

about

# BUDDHISM



## What Are the Major Beliefs of Buddhism?

Regarded by some as a philosophy rather than a religion because it lacks deity worship, Buddhism grew out of the teachings of Siddhartha Gotama who lived over 2,500 years ago in present-day Nepal. Buddhists believe that human beings die and are reborn as part of a continuous cycle known as samsara. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to escape samsara and achieve nirvana, a transcendent state devoid of pain and desire.

### Five Precepts

- Buddhist morality is embodied in the five precepts, a set of rules that describe proper behavior towards others. The first precept condemns the killing of any living creature, the second forbids stealing, and the third discourages inappropriate and overindulgent sexual behavior. The fourth and fifth precepts, respectively, denounce deceptive speech and behavior, and decry the consumption of intoxicating substances -- drugs and alcohol -- that impair the mind.

### Four Noble Truths

- In his debut sermon, the Buddha addressed the nature of human suffering and outlined the Four Noble Truths, which became the backbone of Buddhism. The first noble truth establishes that life is inherently painful. Suffering, per the second noble truth, stems from attachment to possessions, relationships and life itself, all of which are impermanent. The third noble truth proposes that people can attain happiness -- the ultimate state of which is nirvana -- by relinquishing attachments and the impulse to control their lives. The fourth noble truth promotes a set of steps for releasing attachments known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

### Noble Eightfold Path

- Buddhism's Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three categories. The first two steps make up the "wisdom" group: "right view" -- accepting the Four Noble Truths and approaching life without expectations -- is the first step; the second step, "right intention," entails refraining from manipulation. Steps 3 through 5 comprise the "moral discipline" group: the third step, "right speech," requires genuineness of expression; the fourth step, "right action," means living righteously according to the other precepts; and the fifth step, "right livelihood," is attained by performing one's job well. The "concentration" group encompasses the last three steps: "right effort," "right mindfulness" and "right concentration." "Right effort" involves approaching life without struggle or negativity; "right mindfulness" means being aware of and deliberate when it comes to thoughts and behavior; the final step, "right concentration," promotes being fully present and focused on the moment, and is typically interpreted as a call for meditation.

## Karma, Rebirth and Nirvana

- Though there is no concept of an eternal soul in Buddhism, the tradition does incorporate a belief in rebirth, or reincarnation. According to Buddhism, after death, a person's "mental energy" -- thoughts, feelings and perceptions -- are re-established in a new body. A person's lot -- wealth, health and talents, among other things -- are determined by his actions in the present and previous lives. This principle of cause and effect is called karma. The Buddha prescribed the Noble Eightfold Path as a way out of the cycle of birth and death and into nirvana, an enlightened and struggle-free state of bliss.

