World Religion Unit Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Buddhism** Page 121 in Ancient World Book:

**Vocabulary:**

**Meditate** To focus the mind inward in order to find spiritual awareness or relaxation.

**Nirvana** The lasting peace that Buddhists seek by giving up selfish desires.

**Missionary** A person who spreads his or her religious beliefs to others.

According to Buddhist tradition, a young Hindu prince once lived a life of luxury in his palace in northern India. The prince was surrounded by beauty and youth. He had never witnessed old age, sickness, or death.

Then, around the age of 30, the prince traveled outside the palace walls. What he saw changed his life. He met a bent and tired old man. Then he saw a man who was very sick. Finally, he saw a corpse, or dead body, as it was carried to a funeral.

This suffering and death troubled the young man greatly. He wondered why there was so much misery and pain in the world. He decided he must change his life to find the answer. He gave up his wealth, his family, and his life of ease in order to find the causes of human suffering. The young man was named **Siddhartha Gautama**. What he discovered after seven years of wandering led to the beginnings of a major world religion: Buddhism.

**The Buddha and His Teachings:**

As Gautama traveled in the 500s B.C., he sought answers to his questions about the meaning of life. At first, Gautama studied with Hindu philosophers, but their ideas did not satisfy him. He could not accept the Hindu belief that only priests could pass on knowledge.

**The Search for Understanding:**

Gautama decided to stop looking outwardly for the cause of suffering. Instead, he tried to find understanding within his own mind. To do this, he decided to **meditate,** to focus the mind inward in order to find spiritual awareness. Meditation was an ancient Hindu practice used by Indus valley civilizations. Buddhist tradition says that Gautama fasted and meditated under a fig tree. After 49 days, he found the answers he sought. He believed he finally understood the roots of suffering.

For the next 45 years, Gautama traveled across India and shared his knowledge. Over the years, he attracted many followers. His followers called him the Buddha, or “Enlightened One.” His teachings became known as **Buddhism**.

**The Middle Way:** Buddhism teaches people to follow the Eightfold Path, also called the Middle Way. By following this path, a person avoids a life of extreme pleasure or extreme unhappiness.

The **Buddha believed that selfish desires for power, wealth, and pleasure cause humans to suffer.** By giving up selfish pleasures, a person can become free from suffering. He taught that the way to end human suffering is by following the Eightfold Path. To overcome selfish desires, Buddhists must learn to be wise, to behave correctly, and to develop their minds.

***The practice of Buddhism: The Eightfold Path***

1. Right Understanding – Having faith in the Buddhist view of the universe
2. Right Intention – Making a commitment to practice Buddhism
3. Right Speech – Avoiding lies and mean or abusive speech
4. Right Action – Not taking life, not stealing, and not hurting others
5. Right Livelihood – Rejecting jobs and occupations that conflict with Buddhist ideals
6. Right Effort – Avoiding bad attitudes and developing good ones
7. Right Mindfulness – Being aware of one’s own body, feelings, and thoughts
8. Right Concentration – Thinking deeply to find answers to problems

**Release From Reincarnation:** To find this Middle Way, the Buddha taught, people must act unselfishly toward others and treat people fairly. They must tell the truth at all times. People should also avoid violence and the killing of any living thing. If people follow the Buddha’s path, their suffering will end. They will eventually find **nirvana**, or lasting peace. By reaching nirvana, people will be released from the cycle of reincarnation.

**Followers of Buddhism**: Buddhism also taught that all people are **equal**. Anyone, the Buddha declared, could follow the path to nirvana, regardless of his or her social class. This idea appealed to many people living under the caste system.

Like other religions, Buddhism has priests. Although monastery life is difficult, people of any social class can work to become a Buddhist priest or monk. The Buddha encouraged his followers to establish monasteries. There they would learn, meditate, and teach. He also urged monks to become missionaries, or people who spread their religious beliefs to others.

**Buddhism Inside and Outside India**

After the Buddha’s death, his teachings spread all over India. But the Buddha’s teachings did not last in the land of his birth. Hinduism gradually regained favor among those in power. Meantime, Hinduism had developed in ways that made it more appealing to the lower castes. Over time, Buddhism died out almost completely in India. But for many years, Buddhism and Hinduism existed side by side.

**Hindus and Buddhists: Shared Beliefs:**

When Hinduism and Buddhism coexisted in India, a number of basic ideas came to be shared by both. Both Hindus and Buddhists accept the idea that it is wrong to harm other living creatures. Both value nonviolence and believe in dharma and the cycle of rebirth. Some Hindus came to honor the Buddha as a reincarnation of the god Vishnu. But because Buddhists do not embrace the sacred texts of Hinduism, most Hindus do not worship the Buddha as an avatar.

**Buddhism Spreads to Other Countries**

Buddhism was accepted by millions of people in other lands. Missionaries and traders carried the Buddha’s message throughout Asia. It took root first in China, where the ideas of the Buddha became mixed with those of earlier Chinese thinkers. Millions of Chinese became Buddhists, and Buddhist monasteries in China became centers of religious thought. From China, Buddhism spread to Korea and Japan. Today, Buddhism is part of the cultures of such countries as Japan, the Koreas, China, Tibet (part of China), and Vietnam.

1. Why do Buddhists try to follow the Middle Way?
2. What other countries has Buddhism spread to?