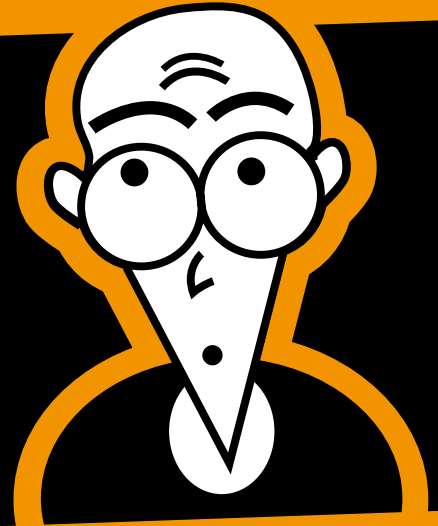


BUDDHISM FOR DUMMIES



Buddhism in a nutshell

- Fourth largest religion in the world; second largest religion in Australia
- Founded in Northern India
- Two main forms:

Theravada – the dominant, traditional school of Buddhism, found in South East Asia (Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, Laos). Follow only the recorded words of the Buddha.

Mahayana – largely found in China, Japan, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia. Accepted many additional 'inspired' books and words of wisdom.

Life of Buddha

Early life: Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in India about AD 563 and raised as a Hindu. He lived an extravagant life. In early adulthood, after an encounter that opened his eyes to a world filled with suffering, he renounced the extravagant life and wandered off into the world in search of truth.

Ah-Ha moment: After much meditation and fasting (often only eating a few grains of rice each day!) he discovered that both the life of luxury and the life of extreme self-denial weren't going to get him anywhere. He determined that a better path to achieve Nirvana – a state of freedom from suffering – was to pursue a 'Middle Way'. One night, while sitting under a tree, he attained Nirvana, and was henceforth known as a Buddha (Enlightened One).

Legacy: He spent the remainder of his life travelling throughout India teaching others about how to achieve enlightenment.

Karma and Reincarnation

A key idea of Buddhism is that of Karma - the law of consequences. This is the theory that good and bad deeds will return to a person. Karma plays out in an endless cycle of rebirth, in the cycle of reincarnation, meaning that the actions of this life will determine how you'll be reborn – as a rat or a god. It's best to be reborn as a human as it presents the opportunity to escape from the endless rotation of rebirth and suffering.

Beliefs shared with Christianity

- Life after death. In Buddhism, though, humans are trying to escape being trapped in the continuous cycle.
- Themes of morality, justice and love e.g. do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

- The understanding that we live in a broken world filled with suffering, much of which is caused by selfish desire.
- Practice of meditation.

Beliefs not shared

- The origin and end of the world are left unexplained by Buddha.
- In Buddhism, ignorance, not sin, is considered the roadblock to salvation (or Nirvana), and therefore there is no need for a saviour.
- In its original form, Buddhism did not teach the existence of a god, and in fact demonstrates the futility of searching for one.

Fat or Thin?

There are two typical types of Buddha statues. The 'thin' one is typical in Thailand and other South East Asian countries. This is said to be a representation of the first Buddha, who was thin due to extreme fasting. The 'fat' laughing Buddha is more popular in China. It is regarded as lucky to rub the fat Buddha's tummy or drop a coin in his belly button.

Monks

Buddhist monks are easily identified by their shaved heads and striking orange or maroon coloured robes. In the early days, this was the most readily available dye, ground from the forest roots. This simple clothing symbolises the vow they have taken to live a simple life.

Buddhist Wisdom

"When you realise how perfect everything is you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky."

"However many holy words you read, however many you speak, what good will they do you if you do not act upon them?"

"Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful."

Famous Buddhists

Orlando Bloom, Richard Gere, Jennifer Lopez, Uma Thurman.