



## BUDDHISM

Buddhism can be traced to sixth-century BCE India and the teachings of the spiritual leader, Siddhārtha Gautama, who is generally recognized as Supreme Buddha, or the “Awakened One.” After living under his father’s protection, Siddhartha left his enclosed life only to find a world filled with suffering and sorrow. Renouncing his life of luxury in his quest for enlightenment, Siddhartha chose a “middle way,” or “middle path,” towards the practice of meditation, morality and wisdom.

From its early beginnings, Buddhism spread throughout India to Asia and, by the thirteenth century, to the West. The number of practising Buddhists today is estimated to be between 230 and 500 million, making it world’s fourth largest religion, with the majority of its practitioners living in Southeast Asia.

There are two main branches of Buddhism—Theravada and Mahayana—and many other sects. While practices vary, all Buddhists focus on personal spiritual development and insight as the key to living a more meaningful life, following the principles of Dharma, the general term used to represent Buddhist teaching.

With the exception of the Japanese, most Buddhists follow the Lunar calendar, and festival dates vary between countries and traditions. Some of the most significant festivals include:

**DHARMA DAY**, marking the beginning of the Buddha’s teaching, is celebrated on the full moon in July.

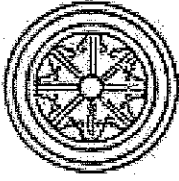
**KATHINA** celebrates the biggest almsgiving ceremony of the year.

**LOASAR** is the Tibetan New Year, and is celebrated for three days, usually in January.

**PARINIRVANA** commemorates the death of the Buddha, and is often celebrated on 8 February.

**SANGHA DAY**, also known as **MAGHA PUJA** or **FOURFOLD ASSEMBLY**, celebrates the spiritual community.

**WESAK**, celebrated on the full moon in May, celebrates Buddha’s birth and death.



## ESSENTIAL NON-FICTION

IRONS, Edward A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Facts on File. ISBN 0-8160-5459-2.  
Grades 10 and up.

This one-volume encyclopedia contains 700 A-to-Z entries providing an entry-level overview of Buddhist history, key concepts and terms, branches, people, events, and movements. This volume also traces Buddhism's movement into Southeast Asia, describes the evolution of Buddhism's various branches, examines the Four Noble Truths, provides some short biographies and briefly introduces the related beliefs of Daoism, Shinto, and Confucianism.

LEVINE, Noah. (2007). *Against the Stream: A Buddhist Manual for Spiritual Revolutionaries*.  
HarperCollins. ISBN 0-06-073664-X. Grades 10 and up.

Levine presents what he has learned about and through Buddhism in a frank, disarming tone. The author has taken the Buddha's teachings to heart, and is able to comment on central ideas such as impermanence and suffering in a simple and consistent way. An appendix of instructions for a variety of meditations makes this slim book one that will be accessible for young adults with little or no experience of Buddhism.

BORTOLIN, M. (2005). *The Dharma of Star Wars*. Wisdom. ISBN 0-86171-4970. Grades 9 and up.

*The Dharma of Star Wars* explores themes such as suffering, mindfulness, karma and transcending the dark side. Bortolin compares nirvana to the all-pervasive Force of *Star Wars*. He looks to Jedi meditation as a parallel discipline to the Buddhist practice of mindful meditation. When working with the Force, Jedi knights "get in touch with reality as it truly is," observing with calm compassion and allowing greater understanding of the present moment.

METCALF, Franz. (2002). *Buddha in Your Backpack: Everyday Buddhism for Teens*. Ulysses Press.  
ISBN 1-5697-5321-0. Grades 8 and up.

*Buddha in Your Backpack* tells Buddha's life story, describing him as a young rebel not satisfied with the answers of his elders. Metcalf then introduces Buddha's core teachings using language and terms understandable to teens. *Buddha in Your Backpack* also presents thoughtful and spiritual insights on school, dating, hanging out, jobs, and other issues of special interest to teens.