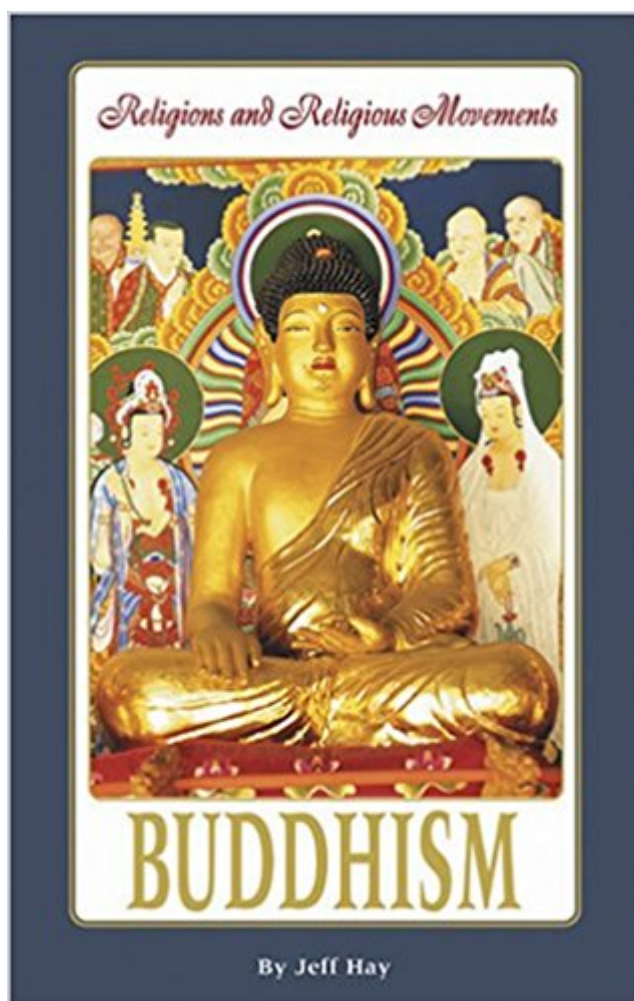


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Buddhism (Religions And Religious Movements)



Synopsis

Buddhists believe in no single deity but ascribe to a guide for living that offers the possibility of transcendent enlightenment. This volume outlines the tenets of Buddhism and traces the spread of the religion from its birth in India to Southeast Asia, China, Japan and ultimately the West.

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Customer Reviews

Buddhists believe in no single deity but ascribe to a guide for living that offers the possibility of transcendent enlightenment. This volume outlines the tenets of Buddhism and traces the spread of the religion from its birth in India to Southeast Asia, China, Japan and ultimately the West.

Buddhism, edited by Jeff Hay, is a textbook and part of the Religions and Religious Movements series. Interestingly for those who argue about Buddhism being a religion or not, the very first line in the book is that "Buddhism is a religion with no gods" \:)\ Rather, buddhism is a way of life that promotes individual enlightenment, or "nirvana".I'm going to provide only great oversimplifications to help explain what the book covers. Please do not take this as an actual definition of any of the paths.Buddhism began around 500bc in India, when Siddhartha Gautama, a wealthy prince, became acutely aware of the suffering around him and wanted to find a solution. His realization came in four parts - that indeed suffering is a fact, that the suffering is caused by desire, and therefore suffering goes away when desire goes away. He came up with the eightfold path as a means of doing that. This path is not about extremes, and is called the "middle path" for going a

middle ground between excessive luxuries and depriving yourself of the basics. The three main terms to understand for Buddhism are therefore Buddha - the official name of Siddhartha when he became enlightened, Dharma - the name of his path he came up with, and Sangha - the communities of Buddhists who celebrate this way of life. The Buddhist calendar begins from his enlightenment and in 2008 had reached year 2551. There are two main paths of Buddhism. First came Theravada, which is primarily now practiced in Sri Lanka and southeastern Asia. These are the monks with saffron robes, who abstain from food after noon and who rely on the charity of others. Monks would not have to be life-long converts - men could go for a spiritual retreat, and in fact some women say a man who has not gone through this phase of their life is not yet "fully cooked". The keys here are to focus were incense, flowers and candles, to capture all the senses. Then, as Buddhism spread to China and beyond, it morphed into Mahayana. In this version, Buddha changed from a teacher to someone to worship. In fact, many enlightened people now became worshipped almost as gods. This went further into a "Pure Land" sect which focused more on these gods and having shrines to them. Some also believe that simply reciting Buddha's name is enough to gain you enlightenment. The Tantric Buddhism, another form of Mahayana buddhism, involved rituals and ceremonies. The buddhists of Tibet had their own style as well, and their leader is the Dalai Lama, a man who is reincarnated at each death into a new body. Then there are the Zen Buddhists - yet another form of Mahayana. With Zen Buddhism they focus on meditation and simplicity. They are well known for their simple poems - or haiku, and their riddle-like koans. There are five main precepts to being Buddhist that span the various systems. You should not kill, not take what is not given freely, not lie, not commit adultery, and not drink alcohol. I do want to note that there are several areas here where they talk about women in Buddhist religion. Women can only reach nirvana if they are born as a nun - otherwise they are "lower forms" and must keep going around the cycle until they reach the nun stage. Also, the nun system is extremely small compared with the monk system, so even becoming a nun can be difficult. The book incorporates many modern and historical essays on the topic of Buddhism by a variety of writers, including the Dalai Lama. This is not a "Dummies Guide to Buddhism" for people who want to learn to practice this religion, although you can learn all the basics by reading it. Rather, it is an overview of the background of the religion and a summary of the variety of styles that exist. Highly recommended for anyone who wants to learn more about Buddhism.

This book is a good introduction to the history, philosophy, and evolution of Buddhism. Although not a strict chronology, it does touch upon the various historical contexts under which Buddhism

originated and spread. The book is somewhat academic in format, but very accessible to the lay reader - and serves as a quick introduction to the essentials of Buddhism (like the other books in the "Religions and Religious Movements" series). This is NOT a spiritual/moral guide and is not intended to be one; although I don't deny that one can pick up the core principles that underlie Buddhist philosophy right in the earliest chapters. The chapters are selected from a variety of references, and grouped logically on the basis of what they pertain to:- The introduction and the first chapter (with 6 essays) touch upon the origins: a review of the Buddhist beliefs, the enlightenment & teachings of Buddha, growth of Buddhism during Ashok's reign, and its eventual spread into China and rest of East Asia.- Chapter 2 (with 4 essays) deals with Theravada Buddhism [South Asia].- Chapter 3 (with 5 essays) deals with Mahayana Buddhism [East Asia], and its modern incarnation Zen.- Chapter 4 (with 6 essays) concludes the book by discussing contemporary Buddhism & its context in the western world. Sidenote: Chapter 4, Essay 5 is from the pen of the Dalai Lama. A significant chunk of the later chapters dwell upon local social practices (like the use of the 'Buddhist Lunar Calendar' in South Asia, or the 'Tea Ceremony' in Zen/Japan). These serve to put Buddhist 'rituals' in the context of the customs of the people who adopted Buddhism. Some of the essays even read as journalistic accounts! Overall, a highly recommended book for anyone desiring to know about the essentials of Buddhism. Mostly geared to the lay reader or a beginning student.

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