

Buddhism first appeared during the seventh century. Its founder Siddhartha Gautama, son of a king, was born in Northern India, close to Nepal's borders.

At twenty-nine, Siddhartha decides to leave both his family and the royal palace in order to find a solution to a preoccupying issue : human suffering. He then becomes a recluse roaming for six years. He finally decides give up his princely life for an ascetic one. One day, as he pursues his quest, he sits under a Bodhi tree for a long meditation. He finally finds an answer to his question : an illumination, awakening. We acknowledge him as Buddha or the Enlightened.

The Enlightened reveals to him the origin of suffering and shows him the path to follow to come to a specific outcome: the suspension which leads to abandoning the eternal cycles of rebirths and to finally reach nirvana. He delivers his message to five of his friends. We now call this message the Benares Sermon.

This message is constituted of Four Noble Truths:

1. Life is but suffering.
2. The cause of this suffering is desire.
3. There is a way to eliminate desire in order to end suffering.
4. The road leading to liberation is the Noble Octuple Sentier or the Way of the Buddha, the balance in the eight in the following domains.
 - Just understanding or opinion
 - Just thought.
 - Just word.
 - Just action or activity.
 - Just livelihood.
 - Just effort.

- Just attention.
- Just concentration or meditation.

Three fundamental elements come from the Noble Octuple Sentier : The Ethics, the Mental Discipline, and the Wisdom.

Ethics : Ten proscriptions : murder, lying, theft, denigration, hedonism, insult, useless words, lust, meanness, incorrect view.

Mental Discipline : Purification of thought through physical and mental control.

The Three Jewels of Buddhism are : Buddha, Dharma and the Samgha.

Buddha : The Enlightened one who has reached his goal.

Dharma : Buddhism teachings or Buddhism wheel condemns physical life that is low, dishonorable and material. It also condemns ascetic life that is undignified, foolish and painful. It condones the way of finding balance in which the Noble Octuple Sentier will lead to nirvana. It does not see inherent existence as a universal self or individual self but perceives the relationship as dependent on all phenomena.

Samgha : the community . Monks and non-religious people take refuge in the Buddhist community. They are spiritual friends that help develop virtuous spiritual states through their teachings, support and example.

Originally, Buddhism did not incorporate divinity. Certain authors speak of discipline rather than religion. It was later dispersed and incorporated in various Asian countries. It then integrates the customs and beliefs of the host country. Divinities and demons appeared later.

Traditions of The Three Vehicles of Buddhism :

Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. Hinayana or Theravada emphasizes spiritual discipline or the renunciation of all earthly material through meditation. Disciples can protect themselves by taking refuge in the three

jewels and practicing moral discipline. This helps constrain or stay away from the ten sinful actions related to karma. They can also protect themselves from all sorts of uncontrollable births and reach nirvana by practicing the three trainings : Ethics, mental discipline and wisdom.

Mahayana (or great vehicle) includes more liberal interpretations of Dharma. Followers have Bodhisattvas to help them attain salvation.

For disciples of great spiritual abilities, Buddha described how they could protect all living things from suffering thanks to illumination by taking refuge in the three jewels. The six Perfections of Mahayana are : generosity, ethical discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom. These practices include the three superior trainings of Hinayana.

Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism) : Esoteric line of Mahayana , magical, it encourages illumination within one's lifetime. Tantrism is mostly practiced in Tibet. The Vajrayana is called the uncommon path while the Hinayana and the Mahayana can be openly taught. This vehicle can only be taught by Tantric spiritual masters. It is taught to those who have received the appropriate initiations.

The Vajrayana practices essentially are to maintain appearances and conceptions pure and that , day and night. These practices include the three superior trainings of the Hinayana and the six Perfections of the Mahayana.

Karma is the vital energy that makes up a considerable force which is indestructible even after death and incites rebirth. All actions, words and thoughts converge. Each action bears the sprout of retribution. When one dies, a new life and conditions are born. One can not go back in the past but we may act upon the future.

Karma is the motor of the wheel of life or Samsara. Its representation explains the cycle's mechanism in which ignorance keeps us locked in.

Samsara's representation is held by Yama, Lord of Death. In the middle stands three animals symbolizing the three poisons : desire (rooster) , aggression or hatred (snake) and ignorance (pig).

Then there are the six compartments that make up the inferior and superior reigns of existence in which everything can be reborn:

On the left : gods superior spirits and man.

On the right : animals, hell and demons.

In the exterior circle are twelve Laws of the Causality or links leading to rebirth : ignorance , action, control, energy, consciousness, contact, desire, affection, existence, birth, death, future life.

Buddha situated in the upper right corner points to the liberation and salvation path.

Sacred Books : The Buddhist Canon or The Three Discourse Baskets.

Sutta Pitaka is the first basket and contains the essential doctrine attributes to Buddha (Dharma). It is about the superior ethical discipline training practices.

The second basket is the Vinaya Pitaka. It describes the rules and precepts that govern monks and nuns. Superior concentration training practices.

Abhidharma Pitaka is the third basket. It is a systematic exposition specific to each Buddhist school. Superior wisdom training practices.

The Fruit Of Self-Realisation

A Buddha is a holy being who reached enlightenment. He is free of all faults, suffering, mental disturbance and obstacles to omniscience. Buddha's compassion is both perfect and impartial. His wisdom perceives all past, present and future phenomena both simultaneously and distinctively. His power enables him to help lead all living things to the liberation path and illumination.

(Recherche : Musée des religions du monde)