Paths and Power

Trace how Buddhist teachings and royal support shaped early India.

AWH.C.8.2 "Explain the origins and significant aspects of Buddhism, including the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the evolution and central principles of Buddhism, and the significance of early Indian Hindu and Buddhist monarchies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two events that changed Siddhartha's path, circle two Buddhist teachings, and number the Maurya and Gupta monarchies 1 and 2 to trace how rulers shaped religious life.

From a Search for Answers to an Empire

1 In the fifth century BCE, Siddhartha Gautama was born into a ruling family in northern India, where older religious traditions taught about karma and rebirth. Buddhist accounts describe how encounters with old age, illness, and death led him to question a sheltered life. He left home to seek a way beyond suffering. After trying severe self-denial, he rejected both luxury and harsh deprivation. Meditating beneath a tree, he attained awakening and became known as the Buddha, or "awakened one." He then taught a Middle Way that avoided those extremes and invited people to test its lessons through practice.

2 The Buddha taught that life involves suffering and dissatisfaction, that craving gives rise to them, and that ending craving makes release possible. These ideas form the first three Noble Truths; the fourth identifies the Eightfold Path as the way to that release. The path joins wise understanding with ethical actions and mental training, including meditation. Rather than requiring priestly sacrifices, Buddhist communities developed practices open to people from different social backgrounds. Monks and nuns followed shared rules, while lay followers offered food and other support. Over time, teachings spread through travelers and teachers, and traditions such as Theravada and Mahayana developed.

3 Rulers shaped how these ideas traveled. In the third century BCE, Ashoka of the Maurya Empire embraced Buddhism after a brutal war. His inscriptions promoted restraint, care for people and animals, and respect for other religious groups; he also supported Buddhist institutions and sent teachers beyond his empire. Centuries later, Gupta rulers favored Hindu traditions, sponsoring temples and Sanskrit learning, while Buddhist monasteries remained active in their lands. Neither dynasty made every subject practice the ruler's faith. Their different forms of patronage show how early Indian monarchies could spread religious ideas, build institutions, and influence what later generations learned.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Siddhartha's experiences lead him to teach a Middle Way?

2. According to the Noble Truths, what causes suffering, and how does the Eightfold Path address it?

3. How did Buddhist communities help the Buddha's teachings develop and spread after his lifetime?

4. How did Ashoka's and the Gupta rulers' religious support differ, and what effect could both forms of support have?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a ruler whose city has Hindu and Buddhist residents. In four sentences, propose one public policy that welcomes both groups, explain how it reflects a Buddhist teaching, and connect it to one ruler's actions in the passage.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two events that changed Siddhartha's path, circle two Buddhist teachings, and number the Maurya and Gupta monarchies 1 and 2 to trace how rulers shaped religious life. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Siddhartha's experiences lead him to teach a Middle Way?	**Encounters with old age, illness, and death led him to seek a way beyond suffering. After trying severe self-denial, he rejected both deprivation and luxury.**
2	According to the Noble Truths, what causes suffering, and how does the Eightfold Path address it?	**Craving gives rise to suffering. The Eightfold Path offers a way to end craving through wise understanding, ethical actions, and mental training.**
3	How did Buddhist communities help the Buddha's teachings develop and spread after his lifetime?	**Monks and nuns followed shared rules, lay followers supported them, and travelers and teachers carried the teachings to new places. Traditions such as Theravada and Mahayana developed over time.**
4	How did Ashoka's and the Gupta rulers' religious support differ, and what effect could both forms of support have?	**Ashoka supported Buddhist institutions and sent teachers abroad, while Gupta rulers favored Hindu temples and Sanskrit learning. Both forms of support helped build institutions and pass on religious ideas.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would open a public rest house that offers food and water to anyone in the city. Helping people meet their needs reflects the Buddhist teaching that ethical action matters. Ashoka promoted care for people and respect for other religious groups, so his actions offer a model for this policy. Hindu and Buddhist residents could both use the rest house without changing their beliefs.

Accept accurate explanations in students' own words. For Your Turn, look for one feasible policy, a clear link to a Buddhist teaching, an accurate historical connection, and a reason the policy welcomes both groups.