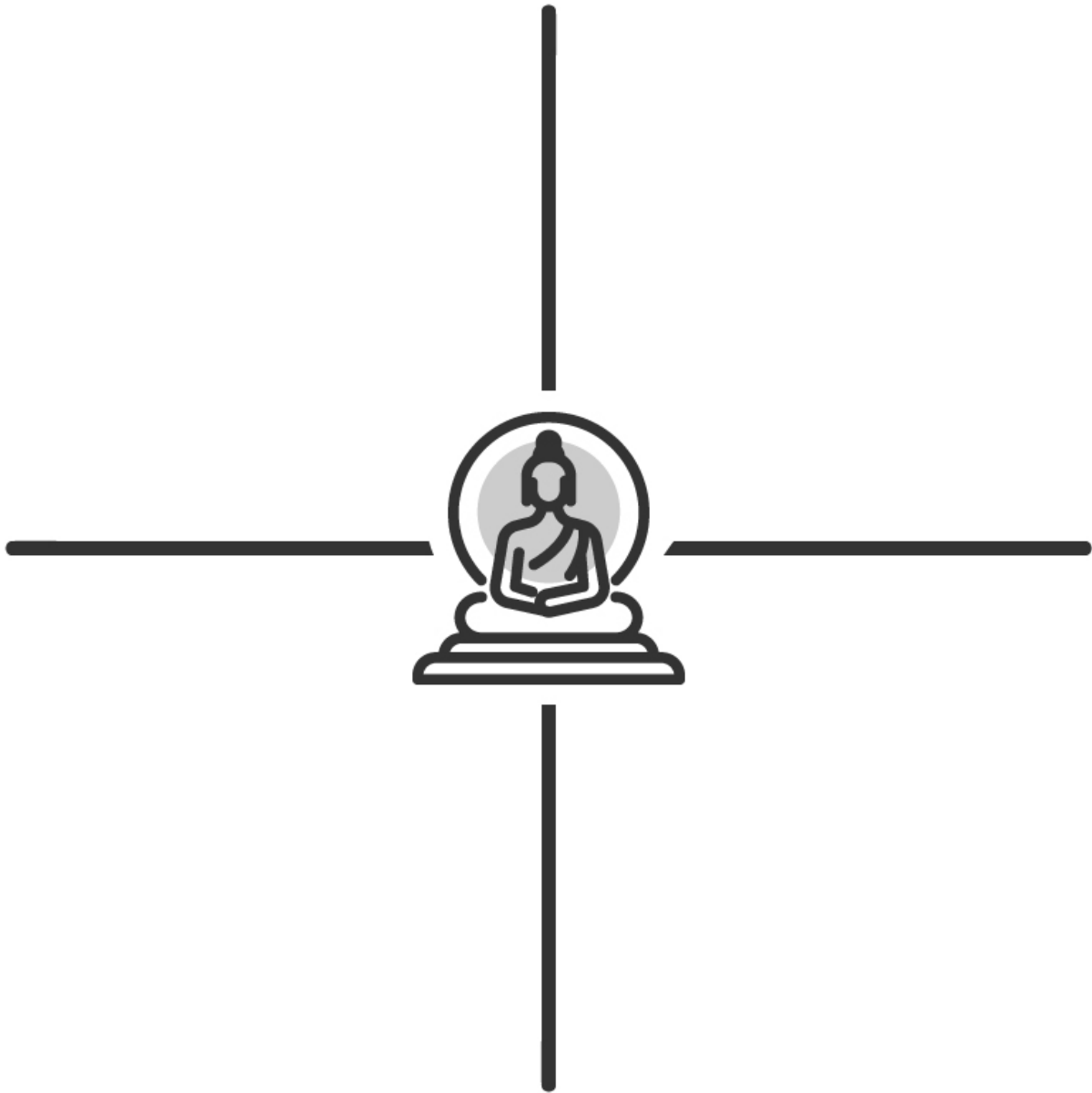
Buddhism by the Numbers

- 501,316,000 Population of Adherents
- 6.3% % of World Population
- 686 People Groups
- 534 (77.8%) Unreached Groups

Top Buddhist People Groups (by Population)

People Group	Country	Population	% Christian	% Evangelical	Progress?
Japanese	Japan	118,468,000	1.20%	0.30%	UPG
Vietnamese	Vietnam	81,193,000	9.40%	1.40%	
Burmese	Myanmar	31,044,000	0.35%	0.08%	UPG
Thai	Thailand	23,214,000	2.00%	1.70%	UPG
Thai Isan	Thailand	18,960,000	0.40%	0.01%	UPG
Khmer	Cambodia	14,086,000	3.20%	1.90%	
Mahar	India	11,284,000	0.13%	0.00%	UPG
Wahumpura	Sri Lanka	8,422,000	7.01%	0.00%	
Northern Thai	Thailand	7,766,000	0.20%	0.03%	UPG
Chinese Thai	Thailand	5,837,000	4.00%	2.66%	





Buddha – How It Began

Buddhism's roots are centered on the life and teachings of the Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha was born into a royal family in present-day Nepal approximately 500 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. He lived a life of privilege and luxury until one day he left the royal enclosure and encountered for the first time, an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. Disturbed by this he became a monk before adopting the harsh poverty of Indian asceticism. Neither path satisfied him, so he decided to pursue what he called the 'Middle Way' – a life without luxury but also without poverty.

One day, seated beneath the Bodhi tree (the tree of awakening), Siddhartha became deeply absorbed in meditation and reflected on his experience of life until he became enlightened. By finding the path to enlightenment, Siddhartha was led from the pain of suffering and rebirth towards the path of enlightenment and became known as the Buddha or '*awakened one*'.

For the next 45 years of his life the Buddha taught many disciples, who became *Arahants* or 'noble ones', who had attained Enlightenment for themselves.

Worldview Answers

1. *Who is God? What is God Like?*

Buddhism holds no belief in a personal god. Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent and that change is always happening. The path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation, and wisdom.

Buddhists believe that life is both endless and subject to impermanence, suffering and uncertainty. These states are called the *tilakhana*, or the three signs of existence. Existence is endless because individuals are reincarnated over and over again, experiencing suffering throughout many lives. Existence is impermanent because no state, good or bad, lasts forever. Our mistaken belief that things can last is a chief cause of suffering.

2. *What Is a Human Being?*

Meaningful conversation about human existence is complicated for Buddhists, let alone others who are seeking to understand what Buddha taught about human nature. Buddha taught that we must seek to embrace a concept of no-self or emptiness of self. This does not mean that we don't really exist, but that our true self lies beyond our concept of an individual self and its concerns. We must come to see that we ourselves as part of the interrelated unity of all beings. Buddhists see *self* as something impermanent rather than the Western concept of a permanent, unified self.

For the Buddhist, the idea of a *soul* is a problem. What most people – especially in Western countries – refer to when speaking of the soul is to Buddhists not only nonsensical but even harmful. For the Buddhist, there is nothing that approximates what others mean by soul. Indeed, it is because people insist on the very idea of a soul that gives rise to detrimental ideas like "me" and "mine". The outworking of believing in one's soul is what produces selfish desires, cravings, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and a variety of other blights upon our lives. The idea of the "soul" is that to which all "evil" (as we have named it) can be traced.

3. *What's Wrong with the World?*

The Buddha based his entire teaching on the fact of human suffering and the ultimately dissatisfying character of human life. Existence is painful. The conditions that make an individual are precisely those that also give rise to dissatisfaction and suffering. Individuality implies limitation; limitation gives rise to desire; and, inevitably, desire causes suffering, since what is desired is transitory.

Living amid the impermanence of everything and being themselves impermanent, human beings search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the transitoriness of human existence—in short, for enlightenment. The Buddha's doctrine offered a way to avoid despair. By following the "path" taught by the Buddha, the individual can dispel the "ignorance" that perpetuates this suffering.

4. *How Can We Be Enlightened?*

Buddha taught that the way out of the cycle of death and rebirth is through the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

Essential Elements of Buddhism

The Four Noble Truths

- **The First Noble Truth** is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means to encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.
- **The Second Noble Truth** relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance.
- **The Third Noble Truth** is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires.
- **The Fourth Noble Truth** is the extinguishing of all desire by following the Eight-fold path. By following this path, adherents will develop habits which will release them from the restrictions caused by ignorance and desire.

The Eightfold Noble Path

The first step in the Eightfold path is the Right View. One must accept the Four Noble Truths. Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty, and must harm no living creature. Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk. Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing.

Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one. Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained. Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow. The eighth is

the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self-effort one can attain the eternal state of *nirvana*.

Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven, but rather an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering; a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end.

The Five Precepts

There are many the rules and regulations by which Buddhist monks and nuns must abide. For the average Buddhist layperson, the moral list of obligations is known as the Five Precepts. Though some have compared them to the Ten Commandments in Christianity and Judaism, it is important to point out that these Five Precepts are to be viewed as *recommendations* rather than strict “commandments”.

1. **Do not kill.** This is sometimes translated as “not harming” or an absence of violence.
2. **Do not steal.** This is generally interpreted as including the avoidance of fraud and economic exploitation.
3. **Do not lie.** This is sometimes interpreted as including name calling, gossip, etc.
4. **Do not misuse sex.** For monks and nuns, this means any departure from complete celibacy. For the laity, adultery is forbidden, along with any sexual harassment or exploitation, including that within marriage. The Buddha did not discuss consensual premarital sex within a committed relationship; Thus, Buddhist traditions differ on this. Most Buddhists, probably influenced by their local cultures, condemn same-sex sexual activity regardless of the nature of the relationship between the people involved.
5. **Do not consume alcohol or other drugs.** The main concern here is that intoxicants cloud the mind. Some include other methods of divorcing ourselves from reality, e.g. movies, television, the Internet, etc.

Those preparing for monastic life or who are not within a family are expected to avoid an additional five activities:

6. Taking untimely meals.
7. Dancing, singing, music, watching grotesque mime.
8. Use of garlands, perfumes and personal adornment.
9. Use of high seats.
10. Accepting gold or silver.

Laypeople are expected to provide the monks with food, material for their robes, and any other material necessities. They also maintain the temples by decorating them once built and are responsible for the upkeep.

Four Groups of Three

Three Schools

Among the numerous different schools or sects of Buddhism, the three largest are **Theravada Mahayana, and Vajrayana**.

- **Theravada or the Doctrine of the Elders** (38%) is followed in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia (Kampuchea), and Vietnam. Theravada is closest to the original doctrines. It does not treat the Buddha as deity and regards the faith as a worldview-not a type of worship.
- **Mahayana or the Greater Vehicle** (56%) is strong in China, Korea, and Japan. Mahayana has accommodated many different beliefs and worships the Buddha as a god. In Japan, one variation balances militant or aggressive Buddhism by seeking tranquility and peace in the struggles of life.
- **Vajrayana or Diamond Vehicle** also called **Tantric Buddhism** or **Lamaism** (6%) is rooted in Tibet, Nepal, and Mongolia. Vajrayana has added elements of shamanism and the occult and includes taboo breaking (intentional immorality) as a means of spiritual enlightenment.

Three Scriptures

In Buddhism, there is not just one scripture, but thousands of speeches and quotations. Shortly after the death of Buddha, the Enlightened One, his disciples collected 84,000 of their teacher's words and teachings, known as *Sutras*. They were passed down orally and only recorded in writing 400 years later in two languages, *Pali* and *Sanskrit*.

The Pali Canon (*the Tripitaka* or 'Three Baskets') was written first (around 25 BC), followed by the Sanskrit Canon (around the 1st century AD). The teachings can be grouped into three categories, or 'baskets':

- The Discipline Basket
- The Discourse Basket
- The Philosophy Basket

The Mahayana Sutras and the Tibetan Book of the Dead are also considered sacred for many Buddhists.

Three Gems

Taking refuge is also like a man traveling for the first time to a distant city. He will need a guide to show him which path to follow and some traveling companions to help him along the way.

- The Buddha is the guide.
- The Dharma is the path.
- The Sangha are the teachers or companions along the way.

There is a special ceremony for taking refuge with the Triple Gem. With a sincere mind, one recites the following verse in front of a Buddhist monk or nun. "I go to the Buddha for refuge. I go to the Dharma for refuge. I go to the Sangha for refuge."

Three Poisons

The cause of human suffering, as explained in Buddhist terms, is *greed, anger, and ignorance*. These negative traits and fundamental evils are called the Three Poisons because they are dangerous toxins in our lives. Not only are they the source of our unquenchable thirst for possessions, and the root cause of all of our harmful illusions, but they are painful pollutants, which bring sickness, both physical and mental.

- Greed's companions are desire and lust, and these passions and attachments cause us to want to "get hold of" things, and to have more and more of them.
- Anger's friends are hatred, animosity, and aversion, which cause us to reject what displeases us or infringes upon our ego.
- Ignorance, which is "not knowing," especially not knowing our true nature, paves the way for delusion or in our believing something that is false.

These poisons fill our lives with suffering, unhappiness, and the loss of satisfaction. They cause us to make unskillful decisions, which affect our future. They cause us to have self-serving and dishonest intentions, which in turn cause us to act unethically and immorally. They are the roots of not only our own pain and misery, but those of our loved ones' and of society's. Fortunately, there is a way to eradicate this trio of contaminants. The practice of loving kindness and compassion is the medicine, and enlightenment is the antidote.

Reaching Buddhists with the Gospel

How Does Buddhism View Christianity? Christians?

Buddhist practices and beliefs vary wildly depending on the region of the world and the particular branch of Buddhism involved. In the West, Buddhism has enjoyed celebrity status among the rich and famous. Tiger Woods, Keanu Reeves, Jennifer Aniston, Brad Pitt, Mark Zuckerberg, Russell Simmons, Richard Gere, Uma Thurman, Orlando Bloom, Angelina Jolie, Steve Jobs, and many others have openly proclaimed themselves as Buddhists and have sought to popularize and mainstream Buddhist ideas.

Given this “westernizing”, Buddhism claims to be quite compatible with Christian beliefs. It is not uncommon to hear Christians and even Christian leaders employ sayings with Buddhist connotations such as “nirvana,” “in a former life,” “it’s my karma,” “my next reincarnation,” “let your mind go blank,” “dig deep down within you,” and so on.

So long as the message of Christianity is kept within the safe bounds of “spirituality” and “getting in touch with the divine”, there are no conflicts. But the more articulate the Gospel becomes, the more that Buddhists would charge Christianity with intolerance and arrogance.

How can we work to reach Buddhists with the Gospel?

Practical Approaches

- “Proclaiming the Glory of God among Buddhist Peoples” by Justin Caudill
- “Praying for Buddhist Peoples” article by Alex Smith in *Buddhism through Christian Eyes* (OMF) pp. 27-30
- “Sharing Life with Buddhists” article by Alex Smith in *Buddhism through Christian Eyes* (OMF) pp. 31-36

Apologetic Questions & Answers

- “Buddhism” article by Daniel Heimbach on NAMB.net [<https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/buddhism/>]
- “Buddhism: A Christian Perspective” article by Patrick Zukeran published online at Probe Ministries [<https://probe.org/buddhism/>]
- “Communicating with the Buddhist Mind” article by Alex Smith in *Buddhism through Christian Eyes* (OMF) pp. 23-26
- “The Gospel Facing Buddhist Cultures” article by Alex Smith in *Buddhism through Christian Eyes* (OMF) pp. 37-64