

Access World Religions Buddhism Glossary

bodhisattva – An enlightened person who forgoes nirvana until all people are free from suffering.

Buddha – Born Prince Siddhartha Gautama, approximately 500 years before the Common Era. In his early thirties, Prince Siddhartha left his royal life in search of enlightenment. After living ascetically, he applied a more balanced discipline known as the "middle path." According to tradition, it was under the bodhi (a sacred fig tree) that the prince became the Buddha or "Enlightened One." His teachings after becoming the Buddha formed the foundation of Buddhism.

buddhahood – The attainment of perfect enlightenment through the discovery and realization of the Four Noble Truths.

Buddha nature – The potential believed to be in everyone to reach buddhahood through Buddhist practices.

Confucianism – A philosophical and ethical code of living based on the teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.E.). Confucius believed man's fate depends purely upon his own moral efforts. The main characteristics of Confucianism are ethical values, the worship of ancestors and social responsibility.

Confucius – (551-479 B.C.E.) A philosopher, teacher, political figure and founder of Confucianism. His ethics-based teachings focused on topics such as education, behavior and government.

Dalai Lama – Meaning "Ocean of Wisdom." Tenzin Gyatso is the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama and current leader of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Born in 1935 in Tibet, he was named the Dalai Lama after a series of tests performed by high lamas, when he was 3 years old. At 15, Tenzin Gyatso was given the formal title of Dalai Lama and lived in the capital of Lhasa. He later escaped to India in 1959 after the Chinese conquered the Tibetan people.

Daoism (also, Taoism) – Based on the teachings of Lao Tzu, a legendary figure who lived during the sixth century B.C.E., according to Chinese tradition. He explained his teachings on the meaning of Dao or "way" in the Daodejing (Tao-te ching), the "Classic of the Way and Virtue," which is considered the core text of Daoist thought. Lao Tzu taught that the Dao encompasses everything and is the origin of all creation and the force of the natural world and change.

Eightfold Path – The foundation for Buddhist wisdom, ethical teachings and meditation:

1. The right view
2. The right resolve
3. The right speech
4. The right action
5. The right livelihood
6. The right effort
7. The right mindfulness
8. The right concentration

five colors – The five colors of Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags represent the elements:

1. Blue – space or sky
2. White – air
3. Red – fire
4. Green – water
5. Yellow – earth

Five Relationships – The five principal relationships in society, according to Confucius: ruler and subject; father and son; elder brother and younger brother; husband and wife; and friend and friend. Confucius prescribes certain behaviors for each role of the five relationships, which are believed to foster social harmony when practiced.

Four Noble Truths –

1. That life is suffering, disjointed and impermanent, or dukkha
2. That dukkha is caused by tanha, selfish desire and weaknesses of the mind
3. That there is a way out of dukkha to end suffering (liberation or nirvana)
4. That the way to experience nirvana is to follow the eightfold path of Buddha.

Han Dynasty – (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) Established after the defeat of the Qin Dynasty in 206 B.C.E., which was part of a larger rebellion against Qin tyranny and government. Although the Qin administrative structure continued, the Han moved away from centralized government and adapted Confucian ideals.

Kagyü – Also called the Kagyupa school or the “oral lineage.” One of the four main schools in Tibetan Buddhism and led by the Karmapa Lama.

laity – The followers or members of a religion, outside of the clergy.

Lao Tzu – A legendary figure who lived during the sixth century B.C.E., according to Chinese tradition. Philosopher and author of one of the most widely translated texts in world literature, the Daodejing, or the “Classic of the Way and Virtue.”

Mahayana Buddhism – One of the three main vehicles, or paths, in Buddhism. Mahayana is the more liberal and mystical Northern School that stresses the virtue of altruistic compassion over intellectual efforts at individual salvation.

mantras – Chanted sounds, syllables or phrases that are used to harness speech to the path of enlightenment.

mendicant – An individual who survives by begging. Often a term used for religious ascetics who live solely on alms.

monk – A person who abstains from worldly pleasures and lives a life of intense spiritual devotion and practice.

nirvana – Enlightenment, the liberation from samsara, the endless cycle of rebirth and suffering.

ordination – A series of formal rites designed to sanctify an individual. The ordained is often then conferred into office, from which they provide services for the laity.

Pure Land Buddhism – Developed from the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism in India around second century C.E. It further developed in China and then reached Japan around sixth century C.E. The tradition rose to popularity in Japan when the Buddhist monk Honen (1133-1212) reinterpreted the Pure Land sutras, making them more accessible to the laity. His reforms eliminated many of the complexities found in other Buddhist schools and centered on the oral repetition of Namo Amida Butsu or "Name of the Amida Buddha." In Pure Land Buddhism, Amida Buddha, the Buddha of Boundless Light, used his virtue to prepare a pure land or "western paradise," for those who chant his name.

Siddhartha Gautama – A prince born in sixth century B.C.E. in present-day Nepal. Gautama renounced his inheritance to the throne and left all the comforts of his princely life in search of a path to end human suffering and for six years lived as an ascetic. It is believed that at about the age of 35, he attained enlightenment during a state of deep meditation under the bodhi tree and as a result, became the Buddha or "enlightened one."

sutras – Buddhist scripture that represent the life and teachings of Buddha.

ten precepts – The code of behavior for a samanera, or novice monk:

1. To abstain from killing
2. To abstain from stealing
3. To abstain from sexual activity
4. To abstain from lying
5. To abstain from taking any type of intoxicant
6. To abstain from taking food after midday
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, listening to music and attending any entertainment performances
8. To abstain from wearing flowers, garlands, perfumes, cosmetics and other decorative accessories
9. To abstain from using high chairs and sleeping on luxurious beds
10. To abstain from accepting money, gold or silver

Theravada Buddhism – One of the three main vehicles, or paths, in Buddhism. Theravada, the most traditional and orthodox, focuses on upholding the Buddha's teachings. Central to Theravada Buddhism is the arhat, or "worthy one," who, through the teachings of Buddha, has attained enlightenment and ended the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

Three main Buddhist schools – Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Each branch sees itself as embodying the original teachings of Buddha, although some schools believe that the dialectic nature of Buddhism allows it to adapt over time in response to ever-changing conditions.

Tibetan Buddhism – Tibetan Buddhism, also known as Vajrayana Buddhism, emerged in India as an intersection of Mahayana and Theravada rituals with Hindu influences. From northern India it migrated to Tibet where it fully developed and fused with Bon, a shamanic indigenous tradition. Central to Tibetan Buddhism is the belief that all sentient beings are

endowed with an enlightened essence, and all thought and action should be geared toward manifesting it to help others also become enlightened.

Vajrayana – A Buddhist sect that emerged between the third and seventh century from the Mahayana tradition and is most commonly practiced among Tibetan and Shingon (Japan) Buddhists. The faithful believe both monks and sentient beings should experience Buddhism. Vajrayana Buddhists look to pursue the Buddha path by following bodhisattva or “a being bound for enlightenment.”