Buddhism’s Beginnings

The founder of Buddhism was born in a part of India that is in present day Nepal. His name was Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha was born into a wealthy, noble family and lived a privileged life. After experiencing pain and suffering, he sought to find ways to rid the world of these things. Through much meditation, or inward thought, and fasting, or going without food, Siddhartha found enlightenment. His followers began to call him Buddha, the “Enlightened One.” The Buddha spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. These were ways to eliminate pain and suffering and reach nirvana, a union with the universe in which no one suffers. Buddhism borrowed some ideas from Hinduism and the concept of nirvana is similar to moksha for Hindus.

The Buddha’s teachings eventually spread across Asia and into China through missionaries and traders. Asoka, a famous Indian leader, converted to Buddhism and sent missionaries out across his empire which led to the rapid expansion of the faith in India and beyond. Buddhism became a major religious influence in China and Southeast Asia. In China, people combined Buddhism with the beliefs and teachings of Taoism and Confucianism. Buddhist monks from China brought the faith to other nations like Japan and Korea where it continued to grow and spread.

Key Vocabulary

**Meditation:** inward thought

**Fasting:** going without food or water

**Enlightenment:** the realization of spiritual or religious understanding

**Buddha:** enlightened one; name given to Siddhartha Gautama

**Four Noble Truths:** ways to eliminate suffering and reach nirvana

**Eightfold Path:** teachings for following the Four Noble Truths; ways to eliminate suffering and reach nirvana

**Missionaries:** people who travel to other lands to spread their religious beliefs and ideas

**Nirvana:** freeing of the spiritual self from attachment to worldly things as well as pain and suffering

**Converted:** changed from one religion to another religion

**Monk:** a man who lives in a religious community and devotes his time to prayer and service
Quick Review

1. The Founder of Buddhism was ________________________.
   A. Abraham
   B. Mohammad
   C. Jesus Christ
   D. Siddhartha Gautama

2. The diagram of key teachings is most closely related to which belief system?
   A. Shinto
   B. Taoism
   C. Buddhism
   D. Christianity

3. The Indian leader who sent Buddhist missionaries across his empire to spread Buddhism was
   A. Asoka
   B. Chandra Gupta
   C. Siddhartha Gautama
   D. Chandragupta Maurya

4. Reflect on the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. Describe 3-5 ways you have observed these in life.

Connection to Today
The spread of Buddhism took many years and was spread mainly through the teachings of missionaries. How fast do ideas travel today and what are the main ways ideas spread? Where have you observed Buddhist ideas or practices?

Resources
Learn 360
- Religions of Southeast Asia (http://goo.gl/1DgHZ)
- East Asian Religions and Cultural Traditions (http://goo.gl/qyEiS)
- Ancient India: The Impact of Buddhism as a World Religion (http://goo.gl/eHD16)