



**Five minutes of Introduction
Buddhism is a Religion? It is a Philosophy or way of life?
You decide it!**

• **What is Buddhism?**

Buddhism is a religion to about 300 million people around the world. The word comes from 'budhi', 'to awaken'. It has its origins about 2,500 years ago when Siddhartha Gotama, known as the Buddha, was himself awakened (enlightened) at the age of 35.

• **Is Buddhism a Religion?**

To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or '**way of life**'. It is a philosophy because philosophy 'means love of wisdom' and the Buddhist path can be summed up as:

- (1) To lead a moral life,
- (2) To be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and
- (3) To develop wisdom and understanding.

• **How Can Buddhism Help Me?**

Buddhism explains a purpose to life, it explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world, and it provides a code of practice or way of life that leads to true happiness.

• **Why is Buddhism Becoming Popular?**

Buddhism is becoming popular in western countries for a number of reasons, the first good reason is Buddhism has answers to many of the problems in modern materialistic societies. It also includes (for

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those who are interested) a deep understanding of the human mind (and natural therapies) which prominent psychologists around the world are now discovering to be both very advanced and effective.

- **Who Was the Buddha?**

Siddhartha Gotama was born into a royal family in Lumbini, now located in Nepal, in 563 BC. At 29, he realized that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different teachings religions and philosophies of the day, to find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he finally found 'the middle path' and was enlightened. After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism — called the Dharma, or Truth — until his death at the age of 80.

- **Was the Buddha a God?**

He was not, nor did he claim to be. He was a man who taught a path to enlightenment from his own experience.

- **Do Buddhists Worship Idols?**

Buddhists sometimes pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favors. A statue of the Buddha with hands rested gently in its lap and a compassionate smile reminds us to strive to develop peace and love within ourselves. Bowing to the statue is an expression of gratitude for the teaching.

- **Why are so Many Buddhist Countries Poor?**

One of the Buddhist teachings is that wealth does not guarantee happiness and also wealth is impermanent. The people of every country suffer whether rich or poor, but those who understand Buddhist teachings can find true happiness.

- **Are There Different Types of Buddhism?**

There are many different types of Buddhism, because the emphasis changes from country to country due to customs and culture. What does not vary is the essence of the teaching — the Dharma or truth.

- **Are Other Religions Wrong?**

Buddhism is also a belief system which is tolerant of all other beliefs or religions. Buddhism agrees with the moral teachings of other religions but Buddhism goes further by providing a long term purpose within our existence, through wisdom and true understanding. Real Buddhism is very tolerant and not concerned with labels like 'Christian', 'Moslem', 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist'; that is why there have never been any wars fought in the name of Buddhism. That is why Buddhists do not preach and try to convert, only explain if an explanation is sought.

- **Is Buddhism Scientific?**

Science is knowledge which can be made into a system, which depends upon seeing and testing facts and stating general natural laws. The core of Buddhism fit into this definition, because the Four Noble truths (see below) can be tested and proven by anyone in fact the Buddha himself asked his followers to test the teaching rather than accept his word as true. Buddhism depends more on understanding than faith.

- **What did the Buddha Teach?**

The Buddha taught many things, but the basic concepts in Buddhism can be summed up by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

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• What is the First Noble Truth?

The first truth is that life is suffering i.e., life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger. This is an irrefutable fact that cannot be denied. It is realistic rather than pessimistic because pessimism is expecting things to be bad. Instead, Buddhism explains how suffering can be avoided and how we can be truly happy.

• What is the Second Noble Truth?

The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. We will suffer if we expect other people to conform to our expectation, if we want others to like us, if we do not get something we want, etc. In other words, getting what you want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what you want, try to modify your wanting. Wanting deprives us of contentment and happiness. A lifetime of wanting and craving and especially the craving to continue to exist, creates a powerful energy which causes the individual to be born. So craving leads to physical suffering because it causes us to be reborn.

• What is the Third Noble Truth?

The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained; that true happiness and contentment are possible. If we give up useless craving and learn to live each day at a time (not dwelling in the past or the imagined future) then we can become happy and free. We then have more time and energy to help others. This is Nirvana.

• What is the Fourth Noble Truth?

The fourth truth is that the Noble 8-fold Path is the path which leads to the end of suffering.

• What is the Noble 8-Fold Path?

In summary, the Noble 8-fold Path is being moral (through what we say, do and our livelihood), focusing the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and developing wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and by developing compassion for others.

• What are the 5 Precepts?

The moral code within Buddhism is the precepts, of which the main five are: not to take the life of anything living, not to take anything not freely given, to abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence, to refrain from untrue speech, and to avoid intoxication, that is, losing mindfulness.

• What is Karma?

Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life. Karma underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions. How can we test the karmic effect of our actions? The answer is summed up by looking at (1) the intention behind the action, (2) effects of the action on oneself, and (3) the effects on others.

• What is Wisdom?

Buddhism teaches that wisdom should be developed with compassion. At one extreme, you could be a good hearted fool and at the other extreme, you could attain knowledge without any emotion. Buddhism uses the middle path to develop both. The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality, all phenomena are incomplete, impermanent and do not constitute a fixed entity. True wisdom is not simply believing what we are told but instead experiencing and understanding truth and reality. Wisdom

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requires an open, objective, unbigoted mind. The Buddhist path requires courage, patience, flexibility and intelligence.

- **What is Compassion?**

Compassion includes qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, sympathy, concern, caring. In Buddhism, we can really understand others, when we can really understand ourselves, through wisdom.

- **How do I Become a Buddhist?**

Buddhist teachings can be understood and tested by anyone. Buddhism teaches that the solutions to our problems are within ourselves not outside. The Buddha asked all his followers not to take his word as true, but rather to test the teachings for themselves. In this way, each person decides for themselves and takes responsibility for their own actions and understanding. This makes Buddhism less of a fixed package of beliefs which is to be accepted in its entirety, and more of a teaching which each person learns and uses in their own way.



In the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, these are the [Five Mindfulness Trainings](#), namely

- Reverence for life
- True Happiness
- True Love
- Loving Speech and Deep Listening
- Nourishment and Healing

So, even without any further teaching, by following these 5 precepts (not like commandments – i.e. don't spend your time finding fault in others), you can avoid a lot of trouble!

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Ven. Guan Cheng then goes on to explain meditation, or **Samadhi**, as being like a country's internal police force. If all we have are our armed forces at the borders (**Sila** – morality or precepts), then while we may be safe from gross transgressions, our internal state of affairs is still a mess. Crime and vice can still run rampant inside the country – that is to say, our mind will be all over the place! This will make the act of maintaining the armed forces (our precepts) seem like a painful austerity.

By practicing **Samadhi** (meditation) we calm and control our internal population. We come to recognize the more troublesome characters and show them compassion and understanding – or Maitri (loving kindness). By meditating, we aim to bring harmony to our internal population. By removing internal tensions, giving attention to and accepting who we are, we naturally start to experience less anxiety, anger and fear. By learning to recognize the bad characters that are in our internal population we are able to deal with them and prevent them from developing and taking control – we become less reliant on the precepts (**Sila**) to prevent our gross transgressions because our practice of **Samadhi** already reveals to us when damaging thoughts and views are arising.

Finally the topic of **Prajna** is discussed, and in the context of our pretend country, **Prajna** is represented as the central government, universities and education. This is the core of our wisdom. It has the ability to eliminate our bad characters at the very source by eliminating ignorance. It is the ability to recognize not just the harmful characters in our internal population, but to also understand the causes and conditions that led to their manifestation. **Prajna** is the ability to intuit the very seeds of our suffering at the most subtle level.

Thich Nhat Hanh was once asked “don't you find it difficult to follow the precepts?” His answer was, predictably, “No”. He went on to explain that through meditation, and mindful living that one develops a way of life that is very much in harmony with the Precepts. This doesn't mean that the precepts are not important – or that Samadhi and Prajna are all you need – it simply means that our daily life, and our morality, naturally begin to reflect the precepts without any conscious effort.