

Buddhism originated in the middle of the first millennium B.C. in northern India. Its founder was a native by the name of Siddhartha Gautama. It is believed he left behind a privileged lifestyle in his late twenties to go on a journey in pursuit of answers to human suffering.

He apparently reached his goal some years later while meditating under a fig tree. Gautama claimed to have reached a transcendent state known as *nirvana*, which is the highest spiritual state for any human being to reach. From that moment on he became known as *Buddha*, the *enlightened one*, and dedicated the rest of his life to guiding others.

It wasn't long before his teaching began to influence many of his own people, who were seeking something different from Hinduism. After that, it began to spread around the countries of eastern and south-eastern Asia. More recently, Buddhism has spread increasingly to Europe, Canada and the USA.

What are the concepts of God in Buddhism? Many Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars believed Gautama was an atheist. This is because he never claimed divinity and even refused to affirm the existence of any gods. Rather, he explained that following his teaching (*dhamma*) instead of worshipping deities would lead to full enlightenment!

What is noteworthy about Buddha's teaching, or moral code, is that as it began to spread, it changed to adapt to its surroundings, dividing it into two very different branches. The older is the *Theravada Tradition* and the younger is *Mahayana Buddhism*.

In its basic form, Buddhism, whether Theravada or Mahayana, has no gods. However, there are now many Mahayana Buddhists, and sects deriving from it, that worship various gods, borrowed from ancient Hindu practices, and even Gautama himself!