

LESSON 4

2500
B.C.

2000
B.C.

1500
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1000
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563
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100
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Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

What did the Buddha teach?

VOCABULARY

Buddhism

monk

karma

Four Noble Truths

Eightfold Path

Middle Way

PEOPLE

Siddhartha Gautama

PLACES

Kosala

BEGINNINGS OF BUDDHISM

READ ALOUD

According to its followers, the founder of one of the world's major religions began his life as a prince in a mountain kingdom of northern India. He enjoyed all the best the world had to offer him—the finest clothes, many servants, and a beautiful palace for each season of the year. As a young man, though, the prince gave up his fame and fortune to seek the true meaning of life. His followers believe he found the answer. The man would become known as “the Buddha.”

THE BIG PICTURE

Between about 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C., Aryan settlers spread eastward across the Indian subcontinent. They conquered many towns and cities as they went. By around 500 B.C. Aryan princes were in control of much of the Indian subcontinent.

In the far north, at the base of the Himalayas, some kingdoms held onto their independence. To keep their freedom, however, they had to make yearly payments to Aryan rulers to the south. In spite of this, conflict and struggle remained a part of their lives. Some Indians began to look for answers to life's problems beyond the Vedas. One was the prince described in the Read Aloud. His name was **Siddhartha Gautama** (suh DAHR tuh GOW tah muh). The answers he found would become **Buddhism** (BOOD ihz um), a religion that continues to attract followers. Today there are more than 330 million Buddhists.

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Siddhartha Gautama is traditionally said to have been born around 563 B.C. His parents were the king and queen of **Kosala**, a northern kingdom near the Himalayas. Siddhartha means “He Who Has Reached His Goal” in Sanskrit.

The Young Prince

Ancient Buddhist writings say that Siddhartha’s mother dreamed about her son’s future. The dreams predicted that if Siddhartha stayed at home, he would rule a great kingdom. If he left home, he would become a wise teacher and **monk**. A monk is a man who devotes his life to a religious group. Monks often give up all they own and live only a religious way of life.

Siddhartha’s father wanted the boy to be a king. From that point on, Buddhist texts state, the king did all he could to keep his son happy at home. He had the best singing groups entertain his son and arranged for the prince to marry the woman of his dreams. He built stunning gardens around the royal palace so Siddhartha would be surrounded by beauty.

Discovery in the Garden

Even in his own garden, though, the king could not shelter Siddhartha from sorrow forever. One day the prince went for a ride in the royal gardens. There he spotted an elderly man hobbling painfully along with a cane. Siddhartha asked his chariot driver what was wrong with the man. He learned that all people grow old someday and said, “Shame on birth, since to everyone that is born, old age must come!”

During another ride through the gardens, Siddhartha saw someone



The young Siddhartha was introduced to sickness, old age, and death in his daily rides through his father’s gardens.

who was very ill. It troubled him to find out that sickness was part of life. On yet another day the prince came upon a funeral procession. He learned that death was a part of life.

Finally Siddhartha spotted a man in the park who seemed to be at peace with the world. The man was calm even though he was asking people for help in getting his next meal. Siddhartha asked his driver who the man was and learned that the man was a monk. The prince was amazed that someone could be so at peace in a world filled with sorrow and suffering.

That day, Buddhist texts state, the prince made a difficult decision. He chose to give up all he had and become a monk. After saying good-bye to his wife and newborn son, he left the palace. His journey to find the meaning of life had begun.



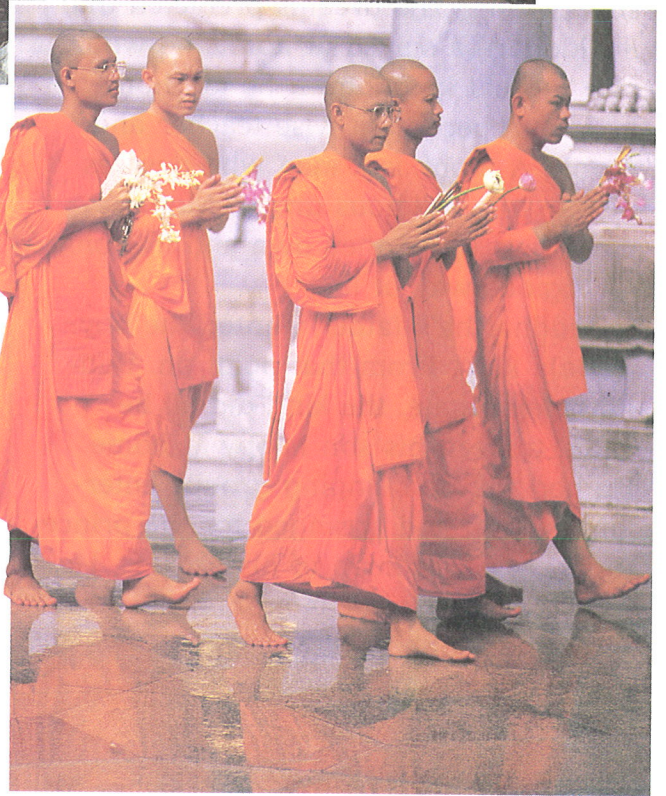
THE TRAVELS OF THE BUDDHA

For the next six years, Siddhartha traveled throughout northern India as a monk. In his search for wisdom, he talked at length with Hindu priests, but felt their answers were not enough. To clear his mind, he stopped eating, but began again when he nearly starved himself to death.

At last, Buddhist texts say, an understanding came to the former prince one day as he sat under a fig tree. The wisdom it is said he received that day would later earn him the title *the Buddha*, which means “Awakened One.”

The Teachings of Buddhism

Some of the Buddha’s ideas were not new to India. He used some Hindu ideas and changed others. Like Hindus, the Buddha believed that all people went through a circle of birth, death, and rebirth, or reincarnation. Also like Hindus, he believed in **karma**. Karma is described by both Hindus and Buddhists as a force caused by a person’s good and bad acts. Karma is said to affect future lives.



Buddhist prayer flags (top) float in the breeze near Kanchenjunga, India, the world’s third-highest mountain. Buddhist monks (above) in Thailand wear traditional robes.

Unlike Hindus, the Buddha did not search for the one powerful force believed to connect all of life. Instead, the Buddha believed that the most important thing in life was to reach peace by ending suffering. How did he reach his conclusion, and how did he hope to reach this end?

The Way to End Suffering

Buddhist texts say that as he sat under the tree that day, the Buddha concluded that life is ruled by **Four Noble Truths**.

1. Life is filled with suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by people's wants. People may want more pleasure, more power, or a longer life.
3. Suffering can be ended if people stop wanting things.
4. To stop wanting things, people must follow eight basic laws.

The Buddha explained these Four Noble Truths to his followers, but they were not written down until later. He called the way to end suffering the **Eightfold Path**. The Eightfold Path is a set of instructions on the proper way to live. By following the Eightfold Path, the Buddha taught, people could end the suffering in their lives.

The Middle Way

The laws of the Eightfold Path were meant to represent a **Middle Way** of living for Buddhists. This way of life was meant to be neither too strict nor too easy. The Buddha compared the Middle Way to playing a stringed instrument. If the strings are kept too loose, they will not make a sound. On the other hand, if they are too tight,

they will break when they are played. Only those strings that are kept at just the right amount of tightness will make beautiful sounds. Life works the same way, the Buddha concluded.

The Buddha's Final Journeys

The Buddha spent the rest of his life traveling around India and sharing his message with people of all castes. One of the first places he went to was his father's palace.

At first the elderly king was shocked. His son looked no different from any other humble monk he had met. But after listening to his son's message, Buddhists believe that the king, too, became a follower of the Buddha. So did the Buddha's wife and son.

By the time the Buddha died at age 80, there were thousands of Buddhists in northern India. They lived according to his Four Noble Truths. Like the Buddha, Buddhist monks gave up all they owned and depended on other Buddhist followers to give them food each day. They worked to live peacefully among all living things and to love others.

Special prayers are written in Sanskrit on "Mani" stones (below). The stones are left along roadsides. Scenes from the Buddha's life are painted in the Ajanta caves in India (right).



THE GROWTH OF BUDDHISM

After the Buddha's death in 483 B.C., Buddhism spread throughout southern and eastern Asia. Traveling monks introduced the Buddha's teachings in other places. These included what are today China, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Japan, Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Buddhists everywhere lived by the Buddha's teachings, which were written down as proverbs. According to the proverbs that follow, what qualities do Buddhists value and believe to be the most important in life?

MANY VOICES PRIMARY SOURCE

Verses on the Law,
an ancient Buddhist text,
written down around 100 B.C.

Hatreds never cease by hatred in this world; by love alone they cease. This is an ancient law.

The reputation of him who is energetic, mindful, pure in deed, considerate, self-controlled, right-living, and heedful steadily increases.

Calm is his mind, calm is his speech, calm is his action, who, rightly knowing, is wholly freed, perfectly peaceful, and self-controlled.

Irrigators lead the waters; carpenters bend the wood; the wise control themselves.

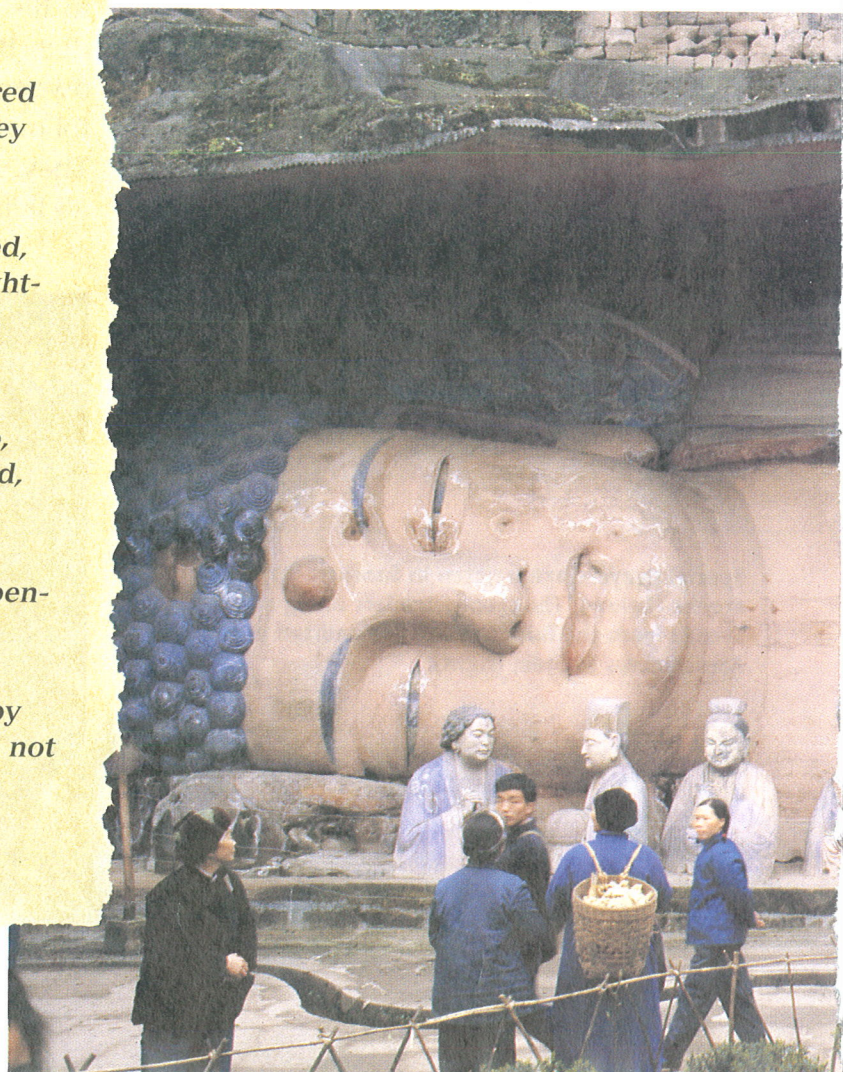
As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind, even so the wise are not ruffled by praise or blame.

cease: stop
heedful: aware

Changing Buddhism

As in Hinduism, many different schools of thought developed in Buddhism over the years. Some suggested that the Buddha was a god. Others thought that the Buddha was an ordinary person who discovered a way to end suffering. Buddhists differed with each other on what it meant to live according to the Middle Way. Buddhists also disagreed about how people reached peace and truth and freedom from suffering.

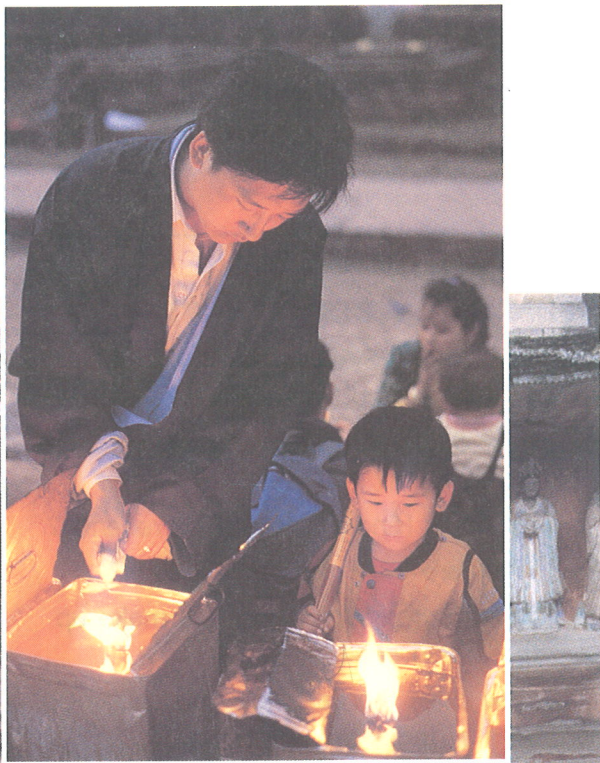
These differences of opinion continue today among Buddhists around the world. Yet some basic teachings continue to be shared by all Buddhists. These include honoring the Buddha and his teachings and helping others to end suffering.



WHY IT MATTERS

Buddhism developed in ancient India. From the beginning, it centered around the life and thoughts of Siddhartha Gautama. This man had much wealth as a prince, but left it all behind when he chose to become a penniless monk.

The teachings of the Buddha would have a big impact on Indian civilization for a time. However, Buddhism gained even greater influence in other parts of Asia. You will read about more of this story in chapters to come.



✓ Reviewing Facts and Ideas

MAIN IDEAS

- Between about 1500 and 500 B.C., Aryan rulers gained control over much of India and spread Hinduism.
- Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism. He gave up all he owned to search for a way to end suffering.
- The Buddha borrowed beliefs from Hinduism. He also taught the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way.
- Buddhism spread after the Buddha's death. This religion has 330 million followers today.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What were the two ways of life that the young prince Siddhartha was said to have to choose between?
2. What might a Buddhist hope to achieve by following the Buddha's Eightfold Path?
3. **FOCUS** How did the Buddha say people should live? What guidelines did he offer?
4. **THINKING SKILL** What *caused* Siddhartha Gautama to become a monk? What *effects* did his becoming the Buddha have on life in India?
5. **WRITE** Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. What do they share?

In China this giant statue of "sleeping Buddha" (left) is visited by Buddhists and tourists. The smaller statues are other ancient sculptures of the Buddha. A father and son (above, left) share a Buddhist candle ceremony.