

THE  
**COMPLETE**  
**IDIOT'S**  
GUIDE<sup>®</sup> TO

# Buddhism

**Third Edition**

*by Gary Gach*



A member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

# Contents at a Glance

<b>Part I:</b>	<b><u>Buddha, Showing the Way</u></b>	<b>1</b>
1	The Teachings of a Smile: The Life of the Buddha <i>The Buddha is his teachings, embodied in his life, and still alive today. Take and make real in your own life as you need. A little goes a long way. Just this story of one person has changed civilizations. A smile that's gone around the world.</i>	3
2	Different Flavors, One Taste: The Teachings Travel to Different Lands <i>How the news spread, by foot and by ear ... and how it transformed and was transformed by each country it touched. The ripples still ring on out ....</i>	19
3	Interfaith: Same Mountain, Different Trails <i>No matter your outlook, there's room for Buddha. There are Zen Judaists ... Benedictine buddhas ... Sufi Muslim buddhas ... atheist, agnostic, and pagan buddhas. (All roads lead to Om.)</i>	35
4	The Newest Petal of the Lotus: Western Buddhism <i>Buddhism's latest chapter is still being written ... not just by scholars but by cabbies and dentists, secretaries and soccer moms. Can we see history in the making ... as we make it?</i>	51
<b>Part 2:</b>	<b><u>Dharma: Truth, and the Way to Truth</u></b>	<b>69</b>
5	Gem of Refuge, Ennobling Truth <i>Here's the Buddhist Pledge of Allegiance, called taking refuge. The Three Jewels are as basic as ABC. And the Four Noble Truths are four-square like a table or chair. Of such simple statements come profundity you can rely on, like a rock.</i>	71
6	Buddha's Way: The Eightfold Path <i>Count them on your fingers. These eight steps lead to wisdom and compassion ... freedom from needless suffering ... awakening to abiding peace and true happiness.</i>	85
7	Take Karma, Make Dharma: Key Points <i>Dotting the i's and crossing the t's. Here are the fine points that make everything click. Everything ... and no thing ...</i>	97

- 8 Conscious Conduct: Precepts for a Path with a Heart 115  
*Five variations on the Golden Rule, with a Buddhist twist. These blueprints for happiness guide our stepping into freedom.*

**Part 3: Sangha: Joining the Path** 131

- 9 Stepping into Freedom: Establishing a Practice 133  
*Don't just read about it when you can find out for yourself. Here's how to get started ... and keep at it.*

- 10 Meditation: Base Camp 149  
*Mind at rest is the greatest human achievement. It's easier than you think, and always available—sitting, walking, driving, or washing the dishes. Welcome to Base Camp!*

- 11 Look Within: Insight Meditation 167  
*What's up with all these spiritual metaphors about "seeing" (insight, illumination, enlightenment)? Well, they're all about clarity, seeing clearly and deeply ... and so penetrating into the source of life, and your own life, with calm wisdom and boundless love, as you shall see ....*

- 12 Gate to the Source: Zen 183  
*What can I tell you that you don't already know? This very moment is a complete manifestation of the entire universe—utter buddhahood—and you're absolutely intertwined with it. (And you don't need wireless to enjoy it!)*

- 13 The Way Is Easy and Wide: Buddha's Pure Land 201  
*Here's the simplest and largest path of Buddhism, yet the least known (to outsiders) ... until now.*


- 14 Diamond Way: Tibetan Buddhism 219  
*From the high mountain countries comes the most recent Dharma school to awaken the West. Continuing the most evolved traditions of the Buddha, it's the apt culmination of all we've explored up to now, like a radiant, swift river returning to the vast ocean.*

**Part 4: Buddhism in Action: Applications in Everyday Life** 231

- 15 Bringing It All Back Home: Relations 239  
*No one is an island. Rather, we're more like intertangled stories with no beginning, middle, or end. Here are Buddhist perspectives on life's most basic stories, from cradle to grave, and all the juicy good stuff in between.*

You're  
 an ancie  
 But whe  
 Buddhis  
 struggle  
 The Co  
 you emt  
 Complet

- ◆ Rev
- pra
- Ins
- ◆ Pei
- Ha
- ◆ Do
- intc

 **G**  
 th  
 What Bo  
 Songs for  
 150 perie  
 Harvard l  
 Sacred, al

16	It's Not Just a Job, It's Life Itself: Right Livelihood <i>"Chop wood, carry water." Or do you chop wood thinking you'd rather be carrying water? Is a job just to pay the bills, or can work just possibly really fulfill us? See how Dharma is a sound investment in true value.</i>	253
17	Food for the Heart: The Meal of Life <i>A couple times a day, seven days a week, we encounter the whole universe: through food. The ingredients of our life are all there. We only need to stop to give thanks, and all of life comes into view. Here's Dharma at our fingertips! Taste, and see ....</i>	265
18	Everybody's Doing It: Buddhism and Popular Culture <i>There's Buddhism in the crack of a bat hitting a ball ... the twang of a guitar ... a Saturday afternoon matinee ... or just a snapshot. Come one, come all. The Buddha's trail is easy and wide.</i>	279
19	Awakening Ways of Seeing and Being: Dharma Art <i>Who says art or enlightenment dwell in distant worlds apart from us? Not Buddha! Here are arts of awakening you can enjoy ... and practice yourself.</i>	297
20	Life Within Us and Without Us: Buddhism and Science <i>Buddhism has been mapping inner and outer space for millennia. Now it interfaces with Western research, as changing views reevaluate everything from quantum physics and neuroplasticity to simple prayer—new light on ancient wisdom.</i>	315
21	Is Happiness an Individual Matter?: Engaged Buddhism <i>Having begun our tour of applications with family relations, we close with ... the world. The world today is in great need. There are no rules and our active involvement is not mandatory, but it can be so fulfilling ... in caring and in service in mutual interrelation.</i>	335

**Appendixes**

A	Buddhism in a One-Page Book: Quick Reference	353
B	The Vocabulary of Silence: A Buddhist Glossary	355
C	From the Trees to Thee: Further Reads	361
	Index	371

## Chapter 1

# The Teachings of a Smile: The Life of the Buddha

### In This Chapter

- ◆ The Four Signs
- ◆ The Renunciation
- ◆ The Middle Way
- ◆ Supreme Enlightenment
- ◆ Teachings

This life story is itself a teaching. It's both simple and sublime. The tale has been known for upwards of a third of humanity. A sacred story, you can hear at least four levels at once in its multilayered tapestry: in *historical*, *imaginative*, *mythic*, and *personal* dimensions. It's fact that there was such a person, living amid a crucial historical turning point. Reconstruction of his thoughts, feelings, and decisions call upon the imagination ... our inner life ... and the depth and wonder in being human. His story also teaches in mythic terms. Myth invites us to perceive timeless truths beyond the limitations of its words, behind its symbols. Of all myths, scholar Joseph Campbell has said, "The closest we have to planetary mythology is Buddhism. In it all things are potentially Buddha things."

And we might find this story speaks to each of us, if we but change his name to ours, look in the mirror, and reflect. This is the personal dimension. I leave it to each reader to participate in any or all of these levels as they wish. I guarantee this is a story well worth hearing. It's the story of a smile, still felt today.

## Are You Ready?: Waking Up to Yourself, Waking Up to Buddha

We can read the story of the Buddha simply as a biography, but how do we know he was a real person? As Buddhist scholar Professor Lewis Lancaster points out, Europeans at first believed his story was a myth. But when archaeologists started to dig at the key spots matching his biography, they found the oldest examples of writing in India. Within about a century and a half from the time of Shakyamuni, King Ashoka dedicated pillars saying that "This is where the Buddha was born," "This is where he reached Nirvana," and so on. Few ancients have so precise a biographical identification with places so soon after their lifetime. Prof. Lancaster feels this suggests people's personal memory of the Buddha was passed along from the great-grandparent generation. Many of us today have memories passed on to us belonging to our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Prof. Lancaster concludes, "So the timing, the pillars, the collective memory gave scholars good reason to assume that there was a historical person who had a life history close to the lore that had been passed down three generations at the time of Ashoka."

Yet even if he'd never lived, his teachings are still viable today. Whoever invented bread, I salute his or her achievement, which in one stroke enhanced all our lives. I liken this vital relevance of discovery—sometimes called bootstrapping—with the Wright brothers' pioneering of flight. They stepped forth into the unknown and flew, and we still use their extensive calculations for flight today. Indeed, what the Buddha achieved can likewise boot us up to a higher plane (pun intended). Just reading the story of the Buddha encourages us to achieve peace—a wakefulness, a heightened sense of goodness, and the full potential of life.

Are you ready to meet a person who charted a priceless, complete, commonsensical guide to true happiness? His discovery is universal, available to every human being. It's right in front of our faces. But, as he would also discover, something so simple might not be for everyone. Why not? Well, for one thing, the Buddha only said he was teaching what worked for him, and invited others to try it and see for themselves. He was a guide but not a god, and some people prefer to wait for God or priests to tell them what they can find out for themselves or what they already intuitively know. (Might this be you?)

Moreover, some people prefer to imagine their happiness will last forever. (Could *this* be you?) Others have a hard time letting go of the accumulation of wounds and labels that have stuck to them throughout life, tenaciously clinging to sorrows as a ballast, rather than letting go and sensing the innate and ineffable lightness of life; rather than appreciating how the luminous blue sky, solid brown earth, and tender green plants are always present for enjoyment. (Is *this* you?) If you can see yourself in this portrait gallery (and who can't?), then "Welcome to the club!" It's commonly called The Human Condition. Right there, in a nutshell, you have it. We spin around in our self-created rat cage when all along the cage door is unlocked.

But so long as there are people living their life as if sleepwalking through a kind of bad dream, and even choosing to perpetuate their daze, there'll always be a chance for awakening. That's what *Buddha* means, in essence: someone or even something that awakens, and awakens us ... not just physically. Just 'cause your eyes are open doesn't mean you're awake. We're more than physical bodies. We can awaken—really awaken—in body, heart, and mind.

Try this right now: pause, be attentive, listen, and look. A buddha voice or a buddha sight might be right at hand. It's in every ray of sunshine, every snowflake, every drop of rain, every laugh of a child, every wonder around you! (Please consider, too, how you can always pause, throughout your day, as simply as that.) Now, if all things are potentially buddha, then we have great reason to consider and learn from, if not honor, the original Buddha.

The Buddha once said, "If you want to really see me, then look at my teachings." The reverse is equally true. That is, his life is itself a teaching.

The Buddha teaches that living without worry and fear, becoming intimate with life, becoming awake, is to awaken to ourselves, to our fullest potential as human beings, and to the Buddha within all of us. It's as important as life and death, and as easy as drinking a cup of tea. (You'll see.) It starts like this ...



### This Is

**Buddha**, derived from the Sanskrit root *budh*, means "to awaken." It is not a name, per se, but a title, like King, or Christ. As such, it means "Awakened One," "Supremely Awakened." At its root, the word refers to the awakener, the awakened, and the awakening ... and all three as one.

## The Birth of a Sage, Siddhartha Gautama

One full-moon night in May, around 560 B.C.E., a woman gave birth. Her name was Mahamaya, and she'd been on a journey to her father's house, about 50 miles from her

home, to lie in waiting, as was the custom in India. Now she headed back to the foothills of the Himalayas, on the border between what's now India and Nepal, to present to her husband his new son. This would be no ordinary son. Mahamaya was a queen, married to King Siddhodana, the *raja* (ruler) of the Shakya clan. Her son would be prince of their small but prosperous independent nation-state. They named him Siddhartha, meaning "every wish fulfilled" or "aim accomplishment."

As was also the custom, a soothsayer was brought in to make a prediction at birth. He declared Siddhartha would either grow up to rule the world if he remained in the palace, or he'd become the Supremely Enlightened One.



### Along the Path

Sometimes it seems like this one guy had a string of aliases. Here's the lowdown: Gautama (*goh-tah-mah*) was his family clan name, and Siddhartha was his personal name. He's also sometimes called Shakyamuni, meaning the sage of the Shakya tribe. Interestingly, he's called Buddha from the time he went forth from home on his quest.

## The Life of a Prince

The king adored his son and wanted him to inherit the throne, and so he kept him cloistered within the strong, high palace walls—not unlike the way we can wall ourselves in, get set in our ways, and unquestioningly go about our lives. Moreover, the father went so far as to create an environment as artificial as a Hollywood soundstage, wherein sick people, the elderly, and even dirt and withered leaves were all whisked from view. But, for the persevering seeker, the truth is always out there.

The prince proved to be a prodigy; he soon knew more than his teachers, the finest in the land. He was unequalled in literature and math. He surpassed everyone in swimming, running, archery, and fencing. He could strategize, command respect, and win any battle. In a huge athletic competition, he won the hand of one of the most beautiful maidens, Yashodhara (Keeper of Radiance), who became his bride. Not only a whiz kid and a champ, he also got along with everyone and proved a compassionate and loving husband.

Delighted, Siddhartha's father gave his heir three different palaces, one for each of India's three seasons: hot, cool, and wet. There, the prince was lavished with endless fun and games, beautiful attendants, fleets of horses, fabulous feasts, live concerts at the snap of his fingers, and the whole bit. But Siddhartha started to chomp at that bit.

You're  
an anc  
But w  
Buddh  
strugg  
The  
you er  
Compl

- ◆ R
- P
- I
- ◆ F
- H
- ◆ D
- in



What I  
Songs f  
150 pe  
Harvar  
Sacred,



## What Is This!?: The Four Signs

Siddhartha was curious and wished to explore the outside world: the real world. So does anyone who wants to lead an authentic life. To keep his son happy, the king granted his wish, yet made sure everything outside was as controlled as it had been inside.

Everywhere Siddhartha went, he saw prosperity and happiness until, somehow, a decrepit form passed through all the young, healthy people the king had arranged for him to see. Siddhartha asked his servant Channa "What is this!?" The faithful servant told him that although he had white hair down to his knees, this was an old man using a staff to walk, and that this is what eventually happens to everyone. All the way back to the castle, Siddhartha brooded, and when the king heard about this, he increased the budget for Siddhartha's lavish lifestyle.

A second time, however, on another excursion, Siddhartha chanced upon a maimed fellow with bloodshot eyes, groaning through a frothy mouth. "What is this!?" Siddhartha asked, and his faithful servant told him that this was a person who'd become ill, but that Siddhartha needn't worry because the prince ate a good diet and exercised. Siddhartha returned home brooding, and so the king plied him with even still more luxuries and opulence.

On a third outing, reality bit yet again. This time, Siddhartha chanced upon a funeral procession, mourners sobbing and waving their arms in all directions, while at the head of the procession a body was being carried, utterly still, as if sleeping. The faithful servant explained what death is, that nothing could be done for it, and that it happens to everyone. No point in worrying, he said, just hope for a long life.

What a shock! Old age and sickness were bad enough. But now this! The inevitable, ultimate destination of us all. Is there anyone for whom an encounter with death isn't one of the most unforgettable, difficult moments of their life?

Each of these encounters was but a glimpse, but perhaps their having been withheld for so long made them even more of a revelation. In any event, Siddhartha saw they were a matter of his own life and death, and, by extension, of everyone he loved—and indeed, all mortals. Was there no way out?! Meanwhile, when the king saw his beloved boy brooding more darkly than ever before, and found out why, he despaired. He didn't want to lose his only beloved son and heir. But did he level with him? No, he pampered him all the more. Yet life's truth pierced through again, a fourth and final time.

Journeying outside the palace walls, Siddhartha happened to see a man with a shaven head, clad only in an orange sheet the color of liquid sunshine, walking very slowly,

holding only an empty bowl, and his entire manner radiating majestic tranquility and serene joy. "What is this?" Siddhartha asked, and he was told that this was a monk who'd renounced the world in search of spiritual truth. This silent monk seemed to be telling him, yes, there is an answer to the questions burning inside him since he'd so starkly witnessed human suffering for himself. He'd never find this answer as long as he numbed his mind with endless sensual indulgence. Well, when all this got back to the king, he was beside himself.



**Hear and Now**

**Dream Deferred**

What happens to a dream deferred?  
 Does it dry up  
 Like a raisin in the sun?  
 Or fester like a sore —  
 And then run?  
 Does it stink like rotten meat?  
 Or crust and sugar over —  
 like a syrupy sweet?  
 Maybe it just sags  
 like a heavy load.  
 Or does it explode?  
 —Langston Hughes

Just then, as fate would have it, Siddhartha's bride bore a child. Siddhartha probably was torn, as we can see from the name he gave his son, Rahula, which means "chain." The king took the occasion to stage a blowout celebration to keep Siddhartha close to hearth and home. But after the sumptuous feast, as Siddhartha was being entertained by the finest dancing girls in all the land, he yawned, laid down on his cushion, and closed his eyes. As there is no point entertaining someone who isn't paying attention, the dancing girls stopped, laid down, too, and napped. When Siddhartha opened his eyes again, he saw these women who just moments ago had been the quintessence of beauty, now sweaty and sprawled in awkward positions, their once lovely mouths now drooling or gnashing their teeth in their sleep. So much for the pleasures of the material world ... and what a cue for an exit!

He got up and tiptoed out. Passing by his wife's chambers, he took one last lingering look at his sleeping beloved ones, then was gone—gone in search of an answer to the human riddles of disease, decay, and death, in search of the ultimate meaning of life.

**Renunciation and Going Forth**

Time out. Before we follow Siddhartha on his quest, we might pause for a moment to consider his break with his past, his renunciation. For one thing, it was extreme: a prince renouncing the wealth and power of his birthright. In today's terms, he could have been a trillionaire. Actually, it was respectable for noblemen of India to investigate ultimate truth, but only in their retirement, after they'd fulfilled family and social obligations. But for Siddhartha, truth couldn't wait.

You're  
 an anc  
 But wh  
 Buddh  
 strugg  
 The c  
 you en  
 Comple

- ◆ R
- ◆ P
- ◆ I
- ◆ P
- ◆ H
- ◆ D
- in



What B  
 Songs f  
 150 per  
 Harvar  
 Sacred,

True, Siddhartha was also walking away from his responsibilities as a father as well as a prince. He was aware of the pain he'd cause others by leaving, but suffering seemed the ever-present essence of this ultimate enigma he intended to resolve, once and for all. Once he'd found the answer, Siddhartha would return, bringing it back to his people and all the land.

So we acknowledge the courage, the fearlessness necessary to stand up for his dream, his ideals, and his quest to seek sovereignty over his own life rather than over a kingdom. It's also interesting to notice that Siddhartha was leaving behind inherited ideas, as well as inherited privilege. I think a message here, for all of us, is to look at life with our own two eyes, regardless of what Simon says, without asking "Mother, may I?" to see for ourselves, beyond the high, strong palace walls of what we've learned to call self ... to renounce habit and hand-me-down ideas, in search of the genuine.

### **Into the Forest: Finding Out**

Siddhartha gave his royal robes and jewels to his faithful servant. Before giving him his sword, he shaved his head (an act repeated by those who become Buddhist monks and nuns today), leaving only a top-knot, severing his ties with not only his family but also his royal caste—and thus the whole hereditary caste system. (If India were a body, the peasants were the feet, the merchants and craftsmen were the legs, the warrior and noble class—from which the Buddha hailed—were the arms, and the priestly Brahmins were the head.) He went forth into the wilderness.

Now, in those days, India's wild mountains and forests were dotted with a variety of truth-seekers, abundant with as many as 63 discernible schools. Siddhartha studied under one renowned forest teacher after another. In relatively no time, he learned all his teachers knew and was even offered jobs carrying on their work, but that wasn't what he was looking for. True, he'd learned to transcend his senses and thoughts, his materiality, and even his own consciousness. But while these techniques transcended reality, they didn't unlock it. They didn't resolve the riddle of birth and death. They offered temporary bliss, but not permanent peace. They couldn't answer the deep frustration, the pain still burning in his heart.

Siddhartha's achievements had drawn to him a handful of companions. With them, he tried the *ascetic* path of self-denial, to the point of self-mortification, as a means of attaining self-control and liberation. He lay on a bed of nails. He progressively reduced his diet until he was down to one grain of rice a day. Soon, overachiever that he was, he came to the brink of self-annihilation.



**This Is**

**Ascetic**, from Greek, originally meant "hermit," such as a person practicing austere self-discipline for religious purposes. Besides seclusion, common forms of asceticism are fasting, celibacy, and poverty. These self-disciplines are believed to sharpen the mind, heighten awareness, and free the practitioner from mundane attachments.

*Just skin and bones. This sculpture depicts Buddha's extreme asceticism. His veins bulge over his ribs, through his blackened and withering skin. If he rubbed his tummy he could feel his spine. His eyes stare from their sockets like stale water from a deep well. Yet he does not waver on his quest.*

*(Sikri, Pakistan [Gandhara], second century C.E., 83.8 centimeters, Lahore Museum)*



**The Middle Way**

At this point, a young girl from the village passed by with food her mother had given her as an offering to the forest gods. She saw Siddhartha, nearly unconscious, and put some rice milk to his lips, and he drank. By so doing, he renounced not only asceticism but also extremism.

There are two things going on here worth noting. First, there's the wonderful recognition of the importance of our bodies and their relationship to our happiness. So many spiritual paths have rejected the body as evil. Siddhartha realized he couldn't achieve his goal if his mind was in a trance and his body too weak to grasp and carry on the truth. Indeed, realizing the mind-body connection, he saw he couldn't have a sound mind without a sound body.

You're  
an anc  
But wh  
Buddh  
strugg  
The  
you en  
Comple

- ◆ R
- ◆ P
- ◆ I
- ◆ P
- ◆ H
- ◆ D
- in



What B  
Songs f  
150 per  
Harvard  
Sacred,

Moreover, he realized something simple yet sublime, now known as the *Middle Way*. We all meet with varying forms of extremism in ourselves and others. The Buddha would say to listen to all sides, then find a harmonious middle road. Don't tear the ground out from under your feet, nor chase after a spring dream. If the guitar string's too taut, it snaps; too loose, it won't play. Find the mean and, *Ping!*, it sings.



### This Is

The **Middle Way** is an expression of the Buddha's direct, nondualist outlook. Dualism divides: good vs. bad, self vs. other, mind vs. body, life vs. death, all or nothing. Buddhism embraces all sides, seeing their interrelatedness, and seeks the mean. Look beyond extremes, and see for yourself. (A school of Buddhism studying the Middle Way is called *Madhyamika*.)

As he realized self-denial didn't free him from attachment, he also came to see self-denial as but another kind of attachment, another attachment to self, no different from his princely self-indulgence. Looking deeper, he began to truly wake up to how identification with "self" is always a set-up for ultimate disappointment, because it implies a dualist opposition: self and its desires ("in here") vs. world and its rewards ("out there"), This *versus* That. So, with no attachment to self, no dualism. No longer debating this versus that, he could experience directly.

Well, meanwhile, his eating food blew his credibility with his five self-appointed disciples, for sure. They wandered off before he could explain his realization. And so he went at it alone. At some point, we all must. But the girl returned and offered him food every day. With the recovery of his health came fresh perceptions, which led to new insights, which would lead to wisdom and, ultimately, enlightenment.

## Enlightenment

Meditating in a healthy body allowed him to see things around him with clarity; really see. Whether looking at the food the girl offered before he ate it, or sitting under a tree and looking at its leaves, he saw how each was not independent. Food might come from a leaf. And the leaf? The leaf came from the sun above, from the Earth beneath, and from the water in a cloud. Where did each of these come from? They were all interconnected ... interdependent ... interacting ... inter-reacting. He saw, too, how self-denial could never liberate him from the intricate, vast web of life, of which he was a part. Nor is the web of life at fault. Indeed, there is no fault, anywhere ... only boundless goodness.

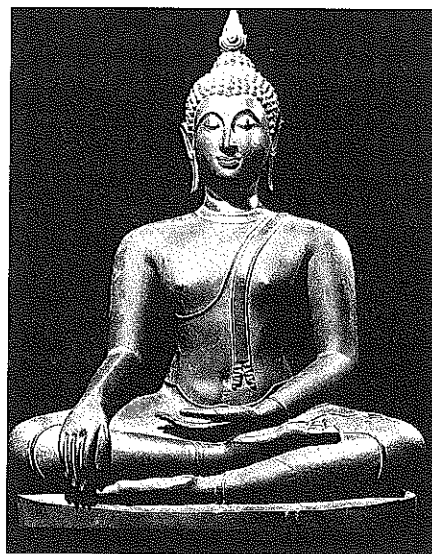
Looking further, he saw how nothing lasts in the dance of life. The cloud passes away in the sun. The leaf falls to Earth. Similarly, he, too, was part of not only the interdependence but also the impermanence of all life. Seeing clearly now, these realizations made him appreciate each moment. And why not? Why not fully live each moment when each moment occurs only once, yet contains the potential of all of life in each instant?

Now he felt he was really getting somewhere. Now he was cooking! The meaning of birth and suffering and death was becoming clear at last. Before sundown, looking at the evening star beside the full moon of May, he felt that tonight he'd make his final, ultimate breakthrough.

Sitting beneath the sheltering leaves of a fig tree (the Indian *banyan* variety), he endured thunderstorms, some say even demonic temptations waged by tempter Mara. First Mara surrounded the Buddha with the most seductive women imaginable, but the Buddha remained composed. Then Mara unleashed the most bloodthirsty warrior demons upon him, but he had no fear. Finally, Mara tried to tempt him away from his meditation by challenging his motives, saying, "Aren't you really doing this for selfish reasons? Who are you to claim enlightenment!?" And if you really have transcended this realm, then why don't you just leave! But even if you did attain enlightenment, who'd believe you?" Looking at Mara, the Buddha touched the ground with one hand, taking the earth—and all of creation—as witness of Enlightenment.

*The Buddha calls upon all the earth, all beings, as witnesses of Enlightenment.*

*(Sukhothai school, fourteenth or early fifteenth century, bronze, 101.6 centimeters, National Museum, Ayuthya)*



You're  
an anc  
But wh  
Buddh  
strugg  
The  
you en  
Comple

- ◆ R
- ◆ P
- ◆ I
- ◆ P
- ◆ H
- ◆ D
- in



What B  
Songs f  
150 pe  
Harvar  
Sacred,

In the dark of night, gazing into his heart and the heart of creation, he saw into the mystery of life, that we are bound to die and thus bound to suffer. Mortality ensures cravings never to be fulfilled—and perpetuates with them the false mind-sets of self that only produce more suffering. He saw clearly now the jail, which we ourselves construct, in which we entrap ourselves, and which we ourselves police. But whatever is constructed will deconstruct. He saw, too, the happiness of being free.

He understood that what we call our life is but a wave, not the ocean. He became one with that ocean, and all the rivers and raindrops flowing into it. He saw the morning star in the sky as if for the first time, his mind as clear as a mirror, and his heart as wide now as the world, almost overflowing with understanding and love. The luminous, joyous starlight matched the smile on his lips. This was it. He had found out. Now he was fully awake.



*Supreme Awakening.*

## **After Enlightenment: Teach!**

Imagine Siddhartha sitting there, at the culmination of a seven-year quest, a fully self-realized being. So happy! He had finally found complete freedom from all unnecessary mortal suffering. He'd experienced the greatest awakening and attained supreme enlightenment. He now directly perceived ultimate reality, free of all limitation, and his compassionate awareness and sublime wisdom was one with all that is.

After some time, he stood up and took his first steps, just walking lovingly around the tree that had sheltered him. He felt the solid earth supporting his bare feet and the fresh wind caressing his cheek, as if he and the world had been born together this instant. When the young girl brought food that day, she could feel his transformation in her own heart.

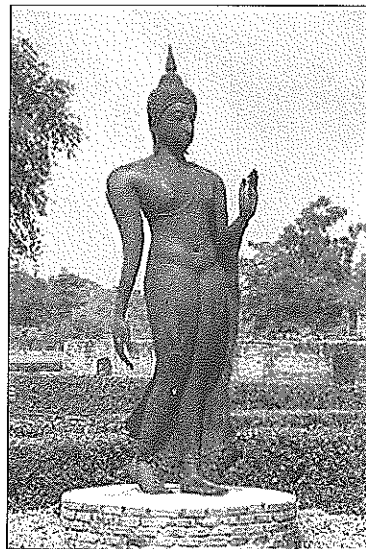
It's interesting to consider how he might have remained beneath the tree in perfect nirvana, supreme peace, for the rest of his days. Yet his enlightenment showed him how the seeds of enlightenment are within the hearts of everyone. His awakening to life's ultimate meaning was bound up, part and parcel, with his love for all beings and compassion for their needless suffering. So he returned to the companionship of his fellow human beings.

Now when his five former followers in the forest saw Siddhartha coming, they turned their backs. They remembered him as having copped out on the rigors of the ascetic path. Yet as he drew nearer, they could recognize in their own hearts that he was transformed. Supreme Enlightenment was evident just from his presence. They let go of judgments and preconceptions, and welcomed him.

That night he gave his first talk, known today as *The Turning of the Wheel of Truth*. Explaining his discovery, he introduced four premises, known as the *Four Noble Truths* (discussed in Chapter 5), defining the origin of and liberation from suffering, with a practical, personal program for such liberation, known as the *Eightfold Path* (Chapter 6). While some were mulling it over, one of the companions got it and awoke on the spot. There was nothing to memorize or take on faith. Instead he awoke to the truth resounding within himself.

*Buddha was a traveling teacher (peripatetic), on a perpetual pilgrimage. Thus did his teachings spread by foot. The traditional topknot of his hair is elongated to represent his enlightenment. His fingers are tapered to symbolize his ability to reach deep within. His gesture of one hand up means "Have no fear"; the other hand offers a boon. The design displays an amazing balance of motion and rest.*

*(Sukhbothai, 3.53 centimeters x 2.35 centimeters)*





It was decided these teachings would be called *Dharma*, the path. Those on this path would be called *Sangha*. Siddhartha would become known as *The Buddha*, the one who shows others the path in this world. Thus began the Buddha's course for the rest of his life—teaching to not only his growing order of disciples but also whomever would listen—young and old, rich and poor, male and female, and even the so-called untouchables, the outcasts below the peasant class (Nirvana knows no borders)—as he walked around the vast delta of the Ganges River, with an annual retreat during India's three-month heavy rains. All told, it was to be a journey lasting the next 45 years.



### This Is

**Dharma**, from Sanskrit (Dhamma, Pali), has a number of meanings, depending on the context: "teachings," "system," "path," "reality," and "truth"; also "calling," and "fruit." We can say it refers to truth and the way to the truth, the Buddha's teachings and that to which they pertain (everything in life).

**Sangha** means "assembly," or "host." Generally, it refers to the Buddhist community; more specifically, it refers to its monastic order, one of the oldest in the world.

## Tales Heard Around Buddha's Campfire

The Buddha was and is a brilliant teacher. Here follow a few examples. Disciples didn't write down his talks (generally called *sutras*), until later. He also taught by his presence, as example; always a good method. ("Don't do as I say, be as I am.") His teachings can be typified as nonauthoritarian (noncoercive), empirical (see for yourself), real-time (present-moment), and pragmatic (practical), as well as supremely compassionate and wise.

It is said the Buddha was a genius for matching his teaching to the person, an art called *upaya* (skillful means), as seen throughout this guide. His clarity can be judged not only for the truth of his message but also the simplicity, inclusiveness, realism, persuasiveness, and care with which he presented it. For example, a woman named Kisa Gotami was a young bride of an arranged marriage. Not having given her in-laws an heir, they grew cold to her and began looking for a more suitable mate for their son. When she did give birth, the boy infant died. She'd heard the Buddha was a miracle worker who'd transcended the bonds of death. Weeping, she came with her infant, wrapped up in a blanket, and implored the Buddha to restore her son to life. (If you were the Buddha, what would you do?)

The Buddha smiled compassionately, giving her hope. She felt reassured in his warm, calm presence, and trusted the lucidity of his wise smile. "Before I do anything,"

he told her, “go to the nearby village and bring me a handful of mustard seed. But, please, make sure the seed comes only from a home where death is unknown.” And so Kisa Gotami hurried to the village, and knocked on the first door. When the owners of the house saw her, clutching her dead child, they invited her in and said they’d be glad to give her some mustard seed. But when she added the Buddha’s stipulation, the woman of the house wiped away a tear as her husband told Kisa Gotami of the death of his father. Second house, third house, everywhere: the same thing. Kisa Gotami returned to the Buddha’s enclave in the forest, buried her child, and asked to learn the Dharma.

Amazing story. He hadn’t told her to learn to forget and be happy. No, he showed her a way to reach deeper into her grief, a way through that also enabled her to see something larger than her own loss, something in which she could take refuge: the universality of impermanence.



**Along the Path**

In Asia, *Buddhism* is an alien term, because it merely refers to reality, *Buddha-Dharma*. What else to call it? Because the Buddha wouldn’t address certain basic metaphysical questions, his path isn’t technically philosophy. Likewise, because his teachings aren’t built around God or an afterlife, they aren’t precisely a religion. His teachings about self as an illusory construction makes it tricky to categorize as psychology. Some people prefer to call it a science, an education, or a way of being.

**Beyond the Dualism of Words: Parables and Silence**

The Buddha frequently used vivid similes and apt parables. Explaining skillful means, for instance, he said one uses a raft to get to the other shore (Nirvana) but then leaves the raft behind. Meaning, don’t mistake a finger pointing at the moon for the moon. The map is not the territory.

Sometimes Buddha answered profound imponderables with a parable. He’d say, for example, that asking where the universe began was like the man struck by a poison dart who won’t allow himself to be taken to a doctor until he knows exactly who fired the dart, just what poison he used, precisely how the dart was made, and so on.

Other times, the Buddha taught by silence. Such was the case when asked questions typically not open to direct, personal experience. “It does not further” (meaning “time is too precious to go down that road”), a disciple might say when asked about God, whether space is infinite, whether the universe is eternal, whether the soul is immortal, and whether body and mind are identical. (Had the Buddha heard of

You’  
an anc  
But w  
Buddh  
strugg  
The  
you en  
Comple

- ◆ R
- P
- In
- ◆ P
- H
- ◆ E
- in



What B  
Songs f  
150 per  
Harvard  
Sacred,



stand-up comedy, he might have replied with one-liners, like Woody Allen: "If man were immortal, just think of what his laundry bills would be!" Ba-dum!)

The Buddha wasn't necessarily being irreverent about the ineffable, but he sure didn't try to catch the wind. Some say that, being omniscient, the Buddha actually knew the answers to questions of infinity and eternity, divinity and immortality, but kept silent realizing how the rest of us would get tangled up in words and views, wanting to argue all night but never getting anywhere. Rather, he's like a noble fireman who doesn't debate the metaphysics of the origin of fire with children who don't realize they're trapped in a burning building.

## The Final Teaching

The end was unexpected. Some food he'd been given as alms was bad. Eventually, he had to lie down. Just as he'd taught meditation while sitting, standing, and walking, now he taught while on his side (as in the first picture in Chapter 21). Naturally, many in the community feared they couldn't go on without him, but he reassured them it wasn't necessary for him to be there for them to practice his teachings. "The Dharma is the best teacher," he said.

"Even if I were to live for eons," he told them, "I'd still have to leave you because every meeting implies a departure, one day." With his faithful disciples by his side, he died the way he'd lived, an exemplary spiritual teacher beyond compare. It is said that, as with his birth and his enlightenment, his final nirvana (extinction) was on the night of a full moon, in May.

That's but a quick sketch of the rich tapestry of the Buddha's life: a life that is, itself, a teaching. (Even if you don't believe the story 100 percent, the teachings remain true 100 percent.) From the very first, the Buddha, and each of us, was born with the capacity for a good life of tranquility, joy, harmony, love, energy, clarity, and excellence. This capacity is a gift. And it is yours ... just by being.

## The Least You Need to Know

- ✓ ♦ The Buddha realized the Middle Way: directly knowing the practical mean between extremes.
- ✓ ♦ With wisdom and compassion, the Buddha realized suffering's origin and its end. In so doing, he also realized that just as he could attain enlightenment, so can we.

- √ ♦ Supreme enlightenment is called Nirvana. It may be more useful to think of enlightenment as a process of transformation, as a way of enlightened living, rather than as a thing.
- ♦ The Buddha was noncoercive, nondogmatic, and nonauthoritarian—a guide not a god. Pragmatic and scientific, he invites us to see for ourselves.
- ♦ Extensively, Buddha can mean whoever or whatever awakens us to greater intimacy with life.
- ♦ When asked about God, Heaven, and the immortality of the soul, the Buddha simply remained silent because these theoretical matters didn't affect his teachings: the nature of suffering and freedom therefrom.