

## 2022-2023 ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE

### FEBRUARY MONTHLY FOCUS:

## BUDDHISM

The Buddha, originally named Siddhartha Gautama, was born in what is now modern-day Nepal, and it is thought he lived from 566-486 BCE. Shortly after the birth of his son, the Buddha left home at the age of 29 in search of freedom from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. For six years, he engaged in several austerity measures as a means to bring about enlightenment, such as food deprivation and extreme breath control, but he found them wanting and he came to see the most productive course of action is the “middle way.” He began advocating for a life of moderation. The Buddha achieved enlightenment at the age of 35 and taught his followers “The Four Noble Truths” which are: “(1) life is suffering, (2) suffering is caused by craving, (3) suffering can have an end, and (4) there is a path which leads to the end of suffering.”<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha did not regard himself as the leader of his community and he rejected calls to appoint a successor upon his death. Accordingly, Buddhism has no central authority, which has resulted in different traditions or schools of Buddhism throughout history. From the outset Buddhism was a missionary religion, which continued to spread under the reign of Ashoka Maurya, one of the great figures in Indian history who became emperor around 268 BCE. Maurya established Buddhism within India but also dispatched ambassadors to courts throughout Asia. When Buddhism enters into a new region, it tends to blend within existing beliefs rather than eradicate them. Consequently, the form of Buddhism in each country, particularly in Asia, has different characteristics, for example, in Zen Buddhism, which can be found primarily in Japan, meditation plays a central role and focuses less on the study of texts, whereas Tibetan Buddhism has at its core a set of treatises known as the Tantras.

### Key Terms

- Buddha – an honorific title which means “awakened one” or “enlightened one.”
- Buddhists in Asia do not use the term “Buddhism,” but rather, use the terms “Dharma” (Law) and/or the *Buddha-sasana* (teachings of the Buddha).
- *Ahimsa* – the principle of non-harming
- *Samsara* – “endless wandering,” a cyclical process of rebirth until one attains nirvana.
- *Karma* – A kind of natural law, that determines where one ends up in the thirty-one rebirth destinations; good deeds result in an upward movement and bad deeds result in a downward one. People are the sole authors of their good or bad fortune.
- *The Eightfold Path* – the middle way, the path which leads to the end of suffering.
- *Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma* – The first sermon of the Buddha which sets out the Four Noble Truths which are key to understanding Buddhist teachings.
- In general, Buddhists have utmost respect for all living creatures and regard the intentional destruction of life as a serious wrong. Many also reject violence of any kind.

### Words of the Tradition

“Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so also this teaching and discipline has one taste, the taste of liberation.”

*The Buddha (from the Udana)*

"May I be a lamp for those who seek light, a bed for those who seek rest, and may I be a servant for all beings who desire a servant."

*Shantideva, A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*

“Meditation is not to escape from society, but to come back to ourselves and see what is going on. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. With mindfulness we know what to do and what not to do to help.”

*Thich Nhat Hanh*

“If we don't do our work, we become work for other people.”

*Lama Rod Owen, Love and Rage*

“What is required is a new Dharma, a radical Dharma that deconstructs rather than amplifies the systems of suffering, that starves rather than fertilizes the soil of the conditions that the deep roots of societal suffering grow in.”

*rev. angel kyodo williams, Radical Dharma*

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<sup>1</sup> Keown, Damien, *Buddhism, A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press (Oxford 1996), p. 45.