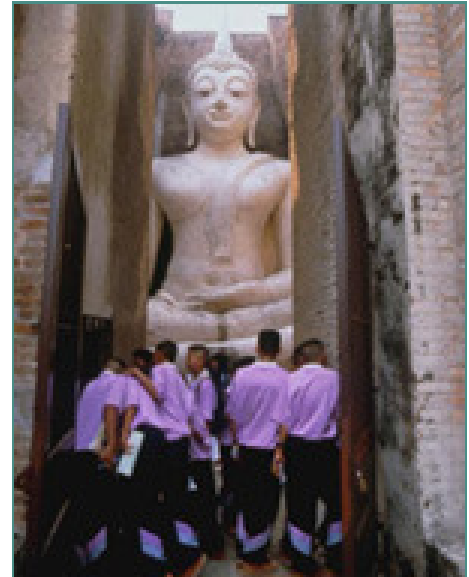


Buddhism

Buddhism has around 376 million adherents throughout the world, with approximately 150,000 active Buddhists in the UK. This number is increasing all the time.

Buddhism started in India over 2,500 years ago. The essence of Buddhism is the attainment of enlightenment. It points to a way of life that avoids self-indulgence and self-denial. There is no supreme god or deity in Buddhism.



Buddha means 'enlightened'. Siddhattha Gotama, later to become the Buddha, lived in the 5th century BC and was a prince born into a rich family. He had an easy life, living in what is now Nepal. However, when he saw the suffering of old age, sickness and death, he decided to renounce his life in the palace and live among the holy men of the day in search of truth and enlightenment. His search took him six years, but he became enlightened whilst meditating under a Bodhi tree. Following this he dedicated his life to spreading the teaching. The Buddha is not considered a god by his followers.

He discovered that the answer lay in what have become known as the **Four Noble Truths**. Craving and desire keep people on the wheel that is the cycle of birth and rebirth, and it is possible to escape this cycle by following the Four Noble Truths.

Five Moral Precepts

All Buddhists undertake to live by the **Five Moral Precepts** which mean refraining from:

- harming living things
- taking what is not given
- sexual misconduct
- lying or gossip
- taking intoxicating substances eg drugs or drink

Buddhists follow the Buddha's example. When they meditate, Buddhists focus on awakening to truth as the Buddha did. In Buddhist countries, there are many temples where people can make offerings of flowers and incense for the shrine and food for the monks. They may also have a shrine within the home. When entering a temple, Buddhists will take off their shoes, put their hands together and bow to the image of the Buddha. In their practice they may use prayer beads called malas.



The main Buddhist ceremonies are the Uposatha observance days when monastics and lay people renew their commitment to the teaching and practice. These are held on each quarter of the moon. The main Buddhist festival of the year is **Wesak**, the celebration of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death, except in Japanese Buddhism where these three events are observed on different days.