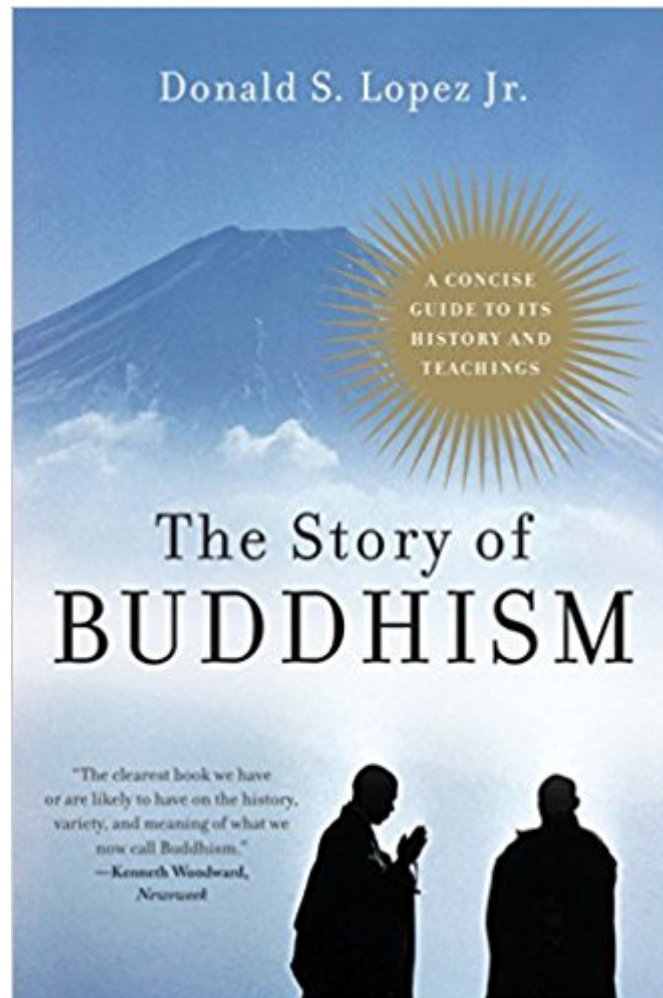




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# The Story Of Buddhism: A Concise Guide To Its History & Teachings



## Synopsis

How and when did the many schools of Buddhism emerge? How does the historical figure of Siddhartha Guatama relate to the many teachings that are presented in his name? Did Buddhism modify the cultures to which it was introduced, or did they modify Buddhism? Leading Buddhist scholar Donald S. Lopez Jr. explores the origins of this 2,500-year-old religion and traces its major developments up to the present, focusing not only on the essential elements common to all schools of Buddhism but also revealing the differences among the major traditions. Beginning with the creation and structure of the Buddhist universe, Lopez explores the life of the Buddha, the core Buddhist tenets, and the development of the monastic life and lay practices. Combining brilliant scholarship with fascinating stories -- contemporary and historical, sometimes miraculous, sometimes humorous -- this rich and absorbing volume presents a fresh and expert history of Buddhism and Buddhist life.

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## Customer Reviews

Much of what we hear about Buddhism today in the West focuses on its philosophy, and how it can change one's life. Throughout history, however, Buddhism's mythology, scriptures, heroes, and its promise for salvation from rebirth have been the Buddhist teachings that most people have known. Religion professor Donald Lopez has mastered a good deal of this immense lore and managed with *The Story of Buddhism* to get it into a manageable package. Rather than providing a chronological history or country-by-country breakdown, Lopez explores general topics, meandering through two-and-a-half millennia, from India to Japan. In sections such as "Monastic Life," "Tantra," and

"Pilgrimage," he talks about the origins of each topic and its mainstream manifestations. In addition, he spices up his work with delectable, if occasionally bizarre, examples from specific cultures. There is, for instance, the story of the depraved man who, once having said the words "Lotus Sutra," was saved from Hell. And the tale of the practice called the "act of truth," in which a perfectly candid statement can have magical powers. Or the story of the monk who attempted to rescue some maggots by opening his own flesh for them. No doubt, Buddhism is interesting, but it takes a competent scholar and a good storyteller to get it just right. Lopez fills the bill. --Brian Bruya --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Lopez, a professor of Buddhist studies at the University of Michigan, says that his primary aim for this book is "to focus on Buddhist practice as a religion." Unlike more superficial how-to books on Buddhism, this book gives a thorough historical and theological explanation of Buddhism's major tenets, starting with Buddhist cosmology and then moving to chapters dedicated to the Three Jewels of Buddhism (the Buddha, dharma and sangha) before ending with a chapter on enlightenment. Interspersed are anecdotes intended to teach key principles in keeping with the idea of Buddhism-as-story; unfortunately, these vignettes are a bit overpowered by lengthy discourse on the history and interpretations of those principles. The bulk of the chapter on "lay practice," for example, focuses on various countries' traditions of lay ordination and funeral rituals, as well as monasteries' relations with their respective states, rather than explicating actual daily lay practice. In trying to explain not only Buddhism's key teachings but also their variations by country, region, teacher and school, the text loses focus. Lopez provides a list for further reading at the end of each chapter as well as a bibliography and glossary at the end of the book, which should be helpful for the student of world religions. His command of the subject is obvious, but his prose is sometimes dry, and the scope may be overly ambitious for the general reader. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is ok, but there is actually little to nothing about the history of Buddhism, despite the title. If that is your interest, I'd recommend *A Concise History of Buddhism* by Andrew Skilton. For a scholarly but accessible look at Buddhist doctrine, I think you can't beat Rupert Gethin's *Foundations of Buddhism*, which also has more history than this volume.

This book is great for someone new to the topic of Buddhism, and interested in a more detailed history of the origins of the spirituality. It goes into great detail on the Buddha, the dharma, and the

sangha. It also compares multiple Buddhist texts from across Asia. A must read for the student of Buddhism, or someone simply interested in learning more about the religion itself.

I was originally looking into the teachings of the Buddhism to provide a center point, as I re-evaluate some of things currently going on around me. I can definitely recommend this book as it is written by a professor who has studied this religion over an extended period of time and, for me, provides a great foundation for this moment in my life.

After a recent course in Buddhist philosophy, taught by a Buddhist, left me, a non-Buddhist, with many unanswered questions, I searched the literature for a book that would help me put this complex picture together. I found this book to be the best of the ones I reviewed, and I highly recommend it. I have since read several other books by Lopez and have enjoyed them all while learning a lot.

Textbook for a college class, I thought it was ok, but World Religions by Smith was much better.

I've been a Buddhist Universalist for about 20 years, and have read various explanations and teachings about the Buddha. This book is the best overview of all -- showing the basic teachings, the contradictions, and the regional differences. Buddhism is much more diverse than we generally think, and this book shares that diversity with the reader.

I am enjoying reading this book in conjunction with an Eastern World Religions Class. I would not recommend trying to understand Buddhism without an instructor or guide. However, making the effort to find someone to help with the religious and cultural references is well worth it. I also recommend: A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life.

Lopez includes a lot of valuable information in this work. Probably more information than a beginner needs or wants. Also, I found the organization to be confusing. A much better book in this category, I felt, was Karen Armstrong's "Buddha". I also recommend "The Buddhist Handbook" by Snelling, although it is more idiosyncratic than the others.

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