

Buddhism

[Religious Practices](#)

[Religious Items](#)

[Requirements for Membership](#)

[Medical Prohibitions](#)

[Dietary Standards](#)

[Burial Rituals](#)

[Sacred Writings](#)

[Organizational Structure](#)

[History](#)

- [The Life of Shakyamuni Buddha](#)
- [Early Buddhist Developments \(500 B.C.E. - 0 C.E.\)](#)
- [The Development of Mahayana Buddhism \(0 C.E. - 500 C.E.\)](#)
- [Tantra and Ch'an \(500 C.E.-1000 C.E.\)](#)
- [The Fourth Period \(1000 C.E. - present\)](#)

[Theology](#)

- [Buddhism and Common Beliefs in India](#)
- [The Four Noble Truths](#)
- [The Noble Eight-fold Path](#)
- [Concept of Deity](#)
- [The Three Marks of Existence](#)
- [The Nature of the Buddha's Teachings](#)
- [The *Paramitas*](#)

[Glossary of Buddhist Terms](#)

[Religious Accouterments \(with Pictures\)](#)

There are three major Buddhist traditions: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. Theravada Buddhism is mainly practiced in the Southeast Asian countries of Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma). Mahayana Buddhism is primarily practiced in China, Korea, and Japan. Vajrayana Buddhism is practiced in the Central Asian areas of Tibet and Mongolia, and in the Shingon school in Japan. The Dalai Lama is representative of this tradition. In addition, many independent Buddhist groups have formed following the teachings of a specific leader. This is especially true of Buddhism in the United States.

To do no evil,
To cultivate the good,
To purify one's mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha.
Dhammapada, 183

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Required Daily Observances. Although differences may be seen among the Buddhist traditions, most observe the following: acts of devotion (bowing, making offerings of incense and food, and honoring sacred objects); upholding the precepts and the six *paramitas* through meditation; and the study and chanting of sacred writings in developing wisdom, compassion, and the attainment of Buddhahood. These practices are usually conducted daily on an individual basis.

Required Weekly Observances. Many Buddhist groups in America have adopted the practice of meeting weekly. The daily practices are done together as group observances. Some Buddhist traditions may meet on the full-moon day of each month.

Required Occasional Observances. Each tradition honors a significant date in the life of its founder and may also honor significant dates in the lives of other notable persons. Other days of significance include New Year's Day, Spring and Autumn Equinox, and ancestor memorial days. These are not necessarily days free from work.

In Japan, Obon is observed. It is held during summer and consists of a festival with folk dancing and services honoring one's ancestors. Other Buddhist traditions, especially from countries influenced by Confucianism, conduct memorial services for deceased family members.

Pilgrimages to sacred sites, such as sites where the Buddha became enlightened, and *stupas*, monuments housing ashes or relics of the Buddha or popular disciples, are also important in many traditions.

Holy Days

- February 15, *Parinirvana Day* - commemorates the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.
- April 8, Buddha Day - celebrates the birth of the Buddha.
- December 8, Bodhi Day - a celebration of the enlightenment of the Buddha when he set out on quest of the Middle Way.

Buddhist inmates may select either the three above-listed dates or Vesak Day, but not all four.

- Vesak Day, the full-moon day in May - a celebration of the birth and the day of enlightenment, and a commemoration of the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Note: Generally, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists observe the first three holy days separately; Theravada Buddhists observe all three events on Vesak Day. Participating inmates may request either Vesak Day or the three dates as dates of work proscription. These dates may vary slightly depending on the inmate's country of origin. If a question arises concerning actual dates of observance, contact the Regional Chaplaincy Administrator.

In some Asian countries where Buddhism is the predominant religion, the celebration on January 1 has taken on great religious significance. It has been the experience in the Bureau that inmates of those countries may ask for program time in the Chapel. This day is not a day of work proscription.

RELIGIOUS ITEMS

Personal Religious Items

- Religious Medallion and chain.
- *Prayer beads, called *mala*, *juzu*, or *nenju* (*Japanese*), consisting of 108 beads.
- *Small picture or scroll of the Buddha or object of worship.

Security note: Only plastic prayer beads are permitted in the institutions.
--

Congregate Religious Items

- *Altar.
- *Image of the Buddha.
- *Bell and *dorje*.
- Incense and burner.
- **Zafu* (small cushion).
- **Zabuton* (meditation mat).
- *Singing bowls.
- Candles.

- Candle holders.
- Cup.
- **Tingshas* (clappers).
- *Silver bowls.
- *Prayer wheel.
- Flowers, usually made of silk as a substitute for fresh flowers.

Note: Pictures of items marked with an asterisk (*) and a description of their uses are provided in the section on Religious Accouterments.

Searches. Personal property should be respectfully handled while items are being examined or searched. There are no restrictions on searching religious property. However, items should not be placed on or come in contact with unclean or unsanitary places such as floors, toilets, or basins. Religious items should be returned to the same place after the search. When packing property, wrap items in a clean cloth or towel.

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Requirements (including Rites of Conversion). There are different requirements for membership, depending on which tradition a person desires to join. All traditions honor the threefold refuge; some require a person to formally declare taking refuge in its three treasures (the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) and upholding the precepts held by the monks, nuns, or laity. Some Buddhist traditions no longer have monks or nuns, but are composed solely of laity.

The formula found in *Going to the Threefold Refuge* must be recited three times. The utterance need not be public, but could be self-administered as long as the individual has a clear understanding of what the Dhamma of the Buddha is. The formula is:

I take refuge in the Buddha;
I take refuge in the Dhamma;
I take refuge in the Sangha.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the incomparably honored one;
I take refuge in the Dhamma, honorable for its purity;
I take refuge in the Sangha, honorable for its harmonious life.

I have finished taking refuge in the Buddha;
I have finished taking refuge in the Dhamma;
I have finished taking refuge in the Sangha.

Total Membership. It is estimated that there are about 500 million Buddhists in the world today, and 4 to 6 million in the U.S. American Buddhism is a very diversified movement, since different immigrant groups practice their traditional form. In addition, many Americans strive to practice Buddhism, following the teachings of different leaders.

MEDICAL PROHIBITIONS

There are no medical prohibitions in most Buddhist traditions. Some traditions may have medical issues addressed in their precepts, such as the taking of drugs. These concerns will be reviewed on an individual basis.

DIETARY STANDARDS

Most Buddhists follow a vegetarian diet even though this is not a precept of the faith. The precept concerning not eating after noon may be followed by some. The sixth precept is "to refrain from eating at the forbidden time (i.e., after noon)." Self-selection from the mainline, which includes the no-flesh option, is recommended.

BURIAL RITUALS

There are no restrictions on autopsies. Most Buddhist traditions place high importance on funeral rituals, although they can vary greatly. A Buddhist funeral generally includes a procession, ritual prayers, a water-pouring ritual, cremation, final prayers, and a communal meal. In cultures where wood is expensive, burial in the ground is an acceptable alternative.

Memorial services may be held in the weeks following the funeral. Yearly memorial services are held on the anniversary date of death.

SACRED WRITINGS

The modern Buddhist Canons are primarily derived from two ancient sources: the Buddhist Canon written in Pali and the Buddhist Canon written in Sanskrit. The Buddha's writings were translated into many different languages, but three - in the Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan languages - are more thorough and complete than others and are the bases for the Buddhist Canons.

The **Pali Canon** or *Tripitaka* is a collection of Pali-language texts that form the doctrinal basis of Theravada Buddhism. The three divisions of the *Tripitaka* are:

- **Vinaya Pitaka:** A collection of texts describing rules of conduct primarily for the community of ordained monks and nuns.
- **Sutta Pitaka:** A collection of discourses, attributed to the Buddha and several of his closest disciples, which form the basis of Theravada Buddhism.
- **Abidhamma Pitaka:** A collection of texts in which the underlying principles found in the *Sutta Pitaka* are systematized. This collection is an analytical and methodological elaboration of the *Vinaya Pitaka* and *Sutta Pitaka*.

Perhaps the best known work in the Pali Canon is the *Dhammapada*, an anthology of maxims arranged in 423 stanzas.

The **Tibetan Canon** describes the teachings and understanding of the Vajrayana tradition of Buddhism. The longest of the three Canons, the Tibetan Canon has two major divisions:

- **Kanjur:** This collection of 98 volumes is said to consist of the words or sayings of the Buddha and has six subdivisions.
- **Tanjur:** This collection of 224 volumes (3,626 texts) is a supplement to the *Kanjur*. Among the works is a collection of stories and commentaries on the tantra section of the *Kanjur*.

The **Chinese Canon**. The now standard modern edition is known as the *Taisho Shinsu Daizokyo* (its Japanese name), containing 55 volumes with 2,184 texts, along with a supplement of 45 additional volumes. One of these volumes could contain the entire Pali Canon in terms of length. These volumes contain records of the Buddha's teachings as accepted by the Mahayana tradition.

There is some overlap of content in the three Canons. The length of each Canon allows for differences among the Buddhist traditions.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Since Buddhist traditions in America are independent, there is no central organization or administration. Each tradition will have its own organizational structure.

Location of Headquarters. Each chaplain is encouraged to develop local contacts.

Contact Office/Person. No one religious leader exists who can speak for all of Buddhism. Contact with local Buddhist leaders is encouraged. The Internet is a good source for information on Buddhism and the locations of different Buddhist temples and spiritual leaders.

