

An Introduction to Buddhism
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2600 years ago under a bodhi tree in India, a young man named Siddhartha Gautama sat in meditation through the night, being taunted, terrorized and tempted by all manner of thoughts and sensations. He did not fight them, grasp at them or run from them, but acknowledged them warmly, allowing them to appear and dissolve without falling under their spell. In this way by morning he was liberated from suffering.

The first words he spoke after his transformation were that **everything is interconnected, that nothing is separate unto itself**. The second: that **all beings are endowed with the nature of awakening**.

He spent the following 45 years teaching what he discovered so that all might experience such liberation. His followers called him the Buddha, the awakened one.

In his teachings he rejected both the austerity of the ascetics with whom he had practiced for six years previous and the over-indulgence of sensory pleasures that had been available to him in his earlier life as the son of a wealthy family. He chose instead to follow what he called the **Middle Way**, a balance, by simply be present with what is, without grasping or pushing away.

Being with what is as it arises, he came to know the impermanent nature of things. Thus he found a way to be with suffering, for suffering too is impermanent -- but only by paying attention to it, and not trying every escape route to block it out.

So came the **First noble truth: the existence of suffering**. This first truth is a comfort to those who thought that they alone suffer.

The **Second noble truth is that we can find the root of our suffering**, identify its causes within ourselves and how through our habitual patterns we create and enforce it.

The **Third noble truth is that we can be liberated from suffering** by providing patient spacious attention to our experience, both pleasant and unpleasant.

The **Fourth noble truth is that the means of liberation is called The Eightfold Path**, consisting of: **right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence, right mindfulness, and right concentration**.

For 500 years the teachings of the Buddha were transmitted orally. As disagreements arose as to what the Buddha really meant or where it is most important to place the emphasis of the teachings, or simply how to communicate the teaching to people of different cultures as Buddhism spread, there became many different schools such as Mahayana, Tibetan, Theravada and Zen. All these schools are considered threads of the same garment.

The regular practice of sitting in meditation is fresh in every moment and offers a direct connection to the Buddha's experience under that bodhi tree 2600 years ago.