

## Buddhism for the Tourist

---

A Buddhist is someone who has declared his faith and interest in finding out more about the Triple Gem, which is to say: The Lord Buddha, The Dhamma or the Way that He taught and which can lead to Enlightenment and Nirvana, and the Noble Order of Enlightened Followers, the Sangha or monks that we see today.

Having declared one's faith three times in the ancient Pali language to a monk, he will then chant and ask you to repeat the Five Precepts.

I promise that I will start training myself not to destroy life.

I promise that I will start training myself not to take anything that has not been freely given to me.

I promise that I will start training myself to refrain from wrong-doing in sexual desire.

I promise that I will start training myself not to tell lies or speak badly or loosely.

I promise that I will start training myself not to take distilled or fermented intoxicants which can lead me into trouble.

The monk then says: "Guard these Three Jewels and Five Precepts well, they are for your own good and you must make a conscious effort to follow them."

You have now taken the first step along the way to Enlightenment.



But you will certainly need a good Teacher to help you, particularly if you are to make progress towards Concentration, Wisdom and Meditation.

The way in which these Precepts are worded immediately shows the great difference between Buddhism and other major religions with God-given commandments, "Thou shalt not..."

Gautama, who was to become the Lord Buddha, was born near the India - Nepal border some five hundred years before Jesus. He came from a rich, if not princely, family, was brought up in a sheltered life of luxury, married and had a son. Then one day He was shocked to discover the suffering of human life, the pain, anxiety and death. He abandoned everything and sought through consulting sages and practicing asceticism, a solution to the problems of life. Finally through His own efforts and because He already was Bodhisatta, a future Buddha, He was able to achieve Enlightenment. With it came complete knowledge so that His wisdom enabled Him to see the total truth of everything. All His past lives He saw, He knew exactly how everyone's past actions effected their present ones and how their present ones would shape their future. He saw to the root cause of all unsatisfactoriness of life (Dukka), the desire for pleasure, the desire to continue life and the great problem of ignorance which prevented people from seeing the truth and doing the right things.



When He stood up in the morning He was the Lord Buddha and in His great pity for the suffering of mankind He resolved to pass on His discovery to all those who would listen. And this He did for the next forty years, preaching throughout the Ganges Valley.

In almost all religions you have to make that great leap in the dark to accept in faith. In Buddhism, you can proceed along the way as far as you are able, knowing that in your next life you will have the chance to progress further. The Lord Buddha taught in different ways to different people according to their level of understanding and He told them not to accept anything blindly until they had worked it out for themselves. Thus some serious Buddhist disciples scale the north face of the mountain in an attempt to reach Nirvana in their present life, but most laymen meander peacefully along the gentle paths of the foothills knowing that they will probably have the chance to go further in their next life.

## **Buddhist Etiquette and Proper Behavior**

Have you ever felt awkward entering a mosque, church, temple or synagogue? Here are some helpful hints for you to know the proper etiquette of entering Thai temples.

The Buddhist religion is remarkably tolerant, but there are certain simple rules that must be observed. You are welcome to enter any Buddhist temple (certain areas are out of bounds to ladies - these are usually marked with signs such as 'lady no enter', while this may offend feminist sensibilities, they are - metaphorically speaking- unavoidable). Always remove your shoes (this applies to most houses in Thailand as well). Never point with your foot or sit with your legs stretched towards a Buddha statue (or at any person for that matter). Never climb onto a Buddha statue to have your photo taken on one. A monk may not touch a lady or receive anything directly from her hand - the temptation may prove too great. Dress discretely - in some places ladies must wear skirts and shorts are generally frowned on - some temples provide suitable covering.



Spanning the door to every temple is a raised thresh hold. Thai people never step on it, but walk over it instead to ward against bad luck.

It is illegal to take a Buddha statue out of the country without getting permission from the Fine Arts Department, this can be a time consuming business. If you wish to take an inexpensive and new Buddhist souvenir, quietly do so - at the worst it might be confiscated. If you have a Buddha statue in your home treat it with respect and make certain it is placed on a shelf above head height.