

Unity of Faiths
A Cooperative Education Project by
Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centers in Region 6, USA

BUDDHISM

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August 2007

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism is based on the teachings of its founder, the Buddha, who was born as Siddhartha Gautama in the town of Lumbini nestled in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas. The date of his birth is not certain, but the most recent research puts it at about 485 BCE. His father was a ruler and a warrior (a *Kshatriya*). The earliest Buddhist writings did not thoroughly detail the story of Siddhartha's life, but a variety of elaborations developed within the various Buddhist traditions. Nevertheless, there is one consistent story of the Buddha's life that is found in all traditions. A summary of it is as follows:

Siddhartha Gautama was born into a life of privilege. His father, Suddhodana, was a man of wealth and power and his mother, Mayadevi, was a woman of leisure and refinement. At his birth, a seer named Asita predicted that the young boy was destined to head either a political or spiritual empire. Perhaps for this reason they chose the name, Siddhartha, "one who has accomplished his goal." His mother died shortly after birth, so he was nursed and nurtured by his aunt, Mahaprajapati. During his early life, his father wished that he become firmly attached to wealth and power in order that he may choose the life of a political, rather than spiritual, empire. By his 16th year he was provided a young wife, Yasodhara.

His father's plans were thwarted by the young Siddhartha's exploration of the world beyond his sheltered life. This time is symbolized by the story of the 'four sights', which were four formative experiences he had while traveling in his carriage. It began with the appearance of an old man, the first time Siddhartha had ever truly understood the fact of inevitable old age. Following this sight he saw disease and death for the first time. These shattering insights into the human condition upset his complacency with his life of privilege and forced him to acknowledge that such painful and undignified conditions awaited him and his pretty wife, as surely as they awaited all other creatures. The fourth sight, a meeting with a spiritual wanderer sowed a seed in his mind that, as he pondered his situation in the following months, grew into a conviction that there was an alternative to the passive acceptance of suffering and decay, but that this quest was one that required radical and painful action.

The final event that seemed to tip the balance towards his yearning for the freedom to explore the 'noble quest,' was the birth of his son (Rahula). In frustration, he saw his birth as a fetter—something that confines or chains one to circumstances beyond their control. In response to this, he stole away from his home, unannounced, leaving behind his wife, child, family, and social status. At the age of 29 he cut his hair, donned the rag robes of a wanderer, and began his search for truth and liberation.

His first goal was to find a teacher, which he did. Alara Kalama taught him a form of meditation that led to an exalted state of absorption known as 'the sphere or state of nothingness' (*akimcanyayatana*). Once Siddhartha realized this state, he recognized that it lacked a moral and cognitive dimension and had made no radical difference in his human condition. He was still subject to old age, sickness, and death, and, therefore, his quest was not over. Though Alara Kalama offered him co-leadership, Siddhartha left in search of further guidance. A similar situation occurred with his new teacher, Udraka Ramaputra, who schooled him in the attainment of a meditative absorption termed 'state or sphere of neither perception nor non-perception' (*naivasamjnanasamjnayatana*). Ramaputra eventually offered him sole leadership of his following. Once again, this was not what Siddhartha was looking for, so he moved on. This time he took to the path of asceticism. He lived for five to six years at Uruvilva, on the Nairanjana River, with five fellow ascetics who later became his followers. He carried self-torture to unprecedented extremes, holding his breath for long periods and dramatically reducing his intake of food. The story of this phase of his search is told in the *Mahasaccaka Sutta*.

After endangering his life by this willful pursuit of asceticism, Siddhartha again rejected his attainment. This

time he saw this practice as dangerous and ultimately wasteful. He began taking food in reasonable quantities again and was firmly rejected by his ascetic pupils. So, he set out for the Deer Park at Isipatana, near present day Benares.

In a mood of profound resolution, he sat beneath a tree on the banks of the Nairanjana, where he recalled a natural and unforced experience of meditative absorption (*dhyana*) that had occurred to him in his youth as he sat beneath a rose-apple tree. Taking this as a more balanced and harmonious approach to his quest, during the course of a night spent contemplating the mystery of death and rebirth, he eventually gained a new and profound insight into the nature of the human condition and reality. This was Siddhartha's enlightenment or 'waking up' to the way things really are (*yathabhuta*) and for which reason he came to be called the Buddha or one who has awoken. It was his thirty-fifth year.

Immediately after his enlightenment, the Buddha spent several weeks in the vicinity of the Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa*) (later known as Bodh Gaya), absorbing and assimilating the impact of his transforming insight. He experienced doubts as to whether to communicate this to others, but was encouraged by the high deity (*Brahma*) called Sahampati, to do so for the benefit of those who might be able to understand his message. He thought of his ascetic companions who had left him in disgust and set off to teach them what he had realized. After much initial resistance, they eventually came to the same insight that he himself had achieved at Bodh Gaya.

He later successfully instructed fifty-five more young men and, together with the first five, he asked them to wander the roads and by-ways of the land, each on their own, teaching this same insight into the way things are, for the benefit of the many. The Buddha continued to teach for the next 45 years. His community of followers (*sangha*) grew quickly and he spent much of his time in urban centers such as Rajagrha, Vaisali, and Sravasti, where he had the opportunity to contact the greatest number of people.

At the age of 80, the Buddha grew seriously ill while in the city of Vaisali. He announced that he was to die, or enter his *parinirvana*, in three months time. It is widely believed that his immediate cause of death was a meal of pork or truffles received from a metal-worker called Cunda, which led to severe dysentery. He passed away among a grove of sal trees at Kusinagara. His final words were "*vayadhamma samkhara, appamadena sampadetha,*" or "all compounded things are liable to decay; strive with mindfulness." Seven days later his remains were cremated, and the remains were distributed among the local rulers for interment in ten *stupas*.

BUDDHISM AFTER THE BUDDHA'S PARINIRVANA

The Buddha's disciples, making up the *sangha*, continued his teachings. They met regularly to maintain unity and to regulate the life of the community. Occasionally, more formal Councils were held to discuss and clarify the Buddha's teachings. There were at least four of these during the 500 years following his *parinirvana*. In this process the Buddhist canon was developed. However, differences developed within the *sangha* around the beginning of the Common Era. Out of these differences, separate schools emerged. All still held as valid the Buddha's basic tenets, but the path to enlightenment, the purpose of enlightenment, and philosophical beliefs on the nature of reality varied within the different schools. This led to a diversity of paths which could meet the needs of a variety of spiritual aspirants.

There developed two primary divisions, the Mahayana (Greater Vehicle) and Theravada (teaching of the elders). The Mahayana regards the aspirations and goal of the non-Mahayana schools, i.e. individual liberation, as selfish and inadequate. It replaces them with a radical emphasis upon total altruism and fullest Awakening, embodied in the Bodhisattva Path, and full and perfect Buddhahood



attained for the sake of alleviating the suffering of all beings (discussed in more detail in the next section). The Tibetan form of Buddhism developed early in the Mahayana tradition.



Theravada is widely practiced in Southeast Asia. It began to develop in Burma around the 3rd century BCE when the monk, Asoka, traveled there from India on a mission for the Mon people of Lower Burma and Thailand. These were the first mainland countries outside India to come under Buddhist influence. Subsequent missions from Sri Lanka and southern India arrived in the 1st century CE and firmly established a Theravadin presence among the Mons. Vietnam and Indonesia were influenced later in the early centuries of the Common Era.

Zen is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that traces its origins to at least the 6th century CE in China. The term “Zen” is derived from the Sanskrit term *dhyana*, or meditation. Buddhism was brought from India to China by Bodhidharma, the First Zen Patriarch and founder of Zen. Buddhism absorbed China’s ancient religious and philosophical traditions, especially Taoism, resulting in the new school of Zen, beginning in the 7th century CE. Like Buddhism, Taoism emphasizes humility, compassion, and moderation. Zen spread in succeeding centuries to Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and in modern times is practiced world-wide.



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WEBSITE: <http://www.bodhisattva.com/archive.html> (photos)

BUDDHIST SAINTS—ANCIENT AND MODERN

AVALOKITESHVARA

Avalokiteshvara (or Chenrezig) is known as the *Buddha of Infinite Compassion*. He is the major *bodhisattva* (enlightened being who has postponed his own nirvana and chosen to take rebirth in order to serve humanity) of the Mahayana tradition, and is also known as the Patron Saint of Tibet. Avalokiteshvara is represented with one thousand eyes that see the pain in all quarters of the universe and one thousand arms that reach out to all corners of the universe to extend his help. His primary mantra is the mantra of compassion: OM MANE PADME HUM. This mantra embodies the compassion and blessing of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and invokes the special blessing of Avalokiteshvara on those who chant it

The Legendary Story of Avalokiteshvara:

In the time of the Buddha, one thousand princes all vowed to become Buddhas. One of them, Gautama Siddhartha, did actually become the Buddha. Another of the princes, Avalokiteshvara, vowed that he would delay his Buddhahood until all the other thousand princes had become Buddhas. In his infinite compassion, he also vowed to liberate all sentient beings. He made this vow before the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, saying, “If I ever tire in this great work, may my body be shattered into one thousand pieces.”

Avalokiteshvara began his work of liberation. First he descended into the hell realms, then to the realm of the hungry ghosts, working ceaselessly to liberate beings. Finally he reached the realm of the gods, and from that lofty position, he looked down and saw that although he had saved innumerable beings from hell, countless more continued to pour in.

He was plunged into grief, and for a moment almost lost faith in his noble vow. His body immediately shattered into one thousand pieces. In desperation he called out for help, and Buddhas came to his aid from all the corners of the universe. With their power, the Buddhas made him whole again and gave him a thousand eyes and a thousand hands to help him in his task. He shed two compassionate tears as he renewed his vow, which fell from his eyes and became the two Taras, green and white, who help him in his work.

KWAN YIN (also known as Kannon)

Kwan Yin is a female representation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Infinite Compassion. She is especially revered in China and in Japan, where she is known as Kannon. Kwan Yin exemplifies the core Buddhist value of compassion or *karuna*. Her name means, “One who hears the cries of the world.” She is related to Tara in Tibet, the female divinity born from the tears of Avalokiteshvara.

Kwan Yin is also associated with a female figure in legend, the youngest daughter of a king who was known as Miao Shan (or Wonderful Goodness). From early childhood, she subsisted on only one meal a day, showed great compassion to beggars, and showed no interest in adornments or making attachments such as marriage.

In parallel with the Buddha who as a young prince was affected by the sight of human suffering, she told her father, the King, that she would only marry if he could promise that the man would save her from old age, disease, and death. Of course her father could not make such a promise. He then called upon a Buddhist nun to take the girl and give her such a hard time that she would give up her ideas and agree to marry. This did not work, even on pain of death. When the father was about to have her executed, the girl was miraculously rescued and ascended to heaven. At the very gates of paradise, she heard the cries of suffering humanity and vowed to postpone her enlightenment until all sentient beings were also freed.



Today, Kwan Yin is a much beloved deity throughout the Buddhist east and is called upon by people who are suffering and believe in her mercy and powers of intercession. She is similar to the Virgin Mary in Christianity—an approachable, loving mother.

Kwan Yin is depicted in art as graceful and flowing, holding a willow branch representing her tears of compassion. She sometimes also holds a flask that is emptying its contents, representing the flow of her compassion.



TARA

Tara was born from the tears of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion. At that time, she manifested in two colors: White Tara and Green Tara. More recently, devotion has grown towards Red Tara as well.



Red Tara's legend is associated with a human figure. It was said that she was a devout Buddhist nun who sought enlightenment with a passion and yet was told by her teachers that she must defer her enlightenment until she returned in a male body. She vowed at that time to attain enlightenment in a female body, but she would defer her final liberation until all beings were saved, especially working for the liberation of women. Thus, she is known as Mother of all the Buddhas. She is associated with fertility of all kinds and is worshipped with harvest feasts.

Green Tara represents the divine energy of compassion. White Tara represents the motherly aspect. Tara is also venerated in other colors including Yellow Tara, who is related to abundance and relates to the Hindu goddess Lakshmi, and Dark Blue Tara, the wrathful manifestation related to the Hindu goddess, Kali.

TENZIN GYATSO, THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA

Unlike the previous saints whose stories are lost in the mists of time and have merged into myth, Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, is alive with us today.

The Dalai Lamas are revered by Tibetans as the reincarnations of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, whom they call the “Patron Saint of Tibet”. As such, the Dalai Lamas have been the spiritual and temporal rulers of the country.

When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama died, a search was conducted throughout Tibet for the child who had been reincarnated as his successor. The lamas who conducted the search believed they had found him as a two year old son of a farmer living in a remote area of Tibet. They brought the child and his mother to Lhasa and began his education and preparation for his leadership role.

The destiny of the 14th Dalai Lama was to be very different than that of his predecessors. He was born in 1935 and assumed full power in 1950 at the age of 15. However, in 1949 China invaded Tibet, so the Dalai Lama began his rule in a time of unparalleled crisis for his country. In 1954 he traveled to Beijing for peace talks with the Chinese. But in 1959 a national uprising in Lhasa was brutally suppressed by the Chinese. The Dalai Lama and his followers were forced to flee to India, making a treacherous journey over the Himalayan mountain range. India welcomed him and many other spiritual and political refugees from Tibet, granting them a haven in the northern city of Dharmasala where they could live and form a government in exile.



When the exiled Dalai Lama first met with his people, who were living in refugee camps in India feeling dispirited,

filled with bitterness and hatred towards the Chinese, he led them in chanting the Buddhist scripture, “Hatred does not cease by hatred, but by love alone.” Since that time, he has become a world renowned figure, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. He has authored 72 books and gives talks and meets with people all over the world. He has worked to establish a democratic structure for the government of Tibet in exile. Under the newly established Tibetan constitution, he has agreed to give up his powers and live as a private citizen within a freed Tibet.

The Dalai Lama has made three major commitments in his life. The first two are reminiscent of the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. These commitments are: 1) to promote human values, especially compassion, tolerance, contentment, and self discipline; 2) to promote harmony and respect among all the world’s religions, saying “All religions have the potential to create good human beings”; and, 3) as a Tibetan and the Dalai Lama, to be the spokesperson for Tibet until the conflict with China is finally resolved.



The 14th Dalai Lama describes himself as “a simple Buddhist monk” and exemplifies through his life the compassion of Avalokiteshvara.

MILAREPA

Milarepa is the foremost saint of the Tibetan Buddhist Kagyu School (Order of Oral Transmission). He lived and taught in the time between 1025 and 1135. He secured his place in their history by establishing Buddhism’s ascendancy over local nature-worship and promoting meditation to a central place in Buddhist practice. He is venerated for bravely and gloriously achieving personal liberation in one lifetime. Chogyam Trungpa, a twentieth-century Tibetan Buddhist teacher, admired Milarepa “because everything he did was undertaken with an attitude of complete warriorship”.

Milarepa was born into a Tibetan family impoverished upon his father’s death by a family betrayal. Milarepa’s mother secured his promise to avenge their family for the loss of their inheritance due to the treachery of an aunt and uncle. He used “black arts” to extract deadly retribution. He was terrified to find that his acts doomed him to an endless cycle of revenge. He vowed to seek salvation and began the search for a true spiritual teacher.

Soon after, Mila met Marpa the Translator, a spiritual giant and spiritual heir of the Indian saint Naropa, who introduced the Tibetans to Buddhism. With his esoteric knowledge and profound psychological insight, Marpa crafted the precise course of expiation and training for his remarkable pupil.

To purify Mila so that he would merit the secret teachings, Marpa put him through the “ordeal of the towers”. After many broken promises and much physical and emotional agony, in desperation Mila and Marpa’s wife joined forces in an ultimately futile campaign to trick Marpa out of the teachings. When Mila was finally driven to plan suicide, Marpa relented and conferred the secret teachings, or “ear-whispered truths”.

After a few years, yearning to find his mother and sister, and see the family home once again, Mila obtained Marpa’s reluctant permission to leave. Mila found his mother’s bones amid the ruins of their family home, his sister missing, and their ancestral fields fallow. When old torments reawakened, the futility of ego-based desires became starkly clear, he made the final renunciation. He resolved on his own freedom, but in the tradition of the bodhisattvas, dedicated it to the benefit of all beings.

The next stage of Mila’s spiritual life was extremely ascetic, as he meditated in a series of caves. He lived on almost nothing but the teachings of Marpa and subsisted on infrequent gifts from strangers. Finally, his sister and his former fiancé discovered him and despite their shock at his wild, destitute appearance, supported him lovingly although they too were impoverished.

As he refuted their arguments against his extreme practices and their entreaties to him that he seek alms, his sincerity and resolve were sufficiently compelling to set both women on the spiritual path. When his scheming aunt duped him again, he declared this final loss of his “inheritance” to be freedom won from the material world. He continued to meditate on the teachings, and achieved enlightenment.

After Milarepa's final awakening, he traveled widely to spread the benefit of his enlightened state. Many anecdotes are mythical or symbolic: he alternately defeats, converts, rebukes, and teaches demons, gods and goddesses, as well as lamas, laypeople, and more. A large crowd of devotees followed him, and during a gathering a divinely-inspired disciple pleaded for Milarepa's autobiography. Mila complied, with the stipulation that it be for the sake of elevating the spiritual state of all beings.

Not long after, at 80 years of age, Milarepa allowed a plot against his life to succeed. He knew, he was ready to leave his body and his death would convert the miscreants to a life of spiritual practice. Milarepa's final exposition of the Dhamma, or highest teachings, to his listeners just before his passing was accompanied by various miracles. Rainbows appeared in clear skies, flowers fell to earth like rain, gods and goddesses were seen in the heavens listening to the words of Milarepa, who was seen simultaneously teaching in several locations to gatherings of disciples. All who heard and witnessed were elevated spiritually; many became fully enlightened.

The two greatest spiritual gifts in Milarepa's legacy are the inspiring story of his life, and his spiritual descendants. Many disciples achieved Complete Enlightenment. He caused the teachings of the Buddha to blaze forth like bright sunshine and guided many more, towards the root of happiness.”

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CORE VALUES OF BUDDHISM

Taking *Refuge in the Three Jewels* is the foundation of Buddhist religious practice. The Three Jewels include: 1) the *Buddha*—the awakened or enlightened one, who has realized his true nature and, therefore, the nature of the universe, 2) the *Dharma*—the teachings that lead to enlightenment, and 3) the *Sangha*—community of spiritual aspirants. Taking “Refuge in the Three Jewels” is taking refuge from *samsara*, which is the world of change and suffering.

The Buddha’s teachings rest on the *Four Noble Truths*, which are: (1) All sentient beings are bound to suffering, because, (2) they act under the influence of ignorance, greed, and hatred. All these delusions come from the basic ignorance of not knowing the true nature of oneself and of what one perceives. However, (3) suffering can stop, leaving one in perfect, everlasting happiness (*nirvana*). (4) There is a way, or path, to end the suffering and reach *nirvana* which is the *Noble Eightfold Path*.

The Buddha’s *Noble Eightfold Path* is a practical guideline to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions and leading them to understand the Truth about all things. Together with the *Four Noble Truths* it constitutes the core of Buddhism. Great emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher state of consciousness and reach *nirvana*. The eight aspects of the path are not to be understood as a sequence of single steps; they are highly interdependent principles which should be viewed in relationship with one another.

The Buddha offered the *Eightfold Path* in his first Dharma discourse near Varanasi at Isipatana in the Deer Park. When the Buddha was eighty years old and was about to pass away, in his last Dharma discourse, he exhorted his students to follow the *Noble Eightfold Path* to experience peace, bliss, and achieve *nirvana*. Thus, he continued preaching this noble path until his last breath.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

1. Right Vision or View

Right vision is the beginning and end of the path. It means to see and understand things as they really are and to realize the *Four Noble Truths*. It means to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects and ideas and to understand the law of karma and karmic conditioning. Since our view of the world comes from our thoughts and our actions, right vision yields right thoughts and right actions.

2. Right Thought

While right vision refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom, right thought refers to the mental energy that controls our actions. Right thought can be described as commitment to ethical and mental self-improvement. The Buddha distinguishes three types of right thoughts: 1) renunciation, which means resisting the pull of desires; 2) good will, meaning resistance to feelings of anger and aversion; and, 3) harmlessness, meaning not to think or act cruelly, violently, or aggressively, but to develop compassion.

3. Right Speech

Right speech is the first of the principles of ethical conduct in the *Noble Eightfold Path*. Ethical conduct is viewed as a guideline to moral discipline, which supports the other principles of the path. The importance of speech in Buddhist ethics is that words are powerful and can make enemies or friends, start war, or create peace. The Buddha explained right speech as: 1) abstaining from false speech, especially not telling deliberate lies nor speaking

deceitfully; 2) abstaining from slanderous speech and not using words maliciously; 3) abstaining from harsh words that offend or hurt others; and, 4) abstaining from idle chatter that lacks purpose or depth. In other words: tell the truth, speak friendly, warm, and gently, and talk only as necessary.

4. Right Action

Right action means to: 1) abstain from harming sentient beings, especially from taking life and doing harm intentionally or delinquently; 2) abstain from taking what is not given, which includes stealing, robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty; and, 3) abstain from sexual misconduct. In other words, right action means to act kindly and compassionately, with honesty and respect.

5. Right Livelihood

Right livelihood says that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that any wealth should be gained legally and peacefully. The Buddha mentions four specific activities that harm other beings and that one should avoid: 1) dealing in weapons; 2) dealing in living beings (including raising animals for slaughter as well as slave trade and prostitution); 3) working in meat production and butchery; and 4) selling intoxicants and poisons such as alcohol and drugs. In addition, any occupation that would violate the principles of right speech and action should be avoided.

6. Right Effort

Right effort is using one's mental energy to guide the will toward right actions and avoid unwholesome ones. The same type of energy that fuels desire, envy, aggression, and violence can instead fuel self-discipline, honesty, benevolence, and kindness. Right effort is detailed in four modes ranked in ascending order of perfection: 1) to prevent the arising of unwholesome states; 2) to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen; 3) to provoke wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and 4) to maintain and perfect wholesome states which have already arisen.

7. Right Mindfulness

Right mindfulness is the mental ability to see things as they are at the present moment, with clear consciousness—to be aware of the 'here and now' instead of dwelling on the 'there and then'. Right mindfulness is anchored in clear perception and it penetrates sense impressions without getting carried away by them, to perceive phenomena as they are rather than as our thoughts, feelings, or emotional state might interpret them.

8. Right Concentration

Right concentration means 'wholesome concentration', i.e., concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions. The Buddhist seeks to develop right concentration through the practice of meditation. The meditating mind focuses on a selected object. It first directs itself to it, then sustains concentration, then intensifies concentration step by step. Through this practice it becomes natural to apply elevated levels of concentration in everyday situations.

ADDITIONAL VALUES OF BUDDHIST TRADITIONS: TIBETAN, THERAVADIN, AND ZEN

THE GELUK TRADITION of MAHAYANA BUDDHISM has primarily been practiced in Tibet, though many monks and the Dalai Lama are now in exile due to the Chinese invasion. This tradition focuses on universal self liberation. In the Mahayana tradition, the impetus is on becoming enlightened as a means to help other sentient beings attain liberation and thereby end their suffering. Specific to Mahayana Buddhism is the *bodhisattva*, who is an enlightened being who, out of compassion, forgoes *nirvana*, or liberation, in order to continue taking birth to save others.

Thought Training — the Root Verses

Verse One: By thinking of all sentient beings as even better than the wish-granting gem for accomplishing the highest aim may I always consider them precious.

Verse Two: Wherever I go, with whomever I go, may I see myself as less than all others, and from the depths of my heart may I consider them supremely precious.

Verse Three: May I examine my mind in all actions, and as soon as a negative state occurs, since it endangers myself and others, may I firmly face and avert it.

Verse Four: When I see beings of a negative disposition or those oppressed by negativity or pain, may I, as if finding a treasure, consider them precious, for they are rarely met.

Verse Five: Wherever others, due to their jealousy, revile and treat me in other unjust ways, may I accept this defeat myself and offer the victory to others.

Verse Six: When someone whom I have helped or in whom I have placed great hope harms me with great injustice, may I see that one as a sacred friend.

Verse Seven: In short, may I offer both directly and indirectly all joy and benefit to all beings, my mothers, and may I myself secretly take on all of their hurt and suffering.

Verse Eight: May they not be defiled by the concepts of the eight mundane concerns, and may they be aware that all things are illusory, may they, ungrasping, be free from bondage.



THERAVADA BUDDHISM is primarily practiced in Southern Asia, in countries such as Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Laos. Theravadins emphasize the personal, individual goal of self liberation.

Theravadin Factors of Enlightenment

Passive Elements:

1. Concentration or one-pointedness of mind.
2. Tranquility or quietness of mind.
3. Equanimity, or detachment and balance of mind in the face of change.

Energetic Elements:

1. Effort, which means the volition to be mindful.
2. Investigation or silent observation of what is happening.
3. Rapture, which manifests as bliss and an intense interest in the spiritual practice.

Seventh Factor: Mindfulness, which is the key to practice. Mindfulness is that quality of mind which notices what is happening in the present moment with no clinging, aversion, or delusion.

ZEN BUDDHISM is primarily practiced in Japan. It ranks direct personal experience of Truth above sacred writings, teachings, and sages or masters. Everyone is recognized and respected as inherently qualified to realize Truth through one's own efforts. At the same time, the sutras and writings of Buddhism are the acknowledged roots of Zen, studied and respected along with Zen's own literature. Meditation as a means of directly intuiting Truth is the cornerstone of Zen practice. Truth, or one's authentic Self, can be glimpsed as one simply observes the mind without judgment or attachment. Awareness grows as the mind quiets.

Great emphasis is laid on exact meditative posture, in keeping with Zen's insistence on absolute precision in the smallest matter. The Japanese practices of ikebana, martial arts, and the tea ceremony, which they've raised to the status of fine art, also reflect this precision.

The highest tenet of Zen is that Truth cannot be verbally expressed, only indicated, pointed to, demonstrated, or experienced. Zen instructors skillfully make the ordinary into tools for conveying truth creatively and often dramatically. A stick, a cup of tea, a blow, shout, abrupt departure or a bow is used to invite the student's direct and immediate seeing for himself.

The famous Zen teaching device, the *koan*, is a contradictory or seemingly nonsensical story about historical Zen figures. The student meditates on a *koan* for meaning and must demonstrate understanding to a teacher. Requests for explanations elicit additional illogical-sounding responses. Teaching methods ruthlessly throw the practitioner back on their own experience, forcing them to draw from their deepest self for a response.

Life in Zen monasteries is rigorous. Everyday life is thought a teaching as important as formal instruction. It demands self-discipline, faith in one's abilities, excellence, mindfulness, practicality, determination, strict obedience to rules, and hard work. All the while monks must maintain their composure. Practitioners are expected to live and work in cooperation and harmony, support the monastic community, and serve the greater community as well.

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SRI SATHYA SAI BABA'S TEACHINGS - RELATED TO THE CORE VALUES OF BUDDHISM



Sathya Sai Baba often talks about the Buddha and his profound teachings on human conduct and values for a spiritual life. The *Four Noble Truths* and the *Noble Eightfold Path* provide the very core of Buddhist spirituality and Sai Baba has had much to say about these essential Buddhist teachings. In fact, many of Baba's teachings on the five human values of peace, love, non-violence, right action, and truth are clearly in concordance with the Buddha's *Four Noble Truths* and the *Noble Eightfold Path*. But Sai Baba



expands the Buddha's teachings by discussing them in the light of human concerns and conditions in modern times, far from the world at Deer Park where the Buddha first taught. This section will focus on Baba's teachings which cover these essential aspects of Buddhism.

SAI BABA ON THE BUDDHA'S FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

“Forgetting the spiritual basis of the universe, man gets entangled in misery through his worldly attachments. It was out of recognition of this truth that the Buddha declared: ‘everywhere there is sorrow. Everything is momentary and everything is perishable.’ To consider the worldly things as permanent is the cause of sorrow. If man recognizes that the world is permeated by *Brahman*, which is all bliss, he will free himself from the cause of sorrow. He fails to recognize the divinity that subsumes the whole *Prakriti* (Nature).” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 6/96. p.196.

“For all the sorrows and sufferings that man experiences, it is the body-consciousness that is responsible. As long as bodily delusion remains, the fruit of *Ananda* (bliss) cannot be got.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 12/87. p. 320.

“The mind is like the rein for restraining the horses (senses). Mind is a cauldron of *Sankalpas* [good thoughts] and *Vikalpas* [bad thoughts]. It is a conglomeration of various thoughts of various kinds . . . The mind is also referred to as self, the pseudo self. In truth it is *Maya* [illusion]. Everyone says, ‘I am mentally worried. My mind is troubling me much.’ . . . No one knows what the mind is, but they suffer from the mind, from its illusory existence. The worry which you suffer is your own creation. Fear too is self-created. When we imagine the mind is there, it shows up. Deny it or inquire into it, it vanishes totally. Instead of inquiring, we give the Mind undue prominence and allow it to ride over us and subject ourselves to suffering.” Sai Baba. *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Volume XI. 1985. p. 101.

“Both in the material world and spiritual attainment, control of sensory organs is essential. It is not good to completely and rigidly control all your senses nor is it desirable to give them complete freedom. One should adopt the middle path.” Sai Baba. *Summer Showers in Brindavan*. 1974. pp. 14-15.

SAI BABA ON THE BUDDHA'S NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

“The primary duty of man lies not in protecting his wealth and valuables, but in conserving the five elements and protecting the five senses from evil effects. The same message was propagated by Gautama Buddha also. In the beginning, he studied many scriptures, approached many preceptors and undertook various types of spiritual exercises. But, his thirst was not quenched. Ultimately, he realized that proper utilization of the senses would alone confer peace. First and foremost, he stressed on the importance of right vision. All that you see, be it good or bad, gets imprinted in your heart forever. So, see no evil; see what is good. Hear no evil; hear what is good. This is what is called right listening. Right vision and right listening will lead to right feelings. Your life will be sanctified once you cultivate right feelings. Human life is based on feelings.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 8/99. p. 214.

“Besides right vision, the Buddha emphasized the need for right listening, right speech, right feeling, and right thinking. Due to lack of these, humanness is fast giving way to devilishness and beastliness.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana*

Sarathi. 7/2002. p. 195.

“The Buddha performed *tapas* (*penance*) for many years to put his five senses on the sacred path. Mere bookish knowledge is of no consequence. It is related to art, and is in fact artificial. Mere textual knowledge will not lead you to right vision. Similarly, your sense of hearing does not become holy by listening to the expositions of a teacher. God thoughts cannot be acquired by reading scriptures or by listening to the teachings of the preceptor. By self-effort you should put your sense of *shabda* (sound), *sparsha* (touch), *rupa* (form), *rasa* (taste), and *gandha* (smell) to right use. That alone leads you to proper *sadhana* (spiritual practice). When you put your senses in the right direction, your life too will enter the right path. For the wrong attitude of man today, senses are the cause. As the sense becomes impure, the entire life too becomes impure and unsacred. If you want to make your life sacred, you have to first sanctify your senses. So, the Buddha, who did penance for several years, understood that all ritualistic practices were useless. He declared that right vision, right listening; right speech, right thoughts, and right acts are the five primordial principles for guidance of man.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 10/1999. p. 270.

Right Vision:

“The Buddha declared that the first requisite is having the right vision. The implication of this statement is that, having been bestowed with the great gift of eyes, man should use them for seeing sacred objects and holy beings. But, on the contrary, by using his eyes to look at unsacred objects and evil persons, man fills himself with bad thoughts and becomes a prey to evil tendencies. What one sees influences the feelings in the heart. The state of the heart determines the nature of one's thoughts. The thoughts influence one's speech and one's life. Hence, to lead a good life, the first requisite is a pure vision.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 2/98. p. 29.

“Man is burdened with the delusion that the temporary is eternal. Long identification has trained him so, so he has to be re-educated into the right vision. The absolute reality that persists unchanged is this *I*. All else is unreal, appearing as real. The *I* in you is Paramatma (God) Himself. The waves play with the wind for a moment over the deep waters of the sea. It gives you the impression that it is separate from the ocean below, but it is just an appearance—a creation of the two ideas of Name and Form. Get rid of the two ideas and the wave disappears into the sea. Its reality flashes upon you and you realize that God is present in man as Love.” Sai Baba. *Thought for the Day*. 8/13/2004.

Right Thought:

“First of all, one should develop right vision. If the vision is good and pure, the thoughts will also be pure. If you throw a pebble in the lake, it will create ripples. How far will the ripples spread? They will go up to the edge of the lake. In the same way, cast the pebble of good thoughts in the lake of your heart. The ripples of good thoughts will then express themselves through the parts of your body, viz, eyes, ears, hands, legs, etc. When these ripples of good thoughts go to the eyes, you will see only good. When they go to the ears, you will hear only good. When they go to the tongue, you will speak only good. When they go to the hands, they will perform only good deeds. When they go to the legs, the legs will go only to good places. Thus, the lake of the human body becomes full of ripples of pure thoughts, purifying the body from top to toe.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 6/2000. p. 184.

Right Speech:

“From developing sacred vision, man should proceed to sacred speech. The Buddha declared that only sacred thoughts could lead to sacred speech. The Buddha declared that the tongue should not be used recklessly to utter whatever one thinks. The tongue has been given to speak the truth, to expatiate on what is sacred and pure. The tongue has not been given to man to pamper the palate with delicious sweets. It is not given for talking as one likes. It is not to be used for causing displeasure to others. Nor is it to be used for indulging in falsehood. The tongue has been given to man to speak the truth, to be sweet to others, to praise the Divine and enjoy the bliss derived from such sacred speech.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 2/98. p. 30.

“Purity of speech means that: 1) one must speak the truth; 2) one must be sweet and pleasant in speech and avoid using harsh words; 3) excessive talking should be avoided—practice silence; and, 4) you should see that your speech is pure, soft and sweet. Purity in speech implies avoidance of falsehood, garrulousness, abusive language, slanderous gossip and speech which causes pain to others. Today there is very little purity of speech. Bad thoughts and bad words are the order of the day. A vile tongue fouls the mind and de-humanizes man! You should therefore preserve the purity and the sanctity of speech by observing silence and truthfulness. You should exercise utmost care and attention while speaking. Speak truth which is the foundation of life for only truth will take you to God.” Sai Baba. *Sathya Sai Speaks*. (Volume unknown)

Right Action:

“The Buddha emphasized goodness in action. The mark of good action is harmony in thought, word, and deed. When there is no such harmony, the action belies what is said or thought.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 2/98. p. 30.

“The Buddha laid down three rules for all actions. All acts done by the hands should be good. The proper ornament for the throat is truth. For the ears, the best ornament is listening to sacred lore.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 6/96. p. 154.

“It is not possible for anyone to refrain from action. Action is the basis for our existence. The purpose of man’s life is to sanctify it through right action. The world is a factory where man has to shape his destiny by honest, untiring effort. One should take up this challenge and spend one’s allotted years and use the skill and the intelligence one is endowed with in purposeful activity. The stream of action flows through *jnana* (wisdom) and ultimately leads us to the highest stage of realization.” Sai Baba. *Thought for the Day*. 7/5/2005.

“Before performing any action, you must investigate whether it is right or wrong. At that stage, sometimes an evil force enters. It is jealousy. It clouds your vision, and its companion is ego. This ego is perpetually seeking to dominate the body and the mind. These two evil elements are always trying to establish themselves, particularly in the minds of the youth. Jealousy has no reason or season.” Sai Baba. *Thought for the Day*. 3/10/2003.

Right Livelihood:

“Earning income is not a great thing. To ensure peace and prosperity in the world is the highest achievement.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 2/96. p. 47.

“Many people think, many people say; ‘Money makes many things.’ But I say that money makes many wrongs.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 10/94. p. 277.

“No doubt, money is necessary for carrying on one’s life. But excessive money is harmful. You have a duty to your family. For this purpose, you have to earn an income. Excessive wealth is the cause of all bad thoughts and feelings. You can see that in most cases, it is the children of the rich who go astray. People should always remember that the ultimate end might come at anytime. One should reform one’s life well before the end comes. Greatness consists not in wealth but in virtues.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 6/96. p. 146.

“Life sustained by food is short; life sustained by the Atman is eternal. Do not claim to long life but to divine life. Do not pine for more years on earth but for more virtues in the heart. The Buddha knew and made known to the world the truths. Everything is grief. Everything is empty. Everything is brief. Everything is polluted. So the wise man has to do the duties cast upon him with discrimination, diligence and detachment. Play the role, but keep your identity unaffected. Have your head in the forest ashram, unaffected by aimlessly rushing to the world. But it is your duty, a duty you can not escape, to fully engage yourself in your work, unconcerned with loss or gain, failure or success, slander or praise.” Sai Baba. *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Volume X. 1980. p. 39.

Right Effort:

“Everyone should aim at achievement of the highest good. *Sadhana* (spiritual effort) means elimination of evil tendencies in man and acquiring good and sacred qualities. True *sadhana* is the eradication of all evils in man. Study of sacred texts, meditation and penance do not constitute the whole of *sadhana*. To remove all the impurities in the mind is real *sadhana*.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. 6/97. p. 145-146.

“The removal of *vasanas* (deep seated tendencies, impurities) which have encased themselves deeply is the principal objective of all *sadhana* or spiritual practice. This is also the goal of all yoga, namely to cleanse ourselves of all traces of the twin evils of attachment and hatred which have harbored themselves inside.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. June 1987, p. 157.

Right Mindfulness:

“When the first intimations of evil influences threaten to invade your mind, stop and inquire coolly into the nature of the urge, the manner of promptings, the type of consequences for you and others. Reason out these things in silence and solitude.” Sai Baba. *Sathya Sai Speaks, Volume IV*. 1981, p. 212.

“When one’s thoughts are centered on God, one’s feelings, speech and actions get sanctified. This leads to the purity of the inner sense organs. Purity in thought, word, and deed is the requisite for experiencing the Divine. The Buddha recognized this truth and experienced bliss.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. May 1999, p. 131.

Right Concentration:



What is meant by *samadhi*? It means treating pleasure and pain, gain and loss alike. ‘Sama-dhi or equal-mindedness is ‘Samadhi.’ To look upon light and darkness, pleasure and pain, profit and loss, fame and censure with an equal mind is ‘samadhi.’ The Buddha termed this equal-mindedness as *nirvana*.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. June 1997, p. 146.

“What is meditation? It is a way of life. While you are walking on the road or driving a car, if your vision is not focused on the road, you may meet with an accident. Concentration is necessary in all aspects of life. But concentration does not become mediation. One should go beyond concentration, which means that mind should become still. You should be free from thoughts. That is true meditation.” Sai Baba. *Sanathana Sarathi*. June 2001, p. 177.

Thought training (Root verses):

“This is the attitude of forbearance [*Titiksha*], which refuses to be affected or pained when afflicted with sorrow and loss and the ingratitude and wickedness of others. In fact, one is happy and calm, for one knows that these are the results of one’s own actions now recoiling on him, and one looks upon those who caused the misery as friends and well-wishers. One does not retaliate, nor does he wish ill for them. One bears all the blows patiently and gladly.” Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sutra Vahini*, 1992, p. 11.

Many of these quotes were taken from:

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SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHIST SYMBOLS

Mahayana Buddhism, as practiced in Tibet, has evolved an especially complex expression of symbolism in Buddhist art form. The most popular of these symbols are the Eight Auspicious Symbols, known in Sanskrit as *ashtamangala*—*ashta* means eight and *mangala* meaning auspicious. Each of these symbols is also associated with the physical image/form of the Buddha. Designs of these eight symbols adorn sacred and secular Buddhist objects, such as carved wooden furniture, metalwork wall panels, carpets and silk brocades. They are frequently drawn on the ground in sprinkled flour or colored powders to welcome visiting religious dignitaries.

Conch Shell (Sanskrit, *shankha*; Tibetan, *dkar*): Among the eight symbols, it stands for the fame of the Buddha's teaching, which spreads in all directions like the sound of the conch trumpet. It also stands for Buddha's voice and is blown during temple services.



Lotus (Skt. *Padma*; Tib. *Pad ma*): The heart of the being is like an unopened lotus: when the virtues of the Buddha develop therein, the lotus blossoms. That is why the Buddha sits on a lotus bloom. The spirit of the best of men is spotless, like the lotus in the muddy water which does not adhere to it. The lotus also symbolizes the flower of the human spirit.

Eight-Spoked Dharma Wheel (Skt. *chakra*; Tib. *khor lo*): The Wheel consists of three basic parts: the hub, the rim, and spokes. The hub represents the axis of the world, and the rim represents the element of limitation. The eight spokes denote the Eightfold Path set down by the Buddha. The Wheel evolved as a symbol of the Buddha's teachings and as an emblem of the 'wheel turner', identifying the wheel as the *Dharmachakra* or 'wheel of law'. For Tibetan Buddhists, *Dharmachakra* means the 'wheel of transformation'. The wheel's swift motion serves as a metaphor for the rapid spiritual change engendered by following the teachings of the Buddha.



Tibetan Parasol (Skt. *chattra*; Tib. *gdugs*): Above the mountain is the dome of the sky. This is symbolized by the umbrella, whose important function is to cast a shadow, the shadow of protection. Exalted personalities such as the Dalai Lama are entitled to a silk or embroidered peacock feathered parasol when in processions. Octagonal and square parasols are also common, representing the Noble Eightfold Path and the four directional quarters

respectively.

The Endless Knot (Skt. *shrivatsa*; Tib. *dpal be'u*): This is one of the most favorite symbols in Tibetan Buddhism. This symbol has no beginning or end and as such represents the infinite wisdom of the Buddha. The intertwining of lines reminds us how all phenomena are conjoined and yoked together as a closed cycle of cause and effect. Since all phenomena are interrelated, the placing of the endless knot on a gift or greeting card is understood to establish an auspicious connection between the giver and the recipient.



Pair of Golden Fishes (Skt. *suvarnamatsya*; Tib. *gser nya*): This symbol consists of two fishes, which usually appear standing vertically with heads turned inwards towards each other. These fish originated as an ancient pre-Buddhist symbol of the two sacred rivers of India, Ganga and Yamuna. Symbolically, these two rivers represent the lunar and solar channels, which originate in the nostrils and carry the alternating rhythms of breath (*prana*).

Banner Proclaiming Victory (Skt. *dhvaja*; Tib. *rgyal mtshan*): The Victory Banner was adopted by early Buddhism as an emblem of the Buddha's enlightenment, heralding the triumph of knowledge over ignorance. The flag also denotes Buddha's triumph over *Mara*, who personifies hindrances on the path to spiritual realization. Cylindrical victory banners made of beaten copper are traditionally placed at the four corners of a monastery and on temple roofs. These signify the Buddha's victorious *dharma* radiating to the four directions.



Vase of Inexhaustible Treasures (Skt. *nidhana kumbha*; Tib. *gter gyi bum pa*): In relation to Buddhism, the Treasure Vase specifically means the spiritual abundance of the Buddha, a treasure that did not diminish however much of it the Buddha gave away.

Above and beyond the smaller symbols noted above is the most noticed religious symbol of all the branches of Buddhism: the Image of The Buddha. Buddha's image is seen throughout the world in carved statue forms as well as on cloth or as a painting on temple walls. Images of the Buddha adorn every temple and sacred site. These are not intended to be realistic portraits, but are symbolic of different aspects of the Buddha's character. Some 32 features symbolize various properties of the Buddhahood. For example, the bump on the top of the head indicates wisdom and spirituality, while a third eye symbolizes spiritual insight. The Buddha is shown in many stylized postures, or *asanas*. The most common are sitting, standing, walking and reclining. The first three are linked with the Buddha's life, while the fourth represents his death. The reclining position symbolizes the Buddha's dying moments and is called *Parinirvana*.



Hand positions, or *mudras*, are also symbolic carrying specific meanings that represent the activities of Buddha. These mudras include teaching, offering protection, meditation and calling for rain. When the Buddha's right hand is raised in the gesture of *abhaya* ('no fear'), this indicates he is offering protection to his followers. Although sometimes seen on the seated Buddha, this gesture is more common on standing figures. The *bhumisparsa* depiction shows the Buddha seated on the ground with the fingers of his right hand touching the earth. The mudra of *bhumisparsa* recalls the time during Siddhartha's long meditation under the Bodhi tree when Mara, the personification of evil, tried to distract him by calling up tempests, demons, and various temptations. By touching the earth, Siddhartha asked nature to witness his resolve.

Dhyana is the traditional seated pose of meditation. The positions of the fingers vary, but they are usually lined up with each other and the thumbs just touch. Often, the hands will rest on the lap with palms facing upward, right hand on top. *Dhyana* symbolizes the intense concentration that is required for a person to overcome the self and achieve enlightenment.

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BUDDHISM'S MAJOR 'HOLY' DAYS AND THEIR SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Buddhist festivals are closely associated with incidents in the Buddha's life. Strictly speaking there are no "holy" days, since Buddhists do not believe in a god. Buddhists hold "festivals and celebrations" on days with meaningful significance in various countries around the world. The calendar of festivities differs among Buddhist countries, which demonstrates that such ceremonies are more of cultural practice, rather than having an over-arching Buddhist doctrinal or spiritual significance. The date and nature of Buddhist festivals vary with the tradition of the country and its indigenous culture. Many festivals celebrate the Buddha's life, teaching, or enlightenment. Others celebrate teachers, saints, or other events in Buddhist history. Most festivals follow a lunar calendar, but this is not true in all places.

Celebrations vary in different parts of the world, with festivals based on the agricultural year more popular in the southern countries and the festival of the rainy season more widely observed in Southeast Asia. Buddhist festivals are sometimes restrained and quiet events but not in every country or for every festival. For example, key events in the life and death of the Buddha are commemorated in Tibet with music and religious dramas. Buddhist holidays are joyful occasions. A festival day normally begins with a visit to the local temple, where one offers food or other items to the monks and listens to a *Dharma* Talk. The afternoon might consist of distributing food to the poor to earn merit, circumambulating the temple three times, chanting, and meditation. Festivals are often marked by temple fairs and temple visits, alms-giving and offerings at shrines.

BUDDHA POORNIMA (full moon) DAY or VAISAKHA DAY Although Buddhists regard every full moon as sacred, the moon of the month of *Vaisakha* (April - May) has special significance because on this day the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and attained *Nirvana* when he died. This strange, three-fold coincidence, gives Buddha Purnima its unique significance. Buddha Poornima Day is celebrated every year at Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba's ashram. Each year, the festival is organized by Buddhists from different countries. In His Buddha Poornima discourses, Bhagawan has said:

"Poornima, the full moon day, signifies fullness or wholeness; shining with bright effulgence; radiating the calm, cool, soothing rays of love; and the harmonizing of purified thoughts, words, and actions."

"Embodiments of love, we are celebrating today Buddha Purnima or Buddha Jayanthi. What does Purnima signify? It signifies wholeness. When the mind is full of love, it achieves fullness."

In Japan, the birth of Siddhartha Gautama is called by Zen Buddhists, *Hana Matsuri*, or the Flower Festival. This stems from a pre-Buddhist festival, but since the Buddha is said to have been born in a grove of flowers, images of the young Buddha are placed in floral shrines and are bathed in scented tea. This commemorates an event in Buddha's childhood when, in the park of Lumbini, he was bathed in a sweet-scented lake. During such festivals, Buddha's statue may be washed with hydrangea leaves and sweet tea. An image of Buddha, decked in a garland of flowers is paraded through streets which are strewn with paper lotus flowers. People decorate their houses and make offerings. An important part of the festival is the use of candles and other lights, which symbolize the enlightenment of the Buddha.

THE BUDDHIST NEW YEAR: The time and circumstances for celebrating the Buddhist New Year depend on the country of origin or ethnic background of the people. In countries where Theravadin Buddhism is practiced, the New Year is celebrated for three days from the first full moon day in April. Chinese, Koreans and Vietnamese celebrate it in late January or early February according to the lunar calendar, while the Tibetans usually celebrate about one month later. For some Buddhists, the New Year is called "The Beginning of *Citta*" (pure consciousness). In preparation for the festival, images of the Buddha are washed with scented water. Stupas of sand are built on riverbanks and, when the New Year has dawned, the sand is carried away

by the river or leveled off to form a new floor, just as the bad deeds of the past year should be cleared away. In Thailand and Burma, the New Year is greeted with a water-throwing festival with elements of fun and fertility. In Tibet, New Year marks the period the country is rededicated to Buddhism. Religious dramas are performed and spectacular butter sculptures are made.

ANCESTOR DAY (ULAMBANA) or O-BON DAY: In Mahayana countries, it is believed that the gates of hell are opened on the first day of the eighth lunar month and ghosts may visit the world for 15 days. Food offerings are made during this time to relieve the sufferings of the departed souls. On the fifteenth day, *Ulambana* or Ancestor Day, people visit cemeteries to make offerings to the departed ancestors. Many Theravadin Buddhists from Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand also observe this festival. In Japan the festival not only remembers ancestors but is a time of family reunion. For two days the ancestors are celebrated; on the third day the family bids them farewell with fires. Offerings are made to the Buddha, and monks visit home shrines to read from the scriptures.

ASHADHA PUJA or PROCLAMATION DAY: This holiday commemorates the “first turning of the wheel of the *Dharma*,” the Buddha’s first sermon, at the Sarnath Deer Park. The Buddha is said to have ascended to heaven and taught the dharma to the gods on the first full moon of July. Ordination of Theravada monks generally takes place in the period leading up to this festival. This is also the beginning of the three-month rainy season known as *Vassa*—a time when monks stay in the monastery for study. In Burma and Thailand, the festival at the end of the rains celebrates the time Buddha preached to his departed mother in a heaven world and is a time for remembering elderly relatives. Tibetan Buddhist festivals include his first sermon in June or July, and the Buddha’s visit to his mother in the heaven world is celebrated in October.



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A BUDDHIST SONG OR CHANT

Aum Mani Pad me Hum:

This is the most popular prayer, song, or mantra chanted by Buddhists of all traditions. Viewing its written form or spinning it on prayer wheels is thought to be equally powerful, while invoking the benevolent attention and blessings of the Avalokitesvara or the Embodiment of Compassion, Kwan Yin. This mantra requires no initiation. It originated in India and moved later to Tibet. It focuses one's visualization of the Buddha, to link one's mind to the Buddha, and become the Buddha. Chanting the mantra removes the fixation on the little self and expands one's love, compassion, and intelligence.

The simple melodic chant *Aum Mani Pad me Hum* contains all the 84,000 sections of the teachings of the Buddha. It is enlightened sound. The union of sound and emptiness in its six syllables is known as the six perfections. The power of chanting the mantra comes from the power of each of the six syllables.

AUM: helps one to achieve perfection in practicing generosity and removes pride and inflation.

MA: helps to perfect the practice of pure ethics and removes jealousy and desire for entertainment.

NI: helps to achieve perfection in practicing tolerance and patience and removes passion and desire.

PAD: helps to perfect practicing perseverance and removes stupidity and prejudice.

ME: helps to perfect the practice of concentration and removes possessiveness and poverty.

HUM: helps perfect the practice of pure wisdom and removes aggression and hatred.

This Mantra helps transform the body, speech, and mind into pure body, pure speech, and the pure mind of a Buddha.