

Buddha

Buddhist art is rooted in its reflection of the Buddhist religion. Buddhism is a very complicated religion with many branches of and variations within itself. One general statement, though, is that Buddhists aim to reach a state called nirvana, an escape from the cycle of reincarnation. Buddhists also try to lead a balanced life—called the Middle Way—between austerity and luxury.



The “Historical Buddha,” his given name being Siddhartha, lived during the middle of the 6th century BCE. There is not a lot known about his daily life, but his followers have passed on his story. Siddhartha’s birth was prophesied by wise men, and he was born to Queen Maya under a tree in modern-day Nepal.

All but one of the wise men that predicted Siddhartha’s birth expected him to become a world leader. This other one, though, said that all of the sadness in the world would make Siddhartha become a spiritual leader. To prevent this fate, Siddhartha was raised among all the good in life, and prevented from feeling sadness. After his marriage, though, Siddhartha saw three signs (an old man, a sick man, and a corpse) that showed him the fragility of life.

Just after his son was born, Siddhartha announced that he was going to embark on a search for a state of peace now called the Great Going Forth. He trained under two spiritual leaders, but eventually gave up their methods and sat in meditation under a tree. Siddhartha resisted temptation from Mara, the Buddhist equivalent of Satan, and finally reached enlightenment after forty-nine days of meditation.

For the next forty-five years, Buddha preached his beliefs to others and gained a large following of both rulers and masses. Before his death at age 80, he reached enlightenment by having been a *bodhisattva* (on the path to enlightenment) for many lifetimes. After his death, Siddhartha’s ashes were divided among his followers and then buried.