

# 8 Buddhism

Buddhism is the practice of reaching Enlightenment or understanding of the truths of life. For millions of followers around the world, Buddhism is the journey following the path of the original Buddha who was able to remove himself from the life of suffering and cycle of birth, death and rebirth which Buddhists believe is the fate of all humankind.

In the 2001 Australian Census, 358 000 people claimed to be Buddhist. This was 1.9 per cent of the population and an increase of 79 per cent over the 1996 Census result and the greatest percentage increase of any religion in Australia over that five year period.



Nan Tien Buddhist Temple at Wollongong, NSW.

1. (a) In 2001, what proportion of Australians called themselves Buddhist? \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) By what percentage has the number of Buddhists increased over five years? \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) Suggest reasons why Buddhism is becoming more popular in Australia. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. The photograph shows a Buddhist temple. Have you been to a Buddhist temple? If so, describe the building and any artworks you saw there. If not, talk to someone who has and ask them to describe their experience.

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## Siddhartha Gautama

Prince Siddhartha Gautama (who later became the Buddha) was born into a Hindu family in the Sakya Kingdom. This was in what is now the Nepal India border region. He was wealthy and had every physical thing that a person could want. Everything except an answer to the question: why do people suffer, grow old and die only to be reborn according to the reincarnation beliefs of Hinduism?

To answer this question, at the age of 29, he practised as an ascetic and lived a life of strict austerity for six years. When this did not help his mental struggle he meditated under a tree to clear his mind and from this he developed an understanding of life.

3. What do you understand by the following terms?  
(a) Hindu \_\_\_\_\_  
(b) reincarnation \_\_\_\_\_  
(c) ascetic \_\_\_\_\_

## Reaching Enlightenment

Stories that have developed around Buddha, explain how Mara, the evil one or embodiment of evil tried to tempt Siddhartha and lure him from his task. In spite of this, he maintained his concentration and in the end, understood all.

4. (a) List some of the temptations to which we are exposed.

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- (b) Describe some of the temptations that Siddhartha would have had to overcome to reach Enlightenment.

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Statue of Buddha at an historic site in Ayutthaya, Thailand.

The picture on this page shows a statue of Buddha at Ayutthaya, an ancient capital of Thailand. Buddha is in a meditative pose with his right hand touching the ground, taking control over the forces of evil. The ruins of a pagoda in the background give an indication of the age of this particular temple complex and the wrapping around the statue shows the reverence that local Buddhists pay to the memory and the teachings of Buddha.

5. Research the life of Buddha and find out where he was born, gained Enlightenment and died.

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## The Four Noble Truths

The initial teachings of Buddhism are called the Four Noble Truths:

- (i) Life is full of suffering.
- (ii) Suffering is caused by desire.
- (iii) Desire can be overcome and therefore suffering can be removed.
- (iv) Following the Buddhist Eightfold Path is the way to overcoming desire and suffering.

6. Describe the Four Noble Truths in your own words.

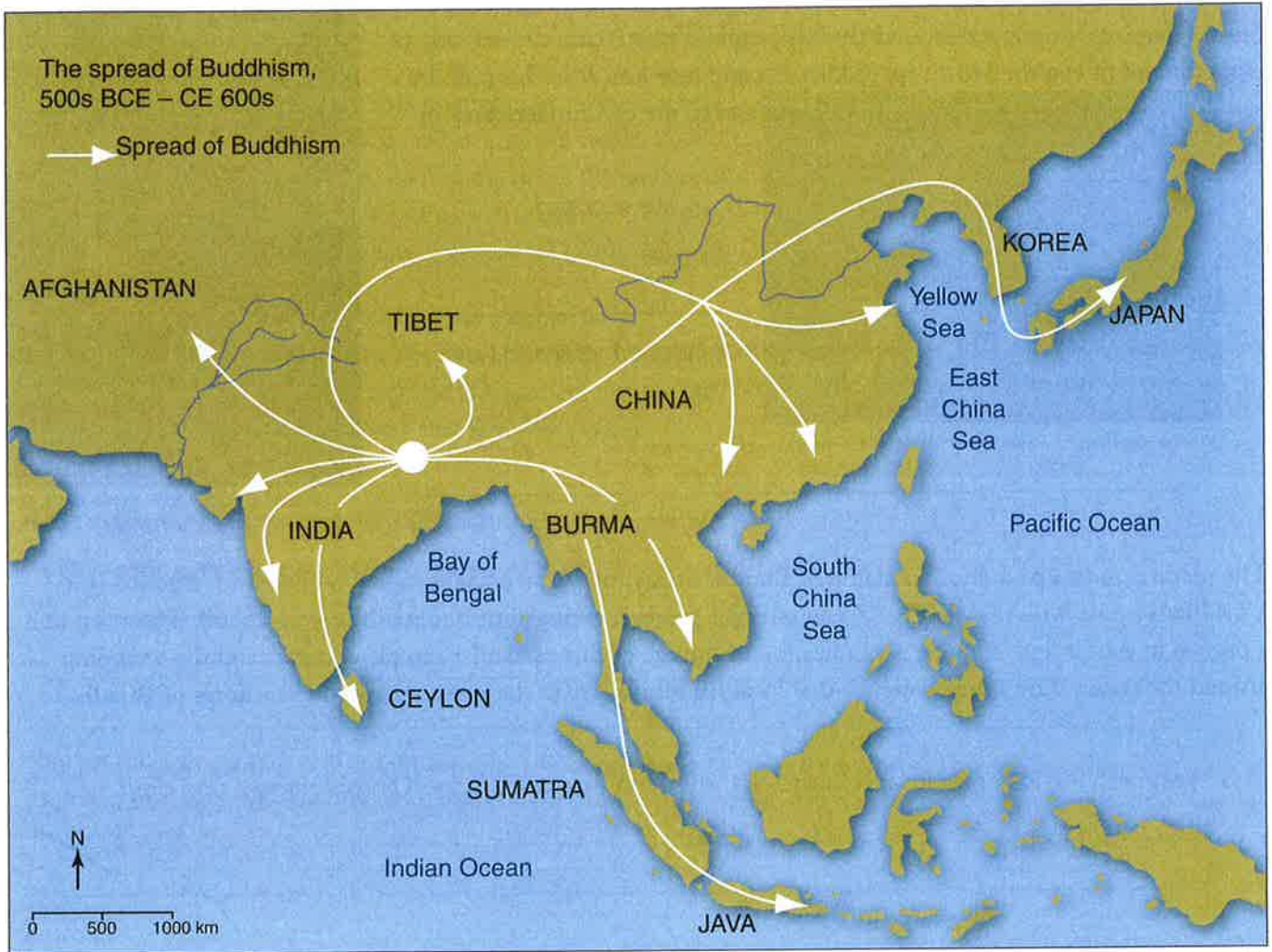
(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

## Spread of Buddhism



Map showing the spread of Buddhism 500s BCE to 600s CE.

7. (a) Look on a map and list where Buddhism is mainly found in the world today. \_\_\_\_\_

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(b) Make a collection of photographs or pictures of Buddhist temples.

8. Use the following websites to find more information about Siddhartha Gautama and Buddha (Enlightened One).

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The Buddhnet website <http://www.buddhanet.net/> and the Alamo Community College Website <http://www.accd.edu/sac/earthsci/lambert/buddhism2.swf> contains an interactive map showing the spread of Buddhism.



Brass bell used in Tibetan Buddhist worship.



## Buddhist history

9. Listed below are some important dates in Buddhist history. Describe these events in your own words and explain how Buddhism changed because of these events.

### Early Buddhist history

Date BCE	History	Description – How did Buddhism change?
528	Date of Buddha's Enlightenment.	
486	Buddhist Council determines the canon of writings (Tripitaka).	
483	Death of Buddha – start of Buddhist calendar.	
386	Second Buddhist Council – First breakaway from Theravada.	
240	Indian Emperor Asoka (272-231 BCE) converts and causes the Dharma to spread through India.	
200	Mahayana Buddhism starts as a separate school.	
68	First Buddhist missionaries in China (Han Dynasty).	

10. The date 528 BCE could be written 528 BC. What does BC and BCE mean? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What do you understand by the following terms?

(a) canon \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Dharma \_\_\_\_\_

(c) converted \_\_\_\_\_



Ruined Buddhist temple in Phonsavan, Laos, destroyed by bombing during the Vietnam War.

### Missionary era of Buddhism

68 BCE	Buddhism is officially established in China.	
200 CE	In the previous years, Buddhists travel from India across to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.	
425	Buddhism reaches Indonesia.	
538	Buddhism travels to China from Korea.	
1000	Islam has replaced Buddhism as the dominant religion in Western Asia.	

12. Research, list and describe some differences between the Buddhism practised in Thailand and Burma, Vietnam, China, Japan and Korea and Tibet. \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

### Establishment and change in Buddhism

1400 CE	Gyalwa Gendun Drubpa (1391-1474) became first Tibetan Dalai Lama.	
1700	Western colonial expansion into Asia brought Christianity as an alternative to Buddhism and traditional religions.	
1800	Thai King Mongkut reformed the monkhood to include more ascetic practices.	
1879	Fifth Buddhist Council in Mandalay, Burma. The text of the Pali Canon was revised and inscribed on 729 marble slabs.	
1950	Chinese invasion of Tibet.	
1959	Dalai Lama flees Tibet for exile.	
1960	Tibetan texts translated in the West.	
1996	Buddhism is the fastest growing religion in Australia.	

## Path to Enlightenment

**The Eightfold Path** is a step-by-step set of instructions for Buddhists to reach Enlightenment. They are described in Unit 22. Part of the process of living involves making ethical decisions. **The Five Precepts** are guides for Buddhists on how to live while they follow this path.

The Precepts are all prefaced by the statement 'I undertake the training to ...' The implication is that the Precepts are not commandments or rules but statements of guidance. Buddhists train to reach the level where they can fulfil the intent of the rule rather than accepting them as a restriction on life. Following each Precept are some associated words.



Buddhist monks accepting food donations in Luang Prabang, Laos.

- I Respect for life: I undertake the training to abstain from taking life (compassion, protection, life).
- II Respect for property: I undertake the training to abstain from taking that which is not given (empathy, generosity, sharing, honesty).
- III Respect for personal relationships: I undertake the training to abstain from sensual misconduct (contentment, respect, integrity, focus).
- IV Respect for truth: I undertake the training to abstain from false speech (truthfulness, confidence, joy).
- V Respect for oneself: I undertake the training to abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind (health, mindfulness, clarity, love).

13. Using some of the words associated with the Precepts describe what actions might show a response for:

(a) Respect for life \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(b) Respect for property \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(c) Respect for personal relationships \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(d) Respect for truth \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(e) Respect for oneself \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Extension

14. How might the monks in the photograph above follow The Five Precepts? Discuss this idea with your group and write a group response.

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