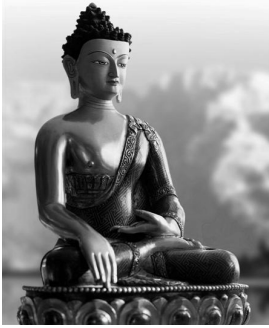




Buddhism: *Dharma* – the way things are



The historical Buddha Shakyamuni lived 2560 years ago, taught for 45 years in a highly developed civilisation and gave 84,000 teachings for people to reach enlightenment – the end of suffering where everything is fearlessly experienced with great joy and great compassion for others.

His methods include meditation, the study of philosophy, psychology, skilful debate, and above all, the cultivation of a pure view in all situations. All Buddhist methods develop mind's inherent richness and clarity, enabling people of varying interests and abilities to avoid suffering and find lasting happiness.

In Buddhism, one distinguishes between **three main vehicles**. They are: *Theravada* or the Way of the Elders, *Mahayana* or the Great Way, and *Vajrayana* or the Diamond Way.

Theravada Buddhism places great importance on calming and focusing the mind. The goal is liberation from the suffering of conditioned existence or *samsara*. The Theravada took root predominately in Southern Asia and prevailed largely in monastic communities. Today, it is practiced by lay people as well.

Mahayana Buddhism or **The Great Way**, is especially useful for people living full lives in society. It holds vast teachings on Buddhist philosophy and psychology, and aims for full enlightenment through the development of compassion and wisdom. One generates the *bodhisattva* attitude, the wish to benefit all beings, and recognises the inherent 'emptiness' of all outer and inner phenomena. The teachings explain that situations, thoughts and feelings change all the time, and thus, are ultimately empty of any lasting reality. **Zen Buddhism** is related to the Great Way.

Vajrayana Buddhism or the **Diamond Way**, is Buddha's ultimate teaching. By using special meditations and methods, he showed his students how to experience their own inherent Buddha nature. In the Diamond Way, the teacher is the direct link to enlightenment, and is considered as important as the Buddha himself. The view is that all phenomena are inherently pure, and that enlightenment is our natural state.

Throughout history, Buddhism has influenced and become part of many different cultures. It is currently developing and making its mark in the West, proving its timeless relevance.

For more teachings on Buddhism including common questions and glossaries, see: