### Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Five percent of the world’s population consider themselves Buddhists – about 400 million people. They call their faith Buddha-sasana, which means “the teaching of Buddha,” or *dharma*, translated “teaching,” “truth,” or “law.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Buddhist faith enjoys great popularity in Japan, China, Tibet, Shi-Lanka, Bhutan, and Southeast Asia. The number of adherents, though, has sharply declined in the 20th century, especially in China, Mongolia and North Korea, due to the influence of communism, and in South Korea, due to the spread of Christianity. Although Buddhism began in India, at present less than one percent of India are Buddhists. This is partially due to the suppression of Buddhism by Moslems in the 11th century.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Buddhism is a multifaceted faith. Keown warns, “Buddhism is a large and complex subject, and we should be wary of generalizations made on the basis of familiarity with any single part.”[[3]](#footnote-3) One reason for this variety of views is that Buddhism adapts to each culture that embraces it.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For example, for many years the dominating worldviews in China were Confucianism and Taoism. When Buddhism entered the picture, however, it intermingled with these other faiths to the point that they united into one philosophical-religious system named the “Three Teachings.” Similarly, in Japan Buddhism merged with Confucianism and Shintoism. In addition, Buddhism may adapt its views to accommodate to local, tribal cults.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**1. History**

The founder of Buddhism is Siddhārtha Gautama, who lived in the sixth or fifth centuries BC, but the exact dates of his life are unknown. He passed through three distinct life-epochs. First, he lived a life devoted to pleasure. Next, he experienced doubts as to the meaning of life and began to seek enlightenment. At age 35, he supposedly found enlightenment while sitting under a Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, and from that time became a religious teacher and leader.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Many have commented on the life of Gautama.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, we must note that his history has been elaborated with claims and legends that are difficult to confirm. Likely, he was born into a wealthy royal family, but renounced his wealth and position in search of enlightenment. According to legend, he was born of a virgin, and prior to that his mother received a vision of a white elephant (a sacred animal) entering her womb.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It is also claimed that, at age 29, he encountered a number of figures that compelled him to consider the meaning of life: an elderly man, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic-wise man.[[9]](#footnote-9) Because of this experience, he abandoned his home and became an ascetic monk for 6 years, seeking enlightenment. Yet, as Baumann claims, this search for meaning was not unique to Gautama, but “in those days monks and ascetic orders commonly sought to find and teach final solutions to the human sufferings of old age, sickness, and death.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Nonetheless, Gautama became disillusioned with the ascetic life, since it did not provide him with the enlightenment he sought. Yet, his experience in asceticism proved valuable in forming his view of the “Middle Path.” He discovered that neither wealth, nor poverty can satisfy the human need for authentic living.

The final epoch of Gautama’s story began when he sat under a Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, where, allegedly, he received enlightenment. Some believe that before receiving enlightenment, Gautama battled the demon Mara and overcame his temptations. Keown comments on the importance of this experience of enlightenment for Buddhists: “The Buddha’s personal experience of enlightenment is the bedrock of the entire Buddhist tradition. Time and again he invoked his own experience as authority for his doctrines.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

From the time of his enlightenment, Gautama became a travelling preacher and teacher for 40 years, promoting his doctrines. Through his teaching, Gautama, reportedly, made the first turn of the “wheel of *dharma*.” His first disciples, called *arhats*, were fellow monks from his ascetic days. They made up the first monastic order of Buddhism, the *sangha*, which in time included women as well.

Because of his experience of enlightenment, Gautama became known as “Buddha,” which means “the Awakened One.” He also bears the title *Bhagavat*, or “lord.” He supposedly performed miracles and displayed supernatural powers, yet this is difficult to confirm. It is believed that Buddha could have attained *nirvana*, yet refrained from entering it in order to teach others the way.

When Buddha died, he appointed no successor, but claimed that his teaching, the *dharma*, would provide his movement the needed direction. His monastic order, the *sangha*, passed down his teaching by oral tradition about 400 years until his followers finally recorded it in the *Pāli* Canon, or the *Tipitaka* (see below).

After Buddha’s death, his disciples began holding periodic councils. Eventually, they divided into two factions: *Theravada*, that is the “Teaching of the Elders,” and *Mahayana*, the “Great Vehicle.” The main difference between the two centered on a disagreement about who could attain *nirvana* – only monks, or laity also. A third movement arose from *Mahayana* named *Vajrayana*. We will discuss these movements more in detail later.

Several key events led to the spread of Buddhism. In the third century BC, the Indian king Ashoka converted to Buddhism and actively promoted the religion of Buddha. In the sixth century AD, the emperor of China converted, and two centuries later the king of Tibet. Tibet also boasts the most famous teacher of Buddhism – the Dalai Lama.

**2. Scripture**

In investigating the scriptures of Buddhism, we encounter the problem of its transmission. Buddha’s teachings were passed down orally for about 400 years (some say 500). In the version that was finally written, we observe indications of adaptations by one Buddhist faction or the other. Bareau offers the following commentary:

The actual, original teaching of the Buddha is accessible to us only through the canonic texts of these (*Hinayana*) schools, texts that were set down in writing only about the beginning of the common era and reflect the divergences that already existed among these sects. Moreover, only a very small part of this vast canonic literature has survived, either in its original Indian language or in Chinese or Tibetan translation, and for this reason our knowledge of the doctrine taught by the Buddha himself still remains rather vague and conjectural.[[12]](#footnote-12)

For at least five centuries, the Buddha’s teaching was actually preserved by oral transmission alone… This and the absence of an authoritative ecclesiastical hierarchy in the *sangha* constitute two obvious sources of progressive distortion and alteration of the message left by the Blessed One to his immediate disciples.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Lopez confirms, “The original teachings of the historical Buddha are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recover or reconstruct.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Nonetheless, Buddhists acknowledge as sacred scripture the *Pāli* Canon, created in the first century BC during the Fourth Buddhist Council. The *Pāli* Canon is also called the *Tipitaka*, or the “Three Baskets.” The first part, the *Vinaya Pitaka*, contains rules for monks. The second, *Sutta Pitaka*, preserves the life, preaching and sayings (*sutra*) of Buddha. The third, *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, is ascribed to Buddha’s disciples, and contains various philosophical teachings that elaborate Buddhist doctrines.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Followers of the *Mahayana* teaching also recognize the *Lotus Sutra*, which relates a different version of the life of Buddha and a version of his teaching, which they consider more authoritative.[[16]](#footnote-16) The *Mahayana* claim that Buddha could not pass on these teachings to his disciples during his lifetime, because they would not have understood them. After his death, however, he revealed them, and the *Lotus Sutra* records them.

Buddhists also revere other works. *Abhidharma* is Buddhist *dharma* in a systematic format. The *Acts of Buddha*, written in the first century AD, relate incidents in Buddha’s life. The *Prajnaparamita-Sutra*, accepted by *Mahayana*, is the “Guide to Perfect Wisdom.” *Jataka-*tales allegedly tell of previous lives of Buddha. *Vajrayana* accepts *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* as sacred scripture. Finally, monks have written commentaries, called *Shastra*.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**3. Teaching**

The teachings of Buddhism are called *dharma*. Buddhists hold that Buddha did not invent *dharma*, which includes not only teaching, but also laws that govern the cosmos, but simply discovered it.[[18]](#footnote-18) The starting point for Buddhists is the “Three Refuges,” which must be repeated three times by a new convert or someone entering a monastic order.[[19]](#footnote-19) The devoted Buddhist will also repeat them several times a day.[[20]](#footnote-20)

I go for refuge in Buddha.

I go for refuge in *dharma* (the teachings).

I go for refuge in *sangha* (the Buddhist community).

The cornerstone of Buddha’s teachings is his “Four Noble Truths.” First, suffering exists. Second, suffering is the result of unfulfilled human desire. Third, one must find liberation from desire. Fourth, liberation from desire comes by observing the “Eightfold Path.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Let us attempt to describe these items in more detail. When people strive for satisfaction and self-realization (so-called *trishna* or *tanha*), they experience disappointment (*duhkha*) when they fail to attain them. However, according to Buddhist thought, the problem consists namely in this: that people consider themselves individual, existing beings.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Buddha taught that the existence of the self was an illusion. People’s experience consist of several components: body (*rupa*), sensations (*vendana*), perceptions (*samjna*), dispositions (*samskaras*) and consciousness (*vijnana*). Yet, humans lack a centralizing factor that unifies these components into a whole personality. In other words, people have no soul or individuality. These components interact with one another and create the illusion that they relate to a concrete person.[[23]](#footnote-23)

When a person dies, though, these components disperse and rejoin in a different combination, making up, as it were, a new personality. The only element that is “preserved” from the original combination is “awareness” (*vijnana*).[[24]](#footnote-24) A person still retains awareness of himself/herself as “me,” in whatever form he/she takes. Metz describes this idea: “The person is actually a flowing stream of *dharmas*, which continually changes and which after death rearranges itself to form a new individual.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

So then, a person needs to accept that he/she is not an individual, but simply a combination of elements without a unifying center. When someone understands this, he/she will realize that striving for satisfaction or self-realization is senseless. How can a non-existing entity attain self-realization? The devotee is now in position to attain liberation from suffering.

Consequently, a person’s primary enemies are desire and hatred. On the one hand, a person desires to live a satisfying life. On the other hand, when his/her happiness is threatened, he/she defends it by manifesting hatred. According to Buddhist teaching, desire and hatred derive from ignorance of the fact that the individual, in fact, does not really exist. Deliverance (*prajna*) from ignorance (*avidya*) results in liberation from desire, hatred and the suffering that arises from them, that is, it results in *nirvana*.

Lopez describes it in this way: “There is, in fact, no permanent and autonomous self in the mind or the body, and to believe otherwise is the root cause of all suffering. It is this imagined self that is inflamed by desire and defended by hatred.”[[26]](#footnote-26) Keown writes, “The recognition that there is ultimately no subject that ‘has’ desires weakens and finally destroys craving once and for all,”[[27]](#footnote-27) and further, “When craving is removed suffering ceases and *nirvana* is attained.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Unlike Hinduism, where *nirvana* is a merging with Brahman, in Buddhism *nirvana* is “the end of all transitory states; the final, peaceful bliss; the ultimate goal of each individual… an inscrutable state of absolute transcendence.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Clearly, the Buddhist conception of *nirvana* is hard to grasp. In fact, as Keown claims, the Buddhist is not so concerned to understand *nirvana*, as to attain it.[[30]](#footnote-30) Buddhists approaching this state are called *arhats*.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Buddhist teaching also differs from Hindu teaching in that the former rejects the existence of *Atman*, i.e. an inner “point of contact” with Brahman. Instead, Buddhism advances the idea *anatman*, which means that at the center of human existence there is no “point of contact” with Brahman, but *synyata*, that is, nothingness.[[32]](#footnote-32)

It is also important to note that in Buddhist thought, not only is the human a combination of factors, but the universe is as well. This doctrine, called “dependent arising,” claims that everything in the universe is interdependent, which means that there is no “independent” object or being, which does not depend on something else.[[33]](#footnote-33)

As mentioned above, the way to attain awareness of one’s non-existence (*prajna*) is to observe the “Eightfold Path,” which is a “Middle Way” between sensuality and asceticism. It consists of the following elements:[[34]](#footnote-34)

1. Right view (acceptance of the Four Noble Truths)
2. Right resolves (“commitment to develop right attitudes,” no hatred)
3. Right speech (no lying or gossip)
4. Right behavior (no killing, stealing)
5. Right livelihood (“having employment not to detriment of others”)
6. Right effort (“generating wholesome states”)
7. Right mindfulness (clarity of thought)
8. Right concentration (meditation)

The first two of these elements concern wisdom (*prajna*), the next three – morals (*shila*), the last three – meditation (*dhyana* or *samadhi*). Each of these categories of religious activity serves a specific goal: *prajna* leads to liberation from the illusion of individuality, *shila* – to moral living, and *samadhi* – to enlightenment through meditation.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Buddhims shares with Hinduism faith in *karma* and *sansara*, i.e. the cycle in reincarnations. Although at death the components of the person disperse, the principle of *karma* guarantees that his/her awareness (*vijnana*) continues on in the next life. A person’s *karma* is determined not only by a person’s deeds, but also by the motivation behind those deeds.[[36]](#footnote-36)

The ten acts that result in bad *karma* are murder, stealing, improper sexual behavior, lying, causing divisions among people, harsh speech, foolish speech, pride, evil intent and improper viewpoint. Contrasting behaviors result in good *karma*.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The cosmology of Buddhism in complicated.[[38]](#footnote-38) According to the Buddhist view, there are three spheres of reality: the sphere of desire, the sphere of form and the sphere of formlessness. People live in the sphere of desire; gods live in the higher spheres, nearer to enlightenment or *nirvana*. Still, *sansara* affects the gods as well, and their fate in the next life depends on *karma*.

It is said that in the sphere of desire exist four islands, one of which, known as *Jambudvipa*, is inhabited by the people of our world. These four islands surround Mount Meru, where the gods live and seek enlightenment through meditation. Under Mount Meru, there are several layers of hell. Reincarnated in the lowest hell are those who kill father or mother, and *arhats*, who have wounded a Buddha or caused division in the *sangha*.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Four levels that the gods inhabit are situated on Mount Meru (and above it). The lower gods inhabit the sphere of form, and the higher gods – the sphere without form. Gods in the sphere of form have sensory perception except for taste and smell. “Formless” gods have no body or sense perception at all. They exist only in a condition of consciousness.

In order to be reincarnated to a higher condition in the sphere of desire, all that is required in good *karma*. The majority of Buddhists strive for this goal. In order to enter the sphere of form, one must devote oneself to meditation as well. The monks strive for this goal. In addition, the adherents of *Mahayana* believe that more than one Buddha exists, and that they live in the “Worlds of Buddha.” A layperson may attain reincarnation there, where his/her attainment of enlightenment is accelerated.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Buddhism teaches that the universe is eternal and passes through cycles of evolution and degradation. After every 20 cycles, the universe disintegrates and the process begins anew. So then, time proceeds cyclically with no goal in mind. It is said that we now live in a period of degradation, during which our life expectancy decreases and conditions in the world worsen.

**4. Divisions**

There exist three main divisions or branches in Buddhism: *Theravada*, *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana*. The first two are more widespread movements, while the third is more prevalent in Tibet and is also known as Tantra Buddhism. Among the *Mahayana,* two subdivisions exist: Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism.

Here we may also mention a reform taking place among some contemporary Buddhists to remove superstition and magical tendencies from Buddhism and focus more on morality and meditation. This reform includes a return to the original teaching of Buddha. In addition, reformers support the idea that *nirvana* is accessible to the laity.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**а. *Theravada* (*Hinayana*)**

*Theravada* makes up 38% of worldwide Buddhism and is prominent in Sri-Lanka and Southeast Asia. The name itself means “the original teaching” or “the teaching of the elders.” It was one of the original twelve Buddhist schools of thought, and the only one to survive from the early period. The *Theravada* branch of Buddhism is also known as *Hinayana*, or “the Lesser Vehicle,” which contrasts with *Mahayana,* the “Great Vehicle.” The *Mahayana*, in fact, ascribed this title to *Theravada* in order to demean it.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The main distinction of *Theravada* is the convictionthat only monks may attain to enlightenment. Consequently, the goal of *Theravada* is to become an *arhat*, i.e. a monk approaching *nirvana*.[[43]](#footnote-43) In addition, *Theravada* teaches that there is only one Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, who was a mere human. Correspondingly, only the words of Buddha are sacred, that is, the *Pāli* Canon. Unlike *Mahayana*, Buddhists in the *Theravada* branch reject the idea that the “spirit” of Buddha can be incarnated in subsequent Buddhas.[[44]](#footnote-44)

**b. *Mahayana* and Related Movements**

In this section, we will discuss not only the *Mahayana* branch of Buddhism, but also two movements arising from it: Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism.

**1) *Mahayana***

*Mahayana* Buddhism makes up 62% of all Buddhism and is especially prevalent in Central and East Asia, namely in Tibet, Korea, Japan and China. As was already mentioned, the term *Mahayana* means the “Great Vehicle.” Its teaching originated in the first century AD.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Several features distinguish *Mahayana*. First, it teaches that not only monks may attain enlightenment, but laypersons also. Second, there are many Buddhas. More specifically, Buddha is an eternal being with three “bodies” (so-called *Trikaya*). The highest form is *dharma-kaya* (or “the body of *dharma*”), which is “an all- pervading principle,” or the “essence of the entire universe.”[[46]](#footnote-46) Next, Buddha may take upon himself a more concrete spiritual body, or *sambhoga-kaya*. The most famous manifestation of this form is Amida. Finally, Buddha may take on physical form, *nirmama-kaya*. One such manifestation was Siddhartha Gautama. So then, Gautama did not receive enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, but only pretended to – he was actually already enlightened. There will also reportedly be a future manifestation of Buddha, Maitreya, who will introduce an era of universal enlightenment.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Another key aspect of *Mahayana* is faith in the so-called *bodhisattvas*. This is a class of beings, which are already able to enter *nirvana*, but refrain from entering it order to help others find the way. They are able to communicate to others the good *karma* they received during their earthly lives, which can accelerate the process of others obtaining enlightenment. The number of *bodhisattvas* is apparently endless. The most famous of them is Avalokitesvara, who, supposedly, is incarnate in the leaders of Tibetian Buddhism, the Dalai-Lamas.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Since Buddha (Gautama) refrained from entering *nirvana* as well, he is still able to give new revelation to his followers. Therefore, *Mahayana* Buddhists accept as sacred scripture not only the *Pāli* Canon, but also the *sutra* of Buddha, such as *Lotus* *Sutra* and the *Prajnaparamita-Sutra*, which were, allegedly, later revealed to *Mahayana* Buddhists. *Theravada*Buddhists reject these additional writings.[[49]](#footnote-49)

*Mahayana* Buddhists, both monks and laity, must strive to become *bodhisattvas.*  That goal, however, is not easily accomplished. Reportedly, it takes 384 x 1058 years to attain it. The first step in that process is taking a vow to devote oneself to helping others reach enlightenment. Next comes the task of developing certain character qualities, such as generosity, morality, patience, courage and wisdom, along with meditative skills. So then, unlike *Theravada*, where the goal is to become an *arhat* on the way to personal attainment of *nirvana*, in *Mahayana* the aim is to become a *bodhisattva*, who helps others reach that stage.[[50]](#footnote-50)

In conclusion, we will briefly mention two other philosophical movements that arose in *Mahayana*: *Yogacara* and *Madhyamika*. These movements challenge the generally accepted postulate of *Mahayana* that the ultimate element making up the essence of reality is *dharma-kaya* (see above). Followers of *Yogacara* feel the ultimate reality is the mind. In *Madhyamika* – it is nothingness.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**2) Zen Buddhism**

Zen Buddhism arose in China in the third-fourth centuries AD, and is, in fact, a combination of native philosophy and *Mahayana* Buddhism. It is especially popular in Japan.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Although Zen is classified within *Mahayana* Buddhism, in many ways it differs from it. For example, Zen rejects the deity of Buddha and the existence of *bodhisattvas* – each person must work out his/her own way to *nirvana* without the assistance of these beings. At the same time, gurus (“masters”) do assist the devotee in his/her meditation.[[53]](#footnote-53)

According to Zen teaching, an all-encompassing “Buddha nature” penetrates all things, including human nature, and is the basis for all reality. The goal of the Zen-devotee is to discover and liberate this Buddha nature within oneself through meditation. Wright describes it thus: “The Buddha-nature is immanent in all beings, and … its discovery through meditation and introspection brings release from illusion.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

One form of Zen, named *Soto*, teaches that enlightenment comes by a slow process. Another school of thought, *Rinzai,* proposes that it comes by a crisis experience, named *satori*, which occurs during meditation. The devotee meditates on the idea that the “Buddha nature” lies at the core of reality, and that it consists of nothing (*sunyata*). Therefore, the goal of meditation is to realize that the basis of human existence is emptiness, i.e. *sunyata.*[[55]](#footnote-55)

In the *Rinzai* school, we observe two approaches to attaining *satori*. First, devotees may practice typical meditation, or *zazen*. Second, they may utilize special techniques, specifically *mondo* and *koan*. *Mondo* consists of giving quick answers to rapid questions, and *koan* is the posing of illogical, unsolvable riddles. The goal of these exercises is to break down the devotee’s logical thought processes, so that he/she may experience *satori* directly through a mystical experience.[[56]](#footnote-56) As Nigosian expresses it, the devotee must “accept the limitations of human reasoning, and … probe beyond the barriers of rational thinking to insight.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

**3) Pure Land Buddhism**

This form of Buddhism appeared in India in the second century AD and today is one of the more widespread forms of Buddhism in East Asia, especially in China and Japan. According to this teaching, there is a certain Buddha named Amitabha, who has enough good *karma* to save all people.[[58]](#footnote-58) Amitabha lives in the so-called “Pure Land,” and invites all who desire to come there. All that is required is to call on his name in faith. If a person arrives in the “Pure Land,” he/she will find it easier to meditate, and in such conditions, he/she will attain *nirvana* sooner. This teaching is found in the *Prajna* *Sutra.*[[59]](#footnote-59)

**c. *Vajrayana* (*Mantrayana*)**

The so-called “Third Vehicle” of Buddhism is *Vajrayana* or *Mantrayana.*  Some consider it simply another branch of *Mahayana.* The term *Vajrayana* means “Diamond Vehicle,” and *Mantrayana* – “Mantra Vehicle.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

*Vajrayana* dates back to the sixth century AD. It enjoys great popularity in Tibetan Buddhism, or “Lamaism,” headed by the Dalai-Lama, who is considered to be the incarnation of Avalokitesvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion*.*[[61]](#footnote-61) In fact, in Tibet the confession of Buddhist faith includes a fourth element:

I go for refuge in Buddha.

I go for refuge in *dharma* (the teachings).

I go for refuge in *sangha* (the Buddhist community).

I go for refuge in Dalai-Lama.[[62]](#footnote-62)

The distinctive feature of this movement is the employment of special meditative methods and visualization to accelerate attainment of *nirvana*, even in this life. This “fast track” to *nirvana* is described in the scriptures of *Vajrayana*, namely the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur.*[[63]](#footnote-63)

*Vajrayana* is also known as esoteric Buddhism, or *Tantrayana*. Many aspects of this teaching are shrouded in mystery and are revealed only in private by one’s personal guru.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**5. Religious Practices**

In Buddhism, the obligations of the monks differ from that of the laity. Although some branches of Buddhism teach that both monks and laity can attain *nirvana*, from a practical point of view, monks still have an advantage in that they can devote more time to meditation.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Monks live on the offerings of the laity. Yet, the laity do this willingly, since they receive good *karma* for it. Nonetheless, at times monks must beg for support. Even though monks differ in class from laypeople, there is no caste system in Buddhism.[[66]](#footnote-66)

The layperson is obliged to observe five basic rules: no killing (any living thing), no stealing, no lying, no adultery, no drunkenness. Other stipulations include earning an honest living, having a good reputation, and the proper use of money: for the happiness of others, the happiness of family, personal protection and the support of monks. The conscientious Buddhist observes these obligations with pure motivation as well. Therefore, the sincere Buddhist must not only observe rules, but also develop good character.[[67]](#footnote-67)

In addition to the five basic rules of conduct, listed above, Buddhist monks observe five others: no eating after noon, no sleeping on high beds, no handling of money, no adorning of self, and no attendance at musical performances. Monks observe many other rules as well that direct nearly every aspect of their lives. The entire code of behavior is known as *vinaya*.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Let us comment more on the monastic life.[[69]](#footnote-69) Monks do not worship so much as meditate, seeking *nirvana*. Yet, the *Mantrayana* monks do pray to the *bodhisattvas.*  Monks do not fulfill any sacerdotal or mediatorial function in Buddhist society. Some monks, though, become philosophers or teachers of *dharma*. Sometimes monks are permitted to work or marry. Although the monastic life is open to women as well, the number of woman monks is small.[[70]](#footnote-70)

All monks and dedicated Buddhists focus on meditation. Keown comments, “Virtually all schools of Buddhism see meditation as the high road to enlightenment.”[[71]](#footnote-71) The devotee occupies a certain bodily position, repeats a mantra and reflects on some concept “until the awareness of subject and object dissolves in a unified field of consciousness.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

At the same time, Buddha taught that this type of meditation does not lead to enlightenment, but only soothes the soul. In order to reach enlightenment, one must distance oneself from all sensibilities, physical and emotional. Only in this way can one become aware of the transient nature of reality and the absence of the personal soul.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Another important aspect of Buddhist religious life is visitation of *stupas* and *pagodas*, some of which are thought to contain relics of Buddha. Pilgrims also visit monuments to unknown *bodhisattvas.* The most sacred site for a pilgrimage is Bodh Gaya, where Buddha, supposedly, received his enlightenment. There exist numerous statues of Buddha, and he is thought to reside in them.[[74]](#footnote-74) In the words of Lopez, “Icons thus empowered were treated as spiritual beings possessed of magical powers, to be worshipped with regular offerings.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

**6. Evaluation**

As noted above, Buddhism shares a number of common features with Hinduism and therefore is subject to the same critique. Buddhism embraces the concepts of *karma* and reincarnation, which find no confirmation in human consciousness. It seems strange that a person, having passed through innumerable reincarnations, would have no recollection of previous lives. In addition, under normal conditions people have an awareness of their personhood and individuality. To the sound mind, the idea that the individual does not exist appears absurd.

Moreover, like Hinduism, Buddhism also postulates that the essence of reality is either nothingness or an impersonal principle. This places the impersonal above the personal, which, again, contradicts universal human judgment. If the Absolute is impersonal, then people occupy a position of higher development and capability than it does. Additionally, with rare exceptions, people value the personal above the impersonal. With another personal being, one can have fellowship, spend time, and share affection, all of which is impossible with an impersonal force.[[76]](#footnote-76)

We may also challenge the basis of Buddhist faith. Buddha claimed to have received enlightenment, but how can we verify that? Anyone can claim, and many have claimed, to have found the way of truth. There is no external or verified supernatural confirmation of Buddha’s claims. As far as we know, his teachings may be of his own creation.

We note another curious feature. The root of Buddhist aspiration is deliverance from suffering, which, in Buddhist thought, requires liberation from desire. Yet, here we encounter a contradiction. Deliverance from all desire requires *having a desire for deliverance from desire*. Consequently, it is impossible, as well as “undesirable,” to be delivered from all desire.

Furthermore, is deliverance from suffering really the ultimate value in life? In fact, the system of *bodhisattvas* directly contradicts this fundamental principle. A *bodhisattva*, allegedly, refrains from entering *nirvana* (and thus subjects himself to hardship) for the sake of others. So then, what is the higher value: deliverance from suffering, or subjecting oneself to suffering for the sake of others?

In connection with *bodhisattvas*, we must note their fairytale-like character. Buddhists assume the reality of innumerable *bodhisattvas*, yet we have no objective evidence of their existence. They believe that the *bodhisattvas*, or Buddha himself, are present in statues, relics and stupas. Yet, these objects are inanimate and give no evidence of a divine indwelling. If the essence of reality is emptiness or an impersonal principle, then whom are they worshipping? The fact is that every person has an irrepressible desire to worship due to his/her inherent awareness of God’s existence (see chapter 3). Buddhism, however, cannot provide the worshipper a genuine relationship with a personal Absolute, and, consequently, cannot meet that universal human need.[[77]](#footnote-77)

All that Buddhism can offer is the annihilation of the individual personality, absorbed into nothingness. However, embracing this as a life goal runs contrary to normal and healthy human ambition. Humans of sound mind have as their life goal some type of progress or achievement, not self-annihilation.

We may comment further on the original reason for Buddhism’s rise – the desire for deliverance from suffering. Buddhism seeks to solve this dilemma by denying the reality of the human individual and his/her normal desires. A preferred solution is trust in God, who will eventually eliminate all suffering and lead believers in Him into His glorious kingdom.

Finally, Buddhism is faulty in regard to ethics. If the basis of reality is nothingness, then what can serve as a standard for the moral living that Buddhism itself promotes?

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8. Hexham, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. According to another version of the story, he saw a youth, an elderly man, a sick person and then a corpse (see Hexham, p. 183-184). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Baumann, v. 1, p. 419-420. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Keown, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bareau, v. 2, p. 1192. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid, v. 2, p. 1193. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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15. https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pāli\_Canon; Corduan, p. 68; Metz, p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Baumann, v. 1, p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Hexham, p. 201; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1092-1093; Keown, p. 9, 16-17; Metz, p. 234; Halverson, p. 60; Lopez D. S. Jr. Religions of Tibet in Practice // Lopez D. Jr. Asian religions in practice. – Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999. – P. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Keown, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Esposito, p. 372; Nigosian, p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Keown calls this stable factor “moral identity” (see Keown, p. 48). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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35. Halverson, p. 54-59; Esposito, p. 364. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
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47. Corduan, p. 188; Tennent, p. 94; Lopez, Buddhism, p. 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
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49. Lopez, Buddhism, p. 58; Keown, p. 62; Davis, p. 78; Hexham, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
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61. Davis, p. 57-58; Baumann, v. 1, p. 421; Reynolds, v. 2, p. 1093; Lopez, Tibet, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
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63. Halverson, p. 56-57; Lopez, Tibet, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
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67. Keown, p. 99; Esposito, p. 375-376. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
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