

# **Teaching About Buddhism**

Lesson plans, suggested readings, background materials, and  
activities for learning about Asian Buddhisms

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For the Global K-12 Outreach Program  
Sponsored by the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute and  
The Fuqua School of Business

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# **Lesson 1: Buddha's Life & Basic Teachings**

## **Student Learning Goals:**

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to do the following:

- Describe the key events in the life of the historical Buddha:  
Birth, home-leaving, awakening, teaching, death.
- Define the Four Noble Truths and the eightfold Noble Path.
- Define the Three Marks of Existence:  
Impermanence, Interdependence, Unsatisfactoriness
- Define karma

## **Instructor Preparation:**

1) Familiarize yourself with the material in your world history text concerning Buddha and the Four Noble Truths. For example, in the text *Holt World History: The Human Journey*, see: pp. 63-65, 259.

2) Read through the Instructor Background materials for this lesson, on Buddha and basic Buddhist doctrines.

3) If you need additional background, the following sources may be helpful:

- Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 1-34, 133-162.
- Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 9-72, 170-195.

4) Make sure you have slides 1-8 ready for viewing.

5) Select and prepare any supplementary materials you would like to incorporate.

## **Student Pre-work**

Ask students to prepare for class by reading introductory materials on the life of Buddha and the Four Noble Truths. Refer to the relevant sections in the *Holt World History* text, and/or copy and distribute before class some pages from Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism* or other introductory book.

## **Class Session**

### **Slide 1: Map Showing Nepal**

The historic Buddha was born in Lumbini, in what is now southern Nepal, some time in the fifth century BCE.

### **Slides 2-4: Key Life Events**

Ask students to describe key events in the Buddha's life, and reveal the relevant text on the slide as they do so.

### Slide 5: The Wheel of Life

This diagram is a traditional way of teaching basic Buddhist concepts.

**Ask:** What are the three animals at the center? What do they represent?

(Rooster=greed, snake=hate, pig=ignorance) Do these differ from what one would expect (e.g., pig=greed)?

These Three Poisons drive the whole wheel.

**Ask:** The next circle shows people rising and falling: What do you think this means?

(Our choices determine whether we grow in compassion and wisdom, or whether we sink into further greed, hatred, and delusion.)

**Point to:** the next circle, showing the Six Realms, depicting different states of mind. **Ask** students about their own experiences of these states (Animal = fear and instinct; Hell = hatred; Hungry ghost = unsatisfied craving; Titan = jealousy and competition; Gods = blissed-out or spaced-out; Human = the opportunity to learn from difficulties and wake up.)

**Point to:** The outer ring shows the twelve-stage process by which greed, hate, and ignorance leads to suffering. It's too technical to explain in detail here. Refer to Gethin or other source for background.

**Point to:** The whole wheel is held in place by Yama, the Lord of Death. The process of awakening is a way of overcoming the various ways we cling to either birth or death, or regard them as separate.

### Slide 6: The Three Marks of Existence

**Discuss** each Mark, either in a large group, or in small groups. What do students think of these? What is their experience of these?

### Slide 7: Karma

**Discuss:** Do students think this is true? Why or why not?

### Slide 8: The Four Noble Truths

Discuss the first three, and explain that the fourth, the Eightfold Path, will be covered in detail in the next lesson.

**Activity:** Either brainstorm with entire class on blackboard, or divide students into small groups to discuss:

- What does it mean that "life entails suffering"?
- Can you recall a time in your life when attachment or dislike caused pain?
- What is your experience of "what goes around comes around"? (Karma)

### Assignment:

Ask students to write an essay or produce some other project in response to these questions: a collage, drawing or painting, song, dance, website, play, etc.

## Lesson 1 Instructor Background: Buddha's Life and Basic Teachings

### The Buddha's Life

Refer to Holt World History text, pages 63-65 for a brief sketch of the life story of the historical Buddha. According to Buddhist tradition, he was not the first or only Buddha, and he will not be the last.

**Key events:** Siddhartha Gautama was born in a military family in Lumbini, in what is now southern Nepal. His mother died a week after the birth, and he was raised by an aunt who later became the first Buddhist nun. At birth it was predicted that the boy would either be a great ruler or a great religious teacher. His father wanted him to be a ruler, so he sheltered the child from all unhappiness. He grew up in luxury, married, and had a son. When the young man eventually encountered old age, sickness, and death, he experienced a spiritual crisis. He left his palace, wife, and baby son, and fled to the forest. For the next six years he studied various religious traditions and practiced different religious disciplines, nearly starving himself in the process. Finally, in Bodhgaya (in northern India), he sat down under a tree and vowed not to get up until he had discovered the cause and cure of human suffering. He experienced a variety of doubts, fears, and temptations, but did not waver. He had various realizations that formed the basis of all his future teaching. At the moment of his enlightenment, he touched the earth and asked it to bear witness to his accomplishment. At first he was reluctant to teach because he feared no one would understand his message, but he was persuaded to share what he had come to understand. He taught for the next 45 years, gathering a community of monks, nuns, and lay followers around him. He died at Kushinagara at age 80, apparently of food poisoning.

For detailed background on the Buddha's life and basic Buddhist history and teachings, see:

Rupert Gettin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

For a very detailed account, taken from the Pali Canon, see:

Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha According to the pali Canon* (Seattle: Buddhist Publication Society Pariyatti Editions, 2001)

### Basic Buddhist Doctrines

#### The Three Poisons

The basic causes of suffering are greed, hatred, and ignorance or delusion.

#### The Six Realms

These "realms" describe different states of mind that we all cycle through at various times.

The **Animal Realm** is characterized by fear and instinctual reactions to things, and the desire to satisfy basic physical cravings.

The **Hell Realm** is characterized by hatred or aversion, the craving to escape whatever one experiences as unpleasant.

The **Hungry Ghost Realm** is characterized by unsatisfied craving -- no matter how much one has or consumes, it never feels like enough.

The **Titan Realm** is characterized by jealousy, competition, and aggression.

The **God Realm** reflects a spaced-out or blissed-out state of mind, where we ignore the realities of suffering around us.

The **Human Realm** is where we have the possibility of enlightenment and liberation from their cycles of suffering. We are comfortable enough to be able to engage in spiritual practice, but also have enough experience of discomfort to motivate our efforts toward enlightenment.

### **The Three Marks of Existence**

**All phenomena have three characteristics:**

#### **1. Interdependence**

All phenomena arise from a myriad of causes and conditions. Nothing exists as independent, unchanging, or eternal. What we think of as the “self” is composed of various elements in constant flux, dependent on conditions, with no substantive core, and inseparable from what we think of as “other.”

#### **2. Impermanence**

All phenomena are in a constant state of change.

#### **3. Unsatisfactoriness**

Although the Sanskrit term *dukkha* is frequently translated as "suffering," its meaning is more like "dissatisfaction." An image that expresses it is that of a wheel that is improperly set on an axle, and rubs and squeaks as it turns. (See the First Noble Truth, below.) We experience unsatisfactoriness because we are separated from what we desire (or it changes), because we have to deal with things we dislike, and because we fail to understand the true nature of reality.

If we don't deeply understand the first two, we experience the third. When we really see interdependence and impermanence, right view becomes direct perception of absolute reality. Right intention becomes true renunciation of greed/hate/delusion, because one understands their consequences in conventional reality. Right action follows naturally.

Buddhism is fundamentally concerned with questions of why we suffer and how we can be freed from suffering. It is not concerned with questions about creation or God.

### **Karma**

What goes around comes around. The law of cause and effect is unavoidable, and because all beings are interconnected, we inevitably inherit the consequences of our actions.

If we persist in behavior driven by greed, hate, and ignorance, we will suffer the consequences. If we cultivate generosity, compassion, and wisdom, we will be able to liberate ourselves and others from suffering.

## **Absolute and Relative**

A. On the *absolute* level of reality, all dualities dissolve: there is no self/other, good/evil. The very notions depend upon each other for their meaning, so they have no absolute reality (they are “empty” of inherent, independent, unchanging essence). They are just relative or conventional ways of thinking and speaking. The Absolute can be perceived in a transformative way through practices such as meditation, but it cannot be described linguistically or grasped conceptually. To clearly perceive the absolute interdependence of all beings is to be liberated from suffering; the deluded “self” that suffers simply disappears.

B. On the *relative or conventional* level of reality, one must make choices and distinctions in order to function. Although our existences are absolutely interdependent, you and I are not identical, and our relative differences are real. The physical world and physical suffering are also real.

Both levels of reality are equally real and true. The absolute expresses itself as, and can only be understood through, the relative. “Absolute” and “relative” are also merely conventional, dualistic ways of speaking, and thus “empty.”

## **The Four Noble Truths/Eightfold Path**

### **The Four Noble Truths**

1. Life entails suffering or dissatisfaction.  
(Some kinds of suffering are preventable; other kinds are not.)
2. Dissatisfaction/suffering is caused by craving (or greed, aversion and delusion).
3. Because suffering arises from conditions, and all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, suffering will end if its causes are eliminated.
4. The Noble Eightfold Path leads to the end of suffering.

The Path will be elaborated in the next lesson.

## **Lesson 2: The Sangha and Buddhist Practice**

### **Student Learning Goals:**

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to do the following:

- Define the terms Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha
- Name the Five Precepts for lay Buddhists
- Describe the purpose and process of monastic ordination
- Describe the relationship between monastics and laypeople: what do they do?
- Describe the traditional relationship between men and women in monastic Buddhism, and express an opinion about it.

### **Instructor Preparation:**

- 1) Read through the Instructor Background materials for this lesson, on Buddha and basic Buddhist doctrines.
- 2) If you need additional background, the following sources may be helpful:
  - Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 85-111, 253-276.
  - Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 73-75, 196-243.
  - Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). A comparison and analysis of the monastic rules for women, and differences from the rules for men.
- 3) Make sure you have slides **1-15** ready for viewing.
- 4) Select and prepare any supplementary materials you would like to incorporate.

### **Class Session**

#### **Slides 1-2: The Sangha**

The Buddhist community, or Sangha, consists of four groups: monks, nuns, lay men and lay women.

#### **Slide 3: Monk with Prayer Beads**

Monks and nuns are the core of the Sangha. Here, a Chinese monk is holding prayer beads. They are used to count prayers, like a rosary.

#### **Slide 4: The Eightfold Path**

One basic way of talking about Buddhist practice, for both ordained and lay people, is the Eightfold Path. This Path is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, the way to find liberation from suffering. **Explain** each element of the Path. **Ask** students to think about how these practices might help to reduce suffering in the world.

**Slide 5: Three Aspects of Training**

The Eightfold Path divides into Three Aspects of Training, which can be compared to the three legs of a tripod. They are supports for awakening. Ethical conduct is the foundation for meditation, because one cannot cultivate a calm mind if one is caught up in guilt, remorse, fear of getting caught, etc. Meditation is the foundation of wisdom, which leads one back to Right View and Intention.

**Slide 6: When Laypeople Formally Become Buddhists, They:**

Take the Three Refuges and adopt five ethical vows.

**Slide 7: Novice Ordination**

Ten vows in most Buddhist countries other than Japan. In Japanese Sōtō Zen, for example, the latter five vows are:

5. not to slander
6. not to elevate or praise oneself while devaluing others
7. not to harbor ill will
8. not to be possessive or greedy
9. not to abuse Buddha, Dharma or Sangha.

Japanese laity take these same vows. They are also part of the 58 additional vows taken in China. Many of the differences among Buddhist groups stem from different sets of vows or practices, or different interpretations or emphases in practice, rather than from disagreements over doctrine.

**Slide 8: Full Ordination**

See reference materials suggested above for background info relevant to this slide, and to women's ordination.

**Activity:** Brainstorm with class: Why might there be more rules for women than for men? What do you think about this? Are there other religious traditions in which women cannot be ordained? Why? What do students think about this; what effects might it have?

**Slides 9-11: Ordination images****Slide 12: Monastic Life**

**Ask:** How do these activities compare and contrast with activities in other monastic traditions?

**Slides 13-15: Monastic Life****Review Questions:**

- What are the groups that make up the Buddhist Sangha?
- How does one formally join as a lay person? As a monk?
- What are the parts of the Eightfold Path?
  - the Three Aspects of Training?
- Why is moral conduct the basis for meditation?
- How and why are women treated differently than men?
- What are the main activities of Buddhist monastic life?

### **Possible Follow-Up Assignments**

Ask students to visit the following websites to learn about different groups in North Carolina:

<http://www.unc.edu/ncbuddhism>

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Lofts/4714/buddhism/nccenters.html>

Students might wish to visit a temple and write a report about their experience.

Students might also be asked to make a presentation in class comparing different types of Buddhist groups or comparing and contrasting a Buddhist group with one from another religious tradition.

## Lesson 2 Instructor Background: The Sangha and Buddhist Practice

### **The Noble Eightfold Path**

The Path is divided into three forms of training: ethical conduct, morality, and wisdom. Ethical conduct is the basis of meditation, because the mind cannot be calm if one is troubled by guilt, remorse, or anxiety related to harmful behavior. Meditation cultivates mental clarity, concentration and calm. It leads to wisdom, or insight into the nature of reality and the causes and cure of suffering. Meditation also leads to insight into interdependence, which naturally reinforces one's desire not to create unnecessary suffering through unethical behavior.

#### **[Wisdom]**

- **Right view**  
This is the starting point, because views condition actions.  
Initially, right view means understanding karma: the moral consequences of volitional action. Later, it means understanding the Four Noble Truths at deeper & deeper levels.
  
- **Right intention**  
Intention is the link between views and actions. The practitioner intends to overcome the unwholesome states of greed, hatred and delusion — not because they are morally evil, but because they cause suffering.  
One replaces greed with renunciation or letting-go, by cultivating an understanding of impermanence.  
One replaces hatred with lovingkindness, by practicing metta: the wish that all beings be happy and at peace.  
One replaces harmfulness with compassion, by cultivating awareness of suffering.

#### **[Ethical Conduct]**

- **Right speech**  
Not engaging in false speech, slander, speaking of the faults of others with the intention of creating division, harsh speech (abusive, derisive, hurtful), or idle chatter.
  
- **Right conduct**  
Not taking life intentionally, not committing theft or fraud, not engaging in sexual misconduct (monks and nuns are celibate; laypeople are expected to avoid inappropriate relationships and to be faithful in commitments).
  
- **Right livelihood**  
Not dealing in weapons, living beings, meat production, butchery, poisons or intoxicants; not committing fraud, usury or exploitation.

#### **[Meditation]**

- **Right effort**  
Energy, vigor, diligence, vigor, perseverance in cultivating wholesome states of body, speech and mind. Overcoming the Five Hindrances of: sensual craving, ill will (anger, resentment, repulsion), dullness/drowsiness, restlessness & worry, and doubt (which means chronic indecisiveness, not critical inquiry — the latter is encouraged).
- **Right mindfulness**  
Bare attention in the present moment, suspending interpretation or judgement, upon:  
Body: breathing, sitting, standing, lying, moving  
Feelings: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral reactions to stimuli  
States of mind  
Phenomena (internal and external)
- **Right concentration**  
Samadhi = one-pointed concentration. The object of concentration depends on the circumstances and the meditator's need. Concentration practices lead to states of mind that counteract the five hindrances. One moves through various, deepening stages of concentration, until one can simply concentrate fully on the stream of events as they arise and pass.

These practices lead to deepening **wisdom** and **compassion**, the cardinal virtues of Buddhism.



## Class Session

### **Slides 1, 2: Tōdai-ji Aerial View and Tōdai-ji Map.**

**Explain:** The name Tōdai-ji means "Great Eastern Temple." Its formal name is "Temple for the Protection of the Nation by the Golden Radiant Four Divine Kings."

**Key facts: It is said to be the largest wooden structure in the world.**

**Construction began in 745.**

Tōdai-ji is one of many monumental Buddhist sites built in Asia, only some of which are still standing. (One such site in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, was destroyed in 2001. It included the tallest stone carvings of Buddha in the world (175 feet and 120 feet), built approximately 1,500 years ago.)

**Key fact: These sites are based on the idea that Buddhist deities will protect the nation if rulers support the temple and the Buddhist monastic community.**

The expansion of Buddhism throughout Asia was fostered by this idea.

Christians, Jews, and Muslim traditions have likewise argued that God will bless the nation if people practice those faiths well and support their institutions.

The relationship between Buddhism and government dates to India in the third century BCE, when the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (Ah-SHO-ka) converted to Buddhism and began sending missionaries to spread Buddhism to other parts of Asia. (Refer to Holt World History text, pages 66-67.)

### **Slide 3: Map of Spread of Buddhism in Asia** (Holt World History Text, page 63.)

**Key fact: Tōdai-ji was influenced by Buddhism in India, China, and Korea.**

Buddhism was first introduced to Japan from Korea in 539/552. Later, when the Japanese imported elements of Chinese culture and government, they also imported elements of Chinese Buddhism. Both Chinese and Korean forms of Buddhism originated in India. The temple architecture and the design of the main statue borrow from Chinese styles.

### **Slide 4: Buddhism spread throughout Asia in the following ways:**

- **Trade** (for example, by merchants and monks who traveled along the Silk Road)
- **Government support** (rulers who sent out missionaries to spread the religion, built Buddhist temples and pilgrimage sites, and supported monasteries)
- **Cultural exchanges** between governments (for example, Korean emissaries who visited Japan, and Japanese adoption of Chinese styles of art, architecture, government, and religion)
- **Missionaries** (monks who traveled abroad to teach Buddhism and translate Buddhist texts into other languages)
- **War** (invasions that displaced Buddhist refugees and forced them to move to new areas)

**Activity:** Have students draw on a blank map the names of Buddhist countries, and arrows showing the directions of movement.

### Slide 5: Map of Japan

**Key fact:** Tōdai-ji is in Nara, which was the capital of Japan from 710–784.

Its main patron was the Emperor Shōmu, a devout Buddhist and Japan's emperor from 724–49. He and his wife Kōmyō commissioned thousands of copies of Buddhist texts, sponsored huge feasts for monks and nuns, and in 749 both gave up their thrones to devote themselves to religious activities.

### Slide 6: Woodblock for Printing a Buddhist Text

Tōdai-ji is the headquarters temple of the Kegon school, which emphasized the Flower Garland Scripture, which was composed in India and translated into Chinese as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. It became very influential in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tang Dynasty) and was enthusiastically received in Korea and Japan. The Korean monk Sim-Pyong was invited to lecture on this text to monks in Nara.

### Slides 7, 8: Daibutsu Cross Section, Current Daibutsu Statue

**Key fact: The central figure in the temple is Vairocana (Vai-RO-cha-na) Buddha,** who represents the "source and center of creation." As we will learn in the next lesson, Buddhists do not consider the historical Buddha who lived in India to be the first, last, or only Buddha. There are many, although they all teach the same basic message in different times and places.

The Japanese statue echoes a monumental stone carving of Vairocana commissioned in the 670s by the Tang court in China. Various other deities and bodhisattvas are enshrined in the temple. A bodhisattva is a being dedicated to realizing for him or herself the teachings of the Buddha, and helping others to do so.

**Key fact: The original statue (called the *Daibutsu*, or Great Buddha) was about 16 meters high and took about 13 years to complete (from 744-757).**

It was dedicated in 752. The emperor and thousands of monks attended, and the Indian monk Bodhisena presided. He painted in the irises of the statue's eyes using a giant brush connected by strings to the emperor's hands.

### Slide 9: Building Todai-ji

The project was so expensive that it drained the imperial treasury. A rival faction of the imperial family moved the capital to Kyoto in 794, to distance the government from the influence of the powerful Nara temple establishments.

**Key fact: Until well into the thirteenth century, Tōdaiji was one of a handful of sites where Buddhist monks and nuns officially were ordained.**

The *Daibutsu* was damaged by cavalry in 1180 during a civil conflict and repaired, then damaged again in 1567 by civil war. Today only parts of the pedestal are original. It was repaired and rebuilt by the Tokugawa Shogun in the 1680s and rededicated in 1692. The current statue is slightly less than 15 m. high.

### Review Questions:

Where did Buddhism begin?

Where did it go?

How did it get there?

What did you learn about Tōdai-ji, and why it's important?

Where is it?

When was it built?

Why is it significant?

Largest wooden structure in the world

Center of state Buddhism in Japan

Buddhism and Buddhists from various countries came together here

A major ordination site

Required a phenomenal amount of resources

Who does the main statue in the temple represent?

**Activity:** Read the Japanese comic book (*manga*) about Tōdaiji. Students can be asked to reflect on the nature of this sort of Japanese comic. Are there similar ones in English? Also, the teacher can mention the nature of the Japanese language, using the text in the comic as an illustration of the Japanese writing system, which consists of a phonetic syllabary plus Sino-Japanese logographic/phonetic characters. Finally, a third activity would be to compare the traditional Japanese system of measurement, mentioned in the comic book, with the metric and the English systems of weights and measures. Students could be asked to convert the metric measurements for the great Buddha image into feet, inches, etc. Students could also be asked to reflect on the relative nature of measurement systems, including our own.

### **Optional Follow-up Activities:**

In small groups, have students discuss how religions spread, and report back to the whole group. Build a model of Tōdai-ji, or find photos and create a collage.

Research and report on some important Buddhas, deities, and Bodhisattvas:

(e.g., Avalokiteśvara/Kannon/Chenrezig, representing compassion

Mañjuśrī, representing wisdom

Guardians

Kṛtigarbha/Jizō, patron of women, travelers, and children

Amida Buddha).

Research and report about some aspect of the relationship between religion and government.

Reflect and write about how Buddhist uses of religious images are similar to or different from

Catholic veneration of saints, and different from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim attitudes about "idol worship."

## Lesson 3 Instructor Background: Tōdai-ji and the Spread of Buddhism

### Japan historical periods:

#### JAPAN

##### Protohistoric

Tumulus (J: kofun)                      c.250-552

##### Early Historical Era (J: kodai)

Asuka	552-645
Early Nara	645-710
Late Nara	710-784
(capital at Nagaoka)	784-794
Early Heian	794-898
Late Heian	898-1185

##### Medieval Era (J: chōsei)

Kamakura	1185-1333
Nambokuchō	1333-1392
Muromachi	1392-1568
Sengoku	1467-1568
(country at war)	

##### Early Modern Era (J: kinsei)

Momoyama	1568-1603
Edo	1603-1868

For info on Chinese Dynasties, see:

<http://westy.jtwn.K12.pa.us/users/mjr/dynasty3.html>

### Tōdai-ji and State Buddhism

The name Tōdai-ji means "Great Eastern Temple." Its formal name is "Temple for the Protection of the Nation by the Golden Radiant Four Divine Kings" (J: Konkōmyō Shitennō Gokoku-ji). It is said to be the largest wooden structure in the world.

"[B]uilt at a time when the spirit of internationalism in Buddhist Asia was at its peak, Tōdai-ji is the easternmost of a series of sanctuaries that express the union of kingship and faith."<sup>1</sup> Others include the (recently destroyed) Bamiyan in Afghanistan, the Angkor Thom temple complex in Kampuchea (Cambodia), the cave sanctuaries Yungang and Longmen in northern China, and

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Rosenfield, "Tōdai-ji in Japanese History and Art," in *The Great Eastern Temple: Treasures of Japanese Buddhist Art from Tōdai-ji*, catalogue of an exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago June 28-September 7, 1986. Distributed by Indiana University Press. 17.

Pulkuk-sa monastery and the Sokkuram grotto near Kongju, formerly the capital of Korea. Other such monuments in Pakistan and China no longer exist.

These sites are based on the idea that deities will protect the nation if rulers support the temple and monastic community. The expansion of Buddhism throughout Asia was fostered by this idea, because monastic communities attracted state resources to support their activities. (See *Holt World History* text, map of the spread of Buddhism on page 63.) This was a major shift from the earliest form of Indian Buddhism, when the Buddha renounced his noble status as a member of the military ruling class and became a wandering monk.

The relationship between Buddhism and government dates to the third-century BCE, when the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (Ah-SHO-ka) converted to Buddhism and began sending missionaries to spread Buddhism to other parts of Asia. (See *Holt World History* text, pages 66-67.)

Tōdai-ji is in Nara, which was the capital of Japan from 645-784. Its main patron was the Emperor Shōmu, a devout Buddhist and Japan's 45<sup>th</sup> emperor (reigned 724-49). He consolidated the authority of the throne and presided over a period in which Tang-style court and religious culture flourished in Japan. He and his consort Kōmyō commissioned thousands of copies of sutras, sponsored huge feasts for monastics, and in 749 both abdicated to devote themselves to religious tasks. Those who objected to emperor's pouring massive state resources into the temple moved the capital to Kyōto.

Tōdai-ji is the headquarters temple of the Kegon school, which emphasized the Flower Garland Scripture (S: Avatamsaka-sūtra, C: Hua-yan-jin, J: Kegon-kyō). This text was composed in India and translated into Chinese as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. It became very influential in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (Tang Dynasty) and was enthusiastically received in Korea and Japan. The Korean monk Sim-Pyong was invited to lecture on this text to monks in Nara.

### **The Great Buddha (Daibutsu)**

The central figure in the temple is Vairocana (Vai-RO-cha-na) Buddha, who represents the "source and center of creation" (20). The Japanese statue echoes a monumental stone carving of Vairocana commissioned in the 670s by the Tang court in one of the Longmen cave temples near Luoyang, China. Various deities and bodhisattvas enshrined in the temple reflect the popularizing developments of Mahāyāna.

Construction of the temple began in 745.

Half the side of Mt. Wakakusa (700+ meters) was excavated and terraced to a depth of 10-30 meters.

The original statue (called the *Daibutsu*, or Great Buddha) was about 16 meters high and took about 13 years to complete (from 744-757). It was dedicated in 752. The emperor and thousands of (Japanese and Chinese) monks attended. The Indian monk Bodhisena presided. He painted in the irises of the statue's eyes using a giant brush connected by strings to the emperor's hands.

Among the resources that went into the statue:

444 metric tons of refined copper (about 978,853 pounds)

7 metric tons of unrefined tin (15,432.36 pounds)

391 kg. gold leaf (860 pounds, or roughly 13,763 ounces. At the current price of \$384.50 per ounce, that would be worth almost \$5.3 million.)

2.2 m tons mercury (4,850 pounds)

4.66 cu. km charcoal

372,075 days of skilled labor and 514,902 days of unskilled labor in casting

51,590 days of skilled carpentry and 1,665,071 days of unskilled (52)

Up to 1.6 million volunteer laborers during the course of the project (40)

50,000 donors of timber, gold, copper and other valuables from 370,000.

The 48 principal pillars are 30 m long and 1.5 m in diameter, and were floated from mountain sites, down rivers to the capital.

227 site supervisors, 917 master builders, 1,483 laborers, and at times more than 1,000 cooks.

The cost of the project drained the imperial coffers. A rival faction of the imperial family moved the capital to Kyōto in 794, to distance the government from the influence of the temple.

The *Daibutsu* was damaged by cavalry in 1180 during a civil conflict and repaired, then damaged again in 1567 by civil war. Today only parts of the pedestal are original. It was repaired and rebuilt by the Tokugawa Shogun in the 1680s and rededicated in 1692. The current statue is just under 15 m.

Details of materials used at that time, according to temple records of 1699:

more than 3,000 copper ingots

133,660 clay roof tiles

cash balances of nearly 15,000 kilograms of silver and 1,800 kilograms of gold coins.