

What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is a religion that was established by Shakyamuni Buddha who lived in India nearly 3,000 years ago. He observed people suffering as a result of the inevitable cycles of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In searching for the means to alleviate that suffering, he realized, through his religious practices, that life is impermanent and subject to change, yet at the core of existence is something eternal and immutable—the eternal Law of life, the Law of causality. He clarified this eternity of life, and explained the reasons for the individual circumstances of our day-to-day lives.

Shakyamuni Buddha attained this enlightenment after many years of meditation and study. Then, for the next forty-two years, he expounded to his followers the teachings they should practice, so that they could realize for themselves the same enlightenment and liberation that he had gained. The most devoted followers became monks or nuns and were expected to abstain entirely from sex, intoxicants, and all harmful, abrasive, or frivolous conduct. In addition, the Buddha and his following avoided all luxuries of attire, accommodation, and diet. Like their teacher, the monks and nuns possessed only a robe and begging bowl. They moved constantly from place to place, so that they would not become attached even to such rudimentary shelter as a certain tree or cave. In the afternoon or evening, they would listen to sermons by the Buddha and then put the teachings into practice through meditation. These sermons were also attended by lay followers of the Buddha, interested and sometimes hostile followers of other religious persuasions, and the merely curious. Because of this diverse group of followers, Shakyamuni Buddha realized the necessity of presenting his teachings according to the capacity of the listeners. There were many different sutras that now have been classified according to their level of profundity. After forty-two years, Shakyamuni revealed that up to that point, he had preached only provisional teachings and was now ready to reveal the truth. This truth was the Lotus Sutra, which he expounded during the final eight years of his life.

Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the age in which we now live. He made his advent in this world more than 790 years ago in Japan. Through his study of Shakyamuni's teachings, he determined the Lotus Sutra to be the only correct teaching for the Latter Day of the Law, a period of time beginning 2,000 years after Shakyamuni's death. He revealed that all human beings have the potential to attain the enlightened state of Buddhahood in their present lifetime. He was able to reveal that all of life's phenomena are manifestations of the eternal true entity of life, the Buddha nature.