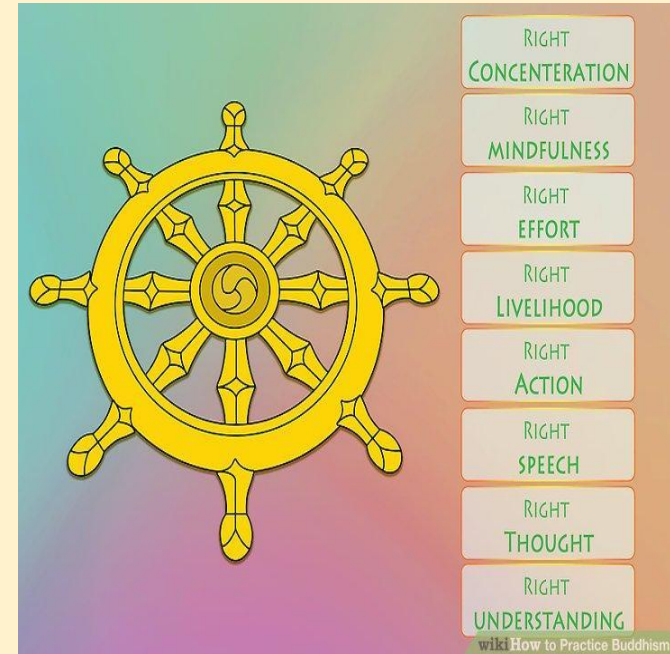


Ancient India



Hinduism

Hinduism is the most commonly-followed religion in India, and one of the world's oldest religions. The Hindu belief is that gods or *divinities* come in many forms, but they all form one universal spirit called **Brahman**. The three most important representations of Brahman are: Brahma, the creator of the universe, Vishnu, the protector/preserver of the universe, and Shiva, the destroyer of the universe.

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* are important pieces of literature from ancient India (sometimes called "The Great Epics"). *Ramayana* is the small and more compact tale of Rama (one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu). *Ramayana* teaches about social and cultural values (the importance of family).



Brahma



Vishnu



Shiva

The sacred book of *Mahabharata* teaches the concepts of **dharma** and **karma**. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a part of *Mahabharata*, as explained by Krishna (another incarnation of Vishnu).

The *Vedas* are the largest texts originating in India. *Vedas* is composed of ancient Vedic Sanskrit. There are four Vedas: the **Rigveda**, the **Yajurveda**, the **Samaveda** and the **Atharvaveda**. Vedas is the primary text of Hinduism. It also has a vast influence on Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The Vedas contain hymns, incarnations, and rituals from ancient India.

Caste System/Classes

Hindus (followers of Hinduism) are divided into four major classifications, or categories: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and the Shudras (untouchables).

- **Brahmins:** They are considered the first-class, or the highest class, of people in the Indian caste system. According to *Rigveda*, Brahmins evolved from the head of Brahma. Also known as priests (who lead prayers in Hindu temples), they are the only caste who are specialized in doing rituals like weddings with hymns/prayers and other religious ceremonies. They are also classified as white-colored people in terms of soul purity.
- **Kshatriyas:** They come second-class in the sequence. According to *Rigveda*, Kshatriyas evolved from Brahma's shoulders. They are considered rulers. Their responsibility is to protect their people and make sure that the governing area is in peace and tranquility. Kshatriyas are separated as red-colored people when regarding soul purity. *Gautama (Buddha) was born into a Kshatriya family.*

- **Vaishyas** : Vaishyas are the third highest of the four categories in the caste system. As per *Rigveda*, they evolved from Brahma's thighs. Their role in society is trading , money-lending, and finance exchanges (merchants). They are classified as brown people in terms of soul purity.
- **Shudras** : Shudras are the last group in this system. They evolved from Brahma's feet. They were also known as the Untouchables. They are assigned for doing low-class jobs (farmers, cooks, cleaners, etc.). Shudras were not supposed to live together with other classes/castes. Shudras are separated as black people in terms of soul purity.

Buddhism

Buddhism is another older religion followed in India and is known as the world's fourth-largest religion . Buddhism is derived from ancient India (present-day Nepal). Buddhism is a path towards spiritual development through meditation. Following Buddhism means knowing your mind and yourself better from the inside. Buddhism is also about questioning and answering your fears.

People who follow Buddhism are called Buddhists. Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism doesn't believe in worshiping the creator, or idol. Some people do not see it as a religion .The basic principle/belief of Buddhism is teaching straightforwardness and being practical (nothing is fixed or permanent). Buddhism itself addresses all people regardless of race, nationality, caste, sexuality, or gender.

Founder of Buddhism :

Siddhartha Gautama, also known as **Buddha, the Awakened One** was the founder of Buddhism. Siddhartha Gautama was born in Kshatriya / royal family and went on seeking for the true meaning of life, which he believed is spirituality. Buddha was born in a city called **Lumbini** (in present day Nepal and closest border to India)

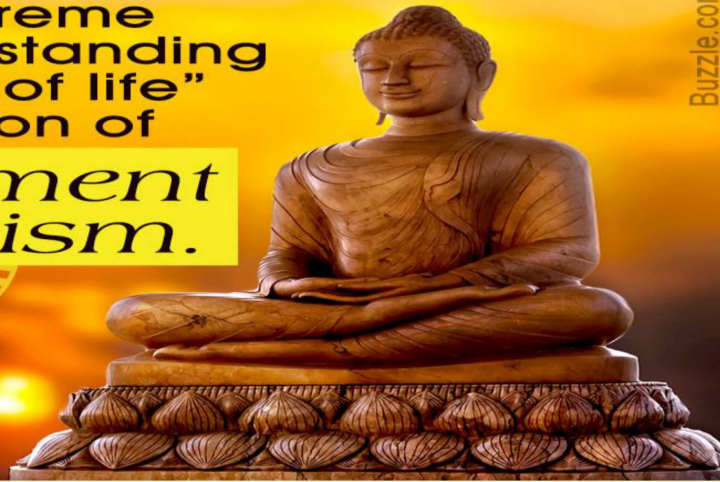
At the early age of 29 , Siddhartha had to face the real truth of life, which is incompatible with his luxurious castle. He started searching for the full enlightenment of life and in this search he mastered techniques of meditation. He knew that he had to experience himself for the good of all.

Teachings of Buddhism :

At a place called **Bodhgaya**, the future Buddha decided to remain in meditation. He knew the mind's true nature that could benefit all beings. After spending **six days and nights** cutting through the mind's most narrow obstacles, it's been said that he reached enlightenment on the **full moon morning of May**, a week before he turned thirty-five. After his enlightenment, Buddha traveled on foot throughout northern India. He taught constantly for **forty-five years**. His teachings were divided into three main classifications. They are Theravada, Mahayana ("The Great Way") and Vajrayana ("The Diamond Way").

"To attain supreme wisdom by understanding the divine truth of life" is a signification of

Enlightenment in Buddhism.



The Noble Eightfold Path

