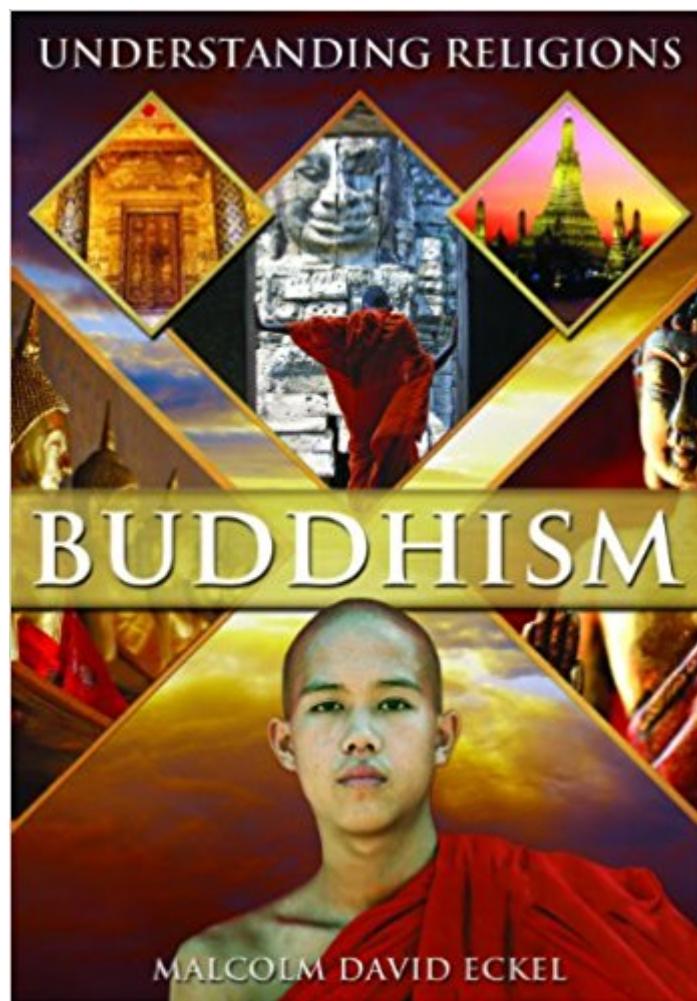


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Buddhism (Understanding Religions)



Synopsis

Founded on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, the faith taught by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha, or Awakened One) spread rapidly across Asia and then across the globe, becoming one of the world's largest and most influential religions. Buddhism combines lavish colorful photography and an authoritative text to provide a sweeping survey of this rich and varied religious tradition. Eckel begins with an engaging portrait of the Buddha (who predated Jesus by 500 years), an Indian prince's son who embarked on an epic journey of enlightenment and discovered a way of overcoming suffering. The authors trace the flowering of Buddhist schools in his wake, from the major groups (Mahayana, Theravada, Tantric) to the minor (such as the Pure Land sect in Japan). With helpful sidebars, boxed features, and numerous illustrations, they explain Tantric Mandalas (sacred circles), the Sutras (holy writings), the sacred landscape, celestial beings in some Buddhist mythology, the path to Nirvana, and much more. They also discuss Buddhist temples, forms of worship and meditation, the cycle of rebirth, and roles and relationships in the Buddhist community (including Theravada, Buddhism's stress on the importance of becoming a monk for at least part of life). A helpful map reveals the course of Buddhism's expansion throughout Asia. As a belief system, as an influential way of seeing the world, as a unifying thread of Asian cultures, Buddhism remains vitally important. This lucid, eye-pleasing introduction explains and celebrates this major world religion, bringing to life the full variety of Buddhist tradition. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Eckel, an associate professor of religion at Boston University and author of *To See the Buddha*, offers the latest installment in Oxford's series of well-designed introductions to various world religions. Unlike previous volumes that have explored less well-known religions such as Confucianism and Shinto, this book undertakes the unenviable task of explaining one of the world's most over-published faith traditions: Buddhism. Also unlike those volumes, Eckel's addresses a religion that has adapted considerably throughout history and across many diverse cultures. Eckel begins with Buddhism's origins in the person of Siddhartha Gautama, discussing the religion's gradual dissemination throughout Asia and briefly mentioning its major divisions. His chapter entitled "Aspects of the Divine" ably tackles theological beliefs. (Although Buddhism superficially appears to have no theology, since it is non-theistic, some of its Mahayana traditions actually posit a rather complicated pantheon of deities, enlightened beings and bodhisattvas.) Other chapters deal with sacred persons, holidays and life cycle rituals, death and the afterlife and the role of religion in society. Eckel writes at a very accessible level, and the inclusion of primary texts at the end of each short chapter goes far to helping novices understand the issues at hand. Also, the full-color photographs and lovely design help to set the book apart. There are more comprehensive and engaging Buddhist primers on the market, but-considering the vast nature of the topic-this one will be useful to the neophyte. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Though hardly an exhaustive introduction, this new member in the series already including Shinto and Islam will be welcomed by those seeking to learn more about this subject without being overburdened by detail. Buddhism begins with an overview of the historical and mythical roots of the tradition, focusing on Siddhartha Gautama's enlightenment and the subsequent spread of his teachings across the Silk Road from India to Southeast Asia. Eckel goes on to explore, albeit briefly, the sacred texts of the Mahayana, Theravada, and Tantric schools of Buddhism; sacred space and time in Buddhist thought; and the interaction between Buddhism and society. Without shying away from philosophic complexity, Eckel manages to convey the Buddhist basics in remarkably few words, and the many illustrations complement an engaging read. John GreenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a well-written and very concise introduction to Buddhism. It is written from a neutral perspective, meaning it simply explains Buddhist beliefs with respect to a given theme (sacred

places, sacred time, etc.). There is also a chapter on the basic history of Buddhism. All of the chapters end with a quote from some Buddhist followed by the quote's relevance for Buddhism. For me, the book provides just the right amount of information to whet my appetite for further inquiry, which is made possible by a nice short list of reading suggestions at the end. This book is a great place to start out one's exploration of Buddhism.

The author covers the history of Buddhism from the birth of Siddhartha Gautama to Buddhism in the world today. It also discusses the differences between different schools of Buddhism especially The Mahayana and Theraveada schools, festivals celebrated in the Buddhist world, etc. However, I felt as though something was missing. I was looking forward to seeing what are some of the daily practices of a Buddhist, what is a day in the life of a monk like, etc. which aren't really covered that well in the book.

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