



## Buddhism



Buddhism developed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. during the Classical Era. The founder of this belief system was **Siddhartha Gautama**, now known as Buddha or the “Enlightened One”. Siddhartha came from a small kingdom in the Himalaya Mountains and was a son of a ruling family and lived a very privileged life. At the age of 16 years old he married a princess and started his family. He appeared to have everything anyone could want, but in his 20’s he became aware the suffering people go through during their lives. He decided to make it his life goal to find the cure for this human suffering. He gave up his privileged life, shaved his head, and abandoned his family to set off to find the meaning of life. One evening while Siddhartha was sitting under a tree meditating he reached enlightenment to the meaning of life. He spent the rest of his life sharing his beliefs and his teachings we now know as Buddhism.

Buddhism teaches that the pain that people experience in their lives is caused by their attachment to worldly things. Once people let go of their worldly cares, pain, and sorrow can be forgotten. He also taught others that there were **four noble truths**.

<b>4 Noble Truths</b>
1. All life is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by desire
3. There is a way out of suffering
4. The way out of suffering is to follow the Eightfold Path

**The Eightfold Path** includes; right understanding, purpose, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, awareness, and concentration. If a person wants to stop suffering they must stop desiring worldly things and live a righteous life following **The Eightfold Path**. Reaching **Nirvana** is the ultimate goal of Buddhism in which a person is released from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Buddhism does take some ideas from Hinduism such as dharma (divine law) and karma (what you do comes back to you). But according to Buddhism people did not need rituals or gods and goddesses; everyone can achieve enlightenment on their own. Buddhism was spread throughout the region and many of the “Untouchables” in the caste system decided to convert.

# Hinduism



Hinduism originated with the Aryan people who settled in India during the Classical Era. We learn about the origin of Hinduism in the Vedas, a collection of hymns and religious ceremonies that were passed down verbally (eventually written) through the centuries by Aryan priests. Early Hindus believed in the existence of a single force in the universe which they called **Brahman**. It was the duty of individuals to seek to know the Brahman.

The idea of **Reincarnation** developed in Hinduism in the sixth century B.C. Reincarnation is the belief that the individual soul is reborn in a different form after death. A person is reincarnated into something else based on what they achieved in their past life. If you lived a good life chances are you would come back as a better being than you were in your past life. The ultimate goal was to keep moving through Reincarnation until you reach a union with Brahman. According to Hinduism, that is the ultimate goal of ALL living beings.

Another important part of Hinduism is the belief in **Karma**. Karma is the force generated by a person's actions that determines how they will be reborn in the next life. According to this idea what people do in their current life will affect their next life. Another important concept is the idea of the **dharma**, or the divine law. The law requires that all people do their duty, but each person's duty in life is different based on their status in society. The higher you are on the social scale, the more that is expected of you.

The idea of reincarnation, karma, and dharma all helped explain the need for a rigid social structure in India. India had the **caste system**, a set of rigid social categories that determined not only a person's occupation and economic potential, but also their position in society. The lowest level of Indian society is the "Untouchables" which are not even considered a part of Indian society. The Untouchables were given jobs that other Indians wouldn't do, they were treated as outcasts.

## The Caste System

Hinduism also includes the belief in many human-like gods and goddesses. This means that Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. They have hundreds of gods and goddesses that they worship. Hinduism is still the dominant religion in India today.

