

Buddha's Teachings

After his enlightenment under the bodhi tree at Bodh-gaya, Buddha (the "Awakened One") began teaching others. Once he truly understood the cause of sorrow, he could begin to free people. What, then, did he teach?

Buddha delivered his first sermon in a deer park in the city of Sarnath. He taught that all humans are caught in the *Wheel of Dharma*. They go through lifetimes in a cycle of birth and death, creating situations which create consequences. (To review *dharma*, see the chapter on Hinduism.) Until an individual can free him or herself from the wheel, he or she will be subject to the ups-and-downs of life. The only way to free oneself, preached Buddha, is to be free of desire. Thus, desire is the root of suffering. Then he taught his first disciples *The Four Noble Truths*. These truths form the bedrock of Buddhist belief.

The Four Noble Truths

I. **Dukkha: The Noble Truth of Suffering**

Life is full of suffering, full of sickness and unhappiness. Although there are passing pleasures, they vanish in time.

II. **Samudaya: The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering**

People suffer for one simple reason: they desire things. It is greed and self-centeredness which bring about suffering. Desire is never satisfied.

III. **Nirodha: The Noble Truth of the End of Suffering**

It is possible to end suffering if one is aware of his or her own desires and puts an end to them. This awareness will open the door to lasting peace.

IV. **Magga: The Noble Truth of the Path**

By changing one's thinking and behavior, a new awakening can be reached. This is called the *Middle Way* and can be followed in the *Eightfold Path*.

Buddha's Teachings *(cont.)*

The *Eightfold Path*, also called the *Wheel of Law*, contains eight steps for eliminating *dukkha* (suffering). By following this path, one can bring an end to his or her own *karma* and be released from continuous rebirth. (To review *karma*, see the chapter on Hinduism.) Buddha introduced these ideas during his first sermon at Sarnath. This teaching is often symbolized by a wheel with eight spokes. Later in this chapter, you will read more about this symbol.

The *Five Precepts* represent the third set of laws governing Buddhist thought. Although these are not "commandments" in the strict sense of the word, they are vows which ensure right behavior.

The Eightfold Path

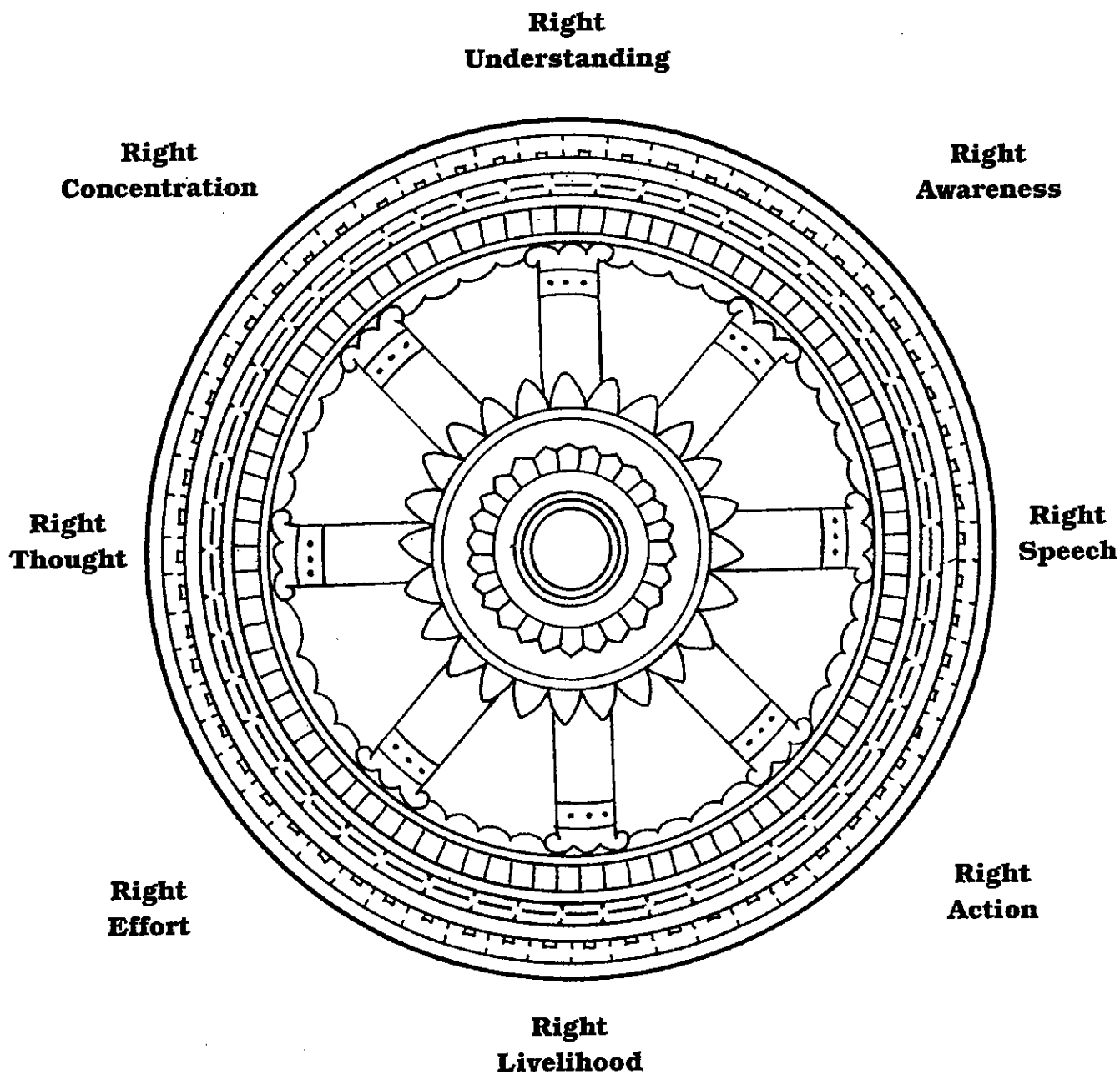
- **Right Understanding**
Strive to clearly understand the Four Noble Truths. Strive to understand the workings of your own mind.
- **Right Thought**
Think kindly of others and avoid dwelling on the past or future.
- **Right Speech**
Speak kindly and truthfully.
- **Right Action**
Act kindly toward all living things. Do not be attached to the results of actions.
- **Right Work**
Have a vocation that does not harm others.
- **Right Effort**
Be determined to cleanse the mind.
- **Right Mindfulness**
Be fully aware of what you are doing, always with concern for others.
- **Right Concentration**
Intensely concentrate during meditation to focus on being one with any situation.

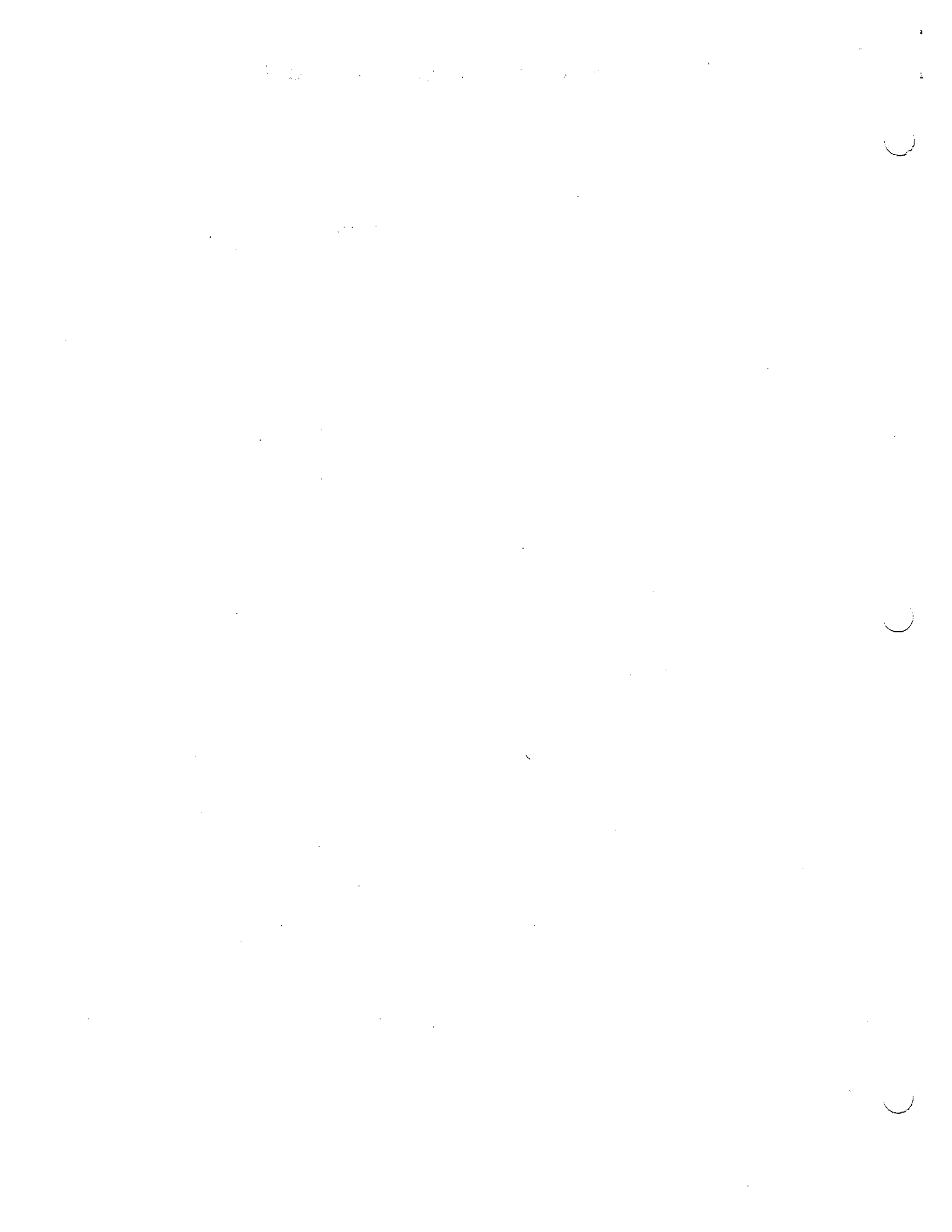
The Five Precepts

- Do not harm any living thing.
- Do not steal. Take only what is given.
- Avoid over-stimulation.
- Do not say unkind things.
- Do not take alcohol or drugs.

Buddha's Teachings *(cont.)*

The Wheel of Law





Buddhism: Basic Teachings

Main beliefs

- The “three jewels” (*triratna* or *triratana*) of Buddhism are the Buddha, the *dharma* or *dhamma* (“teaching,” or “truth”), and the *sangha* (“community”). Anyone who “takes refuge” in these is considered a Buddhist
- The way to enlightenment is through the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path
- Theravada Buddhists believe that people should not worship any gods but should strive to attain happiness by learning to control their own minds
- Mahayana Buddhists believe that it is possible to attain happiness by having faith in, and praying to, the Buddha of Infinite Light (Amitabha Buddha)
- When people achieve true happiness, they are released from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth and reach a blissful state called *nirvana*

The Four Noble Truths

- Suffering is part of life and is brought about by the results of past actions (*karma* or *kamma*)
- Suffering is the result of giving value to the wrong things and desiring them
- Suffering will stop if selfish desires are crushed
- The way to crush desire and reach *nirvana* is to follow The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path

- Right knowledge: acceptance of the Four Noble Truths, which allows life to be looked at from the right viewpoint and happiness found
- Right attitude: love and kindness are to be valued over selfishness
- Right speech: speech is to be kind and helpful, rather than boastful, gossiping, lying, or tale-telling
- Right action: think right thoughts, and this will allow good to be done, so overcoming evil
- Right living: employment is to be done that is useful to other people, and done to the best of one's ability

- Right effort: love, thinking, and concentration are to be developed rather than evil things, and the Noble Eightfold Path is to be followed at the individual's own pace
- Right mindfulness: the desire for unnecessary things is to be avoided
- Right concentration: the mind has to be controlled so that concentration on the important things in life can be learned

Buddhist symbols

- The Buddha's enlightenment (Buddha sitting in the lotus position)
- The Buddha's death (Buddha lying on his side)
- The Wheel of the Law

Sacred texts

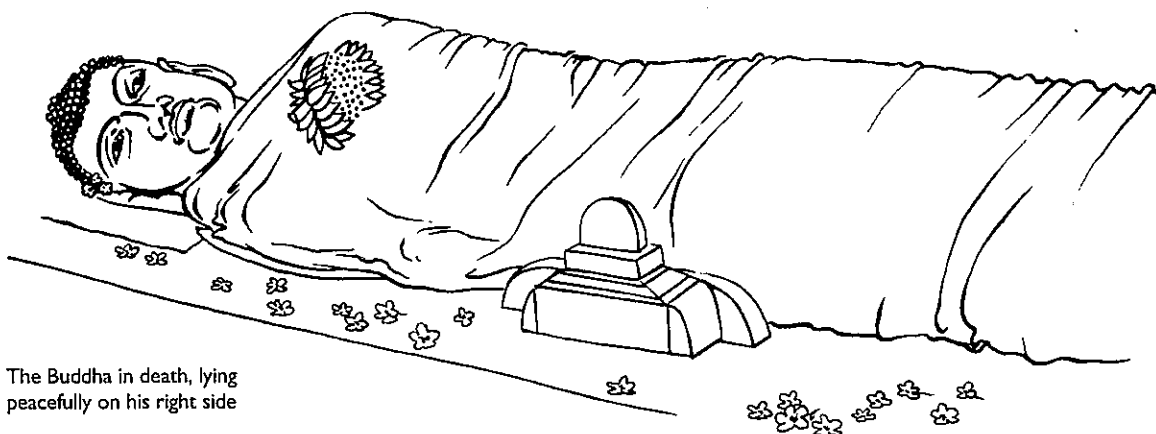
- *Tripitaka* (*Tipitaka*) or *Pali Canon* (Buddha's teachings)
- *Sutras* or *Suttas* (Buddha's teachings translated into Sanskrit)
- *Kajur* (Buddha's teachings translated into Tibetan)
- *Lalitavistara* (stories of Buddha's life in Sanskrit)
- *Buddhacarita* (stories of Buddha's life in Sanskrit)

Buddhist groups

- Theravada (“the southern way”)
- Mahayana (“the northern way”), which includes Zen Buddhism

Festivals and holy days

- Hana Matsuri (birth of Buddha) – April – Japan
- Saga dawa (Buddha's first sermon) – May – Tibet
- Festival of Wesak (Buddha's birth and enlightenment) – May/June – Thailand
- Summer Retreat (prayer and study) – July – China
- Anniversary of the arrival of Sanghamitta – December/January – Sri Lanka



The Buddha in death, lying peacefully on his right side

Buddhism: Monks, the Four Noble Truths and the Ten Precepts

