



**SIDDHARTHA
GAUTAMA BUDDHA 563 – 483 BCE**

With his great wisdom and appreciation of how philosophy, religion and science inform each other, Albert Einstein believed that, “The religion of the future will be a cosmic vision. It will have to transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Encompassing both the natural and the spiritual, it will have to be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, considered as a meaningful unity...Buddhism answers this description...If there is any religion that could respond to the needs of modern science, it would be Buddhism” (Einstein, *The Human Side*, 1954).

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was a spiritual teacher in northern India in the 6th century BCE and founder of Buddhism, the world’s fourth largest religion. Considered the Supreme Buddha (meaning “awakened one”), the teachings of Buddhism were handed down by oral tradition and committed to writing after his death; consequently all Buddhist scripture (sutra) began with the words “thus I have heard.”

Born into royalty and predicted to be a great king or holy man, Siddhartha lived in luxury, shielded from knowledge of human suffering for twenty-nine years. When he eventually ventured out to meet his subjects, their harrowing plight made him so depressed that he fled from the shelter of his palace, an event known as “The Great Departure,” and undertook a period of study under two teachers. Totally depriving himself of all worldly goods, Buddha meditated underneath a fig tree, vowing to never arise until he had found the truth. After forty-nine days, at the age of thirty-five, he attained the

spiritual awakening of Enlightenment, an awakening that gave him knowledge of the true nature of the world and the cause of human suffering.

Buddha's first teachings, which he called the Four Noble Truths, were bestowed:

1. All life is suffering.
2. The origin of suffering is desire (dukkha) and spiritual ignorance.
3. The escape from suffering can be achieved.
4. The way to end suffering is by following the Noble Eightfold Path (essential ethics leading to the truth of all things).

Buddha outlined a guide for ethical and practical personal development in the Noble Eightfold Path that described the way to end suffering and attain wisdom:

1. Right View (realize the Four Noble Truths).
2. Right Thought (aspire to avoid wrong or immoral qualities).
3. Right Speech (abstain from lying, abusive speech and idle chatter).
4. Right Behavior (engage only in gentle, helpful and morally upright behavior).
5. Right Means of Livelihood (participate in trades that do not harm others).
6. Right Effort (abandon wrong thoughts and deeds).
7. Right Mindfulness and Awareness (keep minds alert).
8. Right Meditation and Concentration (achieve a state of mind which leads to the cessation of suffering).

Although reluctant at first, his followers encouraged Buddha to teach Dharma (the law and truth of the universe), the moral life, and the attainment of Nirvana (the state of mind of perfect peace and awareness). For forty-five years he travelled and taught in northern

India, gathering many converts (sangha) who were dispatched to teach the Dharma to others. Buddha taught that the self and soul are illusions that do not exist. Life is part of a dynamic, universal continuum, always subject to change. Everything existing is not predetermined but dependant on a cause, followed by another event called the effect (the Doctrine of Dependent Origination).

As one causes events to occur in the present, the essence of an individual stems from the direct effect of his cumulative past actions. Man goes through successive rebirths (samsara) in generating the next life, until the cycle is halted when the profound mental peace of Nirvana is reached. Nothing happens by chance, and everything in the world is continually changing and interconnected. Buddha's core teachings to support reaching Enlightenment were to follow right action (karma) and embrace learning that avoids extremes (Middle Path) – thereby halting suffering and the cycle of reincarnation, ultimately leading to the attainment and peacefulness of Nirvana.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha himself refused to speculate on the nature of reality. He said that all he taught was suffering and its cessation – suffering being greed, anger, and ignorance of the true nature of the world. His central message was that by letting go of hatred and desire for wealth and prestige, by understanding the unimportance of impermanent things, we can be liberated from the anxiety it breeds. Buddha encouraged people to pursue their own path toward Enlightenment, discouraging dogmatic attachment to doctrines – including his own. He did not speak of a God, nor focus on the corporeal world or why we live, but taught how to live a way of life that achieves inner peace.

Although Siddhartha Gautama Buddha spoke of a world full of ignorance trapped in an endless cycle of death and rebirth, the philosophy and principles of Buddhism are based on great optimism; knowing that awareness of the right path will result in the end of

suffering, true peace, and happiness. Buddha taught, “I teach only suffering and the end of suffering” (Buddha, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 22). From the collected writings of Buddha, compiled from ancient records, he affirmed:

“I have found the truth and have taught you the noble path that leads to the city of peace. I have shown you the way to the lake of ambrosia, which washes away all evil desire. I have given you the refreshing drink called the perception of truth, and he who drinks of it becomes free from excitement, passion and wrong-doing.”

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha died and was cremated at the age of eighty. His final, insightful words were, “All composite things pass away. Strive for your own liberation with diligence.”

PRINCIPLE WORK

Collected Teachings: *Tripitaka* (or *Pali Canon*)