

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

**I M A HISTORY I SEMESTER CORE – I : SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF
INDIA UPTO 1206 A. D(18MHI11C)**

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6th century

The 6th century

The period from 501 to 600 in line with the Julian calendar. In the West, the century marks the end of Classical Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages. The collapse of the Western Roman Empire late in the previous century left Europe fractured into many small Germanic kingdoms competing fiercely for land and wealth. From the upheaval the Franks rose to prominence and carved out a sizeable domain covering much of modern France and Germany. Meanwhile, the surviving Eastern Roman Empire began to expand under Emperor Justinian, who recaptured North Africa from the Vandals and attempted fully to recover Italy as well, in the hope of reinstating Roman control over the lands once ruled by the Western Roman Empire.

In its second Golden Age, the Sassanid Empire reached the peak of its power under Khosrau I in the 6th century.^[1] The classical Gupta Empire of Northern India, largely overrun by the Huna, ended in the mid-6th century. In Japan, the Kofun period gave way to the Asuka period. After being divided for more than 150 years among the Southern and Northern Dynasties, China was reunited under the Sui Dynasty toward the end of the 6th century. The Three Kingdoms of

Korea persisted throughout the century. The Göktürks became a major power in Central Asia after defeating the Rouran.

In the Americas, Teotihuacan began to decline in the 6th century after having reached its zenith between AD 150 and 450. Classic Period of the Maya civilization in Central America.

Mahavira

Mahavira (Sanskrit: महावीरः), also known as **Vardhamana** or **Veer** was the 24th *Tirthankara* of Jainism. He was the spiritual successor of 23rd Tirthankara **Parshvanatha**.^[9] Mahavira was born in the early part of the 6th century BC into a royal Kshatriya Jain family in Bihar, India. His mother's name was **Trishala** and father's name was **Siddhartha**. They were lay devotees of Parshvanatha. Mahavira abandoned all worldly possessions at the age of about 30 and left home in pursuit of **spiritual awakening**, becoming an **ascetic**. Mahavira practiced intense meditation and severe austerities for 12 and half years, after which he attained *Kevala Gyan* (omniscience). He preached for 30 years and attained **Moksha** (salvation) in the 6th century BC, although the year varies by sect.

Historically, Mahavira, who preached Jainism in ancient India, was an older contemporary of **Gautama Buddha**. Scholars variously date him from 6th-5th century BC and his place of birth is also a point of dispute among them.

Mahavira taught that observance of the vows of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (chastity), and *aparigraha* (non-attachment) are necessary for spiritual liberation. He taught the principles of *Anekantavada* (many-sided reality): *syadvada* and *nayavada*. Mahavira's teachings were

compiled by [Indrabhuti Gautama](#) (his chief disciple) as the [Jain Agamas](#). The texts, transmitted [orally](#) by Jain monks, are believed to have been largely lost by about the 1st century CE (when the remaining were first written down in the Svetambara tradition). The surviving versions of the Agamas taught by Mahavira are some of [Svetambara Jainism's](#) foundation texts, but their authenticity is disputed in [Digambara Jainism](#).

Mahavira is usually depicted in a sitting or standing meditative posture, with the symbol of a lion beneath him. His earliest iconography is from archaeological sites in the [North Indian](#) city of [Mathura](#), and is dated from the 1st century BCE to the 2nd century AD. His birth is celebrated as [Mahavir Janma Kalyanak](#) and his *nirvana* (salvation) is observed by Jains as [Diwali](#).



Surviving early Jain and Buddhist literature uses several names (or [epithets](#)) for Mahavira, including *Nayaputta*, *Muni*, *Samana*, *Niggantha*, *Brahman*, and *Bhagavan*.^[1] In early Buddhist *suttas*, he is referred to as *Araha* ("worthy") and *Veyavi* (derived from "Vedas", but meaning "wise" in this context; Mahavira did not recognize the [Vedas](#) as scripture).^[10] He is known as *Sramana* in the *Kalpa Sūtra*, "devoid of love and hate".^[11]

According to later Jain texts, Mahavira's childhood name was *Vardhamāna* ("the one who grows") because of the kingdom's prosperity at the time of his birth.^[12] According to the *Kalpasutras*, he was called Mahavira ("the great hero") by the gods in the *Kalpa Sūtra* because he remained steadfast in the midst of dangers, fears, hardships and calamities.^[11] He is also known as a *tirthankara*.^[13]

Although it is universally accepted by scholars of Jainism that Mahavira lived in ancient India, the details of his life and the year of his birth are subjects of debate.^{[14][15]} According to the Digambara *Uttarapurana* text, Mahavira was born in Kundalpur in the Kingdom of the Videhas;^[16] the Śvētāmbara *Kalpa Sūtra* uses the name "Kundagrama",^{[1][17]} said to be located in present-day Bihar, India. Although it is thought to be the town of Basu Kund, about 60 kilometres (37 miles) north of Patna (the capital of Bihar),^{[7][18]} his birthplace remains a subject of dispute.^{[1][14][19]} Mahavira renounced his material wealth and left home when he was twenty-eight, by some accounts^[20] (thirty by others),^[21] lived an ascetic life for twelve years and then preached Jainism for thirty years.^[20] Where he preached has been a subject of disagreement between the two major traditions of Jainism: the Śvētāmbaras and the Digambaras.^[1]

Jains believe that Mahavira was born in 599 BC and died in 527 BCE.^{[6][20]} The Barli Inscription in Prakrit language which was inscribed in 443 BCE (year 84 of the Vira Nirvana Samvat), contains the line *Viraya Bhagavate chaturasiti vase*, which can be interpreted as "dedicated to Lord Vira in his 84th year", 84 years after the Nirvana of the Mahavira.^{[22][23]} According to Buddhist and Jain texts they are believed to have been contemporaries which is supported by much ancient Buddhist literature has survived.^{[6][7]} The *Vira Nirvana Samvat* era began in 527 BCE (with Mahavira's nirvana) and is a firmly-established part of Jain tradition.^[6]

The 12th-century Jain scholar Hemachandra placed Mahavira in the 5th century BCE.^{[24][25]} Kailash Jain writes that Hemachandra performed an incorrect analysis, which along (with attempts to establish Buddha's nirvana) has been a source of confusion and controversy about Mahavira's nirvana.^[26] According to Jain, the traditional date of 527 BCE is accurate; the

Buddha was younger than Mahavira and "might have attained nirvana a few years later".^[27] The place of his nirvana, [Pavapuri](#) in present-day Bihar, is a pilgrimage site for Jains.^[20]

Jain

According to [Jain cosmology](#), 24 *Tirthankaras* have appeared on earth; Mahavira is the last *Tirthankara* of *Avasarpinī* (the present time cycle).^{[note 1][29]} A *Tirthankara* (ford-maker, saviour or spiritual teacher) signifies the founding of a *tirtha*, a passage across the sea of birth-and-death cycles.^{[30][31][32]}

Birth[\[edit\]](#)

Tirthankara Mahavira was born into the royal [Kshatriya](#) family of King [Siddhartha](#) of the [Ikshvaku Dynasty](#) and Queen [Trishala](#) of the [Licchavi dynasty](#).^{[33][note 2]} The [Ikshvaku Dynasty](#) was established by First Tirthankara [Rishabhanatha](#).^{[34][note 3]}

According to Jains, Mahavira was born in 599 BCE. His birthday falls on the thirteenth day of the rising moon in the month of [Chaitra](#) in the *Vira Nirvana Samvat* calendar era.^{[20][36][37]} It falls in March or April of the [Gregorian calendar](#), and is celebrated by Jains as [Mahavir Janma Kalyanak](#).^[38]

[Kundagrama](#) (the place of Mahavira's birth) is traditionally believed to be near [Vaishali](#), an ancient town on the [Indo-Gangetic Plain](#). Its location in present-day Bihar is unclear, partly because of migrations from ancient Bihar for economic and political reasons.^[1] According to the "Universal History" in Jain texts, Mahavira underwent many rebirths (total 27 births) before his 6th-century birth. They included a denizen of hell, a lion, and a god (*deva*) in a heavenly realm just before his last birth as the 24th *tirthankara*.^[39] Svetambara texts state that his embryo first formed in a Brahman woman before it was transferred by [Hari-Naigamesin](#) (the divine

commander of Indra's army) to the womb of Trishala, Siddhartha's wife.^{[40][41][note 4]} The embryo-transfer legend is not believed by adherents of the Digambara tradition.^{[43][44]}

Jain texts state that after Mahavira was born, the god **Indra** came from the heavens along with 56 dipkumaries, anointed him, and performed his *abhisheka* (consecration) on **Mount Meru**.^[39] These events, illustrated in a number of Jain temples, play a part in modern Jain temple rituals.^[45] Although the *Kalpa Sūtra* accounts of Mahavira's birth legends are recited by Svetambara Jains during the annual *Paryushana* festival, the same festival is observed by the Digambaras without the recitation.^[46]

Early life^[edit]

Mahavira grew up as a prince. According to the second chapter of the Śvētāmbara **Acharanga Sutra**, his parents were lay devotees of **Parshvanatha**.^{[12][47]} Jain traditions differ about whether Mahavira married.^{[44][48]} The Digambara tradition believes that his parents wanted him to marry Yashoda, but he refused to marry.^{[49][note 5]} The Śvētāmbara tradition believes that he was married to Yashoda at a young age and had one daughter, Priyadarshana,^{[18][39]} also called Anojja.^[51]

Jain texts portray Mahavira as tall; his height was given as four **cubits** (6 **feet**) in the *Aupapatika Sutra*.^[52] According to Jain texts, he was the shortest of the twenty-four *tirthankaras*; earlier teachers were believed to have been taller, with **Neminatha** or Aristanemi—the 22nd *tirthankara*, who lived for 1,000 years—said to have been sixty-five cubits (98 feet) in height.^[53]

Renunciation^[edit]

See also: Jain monasticism

At age thirty, Mahavira abandoned royal life and left his home and family to live an ascetic life in the pursuit of spiritual awakening.^{[28][54][55]} He undertook severe fasts and bodily mortifications,^[56] meditated under the [Ashoka tree](#), and discarded his clothes.^{[28][57]} The *Acharanga Sutra* has a graphic description of his hardships and self-mortification.^{[58][59]} According to the *Kalpa Sūtra*, Mahavira spent the first forty-two monsoons of his life in Astikagrama, [Champapuri](#), Prstichampa, Vaishali, Vanijagrama, [Nalanda](#), [Mithila](#), [Bhadrika](#), [Alabhika](#), [Panitabhumi](#), [Shravasti](#), and [Pawapuri](#).^[60] He is said to have lived in [Rajagriha](#) during the rainy season of the forty-first year of his ascetic life, which is traditionally dated to 491 BCE.^[61]

Omniscience

According to traditional accounts, Mahavira achieved [Kevala Jnana](#) (omniscience, or infinite knowledge) under a [Sāla tree](#) on the bank of the River Rijubalika near Jrimbhikagrama at age 43 after twelve years of rigorous penance.^{[54][62][63]} The details of the event are described in the Jain *Uttar-purāṇa* and *Harivamśa-purāṇa* texts.^[64] The *Acharanga Sutra* describes Mahavira as all-seeing. The *Sutrakritanga* expands it to all-knowing, and describes his other qualities.^[1] Jains believe that Mahavira had a most auspicious body (*paramaudārika śarīra*) and was free from eighteen imperfections when he attained omniscience.^[65] According to the Śvētāmbara, he traveled throughout India to teach his philosophy for thirty years after attaining omniscience.^[54] However, the Digambara believe that he remained in his [Samavasarana](#) and delivered sermons to his followers.^[66]

Disciples[edit]

Jain texts document eleven [Brahmins](#) as Mahavira's first disciples, traditionally known as the eleven *Ganadharas*.^[67] [Indrabhuti Gautama](#) is believed to have been their leader,^[66] and the

others included Agnibhuti, Vayubhuti, Akampita, Arya Vyakta, [Sudharman](#), Manditaputra, Mauryaputra, Acalabhraataa, Metraya, and Prabhasa. The *Ganadharas* are believed to have remembered and to have verbally transmitted Mahavira's teachings after his death. His teachings became known as *Gani-Pidaga*, or the Jain *Agamas*.^[68] According to *Kalpa Sutra*, Mahavira had 14,000 *muni* (male ascetic devotees), 36,000 *aryika* (nuns), 159,000 *sravakas* (male lay followers), and 318,000 *sravikas* (female lay followers).^{[69][9][70]} Jain tradition mentions Srenika and Kunika of [Haryanka](#) dynasty (popularly known as [Bimbisara](#) and [Ajatashatru](#)) and [Chetaka](#) of [Videha](#) as his royal followers.^{[60][71]} Mahavira initiated his mendicants with the *mahavratas* (Five Vows).^[67] He delivered fifty-five *pravachana* (recitations) and a set of lectures (*Uttaraadhyayana-sutra*).^[54] Chandana is believed to be the leader of female monastic order.^[72]

Nirvana and moksha[\[edit\]](#)

According to Jain texts, Mahavira's [nirvana](#) (death)^[note 6] occurred in the town of [Pawapuri](#) in present-day [Bihar](#).^{[74][75][76]} His life as a spiritual light and the night of his nirvana are commemorated by Jains as [Diwali](#) at the same time that Hindus celebrate it.^{[76][77]} His chief disciple, Gautama, is said to have attained omniscience the night that Mahavira achieved nirvana from [Pawapuri](#).^[78]

Accounts of Mahavira's nirvana vary among Jain texts, with some describing a simple nirvana and others recounting grandiose celebrations attended by gods and kings. According to the [Jinasena's Mahapurana](#), heavenly beings arrived to perform his funeral rites. The *Pravachanasara* of Digambara tradition says that only the nails and hair of *tirthankaras* are left behind; the rest of the body dissolves in the air like [camphor](#).^[79] In some texts Mahavira is

described, at age 72, as delivering his final preaching over a six-day period to a large group of people. The crowd falls asleep, awakening to find that he has disappeared (leaving only his nails and hair, which his followers cremate).^[80]

The Jain Śvētāmbara tradition believes that Mahavira's nirvana occurred in 527 BC, and the Digambara tradition holds that date of 468 BCE. In both traditions, his *jiva* (soul) is believed to abide in *Siddhashila* (the home of liberated souls).^[77] Mahavira's **Jal Mandir** stands at the place where he is said to have attained nirvana (*moksha*).^[81] Artworks in Jain temples and texts depict his final liberation and cremation, sometimes shown symbolically as a small pyre of sandalwood and a piece of burning camphor.^[82]

Previous births[\[edit\]](#)

Mahavira's previous births are recounted in Jain texts such as the *Mahapurana* and *Tri-shashti-shalaka-purusha-charitra*. Although a soul undergoes countless reincarnations in the transmigratory cycle of *saṃsāra*, the birth of a *tirthankara* is reckoned from the time he determines the **causes of karma** and pursues **ratnatraya**. Jain texts describe Mahavira's 26 births before his incarnation as a *tirthankara*.^[60] According to the texts, he was born as **Marichi** (the son of **Bharata Chakravartin**) in a previous life.^[39]

Yatīṃṣabha's *Tiloya-panṇatti* recounts nearly all the events of Mahavira's life in a form convenient for memorisation.^[83] Jinasena's *Mahapurana* (which includes the *Ādi purāṇa* and *Uttara-purāṇa*) was completed by his disciple, **Gunabhadra**, in the 8th century. In the *Uttara-purāṇa*, Mahavira's life is described in three *parvans*, or sections, (74–76) and 1,818 verses.^[84]

Vardhamacharitra is a [Sanskrit kāvya](#) poem, written by [Asaga](#) in 853, which narrates the life of Mahavira.^{[85][86][87]} The *Kalpa Sūtra* is a collection of biographies of *tirthankaras*, notably Parshvanatha and Mahavira. *Samavayanga Sutra* is a collection of Mahavira's teachings, and the *Acharanga Sutra* recounts his asceticism.

Teachings[edit]

Main article: Jain philosophy

Colonial-era Indologists considered Jainism (and Mahavira's followers) a sect of [Buddhism](#) because of superficial similarities in iconography and meditative and ascetic practices.^[88] As scholarship progressed, differences between the teachings of Mahavira and the Buddha were found so divergent that the religions were acknowledged as separate.^[89] Mahavira, says Moriz Winternitz, taught a "very elaborate belief in the soul" (unlike the Buddhists, who denied such elaboration). His ascetic teachings have a higher order of magnitude than those of Buddhism or Hinduism, and his emphasis on [ahimsa](#) (non-violence) is greater than that in other Indian religions.^[89]

Agamas

Mahavira's teachings were compiled by [Gautama Swami](#), his *Ganadhara* (chief disciple).^[90] The canonical scriptures are in twelve parts.^[91] Mahavira's teachings were gradually lost after about 300 BCE, according to Jain tradition, when a severe famine in the [Magadha](#) kingdom dispersed the Jain monks. Attempts were made by later monks to gather, recite the canon, and re-establish it.^[92] These efforts identified differences in recitations of Mahavira's teachings, and an attempt was made in the 5th century AD to reconcile the differences.^[92] The reconciliation efforts failed, with Svetambara and Digambara Jain traditions holding their own incomplete, somewhat-

different versions of Mahavira's teachings. In the early centuries of the common era, Jain texts containing Mahavira's teachings were written in [palm-leaf manuscripts](#).^[68] According to the Digambaras, [Āchārya Bhutabali](#) was the last ascetic with partial knowledge of the original canon. Later, some learned *achāryas* restored, compiled, and wrote down the teachings of Mahavira which were the subjects of the *Agamas*.^[93] [Āchārya Dharasena](#), in the 1st century CE, guided the *Āchāryas* [Pushpadant](#) and [Bhutabali](#) as they wrote down the teachings. The two *Āchāryas* wrote [Śaṭkhaṇḍāgama](#), among the oldest-known Digambara texts, on palm leaves.

Five Vows

The Jain Agamas enumerate five [vratas](#) (vows) which ascetics and householders must observe.^[94] These ethical principles were preached by Mahavira:^{[54][95]}

1. [Ahimsa](#) (Non-violence or non-injury): Mahavira taught that every living being has sanctity and dignity which should be respected as one expects one's own sanctity and dignity to be respected. *Ahimsa*, Jainism's first and most important vow, applies to actions, speech, and thought.^[96]
2. [Satya](#) (truthfulness): Applies to oneself and others.^[96]
3. [Asteya](#) (non-stealing): Not "taking anything that has not been given"^[97]
4. [Brahmacharya](#) (chastity): Abstinence from sex and sensual pleasures for monks, and faithfulness to one's partner for householders^{[96][98]}
5. [Aparigraha](#) (non-attachment): For lay people, an attitude of non-attachment to property or worldly possessions; for mendicants, not owning anything^[99]

The goal of these principles is to achieve spiritual peace, a better rebirth, or (ultimately) liberation.^{[100][101][102]} According to Chakravarthi, these teachings help improve a person's quality

of life.^[103] However, Dundas writes that Mahavira's emphasis on non-violence and restraint has been interpreted by some Jain scholars to "not be driven by merit from giving or compassion to other creatures, nor a duty to rescue all creatures" but by "continual self discipline": a cleansing of the soul which leads to spiritual development and release.^[104]

Mahavira is best remembered in the Indian traditions for his teaching that *ahimsa* is the supreme moral virtue.^{[54][105]} He taught that *ahimsa* covers all living beings,^[106] and injuring any being in any form creates bad *karma* (which affects one's rebirth, future well-being, and suffering).^[107] According to Mahatma Gandhi, Mahavira was the greatest authority on *ahimsa*.^{[108][109][110]}

Soul

Mahavira taught that the soul exists, a premise shared with Hinduism but not Buddhism. There is no soul (or self) in Buddhism, and its teachings are based on the concept of *anatta* (non-self).^{[111][112][113]} Mahavira taught that the soul is *dravya* (substantial), eternal, and yet temporary.^[114]

To Mahavira, the metaphysical nature of the universe consists of *dravya*, *jiva*, and *ajiva* (inanimate objects).^[71] The *jiva* is bound to *samsāra* (transmigration) because of *karma* (the effects of one's actions).^[71] Karma, in Jainism, includes actions and intent; it colors the soul (*lesya*), affecting how, where, and as what a soul is reborn after death.^[115]

According to Mahavira, there is no creator deity and existence has neither beginning nor end. Gods and demons exist in Jainism, however, whose *jivas* a part of the same cycle of birth and death.^[116] The goal of spiritual practice is to liberate the *jiva* from its karmic accumulation and

enter the realm of the *siddhas*, souls who are liberated from rebirth.^[117] Enlightenment, to Mahavira, is the consequence of self-cultivation and self-restraint.^[104]

Anekantavada[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: Anekantavada

Mahavira taught the doctrine of *anekantavada* (many-sided reality).^{[118][119][120]} Although the word does not appear in the earliest Jain literature or the Agamas, the doctrine is illustrated in Mahavira's answers to questions posed by his followers.^[118] Truth and reality are complex, and have a number of aspects. Reality can be experienced, but it is impossible to express it fully with language alone; human attempts to communicate are *nayas* ("partial expression[s] of the truth").^[118] Language itself is not truth, but a means of expressing it. From truth, according to Mahavira, language returns—not the other way around.^{[118][121]} One can experience the "truth" of a taste, but cannot fully express that taste through language. Any attempt to express the experience is *syāt*: valid "in some respect", but still a "perhaps, just one perspective, incomplete".^[121] Spiritual truths are also complex, with multiple aspects, and language cannot express their plurality; however, they can be experienced through effort and appropriate karma.^[118]

Mahavira's *anekantavada* doctrine is also summarized in Buddhist texts such as the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (in which he is called Nigantha Nātaputta),^[note 7] and is a key difference between the teachings of Mahavira and those of the Buddha. The Buddha taught the **Middle Way**, rejecting the extremes of "it is" or "it is not"; Mahavira accepted both "it is" and "it is not", with reconciliation and the qualification of "perhaps".^[123]

The Jain Agamas suggest that Mahavira's approach to answering **metaphysical**, philosophical questions was a "qualified yes" (*syāt*). A version of this doctrine is also found in the **Ajivika** school of ancient Indian philosophy.^{[124][125]}

According to Dundas, the *anekantavada* doctrine has been interpreted by many Jains as "promot[ing] a universal religious tolerance ... plurality ... [and a] ... benign attitude to other [ethical, religious] positions"; however, this misreads Jain historical texts and Mahavira's teachings.^[126] Mahavira's "many pointedness, multiple perspective" teachings are a doctrine about the nature of reality and human existence, not about tolerating religious positions such as sacrificing animals (or killing them for food) or violence against nonbelievers (or any other living being) as "perhaps right".^[126] The five vows for Jain monks and nuns are strict requirements, with no "perhaps".^[127] Mahavira's Jainism co-existed with Buddhism and Hinduism beyond the renunciant Jain communities, but each religion was "highly critical of the knowledge systems and ideologies of their rivals".^[128]

Gender^[edit]

An historically-contentious view in Jainism is partially attributed to Mahavira and his ascetic life; he did not wear clothing, as a sign of renunciation (the fifth vow, *aparigraha*). It was disputed whether a female mendicant (*sadhvi*) could achieve the spiritual liberation of a male mendicant (*sadhu*) through asceticism.^{[129][130]}

The major Jain traditions have disagreed, with Digambaras (the sky-clad, naked mendicant order) believing that a woman is unable to fully practice asceticism and cannot achieve spiritual liberation because of her gender; she can, at best, live an ethical life so she is reborn as a man.^{[note}

^{8]} According to this view, women are seen as a threat to a monk's chastity.^[132]

Mahavirasvami had preached about men and women equality. The clothes-wearing Svetambaras have interpreted Mahavira's teaching as encouraging both sexes to pursue a mendicant, ascetic life with the possibility of *moksha* (*kaivalya*, spiritual liberation).^{[132][130][133]}

Rebirth and realms of existence[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Saṃsāra \(Jainism\)](#)

Rebirth and realms of existence are fundamental teachings of Mahavira. According to the [Acaranga Sutra](#), Mahavira believed that life existed in myriad forms which included animals, plants, insects, bodies of water, fire, and wind.^{[107][134]} He taught that a monk should avoid touching or disturbing any of them (including plants) and never swim, light (or extinguish) a fire, or wave their arms in the air; such actions might injure other beings living in those states of matter.^[107]

Mahavira preached that the nature of existence is cyclic, and the soul is reborn after death in one of the *trilok* – the heavenly, hellish, or earthly realms of existence and suffering.^[135] Humans are reborn, depending on one's *karma* (actions) as a human, animal, element, microbe, or other form, on earth or in a heavenly (or hellish) realm.^{[107][136][137]} Nothing is permanent; everyone (including gods, demons and earthly beings) dies and is reborn, based on their actions in their previous life. *Jinas* who have reached [Kevala Jnana](#) (omniscience) are not reborn;^[107] they enter the *siddhaloka*, the "realm of the perfected ones".^[136]

Legacy[\[edit\]](#)

Lineage[\[edit\]](#)

Mahavira is often called the founder of Jainism, but Jains believe that the 23 previous *tirthankaras* also espoused it.^[56] Although Mahavira is sometimes placed in

Parshvanatha's lineage, this is contradicted by texts stating that Mahavira renounced the world alone.^[138]

Parshvanatha was born 273 years before Mahavira. [Parshvanatha](#), a [tirthankara](#) whom modern Western historians consider a historical figure, lived in about the 8th century BCE.^{[139][140][141]} Jain texts suggest that Mahavira's parents were lay devotees of Parshvanatha. When Mahavira revived the Jain community in the 6th century BCE, *ahimsa* was already an established, strictly observed rule. The followers of [Parshvanatha](#) vowed to observe *ahimsa*; this obligation was part of their *caujjama dhamma* (Fourfold Restraint).^{[140][142]}

According to Dundas, Jains believe that the lineage of Parshvanatha influenced Mahavira. Parshvanatha, as the one who "removes obstacles and has the capacity to save", is a popular icon; his image is the focus of Jain temple devotion.^[138] Of the 24 *tirthankaras*, Jain iconography has celebrated Mahavira and Parshvanatha the most; sculptures discovered at the [Mathura](#) archaeological site have been dated to the 1st century BCE.^{[138][143][144]} According to [Moriz Winternitz](#), Mahavira may be considered a reformer of an existing Jain sect known as *Niganthas* (fetter-less) which was mentioned in early Buddhist texts.^[88] The [Barli Inscription](#) dating back to 443 BCE contains the line *Viraya Bhagavate chaturasiti vase*, which can be interpreted as "dedicated to Lord Vira in his 84th year".^[145]

Festivals[\[edit\]](#)

Two major annual Jain festivals associated with Mahavira are [Mahavir Janma Kalyanak](#) and [Diwali](#). During [Mahavir Janma Kalyanak](#), Jains celebrate Mahavira's birth as the 24th and last *tirthankara* of *avasarpinī* (the current time cycle).^[38] During [Mahavir JanmaKalyanak](#), the five auspicious events of Mahavira's life are re-enacted.^[146] [Diwali](#)

commemorates the anniversary of Mahavira's *nirvana*, and is celebrated at the same time as the [Hindu festival](#). Diwali marks the New Year for Jains.^[147]

[Samantabhadra's Svayambhustotra](#) praises the twenty-four *tirthankaras*, and its eight *shlokas* (songs) adore Mahavira.^[148] One such *shloka* reads:

O Lord Jina! Your doctrine that expounds essential attributes required of a potential aspirant to cross over the ocean of worldly existence (*Samsāra*) reigns supreme even in this strife-ridden spoke of time (*Pancham Kaal*). Accomplished sages who have invalidated the so-called deities that are famous in the world, and have made ineffective the whip of all blemishes, adore your doctrine.^[149]

[Samantabhadra's Yuktyanusasana](#) is a 64-verse poem which also praises Mahavira.^[150]

Influence[\[edit\]](#)

Mahavira's teachings were influential. According to [Rabindranath Tagore](#),

Mahavira proclaimed in India that religion is a reality and not a mere social convention. It is really true that salvation can not be had by merely observing external ceremonies. Religion cannot make any difference between man and man.

—*Rabindranath Tagore*^{[109][110]}

An event associated with the 2,500th anniversary of Mahavira's *nirvana* was held in 1974.^[151]

Probably few people in the West are aware that during this Anniversary year for the first time in their long history, the [mendicants](#) of the *Śvētāmbara*, *Digambara* and *Sthānakavāsī* sects assembled on the same platform, agreed upon a common flag (*Jaina dhvaja*) and emblem (*pratīka*); and resolved to bring about the unity of the community. For the duration of the year

four *dharma cakras*, a wheel mounted on a chariot as an ancient symbol of the *samavasaraṇa* (Holy Assembly) of *Tīrthaṅkara* Mahavira traversed to all the major cities of India, winning legal sanctions from various state governments against the slaughter of animals for sacrifice or other religious purposes, a campaign which has been a major preoccupation of the Jainas throughout their history.

Mahavira is usually depicted in a sitting (or standing) meditative pose, with a lion symbol beneath him;^[152] each *tīrthaṅkara* has a distinct emblem, which allows worshippers to distinguish similar idols.^[153] Mahavira's lion emblem is usually carved below his legs. Like all *tīrthaṅkaras*, he is depicted with a *Shrivatsa in Shetamber tradition*^[note 9] and downcast eyes in digamber tradition while in Shetamber tradition it is wide open.

Mahavira's earliest iconography is from archaeological sites in the north Indian city of Mathura, dated from the 1st century BCE to the 2nd century CE.^{[156][157]} The *shrivatsa* mark on his chest and his *dhyana-mudra* posture appears in Kushana Empire-era artwork. Differences in Mahavira's depiction between the Digambara and Svetambara traditions appear in the late 5th century CE.^[156] According to John Cort, the earliest archaeological evidence of Jina iconography with inscriptions precedes its datable texts by over 250 years.^[158]

Many images of Mahavira have been dated to the 12th century and earlier;^[159] an ancient sculpture was found in a cave in Sundarajapuram, Theni district, Tamil Nadu. K. Ajithadoss, a Jain scholar in Chennai, dated it to the 9th century.^[160]

Jivantasvami represents Mahavira as a princely state. The Jina is represented as standing in the *kayotsarga* pose wearing crown and ornaments.^[161]



Gautama Buddha

The **Buddha** (also known as **Siddhartha Gotama** or **Siddhārtha Gautama**^[note 3] or **Buddha Shakyamuni**) was a [philosopher](#), [mendicant](#), meditator, spiritual teacher, and religious leader who lived in [Ancient India](#) (c. 5th to 4th century BCE).^{[5][6][7][note 4]} He is revered as the founder of the [world religion](#) of [Buddhism](#), and worshipped by most Buddhist schools as the [Enlightened One](#) who has transcended [Karma](#) and escaped the cycle of [birth and rebirth](#).^{[8][9][10]} He taught for around 45 years and built a large following, both monastic and lay.^[11] His teaching is based on his insight into [dukkha](#) (typically translated as "suffering") and the end of dukkha – the state called [Nibbāna or Nirvana](#).

The Buddha was born into an aristocratic family in the [Shakya](#) clan but eventually renounced lay life. According to Buddhist tradition, after several years of [mendicancy](#), meditation, and [asceticism](#), he [awakened](#) to understand the mechanism which keeps people trapped in the cycle of rebirth. The Buddha then traveled throughout the [Ganges plain](#) teaching and building a [religious community](#). The Buddha taught a [middle way](#) between sensual indulgence and the severe asceticism found in the Indian [śramana](#) movement.^[12] He taught a [spiritual path](#) that included [ethical training](#) and [meditative practices](#) such as [jhana](#) and [mindfulness](#). The Buddha also critiqued the practices of [Brahmin](#) priests, such as [animal sacrifice](#).

A couple of centuries after his death he came to be known by the title [Buddha](#), which means "Awakened One" or "Enlightened One".^[13] Gautama's teachings were compiled by the Buddhist community in the [Suttas](#), which contain his discourses, and the [Vinaya](#), his codes for monastic practice. These were passed down in [Middle-Indo Aryan](#) dialects through an [oral tradition](#).^{[14][15]} Later generations composed additional texts, such as systematic treatises known

as [Abhidharma](#), biographies of the Buddha, collections of stories about the Buddha's past lives known as [Jataka tales](#), and additional discourses, i.e, the [Mahayana sutras](#).^{[16][17]}



Besides "Buddha" and the name Siddhārtha Gautama (Pali: Siddhattha Gotama), he was also known by other names and titles, such as Shakyamuni ("Sage of the [Shakyas](#)").^{[18][note 5]}

In the early texts, the Buddha also often refers to himself as [Tathāgata](#) (Sanskrit: [tə'tʰaːgətə]). The term is often thought to mean either "one who has thus gone" (tathā-gata) or "one who has thus come" (tathā-āgata), possibly referring to the transcendental nature of the Buddha's spiritual attainment.^[19]

A common list of [epithets](#) are commonly seen together in the canonical texts, and depict some of his spiritual qualities:^[20]

- *Sammasambuddho* – [Perfectly self-awakened](#)
- *Vijja-carana-sampano* – Endowed with higher knowledge and ideal conduct.
- *Sugato* – Well-gone or Well-spoken.
- *Lokavidu* – Knower of the [many worlds](#).
- *Anuttaro Purisa-damma-sarathi* – Unexcelled trainer of untrained people.
- *Satthadeva-Manussanam* – Teacher of [gods](#) and humans.
- *Bhagavathi* – [The Blessed one](#)
- *Araham* – Worthy of homage. An [Arahant](#) is "one with taints destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of being, and is completely liberated through final knowledge."

- [Jina](#) – Conqueror. Although the term is more commonly used to name an individual who has attained liberation in the religion [Jainism](#), it is also an alternative title for the Buddha.^[21]

The [Pali Canon](#) also contains numerous other titles and epithets for the Buddha, including: All-seeing, All-transcending sage, Bull among men, The Caravan leader, Dispeller of darkness, The Eye, Foremost of charioteers, Foremost of those who can cross, King of the Dharma (*Dharmaraja*), Kinsman of the Sun, Helper of the World (*Lokanatha*), Lion (*Siha*), Lord of the Dhamma, Of excellent wisdom (*Varapañña*), Radiant One, Torchbearer of mankind, Unsurpassed doctor and surgeon, Victor in battle, and Wielder of power.^[22]

Historical person

Scholars are hesitant to make unqualified claims about the historical facts of the Buddha's life. Most people accept that the Buddha lived, taught, and founded a monastic order during the [Mahajanapada](#) era during the reign of [Bimbisara](#) (c. 558 – c. 491 BCE, or c. 400 BCE),^{[23][24][25]} the ruler of the [Magadha](#) empire, and died during the early years of the reign of [Ajatashatru](#), who was the successor of Bimbisara, thus making him a younger contemporary of [Mahavira](#), the Jain [tirthankara](#).^{[26][27]} While the general sequence of "birth, maturity, renunciation, search, awakening and liberation, teaching, death" is widely accepted,^[28] there is less consensus on the veracity of many details contained in traditional biographies.^{[29][30][31]}

The times of Gautama's birth and death are uncertain. Most historians in the early 20th century dated his lifetime as c. 563 BCE to 483 BCE.^{[1][32]} Within the Eastern Buddhist tradition of China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan, the traditional date for the death of the Buddha was 949 B.C.^[1] According to the Ka-tan system of time calculation in the [Kalachakra](#) tradition, Buddha is believed to have died about 833 BCE.^[33] More recently his death is dated later, between 411 and

400 BCE, while at a symposium on this question held in 1988,^{[34][35][36]} the majority of those who presented definite opinions gave dates within 20 years either side of 400 BCE for the Buddha's death.^{[1][37][note 4]} These alternative chronologies, however, have not been accepted by all historians.^{[43][44][note 6]}

According to the Buddhist tradition, Gautama was born in [Lumbini](#), now in modern-day Nepal, and raised in Kapilavastu, which may have been either in what is present-day [Tilaurakot](#), Nepal or [Piprahwa](#), India.^[note 1] According to Buddhist tradition, he obtained his enlightenment in [Bodh Gaya](#), gave his first sermon in [Sarnath](#), and died in [Kushinagar](#).

One of Gautama's usual names was "Sakamuni" or "Sakyamunī" ("Sage of the Shakyas"). This and the evidence of the early texts suggests that he was born into the [Shakya](#) clan, a community that was on the periphery, both geographically and culturally, of the eastern Indian subcontinent in the 5th century BCE.^[65] The community was either a small republic, or an [oligarchy](#). His father was an elected chieftain, or oligarch.^[65] Bronkhorst calls this eastern culture [Greater Magadha](#) and notes that "Buddhism and Jainism arose in a culture which was recognized as being non-Vedic".^[66]

The Shakyas were an eastern sub-Himalayan ethnic group who were considered outside of the [Āryāvarta](#) and of 'mixed origin' (*saṃkīrṇa-yonayah*, possibly part Aryan and part indigenous). The [laws of Manu](#) treats them as being non [Aryan](#). As noted by Levman, "The *Baudhāyana-dharmaśāstra* (1.1.2.13–4) lists all the tribes of Magadha as being outside the pale of the Āryāvarta; and just visiting them required a purificatory sacrifice as expiation" (In Manu 10.11, 22).^[67] This is confirmed by the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*, where the Sakyans are said to be "rough-spoken", "of menial origin" and criticised because "they do not honour, respect, esteem, revere or pay homage to Brahmans."^[67] Some of the non-Vedic practices of this tribe included

incest (marrying their sisters), the worship of trees, tree spirits and nagas.^[67] According to Levman "while the Sakyans' rough speech and Munda ancestors do not prove that they spoke a non-Indo-Aryan language, there is a lot of other evidence suggesting that they were indeed a separate ethnic (and probably linguistic) group."^[67] [Christopher I. Beckwith](#) identifies the Shakyas as [Scythians](#).^[68]

Apart from the [Vedic Brahmins](#), the Buddha's lifetime coincided with the flourishing of influential [Śramaṇa schools](#) of thought like [Ājīvika](#), [Cārvāka](#), [Jainism](#), and [Ajñana](#).^[69] [Brahmajala Sutta](#) records sixty-two such schools of thought. In this context, a śramaṇa refers to one who labors, toils, or exerts themselves (for some higher or religious purpose). It was also the age of influential thinkers like [Mahavira](#),^[70] [Pūraṇa Kassapa](#), [Makkhali Gosāla](#), [Ajita Kesakambalī](#), [Pakudha Kaccāyana](#), and [Saṅjaya Belatthaputta](#), as recorded in [Samaññaphala Sutta](#), whose viewpoints the Buddha most certainly must have been acquainted with.^{[71][72][note 8]} Indeed, [Śāriputra](#) and [Moggallāna](#), two of the foremost disciples of the Buddha, were formerly the foremost disciples of Saṅjaya Belatthaputta, the sceptic,^[74] and the Pali canon frequently depicts Buddha engaging in debate with the adherents of rival schools of thought. There is also philological evidence to suggest that the two masters, [Alara Kalama](#) and [Uddaka Rāmaputta](#), were indeed historical figures and they most probably taught Buddha two different forms of meditative techniques.^[75] Thus, Buddha was just one of the many śramaṇa philosophers of that time.^[76] In an era where holiness of person was judged by their level of asceticism,^[77] Buddha was a reformist within the śramaṇa movement, rather than a reactionary against Vedic Brahminism.^[78]

Historically, the life of the Buddha also coincided with the [Achaemenid conquest of the Indus Valley](#) during the rule of [Darius I](#) from about 517/516 BCE.^[79] This [Achaemenid](#) occupation of

the areas of [Gandhara](#) and [Sindh](#), which lasted about two centuries, was accompanied by the introduction of Achaemenid religions, reformed [Mazdaism](#) or early [Zoroastrianism](#), to which Buddhism might have in part reacted.^[79] In particular, the ideas of the Buddha may have partly consisted of a rejection of the "absolutist" or "perfectionist" ideas contained in these Achaemenid religions.^[79]

No written records about Gautama were found from his lifetime or from the one or two centuries thereafter. But from the middle of the 3rd century BCE, several [Edicts of Ashoka](#) (reigned c. 269–232 BCE) mention the Buddha, and particularly [Ashoka's Lumbini pillar inscription](#) commemorates the Emperor's pilgrimage to [Lumbini](#) as the Buddha's birthplace, calling him the *Buddha Shakyamuni* ([Brahmi script](#): 𑀧𑀺𑀢𑀺𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺𑀓 *Bu-dha Sa-kya-mu-nī*, "Buddha, Sage of the [Shakyas](#)").^[80] Another one of his edicts ([Minor Rock Edict No. 3](#)) mentions the titles of several [Dhamma](#) texts (in Buddhism, "dhamma" is another word for "dharma"),^[81] establishing the existence of a written Buddhist tradition at least by the time of the [Maurya era](#). These texts may be the precursor of the [Pāli Canon](#).^{[82][83][note 9]}

"Sakamuni" is also mentioned in the reliefs of [Bharhut](#), dated to circa 100 BCE, in relation with his illumination and the [Bodhi tree](#), with the inscription *Bhagavato Sakamunino Bodho* ("The illumination of the Blessed Sakamuni").^[84]

The oldest surviving Buddhist manuscripts are the [Gandhāran Buddhist texts](#), found in Afghanistan and written in [Gāndhārī](#), they date from the first century BCE to the third century CE.^[85]

On the basis of [philological](#) evidence, Indologist and Pali expert [Oskar von Hinüber](#) says that some of the Pali suttas have retained very archaic place-names, syntax, and historical data from

close to the Buddha's lifetime, including the [Mahāparinibbāna Sutta](#) which contains a detailed account of the Buddha's final days. Hinüber proposes a composition date of no later than 350–320 BCE for this text, which would allow for a "true historical memory" of the events approximately 60 years prior if the Short Chronology for the Buddha's lifetime is accepted (but he also points out that such a text was originally intended more as [hagiography](#) than as an exact historical record of events).^{[86][87]}

John S. Strong sees certain biographical fragments in the canonical texts preserved in Pali, as well as Chinese, Tibetan and Sanskrit as the earliest material. These include texts such as the “Discourse on the Noble Quest” (Pali: *Ariyapariyesana-sutta*) and its parallels in other languages.^[88]

Biographical sources

The sources which present a complete picture of the life of Siddhārtha Gautama are a variety of different, and sometimes conflicting, traditional biographies. These include the [Buddhacarita](#), [Lalitavistara Sūtra](#), [Mahāvastu](#), and the [Nidānakathā](#).^[91] Of these, the [Buddhacarita](#)^{[92][93][94]} is the earliest full biography, an epic poem written by the poet [Aśvaghosa](#) in the first century CE.^[95] The [Lalitavistara Sūtra](#) is the next oldest biography, a [Mahāyāna/Sarvāstivāda](#) biography dating to the 3rd century CE.^[96] The [Mahāvastu](#) from the [Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda](#) tradition is another major biography, composed incrementally until perhaps the 4th century CE.^[96] The [Dharmaguptaka](#) biography of the Buddha is the most exhaustive, and is entitled the [Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra](#),^[97] and various Chinese translations of this date between the 3rd and 6th century CE. The [Nidānakathā](#) is from the [Theravada](#) tradition in Sri Lanka and was composed in the 5th century by [Buddhaghosa](#).^[98]

The earlier canonical sources include the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* ([MN 26](#)), the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* ([DN 16](#)), the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* (MN 36), the *Mahapadana Sutta* (DN 14), and the *Achariyabhuta Sutta* (MN 123), which include selective accounts that may be older, but are not full biographies. The [Jātaka tales](#) retell previous lives of Gautama as a [bodhisattva](#), and the first collection of these can be dated among the earliest Buddhist texts.^[99] The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* and *Achariyabhuta Sutta* both recount miraculous events surrounding Gautama's birth, such as the bodhisattva's descent from the [Tuṣita Heaven](#) into his mother's womb.

In the earliest Buddhist texts, the [nikāyas](#) and [āgamas](#), the Buddha is not depicted as possessing [omniscience](#) (*sabbaññu*)^[100] nor is he depicted as being an eternal transcendent (*lokottara*) being. According to [Bhikkhu Analayo](#), ideas of the Buddha's omniscience (along with an increasing tendency to deify him and his biography) are found only later, in the [Mahayana sutras](#) and later [Pali](#) commentaries or texts such as the *Mahāvastu*.^[100] In the *Sandaka Sutta*, the Buddha's disciple [Ananda](#) outlines an argument against the claims of teachers who say they are all knowing^[101] while in the *Tevijjavacchagotta Sutta* the Buddha himself states that he has never made a claim to being omniscient, instead he claimed to have the "higher knowledges" ([abhijñā](#)).^[102] The earliest biographical material from the Pali Nikayas focuses on the Buddha's life as a [śramana](#), his search for enlightenment under various teachers such as [Alara Kalama](#) and his forty-five-year career as a teacher.^[103]

Traditional biographies of Gautama often include numerous miracles, omens, and supernatural events. The character of the Buddha in these traditional biographies is often that of a fully transcendent (Skt. *lokottara*) and perfected being who is unencumbered by the mundane world. In the *Mahāvastu*, over the course of many lives, Gautama is said to have developed supramundane abilities including: a painless birth conceived without intercourse; no need for

sleep, food, medicine, or bathing, although engaging in such "in conformity with the world"; omniscience, and the ability to "suppress karma".^[104] As noted by Andrew Skilton, the Buddha was often described as being superhuman, including descriptions of him having the 32 major and 80 minor marks of a "great man," and the idea that the Buddha could live for as long as an aeon if he wished (see DN 16).^[105]

The ancient Indians were generally unconcerned with chronologies, being more focused on philosophy. Buddhist texts reflect this tendency, providing a clearer picture of what Gautama may have taught than of the dates of the events in his life. These texts contain descriptions of the culture and daily life of ancient India which can be corroborated from the [Jain scriptures](#), and make the Buddha's time the earliest period in [Indian history](#) for which significant accounts exist.^[106] British author [Karen Armstrong](#) writes that although there is very little information that can be considered historically sound, we can be reasonably confident that Siddhārtha Gautama did exist as a historical figure.^[107] Michael Carrithers goes a bit further by stating that the most general outline of "birth, maturity, renunciation, search, awakening and liberation, teaching, death" must be true.^[108]

Legendary biographies like the Pali [Buddhavamsa](#) and the Sanskrit *Jātakamālā* depict the Buddha's (referred to as "[bodhisattva](#)" before his awakening) career as spanning hundreds of lifetimes before his last birth as Gautama. Many stories of these previous lives are depicted in the [Jatakas](#).^[109] The format of a Jataka typically begins by telling a story in the present which is then explained by a story of someone's previous life.^[110]

Besides imbuing the pre-Buddhist past with a deep karmic history, the Jatakas also serve to explain the bodhisattva's (the Buddha-to-be) path to Buddhahood.^[111] In biographies like

the *Buddhavaṃsa*, this path is described as long and arduous, taking "four incalculable ages" (*asamkheyyas*).^[112]

In these legendary biographies, the bodhisattva goes through many different births (animal and human), is inspired by his meeting of [past Buddhas](#), and then makes a series of resolves or vows (*pranidhana*) to become a Buddha himself. Then he begins to receive predictions by past Buddhas.^[113] One of the most popular of these stories is [his meeting with Dipankara Buddha](#), who gives the bodhisattva a prediction of future Buddhahood.^[114]

Another theme found in the Pali Jataka Commentary (*Jātakatṭhakathā*) and the Sanskrit *Jātakamālā* is how the Buddha-to-be had to practice several "perfections" (*pāramitā*) to reach Buddhahood.^[115] The Jatakas also sometimes depict negative actions done in previous lives by the bodhisattva, which explain difficulties he experienced in his final life as Gautama.^[116]

The Buddhist tradition regards [Lumbini](#), in present-day Nepal to be the birthplace of the Buddha.^{[117][note 1]} He grew up in [Kapilavastu](#).^[note 1] The exact site of ancient Kapilavastu is unknown.^[118] It may have been either [Piprahwa, Uttar Pradesh](#), in present-day India,^[60] or [Tilaurakot](#), in present-day Nepal.^[64] Both places belonged to the Sakya territory, and are located only 15 miles (24 km) apart.^[64]

The earliest Buddhist sources state that the Buddha was born to an aristocratic [Kshatriya](#) (Pali: *khattiya*) family called Gotama (Sanskrit: Gautama), who were part of the [Shakyas](#), a tribe of rice-farmers living near the modern border of India and Nepal.^{[119][58][120][note 11]} the son of [Śuddhodana](#), "an elected chief of the [Shakya clan](#)",^[7] whose capital was Kapilavastu, and who were later annexed by the growing Kingdom of [Kosala](#) during the Buddha's lifetime. Gautama was the [family name](#). According to later biographies such as

the [Mahavastu](#) and the [Lalitavistara](#), his mother, [Maya](#) (Māyādevī), Suddhodana's wife, was a [Koliyan](#) princess. Legend has it that, on the night Siddhartha was conceived, Queen Maya dreamt that a [white elephant](#) with six white tusks entered her right side,^{[122][123]} and ten [months](#) later^[124] Siddhartha was born. As was the Shakya tradition, when his mother Queen Maya became pregnant, she left Kapilavastu for her father's kingdom to give birth. However, her son is said to have been born on the way, at Lumbini, in a garden beneath a [sal tree](#).

The early Buddhist texts contain very little information about the birth and youth of Gotama Buddha.^{[125][126]} Later biographies developed a dramatic narrative about the life of the young Gotama as a prince and his existential troubles.^[127] They also depict his father Śuddhodana as a [hereditary monarch](#) of the [Suryavansha](#) (Solar dynasty) of *Ikṣvāku* (Pāli: Okkāka). This is unlikely however, as many scholars think that Śuddhodana was merely a Shakya aristocrat (*khattiya*), and that the Shakya republic was not a hereditary monarchy.^{[128][129][130]} Indeed, the more egalitarian [gana-sangha](#) form of government, as a political alternative to Indian monarchies, may have influenced the development of the śramanic [Jain](#) and Buddhist [sanghas](#), where monarchies tended toward [Vedic Brahmanism](#).^[131]

The day of the Buddha's birth is widely celebrated in [Theravada](#) countries as [Vesak](#).^[132] [Buddha's Birthday](#) is called *Buddha Purnima* in Nepal, Bangladesh, and India as he is believed to have been born on a full moon day.

According to later biographical legends, during the birth celebrations, the hermit seer [Asita](#) journeyed from his mountain abode, analyzed the child for the "[32 marks of a great man](#)" and then announced that he would either become a great king (*chakravartin*) or a great religious leader.^{[133][134]} Suddhodana held a naming ceremony on the fifth day and invited eight [Brahmin](#) scholars to read the future. All gave similar predictions.^[133] [Kondañña](#), the

youngest, and later to be the first [arhat](#) other than the Buddha, was reputed to be the only one who unequivocally predicted that Siddhartha would become a [Buddha](#).^[135]

Early texts suggest that Gautama was not familiar with the dominant religious teachings of his time until he left on his religious quest, which is said to have been motivated by existential concern for the human condition.^[136] According to the [early Buddhist Texts](#) of several schools, and numerous [post-canonical accounts](#), Gotama had a wife, [Yasodhara](#), and a son, named [Rāhula](#).^[137] Besides this, the Buddha in the early texts reports that "I lived a spoiled, a very spoiled life, monks (in my parents' home)."^[138]

The legendary biographies like the [Lalitavistara](#) also tell stories of young Gotama's great martial skill, which was put to the test in various contests against other Shakyan youths.^[139]

While the earliest sources merely depict Gotama seeking a higher spiritual goal and becoming an ascetic or [sramana](#) after being disillusioned with lay life, the later legendary biographies tell a more elaborate dramatic story about how he became a mendicant.^{[127][140]}

The earliest accounts of the Buddha's spiritual quest is found in texts such as the Pali *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* ("The discourse on the noble quest," MN 26) and its Chinese parallel at [MĀ 204](#).^[141] These texts report that what led to Gautama's renunciation was the thought that his life was subject to old age, disease and death and that there might be something better (i.e. liberation, nirvana).^[142] The early texts also depict the Buddha's explanation for becoming a sramana as follows: "The household life, this place of impurity, is narrow - the *samana* life is the free open air. It is not easy for a householder to lead the perfected, utterly pure and perfect holy life."^[143] MN 26, MĀ 204, the [Dharmaguptaka](#) Vinaya and the [Mahāvastu](#) all agree that his mother and father opposed his decision and "wept with tearful faces" when he decided to leave.^{[144][145]}

Legendary biographies also tell the story of how Gautama left his palace to see the outside world for the first time and how he was shocked by his encounter with human suffering.^{[146][147]} The legendary biographies depict Gautama's father as shielding him from religious teachings and from knowledge of human [suffering](#), so that he would become a great king instead of a great religious leader.^[148] In the *Nidanakatha* (5th century CE), Gautama is said to have seen an old man. When his charioteer [Chandaka](#) explained to him that all people grew old, the prince went on further trips beyond the palace. On these he encountered a diseased man, a decaying corpse, and an [ascetic](#) that inspired him.^{[149][150][151]} This story of the "[four sights](#)" seems to be adapted from an earlier account in the *Digha Nikaya* (DN 14.2) which instead depicts the young life of a previous Buddha, [Vipassi](#).^[151]

The legendary biographies depict Gautama's departure from his palace as follows. Shortly after seeing the four sights, Gautama woke up at night and saw his female servants lying in unattractive, corpse-like poses, which shocked him.^[152] Therefore, he discovered what he would later understand more deeply during his [enlightenment: suffering](#) and the end of suffering.^[153] Moved by all the things he had experienced, he decided to leave the palace in the middle of the night against the will of his father, to live the life of a wandering ascetic.^[149] Accompanied by Chandaka and riding his horse [Kanthaka](#), Gautama leaves the palace, leaving behind his son [Rahula](#) and [Yaśodhara](#).^[154] He traveled to the river [Anomiya](#), and cut off his hair. Leaving his servant and horse behind, he journeyed into the woods and changed into [monk's robes](#) there,^[155] though in some other versions of the story, he received the robes from a [Brahma](#) deity at Anomiya.^[156]

According to the legendary biographies, when the ascetic Gautama first went to Rajagaha (present-day [Rajgir](#)) to beg for [alms](#) in the streets, King [Bimbisara](#) of [Magadha](#) learned of his

quest, and offered him a share of his kingdom. Gautama rejected the offer but promised to visit his kingdom first, upon attaining enlightenment.^{[157][158]}

All sources agree that the ascetic Gautama practised under two teachers of yogic meditation.^{[159][160][161]} According to MN 26 and its Chinese parallel at MĀ 204, after having mastered the teaching of Ārāḍa Kālāma (Pali: Alara Kalama), who taught a meditation attainment called "the sphere of nothingness", he was asked by Ārāḍa to become an equal leader of their spiritual community.^{[162][163]} However, Gautama felt unsatisfied by the practice because it "does not lead to revulsion, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to knowledge, to awakening, to Nibbana", and moved on to become a student of Udraka Rāmaputra (Pali: Udaka Ramaputta).^{[164][165]} With him, he achieved high levels of meditative consciousness (called "The Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception") and was again asked to join his teacher. But, once more, he was not satisfied for the same reasons as before, and moved on.^[166]

Majjhima Nikaya 4 also mentions that Gautama lived in "remote jungle thickets" during his years of spiritual striving and had to overcome the fear that he felt while living in the forests.^[167]

After leaving his meditation teachers, Gotama then practiced ascetic techniques.^[168] An account of these practices can be seen in the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* (MN 36) and its various parallels (which according to Analyo include some Sanskrit fragments, an individual Chinese translation, a sutra of the *Ekottarika-āgama* as well as sections of the *Lalitavistara* and the *Mahāvastu*).^[169] The ascetic techniques described in the early texts include very minimal food intake, different forms of breath control, and forceful mind control. The texts report that he became so emaciated that his bones became visible through his skin.^[170]

According to other early Buddhist texts,^[171] after realising that meditative dhyana was the right path to awakening, Gautama discovered "the Middle Way"—a path of moderation away from the

extremes of [self-indulgence](#) and self-mortification, or the [Noble Eightfold Path](#).^[171] His break with asceticism is said to have led his five companions to abandon him, since they believed that he had abandoned his search and become undisciplined. One popular story tells of how he accepted milk and [rice pudding](#) from a village girl named [Sujata](#).^[172]

Following his decision to stop extreme ascetic practices, MĀ 204 and other parallel early texts report that Gautama sat down to meditate with the determination not to get up until full awakening (*sammā-sambodhi*) had been reached.^[173] This event was said to have occurred under a [pipal](#) tree—known as "the [Bodhi tree](#)"—in [Bodh Gaya](#), [Bihar](#).^[174]

Likewise, the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta* and most of its parallels agree that after taking asceticism to its extremes, the Buddha realized that this had not helped him reach awakening. At this point, he remembered a previous meditative experience he had as a child sitting under a tree while his father worked.^[175] This memory leads him to understand that dhyana (meditation) is the path to awakening, and the texts then depict the Buddha achieving all four dhyanas, followed by the "three higher knowledges" (*tevijja*) culminating in awakening.^[176]

Gautama thus became known as the *Buddha* or "Awakened One". The title indicates that unlike most people who are "asleep", a Buddha is understood as having "woken up" to the true nature of reality and sees the world 'as it is' (*yatha-bhutam*).^[13] A Buddha has achieved liberation (*vimutti*), also called Nirvana, which is seen as the extinguishing of the "fires" of desire, hatred, and ignorance, that keep the cycle of suffering and rebirth going.^[178] According to various early texts like the *Mahāsaccaka-sutta*, and the [Samaññaphala Sutta](#), a Buddha has achieved three higher knowledges: Remembering one's former abodes (i.e. past lives), the "Divine eye" (*dibba-cakkhu*), which allows the knowing of others' [karmic](#) destinations and the "extinction of mental intoxicants" (*āsavakkhaya*).^{[170][179]}

According to some texts from the Pali canon, at the time of his awakening he realised complete insight into the [Four Noble Truths](#), thereby attaining [liberation](#) from [samsara](#), the endless cycle of rebirth.^{[180][181][182] [note 12]}

As reported by various texts from the Pali Canon, the Buddha sat for seven days under the bodhi tree "feeling the bliss of deliverance."^[183] The Pali texts also report that he continued to meditate and contemplated various aspects of the Dharma while living by the [River Nairājanā](#), such as [Dependent Origination](#), the [Five Spiritual Faculties](#) and Suffering.^[184]

The legendary biographies like the *Mahavastu* and the *Lalitavistara* depict an attempt by [Mara](#), the Lord of the desire realm, to prevent the Buddha's nirvana. He does so by sending his daughters to seduce the Buddha, by asserting his superiority and by assaulting him with armies of monsters.^[185] However the Buddha is unfazed and calls on the earth (or in some versions of the legend, the [earth goddess](#)) as witness to his superiority by [touching the ground](#) before entering meditation.^[186] Other miracles and magical events are also depicted.

According to MN 26, immediately after his awakening, the Buddha hesitated on whether or not he should teach the [Dharma](#) to others. He was concerned that humans were overpowered by ignorance, greed, and hatred that it would be difficult for them to recognise the path, which is "subtle, deep and hard to grasp." The [Nyingma](#) scholar [Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche](#) states the Buddha spent forty-nine days in meditation to ascertain whether or not to begin teaching.^[187] However, the god [Brahmā Sahampati](#) convinced him, arguing that at least some "with little dust in their eyes" will understand it. The Buddha relented and agreed to teach. According to Analayo, the Chinese parallel to MN 26, MĀ 204, does not contain this story, but this event does appear in other parallel texts, such as in an [Ekottarika-āgama](#) discourse, in the *Catusparisat-sūtra*, and in the *Lalitavistara*.^[173]

According to MN 26 and MĀ 204, after deciding to teach, the Buddha initially intended to visit his former teachers, [Alara Kalama](#) and [Udaka Ramaputta](#), to teach them his insights, but they had already died, so he decided to visit his five former companions.^[188] MN 26 and MĀ 204 both report that on his way to [Vārānasī](#) (Benares), he met another wanderer, called Ājīvika Upaka in MN 26. The Buddha proclaimed that he had achieved full awakening, but Upaka was not convinced and "took a different path".^[189]

MN 26 and MĀ 204 continue with the Buddha reaching the [Deer Park \(Sarnath\)](#) (*Mrigadāva*, also called *Rishipatana*, "site where the ashes of the ascetics fell")^[190] near Vārānasī, where he met the group of five ascetics and was able to convince them that he had indeed reached full awakening.^[191] According to MĀ 204 (but not MN 26), as well as the Theravāda Vinaya, an [Ekottarika-āgama](#) text, the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, the [Mahīśāsaka](#) Vinaya, and the *Mahāvastu*, the Buddha then taught them the "first sermon", also known as the "Benares sermon",^[190] i.e. the teaching of "the noble eightfold path as the middle path aloof from the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification."^[191] The Pali text reports that after the first sermon, the ascetic [Koṇḍañña](#) (Kaundinya) became the first [arahant](#) (liberated being) and the first Buddhist [bhikkhu](#) or monastic.^[192] The Buddha then continued to teach the other ascetics and they formed the first [saṅgha](#): the company of Buddhist monks.

Various sources such as the *Mahāvastu*, the *Mahākhandhaka* of the Theravāda Vinaya and the *Catusparisat-sūtra* also mention that the Buddha taught them his second discourse, about the characteristic of "[not-self](#)" ([Anātmalakṣaṇa Sūtra](#)), at this time^[193] or five days later.^[190] After hearing this second sermon the four remaining ascetics also reached the status of *arahant*.^[190]

The Theravāda Vinaya and the *Catusparisat-sūtra* also speak of the conversion of [Yasa](#), a local guild master, and his friends and family, who were some of the first laypersons to be converted

and to enter the Buddhist community.^{[194][190]} The conversion of three brothers named Kassapa followed, who brought with them five hundred converts who had previously been "matted hair ascetics," and whose spiritual practice was related to fire sacrifices.^{[195][196]} According to the Theravāda Vinaya, the Buddha then stopped at the Gayasisa hill near [Gaya](#) and delivered his third discourse, the [*Ādittapariyāya Sutta*](#) (The Discourse on Fire),^[197] in which he taught that everything in the world is inflamed by passions and only those who follow the Eightfold path can be liberated.^[190]

At the end of the rainy season, when the Buddha's community had grown to around sixty awakened monks, he instructed them to wander on their own, teach and ordain people into the community, for the "welfare and benefit" of the world.^{[198][190]}

The growth of the saṅgha

For the remaining 40 or 45 years of his life, the Buddha is said to have traveled in the [Gangetic Plain](#), in what is now [Uttar Pradesh](#), [Bihar](#), and southern Nepal, teaching a diverse range of people: from nobles to servants, ascetics and householders, murderers such as [Angulimala](#), and cannibals such as Alavaka.^{[199][140][111]} According to Schumann, the Buddha's wanderings ranged from "[Kosambi](#) on the [Yamuna](#) (25 km south-west of [Allahabad](#))", to Campa (40 km east of [Bhagalpur](#))" and from "Kapilavatthu (95 km north-west of [Gorakhpur](#)) to Uruvela (south of Gaya)." This covers an area of 600 by 300 km.^[200] His sangha enjoyed the patronage of the kings of [Kosala](#) and [Magadha](#) and he thus spent a lot of time in their respective capitals, [Savatthi](#) and [Rajagaha](#).^[200]

Although the Buddha's language remains unknown, it is likely that he taught in one or more of a variety of closely related [Middle Indo-Aryan](#) dialects, of which [Pali](#) may be a standardisation.

The sangha traveled through the [subcontinent](#), expounding the Dharma. This continued throughout the year, except during the four months of the [Vassa](#) rainy season when ascetics of all religions rarely traveled. One reason was that it was more difficult to do so without causing harm to flora and animal life.^[201] The health of the ascetics might have been a concern as well.^[202] At this time of year, the sangha would retreat to monasteries, public parks or forests, where people would come to them.

The first vassana was spent at [Varanasi](#) when the sangha was formed. According to the Pali texts, shortly after the formation of the sangha, the Buddha traveled to [Rajagaha](#), capital of [Magadha](#), and met with King [Bimbisara](#), who gifted a bamboo grove park to the sangha.^[203]

The Buddha's sangha continued to grow during his initial travels in north India. The early texts tell the story of how the Buddha's [chief disciples](#), [Sāriputta](#) and [Mahāmoggallāna](#), who were both students of the skeptic sramana [Sañjaya Belatthiputta](#), were converted by [Assaji](#).^{[204][205]} They also tell of how the Buddha's son, [Rahula](#), joined his father as a bhikkhu when the Buddha visited his old home, Kapilavastu.^[206] Over time, other Shakyans joined the order as bhikkhus, such as Buddha's cousin [Ananda](#), [Anuruddha](#), [Upali](#) the barber, the Buddha's half-brother [Nanda](#) and [Devadatta](#).^{[207][208]} Meanwhile, the Buddha's father Suddhodana heard his son's teaching, converted to Buddhism and became a [stream-enterer](#).

The early texts also mention an important lay disciple, the merchant [Anāthapindika](#), who became a strong lay supporter of the Buddha early on. He is said to have gifted [Jeta's grove](#) (*Jetavana*) to the sangha at great expense (the Theravada Vinaya speaks of thousands of gold coins).^{[209][210]}

The formation of a parallel order of female monastics ([bhikkhuni](#)) was another important part of the growth of the Buddha's community. As noted by Analayo's comparative study of this topic, there are various versions of this event depicted in the different early Buddhist texts.^[note 13]

According to all the major versions surveyed by Analayo, [Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī](#), Buddha's step-mother, is initially turned down by the Buddha after requesting ordination for her and some other women. Mahāprajāpatī and her followers then shave their hair, don robes and begin following the Buddha on his travels. The Buddha is eventually convinced by Ānanda to grant ordination to Mahāprajāpatī on her acceptance of [eight conditions called gurudharmas](#) which focus on the relationship between the new order of nuns and the monks.^[212]

According to Analayo, the only argument common to all the versions that Ananda uses to convince the Buddha is that women have the same ability to reach all stages of awakening.^[213] Analayo also notes that some modern scholars have questioned the authenticity of the eight gurudharmas in their present form due to various inconsistencies. He holds that the historicity of the current lists of eight is doubtful, but that they may have been based on earlier injunctions by the Buddha.^{[214][215]} Analayo also notes that various passages indicate that the reason for the Buddha's hesitation to ordain women was the danger that the life of a wandering sramana posed for women that were not under the protection of their male family members (such as dangers of sexual assault and abduction). Due to this, the gurudharma injunctions may have been a way to place "the newly founded order of nuns in a relationship to its male counterparts that resembles as much as possible the protection a laywoman could expect from her male relatives."^[216]

According to J.S. Strong, after the first 20 years of his teaching career, the Buddha seems to have slowly settled in Sravasti, the capital of the Kingdom of Kosala, spending most of his later years in this city.^[210]

As the sangha grew in size, the need for a standardized set of monastic rules arose and the Buddha seems to have developed a set of regulations for the sangha. These are preserved in

various texts called "[Pratimoksa](#)" which were recited by the community every fortnight. The Pratimoksa includes general ethical precepts, as well as rules regarding the essentials of monastic life, such as bowls and robes.^[218]

In his later years, the Buddha's fame grew and he was invited to important royal events, such as the inauguration of the new council hall of the Shakyans (as seen in MN 53) and the inauguration of a new palace by Prince Bodhi (as depicted in MN 85).^[219] The early texts also speak of how during the Buddha's old age, the kingdom of Magadha was usurped by a new king, [Ajatasattu](#), who overthrew his father [Bimbisara](#). According to the *Samaññaphala Sutta*, the new king spoke with different ascetic teachers and eventually took refuge in the Buddha.^[220] However, Jain sources also claim his allegiance, and it is likely he supported various religious groups, not just the Buddha's sangha exclusively.^[221]

As the Buddha continued to travel and teach, he also came into contact with [members of other śrāmana sects](#). There is evidence from the early texts that the Buddha encountered some of these figures and critiqued their doctrines. The *Samaññaphala Sutta* identifies six such sects.^[222]

The early texts also depict the elderly Buddha as suffering from back pain. Several texts depict him delegating teachings to his chief disciples since his body now needed more rest.^[223] However, the Buddha continued teaching well into his old age.

One of the most troubling events during the Buddha's old age was [Devadatta's](#) schism. Early sources speak of how the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, attempted to take over leadership of the order and then left the sangha with several Buddhist monks and formed a rival sect. This sect is said to have also been supported by King Ajatasattu.^{[224][225]} The Pali texts also depict Devadatta as plotting to kill the Buddha, but these plans all fail.^[226] They also depict the Buddha as sending

his two chief disciples (Sariputta and Moggallana) to this schismatic community in order to convince the monks who left with Devadatta to return.^[227]

All the major early Buddhist Vinaya texts depict Devadatta as a divisive figure who attempted to split the Buddhist community, but they disagree on what issues he disagreed with the Buddha on. The [Sthavira](#) texts generally focus on "five points" which are seen as excessive ascetic practices, while the [Mahāsaṅghika](#) Vinaya speaks of a more comprehensive disagreement, which has Devadatta alter the discourses as well as monastic discipline.^[228]

At around the same time of Devadatta's schism, there was also war between Ajatasattu's Kingdom of Magadha, and Kosala, led by an elderly king Pasenadi.^[229] Ajatasattu seems to have been victorious, a turn of events the Buddha is reported to have regretted.^[230]

The main narrative of the Buddha's last days, death and the events following his death is contained in the [Mahāparinibbana Sutta](#) (DN 16) and its various parallels in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan.^[231] According to Analayo, these include the Chinese Dirgha Agama 2, "Sanskrit fragments of the *Mahāparinirvanasūtra*", and "three discourses preserved as individual translations in Chinese".^[232]

The *Mahāparinibbana sutta* depicts the Buddha's last year as a time of war. It begins with Ajatasattu's decision to make war on the [Vajjian federation](#), leading him to send a minister to ask the Buddha for advice.^[233] The Buddha responds by saying that the Vajjians can be expected to prosper as long as they do seven things, and he then applies these seven principles to the Buddhist Sangha, showing that he is concerned about its future welfare. The Buddha says that the Sangha will prosper as long as they "hold regular and frequent assemblies, meet in harmony, do not change the rules of training, honor their superiors who were ordained before them, do not

fall prey to worldly desires, remain devoted to forest hermitages, and preserve their personal mindfulness." He then gives further lists of important virtues to be upheld by the Sangha.^[234]

The early texts also depict how the Buddha's two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, died just before the Buddha's death.^[235] The *Mahaparinibbana* depicts the Buddha as experiencing illness during the last months of his life but initially recovering. It also depicts him as stating that he cannot promote anyone to be his successor. When Ānanda requested this, the *Mahaparinibbana* records his response as follows:^[236]

Ananda, why does the Order of monks expect this of me? I have taught the Dhamma, making no distinction of “inner” and “outer”: the Tathagata has no “teacher’s fist” (in which certain truths are held back). If there is anyone who thinks: “I shall take charge of the Order”, or “the Order is under my leadership”, such a person would have to make arrangements about the Order. The Tathagata does not think in such terms. Why should the Tathagata make arrangements for the Order? I am now old, worn out . . . I have reached the term of life, I am turning eighty years of age. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathagata's body is kept going by being bandaged up . . . Therefore, Ananda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, seeking no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge. . . Those monks who in my time or afterwards live thus, seeking an island and a refuge in themselves and in the Dhamma and nowhere else, these zealous ones are truly my monks and will overcome the darkness (of rebirth).

After traveling and teaching some more, the Buddha ate his last meal, which he had received as an offering from a blacksmith named Cunda. Falling violently ill, Buddha instructed his attendant Ānanda to convince Cunda that the meal eaten at his place had nothing to do with his

death and that his meal would be a source of the greatest merit as it provided the last meal for a Buddha.^[237] Bhikkhu and [von Hinüber](#) argue that the Buddha died of [mesenteric infarction](#), a symptom of old age, rather than food poisoning.^{[238][239]}

The precise contents of the Buddha's final meal are not clear, due to variant scriptural traditions and ambiguity over the translation of certain significant terms. The [Theravada](#) tradition generally believes that the Buddha was offered some kind of pork, while the [Mahayana](#) tradition believes that the Buddha consumed some sort of truffle or other mushroom. These may reflect the different traditional views on [Buddhist vegetarianism](#) and the precepts for monks and nuns.^[240] Modern scholars also disagree on this topic, arguing both for pig's flesh or some kind of plant or mushroom that pigs like to eat.^[note 14] Whatever the case, none of the sources which mention the last meal attribute the Buddha's sickness to the meal itself.^[241]

As per the *Mahāparinibbāna suttā*, after the meal with Cunda, the Buddha and his companions continued traveling until he was too weak to continue and had to stop at [Kushinagar](#), where Ānanda had a resting place prepared in a grove of Sala trees.^{[242][243]} After announcing to the sangha at large that he would soon be passing away to final Nirvana, the Buddha ordained one last novice into the order personally, his name was Subhadda.^[242] He then repeated his final instructions to the sangha, which was that the Dhamma and Vinaya was to be their teacher after his death. Then he asked if anyone had any doubts about the teaching, but nobody did.^[244] The Buddha's final words are reported to have been: "All [saṅkhāras](#) decay. Strive for the goal with diligence ([appamāda](#))" (Pali: 'vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādeṭhā').^{[245][246]}

He then entered his final meditation and died, reaching what is known as *parinirvana* (final nirvana, the end of rebirth and suffering achieved after the death of the body). The *Mahāparinibbāna* reports that in his final meditation he entered the four dhyanas

consecutively, then the four [immaterial attainments](#) and finally the meditative dwelling known as *nirodha-samāpatti*, before returning to the fourth dhyana right at the moment of death.^{[247][243]}

Posthumous events

According to the *Mahāparinibbana sutta*, the Mallians of Kushinagar spent the days following the Buddha's death honoring his body with flowers, music and scents.^[248] The sangha waited until the eminent elder [Mahākassapa](#) arrived to pay his respects before cremating the body.^[249]

The Buddha's body was then cremated and the remains, including his bones, were kept as [relics](#) and they were distributed among various north Indian kingdoms like Magadha, Shakya and [Koliya](#).^[250] These relics were placed in monuments or mounds called [stupas](#), a common funerary practice at the time. Centuries later they would be exhumed and enshrined by [Ashoka](#) into many new stupas around the [Mauryan realm](#).^{[251][252]} Many supernatural legends surround the history of alleged relics as they accompanied the spread of Buddhism and gave legitimacy to rulers.

According to various Buddhist sources, the [First Buddhist Council](#) was held shortly after the Buddha's death to collect, recite and memorize the teachings. Mahākassapa was chosen by the sangha to be the chairman of the council. However, the historicity of the traditional accounts of the first council is disputed by modern scholars.^[253]

Teachings

One method to obtain information on the oldest core of Buddhism is to compare the oldest versions of the [Pali Canon](#) and other texts, such as the surviving portions of [Sarvastivada](#), [Mulasarvastivada](#), [Mahisasaka](#), [Dharmaguptaka](#),^{[254][255]} and the Chinese [Agamas](#).^{[256][257]} The reliability of these sources, and the possibility of drawing out a

core of oldest teachings, is a matter of dispute.^{[258][259][260][261]} According to Tilmann Vetter, inconsistencies remain, and other methods must be applied to resolve those inconsistencies.^{[254][note 15]}

According to [Lambert Schmithausen](#), there are three positions held by modern scholars of Buddhism:^[264]

1. "Stress on the fundamental homogeneity and substantial authenticity of at least a considerable part of the Nikayic materials."^[note 16]
2. "Scepticism with regard to the possibility of retrieving the doctrine of earliest Buddhism."^[note 17]
3. "Cautious optimism in this respect."^[note 18]

Regarding their attribution to the historical Buddha Gautama "Sakyamuni", scholars such as [Richard Gombrich](#), Akira Hirakawa, Alexander Wynne and [A.K. Warder](#) hold that these Early Buddhist Texts contain material that could possibly be traced to this figure.^{[261][269][142]}

Influences

According to scholars of [Indology](#) such as Richard Gombrich, the Buddha's teachings on [Karma](#) and [Rebirth](#) are a development of pre-Buddhist themes that can be found in [Jain](#) and [Brahmanical](#) sources, like the [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad](#).^[270] Likewise, *samsara*, the idea that we are trapped in cycle of rebirth and that we should seek liberation from this through non-harming (*ahimsa*) and spiritual practices, pre-dates the Buddha and was likely taught in early Jainism.^[271]

In various texts, the Buddha is depicted as having studied under two named teachers, [Ālāra Kālāma](#) and [Uddaka Rāmaputta](#). According to Alexander Wynne, these were yogis who taught doctrines and practices similar to those in the [Upanishads](#).^[272]

The Buddha's tribe of origin, the Shakyas, also seem to have had non-Vedic religious practices which influenced Buddhism, such as the veneration of trees and sacred groves, and the worship of tree spirits (yakkhas) and serpent beings (nagas). They also seem to have built burial mounds called stupas.^[67]

Tree veneration remains important in Buddhism today, particularly in the practice of venerating Bodhi trees. Likewise, yakkas and nagas have remained important figures in Buddhist religious practices and mythology.^[67]

In the Early Buddhist Texts, the Buddha also references Brahmanical devices. For example, in [Samyutta Nikaya](#) 111, [Majjhima Nikaya](#) 92 and Vinaya i 246 of the [Pali Canon](#), the Buddha praises the [Agnihotra](#) as the foremost sacrifice and the [Gayatri mantra](#) as the foremost meter.^[note 19]

The Buddhist teaching of the [*three marks of existence*](#)^[note 20] may also reflect Upanishadic or other influences according to K.R. Norman.^[274]

According to Johannes Bronkhorst, the "meditation without breath and reduced intake of food" which the Buddha practiced before his awakening are forms of asceticism which are similar to Jain practices.^[275]

The Buddhist practice called [Brahma-vihara](#) may have also originated from a Brahmanic term;^[276] but its usage may have been common in the sramana traditions.^[258]

Teachings preserved in the Early Buddhist Texts

The Early Buddhist Texts present many teachings and practices which may have been taught by the historical Buddha. These include basic doctrines such as [Dependent Origination](#), the [Middle Way](#), the [Five Aggregates](#), the [Three unwholesome roots](#), the [Four Noble Truths](#) and the [Eightfold Path](#). According to N. Ross Reat, all of these doctrines are shared by the Theravada Pali texts and the [Mahasamghika](#) school's *[Śālistamba Sūtra](#)*.^[277]

A recent study by [Bhikkhu Analayo](#) concludes that the Theravada *[Majjhima Nikaya](#)* and Sarvastivada *[Madhyama Agama](#)* contain mostly the same major doctrines.^[278] Likewise, [Richard Salomon](#) has written that the doctrines found in the [Gandharan Manuscripts](#) are "consistent with non-Mahayana Buddhism, which survives today in the Theravada school of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, but which in ancient times was represented by eighteen separate schools."^[279]

These basic teachings such as the Four Noble Truths tend to be widely accepted as basic doctrines in all major [schools of Buddhism](#), as seen in ecumenical documents such as the *[Basic points unifying Theravāda and Mahāyāna](#)*.

In the early Buddhist texts, the Buddha critiques the [Brahmanical religion](#) and social system on certain key points.

The [Brahmin](#) caste held that the [Vedas](#) were eternal revealed (*[sruti](#)*) texts. The Buddha, on the other hand, did not accept that these texts had any divine authority or value.^[280]

The Buddha also did not see the Brahmanical rites and practices as useful for spiritual advancement. For example, in the [Udāna](#), the Buddha points out that [ritual bathing](#) does not lead to purity, only "truth and morality" lead to purity.^[note 21] He especially critiqued [animal sacrifice](#) as taught in Vedas.^[280] The Buddha contrasted his teachings, which were taught openly to all people, with that of the Brahmins', who kept their [mantras](#) secret.^[note 22]

He also critiqued numerous other Brahmanical practices, such [astrology](#), [divination](#), [fortune-telling](#), and so on (as seen in the *Tevijja sutta* and the *Kutadanta sutta*).^[282]

The Buddha also attacked the Brahmins' claims of superior birth and the idea that different castes and bloodlines were inherently pure or impure, noble or ignoble.^[280]

In the *Vasettha sutta* the Buddha argues that the main difference among humans is not birth but their actions and occupations.^[283] According to the Buddha, one is a "Brahmin" (i.e. divine, like [Brahma](#)) only to the extent that one has cultivated virtue.^[note 23] Because of this the early texts report that he proclaimed: "Not by birth one is a Brahman, not by birth one is a non-Brahman; - by moral action one is a Brahman"^[280]

The *Aggañña Sutta* explains all classes or [varnas](#) can be good or bad and gives a sociological explanation for how they arose, against the Brahmanical idea that they are divinely ordained.^[284] According to [Kancha Ilaiah](#), the Buddha posed the first [contract theory](#) of society.^[285] The Buddha's teaching then is a single universal moral law, one [Dharma](#) valid for everybody, which is opposed to the Brahmanic ethic founded on "one's own duty" (*svadharma*) which depends on caste.^[280] Because of this, all castes including untouchables were welcome in the Buddhist order and when someone joined, they renounced all caste affiliation.^{[286][287]}

Analysis of existence

The early Buddhist texts present the Buddha's worldview as focused on understanding the nature of [dukkha](#), which is seen as the fundamental problem of life.^[288] Dukkha refers to all kinds of suffering, unease, frustration, and dissatisfaction that sentient beings experience.^{[289][290]} At the core of the Buddha's analysis of dukkha is the fact that everything we experience is impermanent, unstable and thus unreliable.^[291]

A common presentation of the core structure of Buddha's teaching found in the early texts is that of the [Four Noble Truths](#).^[292] This teaching is most famously presented in the [Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta](#) ("The discourse on the turning of the Dharma wheel") and its many parallels.^[293] The basic outline of the four truths is as follows:^{[292][289]}

- There is dukkha.
- There are causes and conditions for the arising of dukkha. Various conditions are outlined in the early texts, such as [craving \(tanhā\)](#), but the three most basic ones are [greed, aversion and delusion](#).^[294]
- If the conditions for dukkha cease, dukkha also ceases. This is "[Nirvana](#)" (literally 'blowing out' or 'extinguishing').^[295]
- There is path to follow that leads to Nirvana.

According to [Bhikkhu Analayo](#), the four truths schema appears to be based "on an analogy with [Indian medical](#) diagnosis" (with the form: "disease, pathogen, health, cure") and this comparison is "explicitly made in several early Buddhist texts".^[293]

In another Pali sutta, the Buddha outlines how "eight worldly conditions", "keep the world turning around...Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain." He then explains how the difference between a noble (*arya*) person and an uninstructed worldling is that a noble person reflects on and understands the impermanence of these conditions.^[296]

The Buddha's analysis of existence includes an understanding that [karma](#) and [rebirth](#) are part of life. According to the Buddha, the constant cycle of dying and being reborn (i.e. *saṃsāra*) according to one's karma is just dukkha and the ultimate spiritual goal should be liberation from this cycle.^[297] According to the Pali suttas, the Buddha stated that "this *saṃsāra* is without

discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving."^[298]

The Buddha's teaching of karma differed to that of the Jains and Brahmins, in that on his view, karma is primarily mental intention (as opposed to mainly physical action or ritual acts).^[289] The Buddha is reported to have said "By karma I mean intention."^[299] Richard Gombrich summarizes the Buddha's view of karma as follows: "all thoughts, words, and deeds derive their moral value, positive or negative, from the intention behind them."^[300]

For the Buddha, our karmic acts also affected the rebirth process in a positive or negative way. This was seen as an impersonal natural law similar to how certain seeds produce certain plants and fruits (in fact, the result of a karmic act was called its "fruit" by the Buddha).^[301] However, it is important to note that the Buddha did not hold that everything that happens is the result of karma alone. In fact when the Buddha was asked to state the causes of pain and pleasure he listed various physical and environmental causes alongside karma.^[302]

In the early texts, the process of the arising of dukkha is most thoroughly explained by the Buddha through the teaching of Dependent Origination.^[289] At its most basic level, Dependent Origination is an empirical teaching on the nature of phenomena which says that nothing is experienced independently of its conditions.^[303]

The most basic formulation of Dependent Origination is given in the early texts as: 'It being thus, this comes about' (Pali: *evam sati idam hoti*).^[304] This can be taken to mean that certain phenomena only arise when there are other phenomena present (example: when there is craving, suffering arises), and so, one can say that their arising is "dependent" on other phenomena. In other words, nothing in experience exists without a cause.^[304]

In numerous early texts, this basic principle is expanded with a list of phenomena that are said to be conditionally dependent.^{[305][note 24]} These phenomena are supposed to provide an analysis of the cycle of dukkha as experienced by sentient beings. The philosopher Mark Siderits has outlined the basic idea of the Buddha's teaching of Dependent Origination of dukkha as follows: given the existence of a fully functioning assemblage of psycho-physical elements (the parts that make up a sentient being), ignorance concerning the three characteristics of sentient existence—suffering, impermanence and non-self—will lead, in the course of normal interactions with the environment, to appropriation (the identification of certain elements as 'I' and 'mine'). This leads in turn to the formation of attachments, in the form of desire and aversion, and the strengthening of ignorance concerning the true nature of sentient existence. These ensure future rebirth, and thus future instances of old age, disease and death, in a potentially unending cycle.^[289]

The Buddha saw his analysis of Dependent Origination as a "Middle Way" between "eternalism" (*sassatavada*, the idea that some essence exists eternally) and "annihilationism" (*ucchedavada*, the idea that we go completely out of existence at death).^{[289][304]} This middle way is basically the view that, conventionally speaking, persons are just a causal series of impermanent psycho-physical elements.^[289]

Metaphysics and personal identity

Closely connected to the idea that experience is dependently originated is the Buddha's teaching that there is no independent or permanent self (Sanskrit: *atman*, Pali: *atta*).^[303]

Due to this view which (termed *anatta*), the Buddha's teaching was opposed to all soul theories of his time, including the Jain theory of a "*jiva*" ("life monad") and the Brahmanical theories of

atman and [purusha](#). All of these theories held that there was an eternal unchanging [essence](#) to a person which transmigrated from life to life.^{[306][307][289]}

While Brahminical teachers affirmed atman theories in an attempt to answer the question of what really exists ultimately, the Buddha saw this question as not being useful, as illustrated in [the parable of the poisoned arrow](#).^[308]

For the Buddha's contemporaries, the atman was also seen to be the unchanging constant which was separate from all changing experiences and the inner controller in a person.^[309] The Buddha instead held that all things in the world of our experience are transient and that there is no unchanging part to a person.^[310] According to Richard Gombrich, the Buddha's position is simply that "everything is process".^[311] However, this [anti-essentialist](#) view still includes an understanding of continuity through rebirth, it is just the rebirth of a process (karma), not an essence like the atman.^[312]

Perhaps the most important way the Buddha analyzed individual experience in the early texts was by way of the [five 'aggregates' or 'groups' \(khandha\)](#) of physical and mental processes.^{[313][314]} The [Buddha's arguments against an unchanging self](#) rely on these five aggregate schema, as can be seen in the Pali [Anattalakkhana Sutta](#) (and its parallels in Gandhari and Chinese).^{[315][316][317]}

According to the early texts, the Buddha argued that because we have no ultimate control over any of the psycho-physical processes that make up a person, there cannot be an "inner controller" with command over them. Also, since they are all impermanent, one cannot regard any of the psycho-physical processes as an unchanging self.^{[318][289]} Even mental processes such as [consciousness](#) and will ([cetana](#)) are seen as being dependently originated and impermanent and thus do not qualify as a self (*atman*).^[289]

As noted by Gombrich, in the early texts the Buddha teaches that all five aggregates, including consciousness (*viññana*, which was held by Brahmins to be eternal), arise dependent on causes.^[319] That is, existence is based on processes that are subject to dependent origination. He compared samsaric existence to a fire, which is dynamic and requires fuel (the *khandas*, literally: "heaps") in order to keep burning.^[320]

As [Rupert Gethin](#) explains, for the Buddha:

I am a complex flow of physical and mental phenomena, but peel away these phenomena and look behind them and one just does not find a constant self that one can call one's own. My sense of self is both logically and emotionally just a label that I impose on these physical and mental phenomena in consequence of their connectedness.^[321]

The Buddha saw the belief in a self as arising from our grasping at and identifying with the various changing phenomena, as well as from ignorance about how things really are.^[322] Furthermore, the Buddha held that we experience suffering because we hold on to erroneous self views.^{[323][324]}

Worldly happiness

As noted by [Bhikkhu Bodhi](#), the Buddha as depicted in the Pali suttas does not exclusively teach a world transcending goal, but also teaches laypersons how to achieve worldly [happiness](#) (*sukha*).^[325]

According to Bodhi, the "most comprehensive" of the suttas that focus on how to live as a layperson is the [Sigālovāda Sutta](#) (DN 31). This sutta outlines how a layperson behaves towards six basic social relationships: "parents and children, teacher and pupils, husband and wife, friend

and friend, employer and workers, lay follower and religious guides." ^[326] This Pali text also has parallels in Chinese and in Sanskrit fragments. ^{[327][328]}

In another sutta (*Dīghajānu Sutta*, AN 8.54) the Buddha teaches two types of happiness. First, there is the happiness visible in this very life. The Buddha states that four things lead to this happiness: "The accomplishment of persistent effort, the accomplishment of protection, good friendship, and balanced living."^[329] Similarly, in several other suttas, the Buddha teaches on how to improve family relationships, particularly on the importance of filial love and gratitude as well as marital well-being. ^[330]

Regarding the happiness of the next life, the Buddha (in the *Dīghajānu Sutta*) states that the virtues which lead to a good rebirth are: faith (in the Buddha and the teachings), moral discipline, especially keeping the five precepts, generosity, and wisdom (knowledge of the arising and passing of things).^[331]

According to the Buddha of the suttas then, achieving a good rebirth is based on cultivating wholesome or skillful (*kusala*) karma, which leads to a good result, and avoiding unwholesome (*akusala*) karma. A common list of good karmas taught by the Buddha is the list of ten courses of action (*kammāpatha*) as outlined in MN 41 *Sāleyyaka Sutta* (and its Chinese parallel in SĀ 1042).^{[332][333]}

Good karma is also termed merit (*puñña*), and the Buddha outlines three bases of meritorious actions: giving, moral discipline and meditation (as seen in AN 8:36).^[334]

Liberation (*vimutti*) from the ignorance and grasping which create suffering is not easily achieved because all beings have deeply entrenched habits (termed *āsava*s, often translated as "influxes" or "defilements") that keep them trapped in samsara. Because of this, the Buddha

taught a path (*marga*) of training to undo such habits.^{[289][335]} This path taught by the Buddha is depicted in the early texts (most famously in the Pali *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* and its numerous parallel texts) as a "Middle Way" between sensual indulgence on one hand and mortification of the body on the other.^[293]

One of the most common formulations of the path to liberation in the earliest Buddhist texts is the Noble Eightfold Path.^{[336][note 25]} There is also an alternative formulation with ten elements which is also very commonly taught in the early texts.^[338]

According to Gethin, another common summary of the path to awakening wisely used in the early texts is "abandoning the hindrances, practice of the four establishments of mindfulness and development of the awakening factors."^[339]

The early texts also contain many different presentations of the Buddha's path to liberation aside from the Eightfold Path.^[338] According to Rupert Gethin, in the Nikayas and Agamas, the Buddha's path is mainly presented in a cumulative and gradual "step by step" process, such as that outlined in the *Samaññaphala Sutta*.^{[340][note 26]} Early texts that outline the graduated path include the *Cula-Hatthipadopama-sutta* (MN 27, with Chinese parallel at MĀ 146) and the *Tevijja Sutta* (DN 13, with Chinese parallel at DĀ 26 and a fragmentary Sanskrit parallel entitled the *Vāsiṣṭha-sūtra*).^{[338][342][343]} Other early texts like the *Upaniṣa sutta* (SN 12.23), present the path as reversions of the process of Dependent Origination.^{[344][note 27]}

Some common practices which are shared by most of these early presentations of the path include śila (ethical training), restraint of the senses (*indriyasamvara*), mindfulness and clear awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) and the practice of *jhana* (meditative absorption).^[338] Mental development (*citta bhāvanā*) was central to the Buddha's spiritual path as depicted in the earliest texts and this included meditative practices.

Regarding the training of right view and sense restraint, the Buddha taught that it was important to reflect on the dangers or drawbacks (*adinava*) of sensual pleasures. Various suttas discuss the different drawbacks of sensuality. In the *Potaliya Sutta* (MN 54) sensual pleasures are said by the Buddha to be a cause of conflict for all humans beings.^[346] They are said to be unable to satisfy one's craving, like a clean meatless bone given to a dog.^[347] Sensuality is also compared to a torch held against the wind, since it burns the person holding on to it.^[348] According to the Buddha, there is "a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss." The Buddha thus taught that one should take delight in the higher spiritual pleasures instead of sensual pleasure.^[349] This is explained with the simile the leper, who cauterizes his skin with fire to get relief from the pain of leprosy, but after he is cured, avoids the same flames he used to enjoy before (see MN 75, *Magandiya Sutta*).^[350]

Numerous scholars such as Vetter have written on the centrality of the practice of *dhyāna* to the teaching of the Buddha.^[351] It is the training of the mind, commonly translated as meditation, to withdraw the mind from the automatic responses to sense-impressions, and leading to a "state of perfect equanimity and awareness (*upekkhā-sati-parisuddhi*)."^[352] Dhyana is preceded and supported by various aspects of the path such as seclusion and sense restraint.^[353]

Another important mental training in the early texts is the practice of mindfulness (*sati*), which was mainly taught using the schemas of the "Four Ways of Mindfulness" (*Satipatthana*, as taught in the Pali *Satipatthana Sutta* and its various parallel texts) and the sixteen elements of "Mindfulness of Breath" (*Anapanasati*, as taught in the *Anapanasati Sutta* and its various parallels).^[note 28]

Because getting others to practice the path was the central goal of the Buddha's message, the early texts depict the Buddha as refusing to answer certain metaphysical questions which his

contemporaries were preoccupied with, (such as "is the world eternal?"). This is because he did not see these questions as being useful on the path and as not being "connected to the goal".^[354]

Monasticism

The early Buddhist texts depict the Buddha as promoting the life of a homeless and celibate "*sramana*", or mendicant, as the ideal way of life for the practice of the path.^[355] He taught that mendicants or "beggars" (*bhikkhus*) were supposed to give up all possessions and to own just a begging bowl and three robes.^[356] As part of the Buddha's monastic discipline, they were also supposed to rely on the wider lay community for the basic necessities (mainly food, clothing, and lodging).^[357]

The Buddha's teachings on monastic discipline were preserved in the various Vinaya collections of the different early schools.^[356]

Buddhist monastics, which included both monks and nuns, were supposed to beg for their food, were not allowed to store up food or eat after noon and they were not allowed to use gold, silver or any valuables.^{[358][359]}

Socio-political teachings

The early texts depict the Buddha as giving a deflationary account of the importance of politics to human life. Politics is inevitable and is probably even necessary and helpful, but it is also a tremendous waste of time and effort, as well as being a prime temptation to allow ego to run rampant. Buddhist political theory denies that people have a moral duty to engage in politics except to a very minimal degree (pay the taxes, obey the laws, maybe vote in the elections), and it actively portrays engagement in politics and the pursuit of enlightenment as being conflicting paths in life.^[360]

In the *Aggañña Sutta*, the Buddha teaches a history of how monarchy arose which according to Matthew J. Moore is "closely analogous to a social contract." The *Aggañña Sutta* also provides a social explanation of how different classes arose, in contrast to the Vedic views on social caste.^[361]

Other early texts like the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* and the *Mahāsudassana Sutta* focus on the figure of the righteous wheel turning leader (*Cakkavatti*). This ideal leader is one who promotes Dharma through his governance. He can only achieve his status through moral purity and must promote morality and Dharma to maintain his position. According to the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta*, the key duties of a Cakkavatti are: "establish guard, ward, and protection according to Dhamma for your own household, your troops, your nobles, and vassals, for Brahmins and householders, town and country folk, ascetics and Brahmins, for beasts and birds. let no crime prevail in your kingdom, and to those who are in need, give property."^[361] The sutta explains the injunction to give to the needy by telling how a line of wheel-turning monarchs falls because they fail to give to the needy, and thus the kingdom falls into infighting as poverty increases, which then leads to stealing and violence.^[note 29]

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha outlines several principles that he promoted among the Vajjian tribal federation, which had a quasi-republican form of government. He taught them to "hold regular and frequent assemblies", live in harmony and maintain their traditions. The Buddha then goes on to promote a similar kind of republican style of government among the Buddhist Sangha, where all monks had equal rights to attend open meetings and there would be no single leader, since The Buddha also chose not to appoint one.^[361] Some scholars have argued that this fact signals that the Buddha preferred a republican form of government, while others disagree with this position.^[361]

Numerous scholars of early Buddhism argue that most of the teachings found in the Early Buddhist texts date back to the Buddha himself. One of these is [Richard Gombrich](#), who argues that since the content of the earliest texts “presents such originality, intelligence, grandeur and—most relevantly—coherence...it is hard to see it as a composite work.” Thus he concludes they are “the work of one genius.”^[362]

[Peter Harvey](#) also agrees that “much” of the Pali Canon “must derive from his [the Buddha’s] teachings.”^[363] Likewise, [A.K. Warder](#) has written that “there is no evidence to suggest that it [the shared teaching of the early schools] was formulated by anyone other than the Buddha and his immediate followers.”^[265]

Furthermore, Alexander Wynne argues that “the internal evidence of the early Buddhist literature proves its historical authenticity.”^[364]

However, other scholars of Buddhist studies have disagreed with the mostly positive view that the early Buddhist texts reflect the teachings of the historical Buddha. For example, [Edward Conze](#) argued that the attempts of European scholars to reconstruct the original teachings of the Buddha were “all mere guesswork.”^[365]

Other scholars argue that some teachings contained in the early texts are the authentic teachings of the Buddha, but not others. For example, according to Tilmann Vetter, the earliest core of the Buddhist teachings is the meditative practice of *dhyāna*.^{[351][note 30]} Vetter argues that “liberating insight” became an essential feature of the Buddhist tradition at a later date. He posits that the Fourth Noble Truths, the Eightfold path and Dependent Origination, which are commonly seen as essential to Buddhism, are later formulations which form part of the explanatory framework of this “liberating insight”.^[367]

[Lambert Schmithausen](#) similarly argues that the mention of the four noble truths as constituting "liberating insight", which is attained after mastering the four *dhyānas*, is a later addition.^[262] Also, according to [Johannes Bronkhorst](#), the four truths may not have been formulated in earliest Buddhism, and did not serve in earliest Buddhism as a description of "liberating insight".^[368]

Physical characteristics

Early sources depict the Buddha's as similar to other Buddhist monks. Various discourses describe how he "cut off his hair and beard" when renouncing the world. Likewise, Digha Nikaya 3 has a Brahmin describe the Buddha as a shaved or bald (*mundaka*) man.^[369] Digha Nikaya 2 also describes how king Ajatasattu is unable to tell which of the monks is the Buddha when approaching the sangha and must ask his minister to point him out. Likewise, in MN 140, a mendicant who sees himself as a follower of the Buddha meets the Buddha in person but is unable to recognize him.^[370]

The Buddha is also described as being handsome and with a clear complexion (Digha I:115; Anguttara I:181), at least in his youth. In old age, however, he is described as having a stooped body, with slack and wrinkled limbs.^[371]

The 32 Signs

Various Buddhist texts attribute to the Buddha a series of extraordinary physical characteristics, known as "the [32 Signs of the Great Man](#)" (Skt. *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*).

According to Analayo, when they first appear in the Buddhist texts, these physical marks were initially held to be imperceptible to the ordinary person, and required special training to detect.

Later though, they are depicted as being visible by regular people and as inspiring faith in the Buddha.^[372]

Some Hindus regard Gautama as the 9th avatar of Vishnu.^{[note 10][374][375]} However, Buddha's teachings deny the authority of the Vedas and the concepts of Brahman-Atman.^{[376][377][378]} Consequently Buddhism is generally classified as a *nāstika* school (heterodox, literally "It is not so"^[note 31]) in contrast to the six orthodox schools of Hinduism.^{[381][382][383]} In Sikhism, Buddha is mentioned as the 23rd avatar of Vishnu in the Chaubis Avtar, a composition in Dasam Granth traditionally and historically attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.^[384]

Classical Sunni scholar Tabari reports that Buddhist idols were brought from Afghanistan to Baghdad in the ninth century. Such idols had been sold in Buddhist temples next to a mosque in Bukhara, but he does not further discuss the role of Buddha. According to the works on Buddhism by Al-Biruni (973–after 1050), views regarding the exact identity of Buddha was diverse. Accordingly, some regarded him as the divine incarnate, others as an apostle of the angels or as an Ifrit and others as an apostle of God sent to human race. By the 12th century, al-Shahrastani even compared Buddha to Khidr, described as an ideal human. Ibn Nadim, who was also familiar with Manichean teachings, even identifies Buddha as a prophet, who taught a religion to "banish Satan", although not mention it explicitly. However, most Classical scholars described Buddha in theistic terms, that is apart from Islamic teachings.^[385]

Nevertheless the Buddha is regarded as a prophet by the minority Ahmadiyya^[386] sect, generally considered deviant and rejected as apostate by mainstream Islam.^{[387][388]} Some early Chinese Taoist-Buddhists thought the Buddha to be a reincarnation of Laozi.^[389]

Disciples of the [Cao Đài](#) religion worship the Buddha as a major religious teacher.^[390] His image can be found in both their Holy See and on the home altar. He is revealed during communication with Divine Beings as son of their Supreme Being (God the Father) together with other major religious teachers and founders like [Jesus](#), [Laozi](#), and [Confucius](#).^[391]

The Christian [Saint Josaphat](#) is based on the Buddha. The name comes from the Sanskrit [Bodhisattva](#) via Arabic *Būdhasaf* and Georgian *Iodasaph*.^[392] The only story in which St. Josaphat appears, *Barlaam and Josaphat*, is based on the life of the Buddha.^[393] Josaphat was included in earlier editions of the Roman Martyrology (feast day 27 November)—though not in the Roman Missal—and in the Eastern Orthodox Church liturgical calendar (26 August).

In the ancient [Gnostic](#) sect of [Manichaeism](#), the Buddha is listed among the prophets who preached the word of God before [Mani](#).^[394]

In the [Bahá'í Faith](#), Buddha is regarded as one of the Manifestations of God

The Persian Invasions and Indian History

In this article we will discuss about the Persian invasions in India and their effects.

In the sixth century B.C. when Magadha was striving to build up an extensive empire in India, invasions of foreigners started on the north-west frontier. The first who tried to penetrate into India were the Persians and the next were Greeks who entered India under their famous ruler and conqueror, Alexander of Macedonia.

India had relations with Persia or Iran in ancient times. The Aryans who settled in India belonged to the same racial stock which had first entered Persia. The similarity in language and gods of the

Rig-vedic Indian Aryans, with those of Persia, prove that India and Persia had maintained mutual contacts in those days.

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However, there is no evidence of mutual contacts between the Indians and the Persians during the later Vedic age. Of course, Jataka stories refer to trade relations between India and Persia but before the sixth century B.C. we are on an uncertain ground to probe the relations between the two.

Information regarding the relations of these two countries has been derived from the writings of Greek scholars like Herodotus, Strabo and Arrian, though they are not unanimous in their descriptions. However, it is universally accepted that the first political contact of India with the Persians started during the reign of the Persian emperor Cyrus (588-530 B.C.). Cyrus established a great empire in Persia.

He attacked the north-western part of India and annexed to his empire the territories lying west of the river Indus which included the valley of Kabul and hilly regions of Hindukush mountains including Gandhara. The son and successor of Cyrus, Cambyses (530-522 B.C.) could not pay any attention towards India. The successor of Cambyses Darius-I (522-486 B.C.), however, conquered North Punjab.

The inscriptions at Persepolis and Naksh-i-Rustom mention northern Punjab as a part of the Darius empire. Herodotus also described that Darius had sent a naval expedition under Scylax to explore the Indus and Punjab was the twentieth satrapa (province) of the empire of Darius.

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Most of the scholars agree with the view that North-Western India including North Punjab was a part of the Persian empire at that time and the Persians remained there till 330 B.C. It was only when Alexander attacked and destroyed the Persian empire during the reign of Darius-III, the Persian empire in India vanished.

The invasions and the hold of the Persians on the north-western portion of India did not affect Indian politics in any way. The conquest of the Persians proved short-lived and of no significant importance except that it paved the way for the conquest of Alexander.

Alexander chose the same way to attack India which was chosen by the Persians. However, the contacts between the Indians and the Persians which continued even after the attack of Alexander, both by sea and land, brought about some notable results in some other fields.

These contacts were primarily because of trade relations between the two which brought about some cultural impact on India. The Persians provided the facility of contacts between the Indian and Greek cultures.

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Much before the invasion of Alexander, the Greek philosophers had come in contact with Indian philosophy. More than that, the Persians brought about some direct impact on India. The Persians introduced in India the Arabic form of writing, which later on developed into the Kharoshthi script.

The rock-inscriptions of Emperor Asoka in the North-West were written in this script. The Persian silver coins were used in India and it affected the Indian coinage. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandra Gupta, stated that Maurya rulers adopted certain Persian ceremonies and practices.

The ceremony of washing the head-hairs, the keeping of lady- bodyguards and keeping oneself in isolation were certain practices which were started by Chandra Gupta Maurya because of the influence of Persian practices.

It has also been claimed by many scholars that Persian architecture influenced Indian architecture. The rock-inscriptions of Persians served as models for the inscriptions of Asoka. D.B. Spooner says that palaces of the Mauryan emperors were built on the model of palaces of the Persian emperors. H.G. Rowlinson claims that the architecture of the period of Asoka was completely influenced by Persian architecture. Dr V.A. Smith claims the same way that architecture and inscriptions of Asoka were completely influenced by Persian art and the bells inscribed on the columns of Asoka are models of Persian art.

But, there are scholars who have differed with the opinions expressed above. E.B. Havell states that the bells inscribed on the columns of Asoka are actually not bells but lotus- flowers turned upside down which represent the progress of soul and thus are purely an Indian representation.

However, it can be concluded that though the Indians developed their own architecture they were certainly influenced by Persian architecture or, as Dr Coomaraswamy states, Indian architecture formed a part of that Universal culture which was once the culture of the 'Ancient East'.

Thus, we can say that while the political effect of the Persian invasions on India remained negligible, India certainly drew certain advantages in the domain of culture from its Persian contacts.

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Greek conquests in India

The **Greek conquests of India** took place in the years before the Common Era, and a rich trade flourished between **India** and **Greece**, especially in **silk**, **spices**, and **gold**. The Greeks invaded India several times, starting with the conquest of **Alexander the Great** between the years 327 to 326 B.C.E. Alexander launched his conquest of India by invading Punjab in 327 B.C.E. The Battle of Hydaspes (326 B.C.E.) marked the first engagement in which Alexander captured Aornos fortress after ferocious fighting. Alexander pushed to the headwaters of the **Indus River** successfully when, encountering the powerful **Magadha** empire armies, his army mutinied at Hyphasis. Alexander divided his forces, leading one group campaigning successfully to the Indian ocean then back to **Persia**. The second group under general Craterus marched to Carmania in today's southern Iran.



Alexander left Greek troops in [Taxila](#) (today's [Pakistan](#)). They governed the region until 316 B.C.E. The Macedonians helped a league of tribes overthrow the Nanda Dynasty. King Chandragupta consequently founded the Maurya empire in northern India. [Seleucus I Nicator](#), one of Alexander's generals, invaded today's Pakistan and Punjab in 304 B.C.E., founding the Seleucid dynasty. From 180 B.C.E. to 10 C.E. the Greek empire expanded the Greco-Bactrian dynasty into northwest and northern India. Their rule of the region ended with the Scythians and Kushans successful invasion.

Battle of Hydaspes (326 B.C.E.)

In 327 B.C.E., [Alexander the Great](#) began his foray into Punjab.^[1] King Ambhi, ruler of [Taxila](#), surrendered the city to Alexander. Many people had fled to a high fortress/rock Aornos which Alexander took by siege. Alexander fought an epic battle against the Indian monarch Porus in the Battle of Hydaspes (326). After that victory, Alexander made an alliance with Porus and appointed him satrap of his own kingdom. Alexander continued his successful conquest throughout the headwaters of the [Indus River](#).

Alexander turns back

East of Porus' kingdom, near the [Ganges River](#), the powerful kingdom of [Magadha](#) reigned. Exhausted and daunted by the prospect of facing another formidable Indian army at the Ganges River, his army mutinied at the Hyphasis (modern Beas), refusing to march further East. Alexander, after the meeting with his officer Coenus, determined turning back toward Greece the best course of action.

Alexander divides his forces

Turning south, Alexander conquering his way down the Indus to the Indian Ocean. He sent the largest part of his army to Carmania (modern southern Iran) under his general Craterus, and commissioned a fleet to explore the [Persian Gulf](#) shore under his admiral Nearchus. In the meantime, Alexander led the rest of his force back to Persia by the southern route through the Gedrosia (modern Makran in southern Pakistan).^[2]

Taxila

Alexander left behind a contingent of Greek forces which established themselves in the city of [Taxila](#), now in [Pakistan](#). Several generals, including Eudemus and Peithon, governed the newly established province until around 316 B.C.E. Sophytes (305-294 B.C.E.), one of the governors, established himself as independent Greek prince in the Punjab.

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the [Mauryan Empire](#) apparently met with Alexander in Taxila:

Androcottus, when he was a stripling, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that he often said in later times that Alexander narrowly missed making himself master of the country, since its king was hated and despised on account of his baseness and low birth (Plutarch 62-3).^[3]