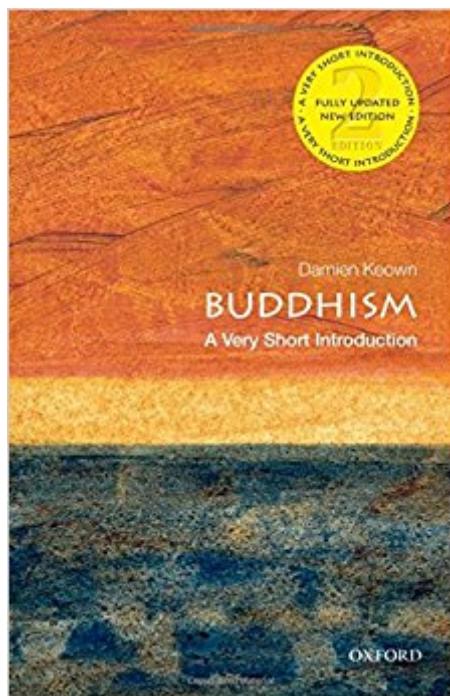


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# Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



## Synopsis

This Very Short Introduction offers readers a superb overview of the teachings of the Buddha, as well as a succinct guide to the integration of Buddhism into daily life. What are the distinctive features of Buddhism? Who was the Buddha, and what are his teachings? Words such as "karma" and "nirvana" have entered our vocabulary, but what do they mean? Damien Keown provides a lively, informative response to these frequently asked questions about Buddhism. As he sheds light into how Buddhist thought developed over the centuries, Keown also highlights how contemporary dilemmas can be faced from a Buddhist perspective. In the second edition Keown provides new perspectives on Buddhist thought, including up-to-date material about the evolution of Buddhism throughout Asia, the material culture of Buddhism and its importance, new teachings on the ethics of war and peace, and changes to ethnicity, class, and gender. About the Series: Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Buddhism: Questions for Consideration and Discussion In what ways is the Buddhist worldview similar to or different from the traditional Western one, and how do both of these compare to the current scientific way of thinking? Are the Buddhist and Western conceptions incompatible? Does it make sense to believe in reincarnation? If "no," are people like the Buddha deluded when they claim to remember past lives? If "yes," what evidence is there for it? What difference would it make to you now if you believed you would be reborn and live again? Is karma the same as destiny, in the sense that everything that happens to you is predetermined? Do you believe that "what goes around comes around," and if so is this the same as karma? Does everyone get what they deserve, in the end? Do people have a soul, and if so, what is it like? If not, what is it that makes you who you are, and how do you remain the same person if--as science tells us--the material basis of your being changes continuously? If your memories changed, would you be someone else? Is Buddhism more or less environmentally friendly than Christianity? Which aspects of Buddhist teachings might make it appear in harmony with contemporary ecological attitudes? Do you think Buddha was concerned about the environment? --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Review from previous edition: "Damien Keown ... His short account has been tried out in draft on students and is admirably lucid, anticipating and dealing well with the questions that are bound to come up." --Roger Farrington, *The Middle Way*, Vol. 71, No. 4, February 1997"Damien Keown's book is a readable and wonderfully lucid introduction to one of mankind's most beautiful, profound, and compelling systems of wisdom. His impressive powers of explanation help us to come to terms with a vital contemporary reality." --Bryan Appleyard"an excellent and highly readable account of a complex and multifarious subject. Even if you were to read nothing else, you would probably come away with a fair idea of what Buddhism is all about." --Looi Siew Tip, *New Straits Times*"impressive" --Sarah Marriott, *Irish Times* 13/5/00

There are many introductory texts available on Buddhism, but this is by far the best I have come across. Its great strength is its scope. Other books that I have read on the subject present some or other particular variety of Buddhism, usually a Westernized version of Zen. As Keown states on page 1, "Students of Buddhism have tended to fasten onto a small part of the tradition and assume

their conclusions held true about the whole". He illustrates this with the story of the blind men and the elephant (from a Buddhist scripture called the *Udāna*) in which each man grasps a part of the elephant - tail, trunk, tusk, etc - and bases his description of the animal on that part alone. Keown attempts a broad overview of the history, development and fragmentation of Buddhist thought, from the life of the Buddha to the present day. It is what it says - only a very short introduction - but it is packed with useful information. Keown writes well, in a lucid, concise style. A different edition of the same book is also available in the *A Brief Insight* series, available here on . The text in that series is (so far as I can tell) always the same as in the *VSI* series, but the print is larger and there are many more illustrations, some in color. You might want to check that out if you intend to read this book, which you should.[PeterReeve]

Part of a series by Oxford University Press, this book, 'Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction', follows the same format as other texts in the Very Short Introduction series -- it has fewer than 150 pages, is well indexed, has a useful glossary, accessible and enjoyable narrative, and captures the essence in a very short space the major points of its topic. There are probably nearing 100 volumes in this Very Short Introduction series (making it, ironically, not a Very Short series), but among those that I have read, this text stands out as being one of the best. Damien Keown, of the University of London and the Royal Asiatic Society, addresses Buddhism past and present, East and West. Beginning with narrative tales the help to exhibit the principles, Keown examines in turn the major questions. First, with regard to Buddhism, is this -- is Buddhism really a religion? Often categorised as such, it is often the exception proving the rule. Many take strong spiritual and philosophical ideas from Buddhism (sometimes without knowing it) but do not subscribe the larger system of practices -- but perhaps most telling, Buddhism is a non-theistic way of being. Keown looks at seven dimensions of religion, and concludes that Buddhism does fit a broader definition of religion. Keown proceeds from there to look at the origins of Buddhism, the life of the Buddha, ideas of karma and reincarnation, and the central ideas of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism. From these beginnings, Buddhism branches out, the largest grouping being the Mahayana (who get their own chapter), and others spreading first across Asia and then to the rest of the world. Like other books in this Very Short series, there are useful maps, a nice snapshot timeline, and suggestions for further reading, should the Very Short introduction not prove sufficient (and for many, this sample will leave the reader wanting more). I cannot speak too highly of this series, and of this volume on Buddhism by Keown in particular.

Found this little volume to be exactly what I hoped it would be. The author presented the information in an interesting, informative and objective manner. specifically comparing the various forms of Buddhism to one another as well as similarities and differences between Buddhism, and other Judeo-Christian religions. If one is looking for a brief introduction, this seems to be right on line.

Gives a short introduction about the basics of Buddhism, the history within Asia, and its interaction and history with European culture and American culture. Has chapters on Buddha, Karma, rebirth, ethics, meditation, art, a short timeline and, as many books in the series have, a list of books for further reading. A great way to start learning about Buddhism if you don't know anything about or just a way to extend your knowledge of it. Small, cheap, and enjoyable to read which makes it a great gift for friends or family who may wish to learn about it without getting into a heavy 500 page tome. Get it used or new!

I enjoyed reading this summary of Buddhism. It broke the subject up into manageable pieces and provided enough specifics to deliver a great taste of its history and philosophy.

Buddhism is a subject that has spawned a huge and bewildering number of books, all meant to encourage the Westerner in understanding its message and way. Like the other volumes in the VSI series, this book provides a succinct introduction into a field in general, highly readable outlines. There is a short bibliography for further study, as well as a timeline; both of these help in placing the historical and religious aspects in perspective. It is also very clear in setting out the demands of Buddhism on adepts in the 21st century. As a starting point, this slim volume points the way to the Way. Highly recommended.

Whole forests have been felled to write of Buddhism. This is certainly not an in-depth study but a very good "introduction". Have many "Very Short Introduction" books; they give me the ability to know a little about a lot.

basically gave it five stars because it delivers on everything it describes. In addition, the information is presented in an substantially unbiased way, describing the different doctrines within buddhism.

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