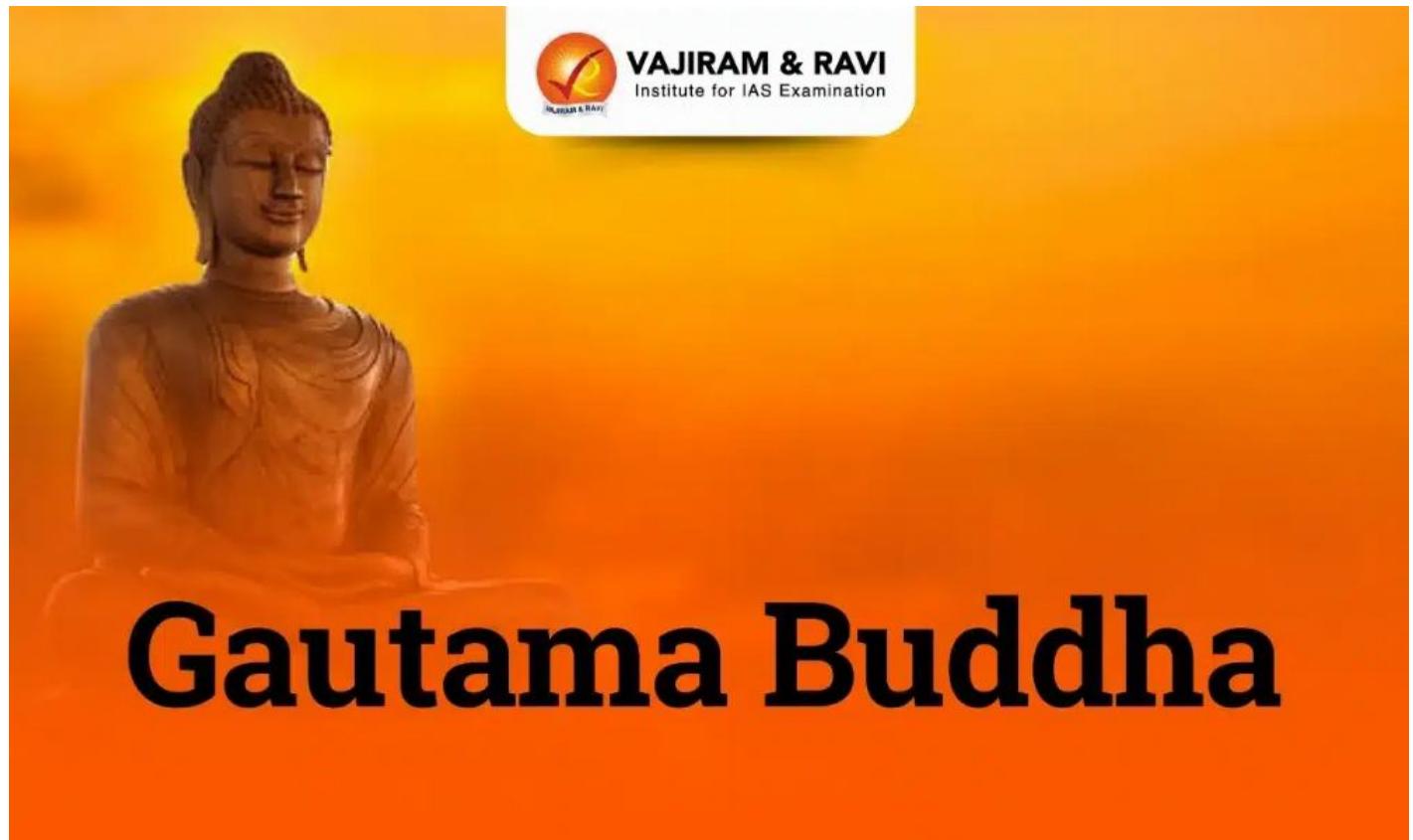


Life and Teachings of Gautama Buddha

July 11, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



Buddhism, an ancient and profound spiritual tradition, emerged in the Indian subcontinent around the **6th century BCE.**, mainly due to religious dissatisfaction caused by complex rituals and class dominance during the Vedic period in India. It was founded by **Siddhartha Gautama** and prospered due to his simple and practical techniques as well as his **emphasis on equality**. Buddhism is considered by many as a **moral code** or a philosophy rather than an established religion due to its **non-theistic faith** without a god or deity to be worshipped.

The essence of Buddha's teaching, which was based on the philosophy of non-self, provides insights into suffering as well as its alleviation through **Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Paths, respectively**. Concepts like **karma**, **the Middle Path**, and **nirvana** underline its philosophy.

Factors that led to the Rise of Buddhism in India

The social and economic conditions of India in the 6th century B.C. were in such a way that the new strands of socio-cultural institutions and practices were inevitable. The gross neglect of the social realities at that time led to socio-religious awakenings, which resulted in the rise of Buddhism (and Jainism). The following are the factors that led to the origin of Buddhism in India:

Complex religious practices of the Vedic era:

- In the Later Vedic period, Indian society had many complex rituals and sacrifices which were not acceptable to the common people.
- For example, the sacrificial ceremonies were too expensive, and the superstitious beliefs and mantras confused people.

Brahminical domination and its opposition:

- Brahmins declared themselves the upper caste, seeking superiority and privileges, causing social divisions.
- This led to tensions and resistance, notably from Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, who strongly opposed their ritualistic dominance, highlighting the demand for alternative religious avenues.

Nature and Philosophy of Buddhism:

- **Doctrine of Equality:** Buddhism's **emphasis on equality** appealed to the masses, providing an escape from the stratified Varna system.
- **Simple Language:** Buddha's teachings were communicated in **Pali**, a language understood by common people. This accessibility facilitated its rapid spread.
- **Simple Doctrine:** Buddhism's practical moralities, including the **Middle Path**, resonated with people seeking guidance in their lives. This approach offered a comparatively easier route to spiritual liberation compared to the intricate Vedic religion.

Economic factors:

- Urbanisation and the growth of non-violence as a value contributed to Buddhism's acceptance.
- The rising Vaishya class found Buddhism's emphasis on ethics and non-violence compatible with their aspirations.

Geographical factors:

- Buddhism's emergence in **Magadha and Eastern Uttar Pradesh** was influenced by their **intellectual ambiance, fertile plains, and strategic towns**.
- Sites like **Sarnath** and **Bodh Gaya** enriched **spirituality**.
- **Monasteries** and **patronage** encouraged **debates**.
- **Trade intersections and prior traditions** aided idea dissemination, shaping Buddhism's growth.

Patronage:

- Buddha's personal appeal and teachings inspired commitment from rulers like **Bimbisara, Ajatashatru, and Ashoka**, which aided the rise and rapid expansion of Buddhism across India and even outside.

Life of Buddha

Buddhism was founded by Gautama Buddha at an early age; he was known as Siddhartha.

- **Place of birth:** As per an inscribed Ashokan pillar, Siddhartha was born in the Lumbini grove (modern Rummindei) in the Nepal Terai region.

- **Parents:** His father was **Suddhodana**, the **chief of the Sakya clan**, and his mother was **Maya**, a princess of the **Koliya clan**.
- **Period:** The date of the birth of the Buddha is a matter of dispute, but most scholars place it about 566 BCE.

Gautama's Early Life

The early life of Gautama was spent with ease and royal splendour, but it failed to attract the mind of Gautama.

- **Four Encounters that Changed Gautama's Life:** As tradition describes it, he was deeply affected by the sight of an old man, a sick person, a dead body and an ascetic.
- **Leaving Home in Search of Enlightenment (Mahabhinishkramana):** The misery of human life cast a deep spell on Gautama. In order to find a solution to the misery of mankind, he left home at the **age of 29**.

Gautama's Wanderings and Spiritual Quest

- Gautama spent six years as a wandering ascetic.
- From a sage named **Alara Kalama**, he learnt the technique of meditation and the teachings of the Upanishads.
- Since these teachings did not lead Gautama to final liberation, he left him along with five Brahmana ascetics.
- He **practised rigid austerities** and resorted to different kinds of self-torture to find the truth.

Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree (Nirvana)

- Ultimately, Buddha went to **Uruvela** (near modern **Bodh Gaya** on the banks of the **Niranjana River**) and sat under a pipal tree (Bodhi tree).
- Here, he attained nirvana - the Supreme Knowledge (**Enlightenment**) **on the 49th day** of his continuous meditation. Since then, he has been called the Buddha (the Enlightened One).
- **First Sermon:** From here, he proceeded to the Deer Park at Sarnath near Varanasi and gave his first sermon, which is known as "**Dharmachakra Pravartana**" (setting in motion the wheel of Dharma).
- **First disciples:** Asvajit, Upali, Mogallana, Sari-putra and Ananda were the first five disciples of the Buddha.
- **Early Patronage:** Kings like Bimbisara and Ajatasatru (Magadha), Prasenajit (Kosala), and Udayana (Kausambi) accepted his doctrines and became his disciples.

Major events and places associated with Buddha's Life and Teachings

These events are **central to the story of the Buddha** and the development of Buddhism as a religion and philosophy. They are **often depicted in Buddhist art** and serve as inspiration for followers of the religion.

Symbols	Associated with	Places
Lotus and Bull	Birth- The Buddha was born.	Lumbini
Horse	Mahabhinishkramana (Renunciation)- Buddha left his palace and renounced his luxurious life in order to seek spiritual enlightenment.	Kapilavastu

Bodhi tree	Nirvana/Sambodini (Enlightenment)- After several years of spiritual practice, the Buddha achieved enlightenment, or Nirvana, under a Bodhi tree	Bodh Gaya
Wheel	Dharmachakra Pravartana (First Sermon)- The Buddha's first sermon was delivered to a group of five ascetics in the Deer Park	Sarnath
Stupa	Mahaparinirvana (Moksha) - Buddha died at the age of 80 in Kushinagar, the capital of the Mallas (Mahajanapada).	Kushinagar

• **Other associated places:**

- **Shravasti:** Buddha **spent 24 monsoons** and gave several teachings. It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India.
- **Sankassa:** Buddha **descended from heaven after preaching to his mother.** It is located in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India.
- **Rajgir:** Buddha spent several years and gave many teachings. It is located in present-day Bihar, India.
- **Vaishali:** It is the place where Buddha gave several teachings and delivered the **Mahaparinirvana Sutra.** It is located in present-day Bihar, India.

Core Teachings of the Buddha

The Buddha's teachings have been reconstructed from stories found mainly in the **Sutta Pitaka**. Buddha proved to be a practical reformer who took note of the realities of the day.

Four Noble Truths of Buddhism (Chatwari Arya Satyani)

Sabbam Dukkam	The world is full of suffering.
Dwadash Nidan	Desire, ignorance and attachment are the causes of suffering.
Nirvana	The suffering could be removed by destroying its cause
Ashtangika Marga	To end suffering, one must know the right path- i.e. Eight-Fold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path (Ashtangika Marga)

- Buddha in his teachings recommended an eight-fold path for the elimination of human misery.
- If a person follows this eightfold path, he will not depend on the intrigue of the priests, and yet he will be able to reach his destination.

Right view	Right Speech	Right livelihood	Right mindfulness
Right aim	Right action	Right effort	Right concentration

Buddhist Ideas and Philosophy

Here is an overview of some of the key ideas of Buddha's Teachings and beliefs of Buddhism:

- **Middle path:** An individual should pursue the middle path, and both severe asceticisms, as well as a luxurious life, are to be avoided.
- **The Idea of Karma and Rebirth:**
 - Buddhism laid great emphasis on the law of 'karma'.
 - According to this law, **the present is determined by past actions.**
 - As per this philosophy, "We are born again and again to reap the fruits of our 'karma'. If an individual has no sins, he is not born again."
- **Existence of god:**
 - The Buddha **neither accepted nor rejected** the existence of God. He was more concerned about the individual and his actions.
- **Existence of soul:**
 - He **did not involve himself in fruitless controversy** regarding the soul (atman) and Brahma, which raged strongly in his time.
 - Instead, Buddha emphasised the spirit of love. Love could be expressed towards all living beings by following '**ahimsa**' (non-killing).
- **Nirvana:**
 - The Buddha preached 'nirvana', the **ultimate goal in the life** of a man.
 - It means the shedding of all desires and ending of suffering, which finally leads to freedom from rebirth. By a process of elimination of desire, one can attain 'nirvana'.
 - Unlike the emphasis on rituals and ceremonies in the Vedic religion, he laid **emphasis on the moral life of an individual.**
- **Non-Self (Anatta):**
 - Buddhism sees the self not as permanent but as constantly changing five aggregates (**skandhas**) - **body, sensations, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness.**
 - Clinging to these aggregates as unchanging causes suffering (dukkha).
 - Realising their impermanent nature frees one from mistaken notions of a fixed self.
- **Origin of the world:**
 - The Buddha regarded the social world as the **creation of humans rather than of divine** origin.
 - Therefore, he advised kings and Gahapatis to be humane and ethical. The individual effort was expected to transform social relations.
- **On Moksha:**
 - The Buddha emphasised **individual agency and righteous action** as the means to escape from the cycle of rebirth and attain self-realisation and nibbana, literally the extinguishing of the ego and desire - and thus end the cycle of suffering for those who renounced the world.
- **Dhamma:**
 - In Buddhism, **Dhamma refers to the teachings of Buddha, the universal truths or ultimate reality** revealed by him and the path one must follow to attain enlightenment.
- **Three Jewels:**
 - **Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha** constitute the three jewels or refuges. Taking refuge in them is the formal process of becoming a Buddhist by accepting Buddha as the teacher, Dhamma as the teaching and Sangha as the community.

- According to Buddhist tradition, his last words to his followers were: **“Be lamps unto yourselves as all of you must work out your own liberation.”**

Buddhahood and Cycle of Buddhas

In Buddhism, there is a belief in the cycle of Buddhas, which refers to the idea that there have been and there will be many enlightened beings or Buddhas throughout the ages.

- **Krakucchanda** was believed to be the first Buddha of the current cosmic age known as Bhadrakalpa. His teachings emphasized moral conduct, meditation and spiritual powers.
- **Kankamuni** was the second Buddha of Bhadrakalpa, born into a Brahmin family. His teachings focused on cultivating compassion and meditation.
- **Kasyapa** was the third Buddha, who stressed ethical conduct and wisdom.
- **Sakyamuni**, also known as **Gautama Buddha**, was the fourth and most renowned Buddha of Bhadrakalpa. His teachings formed the basis of Buddhism, centering around the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path as the way to enlightenment.
- **Maitreya** is a bodhisattva considered to be the future Buddha of the next cosmic age. Believed to reside in Tusita heaven, he will be reborn on Earth and achieve enlightenment when Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings are forgotten.
- The concept of multiple Buddhas across time conveys the cyclical and eternal nature of enlightenment in Buddhism. **Sakyamuni Buddha** is the key figure in our current era.

Buddhism emerged as a significant response to the religious and social complexities of ancient India. Siddhartha Gautama's teachings offered a middle path, emphasizing compassion, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-Fold Path. The religion's appeal lay in its simplicity, practical moralities, and focus on individual transformation. Through its major councils and philosophical concepts, Buddhism left a lasting legacy, influencing Indian culture and shaping spiritual thought.

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Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/teachings-of-buddha/>

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