

History of Ancient India

Section 3



MAIN IDEAS

1. Siddhartha Gautama searched for wisdom in many ways.
2. The teachings of Buddhism deal with finding peace.
3. Buddhism spread far from where it began in India.

Key Terms

fasting going without food

meditation the focusing of the mind on spiritual ideas

nirvana a state of perfect peace

missionaries people who work to spread their religious beliefs

Section Summary

SIDDHARTHA'S SEARCH FOR WISDOM

Not everyone in India accepted Hinduism. In the late 500s BC, a major new religion began to develop from questions posed by a young prince named Siddhartha Gautama (si-DAHHR-tuh GAU-tuh-muh). Siddhartha was born to a wealthy family and led a life of comfort, but he wondered at the pain and suffering he saw all around him. By the age of 30, Siddhartha left his home and family to look for answers about the meaning of life. He talked to many priests and wise men, but he was not satisfied with their answers.

Siddhartha did not give up. He wandered for years through the forests trying to free himself from daily concerns by **fasting** and **meditating**. After six years, Siddhartha sat down under a tree and meditated for seven weeks. He came up with an answer to what causes human suffering. Suffering is caused by wanting what one does not have, wanting to keep what one likes and already has, and not wanting what one dislikes but has. He began to travel and teach his ideas, and was soon called the Buddha, or “Enlightened One.” From his teachings sprang the religion Buddhism.

Why did Siddhartha leave his life of luxury?

Can you think of a form of human suffering not covered by one of Siddhartha's three categories? If so, state briefly what it is.

Section 3, continued

TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism is based upon the Four Noble Truths. These truths are: Suffering and unhappiness are part of life; suffering stems from our desire for pleasure and material goods; people can overcome their desires and reach **nirvana**, a state of perfect peace, which ends the cycle of reincarnation; and people can follow an eightfold path to nirvana, overcoming desire and ignorance.

These teachings were similar to some Hindu concepts, but went against some traditional Hindu ideas. Buddhism questioned the need for animal sacrifice. It also challenged the authority of the Brahmins. The Buddha said that each individual could reach salvation on his or her own. Buddhism also opposed the caste system.

What is the name of the central teachings of Buddhism?

Buddhist texts often refer to “the compassionate Buddha.” Why is this term appropriate?

BUDDHISM SPREADS

Buddhism spread quickly throughout India. With the help of Indian king Asoka, Buddhist **missionaries** were sent to other countries to teach their religious beliefs. Missionaries introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka and other parts of Southeast Asia, as well as Central Asia and Persia. It eventually spread to China, Japan, and Korea. In modern times, Buddhism has become a major global religion.

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Could you leave your family, home, and everything you know to preach what you believe to be a spiritual truth? You are preparing to follow the Buddha. Write a goodbye letter to your family explaining why you have chosen this life of sacrifice.