The Britannica Guide to the World's Most Influential People

The 100 Most Influential WORLD LEADERS of All Time

Edited by Amy McKenna

Britannica Educational Publishing

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EDITED BY AMY MCKENNA, SENIOR EDITOR, GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

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On the cover: *Marking his 100th day as the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama, the first African American to hold the office, speaks during a town hall meeting at Fox Senior High School in Arnold, Mo., April 29, 2009*. Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images

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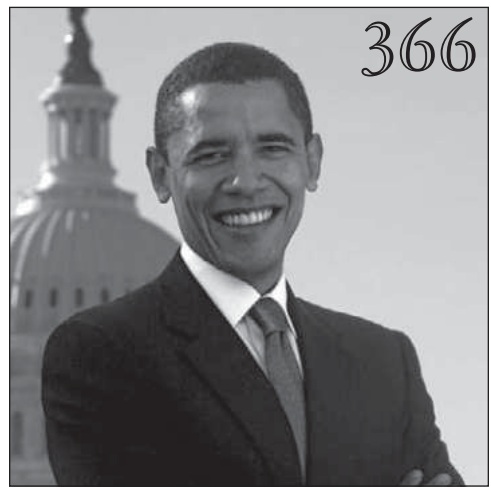


Introduction

What does it mean to be a leader? Does it require that a person hold political office and rule masses? Does it include only those who made a positive impact on society or also those who wreaked devastation and destruction? Do humanitarians or activists who never held office but who had the ability to stir thousands and millions with a vision of a different, better world merit inclusion?

Many very different types of leaders are profiled in this book, which is arranged chronologically by date of birth. It ends with Osama bin Laden and Barack Obama. One is a mastermind of terrorist acts that have killed thousands and another a politician who overcame the weight of hundreds of years of slavery and discrimination against blacks to become the first African American elected president of the most powerful country in the world. They are opposites in almost every imaginable way. Bin Laden leads a global jihad against Western values, and Obama, the symbolic leader of the West, was the recipient of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize. They are linked, however, in their ability to inspire loyal followers—in bin Laden's case to commit destruction and in Obama's to believe that ordinary citizens, acting together, can change a sometimes seemingly bleak world for the better—and in their lasting impact on the world in which they and future generations will live.

The world today has some 6.7 billion people, most of whom adhere to one religion or another. In the 13th century BCE, Moses delivered his people from Egyptian slavery and received the Ten Commandments, establishing Judaism as the world's first great monotheistic religion. Although Jews make up but a small fraction of the world's population today, monotheism flourishes, with Christians and Muslims together accounting for more than half the world's population.

Jesus' Christian followers were once persecuted by the Romans until Constantine I the Great became the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity; now, more than two billion people call themselves Christians. In the 7th century Muhammad founded Islam, and he is considered by Muslims to be the last of the Great Prophets; his name is now invoked several billion times a day by nearly 1.5 billion Muslims around the world. Others, such as Confucius in 6th–5th-century-BCE China and Buddha in the area around Nepal and India about the same time, have inspired hundreds of millions of people, and their teachings remain central to the daily lives of vast numbers today. And, though these figures still have relevance thousands of years after their deaths, the world continues to produce religious leaders—Martin Luther and his Reformation in Europe, Ruhollah Khomeini and his Islamic Revolution in Iran, John Paul II and his more than 25-year leadership as head of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Dalai Lama—who have represented challenges to existing religious views or have spread the reach of their religious doctrine.

While some have founded religions, others have founded countries. George Washington is almost universally revered in the United States as the "Father of His Country," securing independence on the battlefield and then turning down an offer to become king. The American Revolution began the process of independence in the so-called New World, which had been subject to colonial domination by European powers. Less than 40 years after the American Revolution had been won, another American revolution of sorts, led by Simón Bolívar in Latin America, helped throw off Spanish rule there. Bolívar's name is still a symbol to revolutionary leaders in Latin America. Indeed, Hugo Chávez leads his own "Bolivarian Revolution" in Venezuela today.

In Europe, too, new countries were formed in what are generally thought of as ancient lands—Giuseppe Garibaldi helped create a unified Kingdom of Italy in 1861, while Otto von Bismarck helped forge a German empire in 1871. Old empires fell away and were replaced with modern states in the 20th century. Vladimir Lenin established in Russia the world's first communist regime, one that, though it collapsed nearly 75 years later, continues to have a lasting influence on our world. Out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, Kemal Atatürk helped found modern Turkey. Eamon de Valera won Irish independence from Great Britain. Ibn Sa'ūd created a country, Saudi Arabia, that bears his family's name. And, Mao Zedong led a 30-year struggle in China, creating a communist state in 1949 that 60 years later continues to rule over the world's largest population. Sometimes individuals have led peaceful resistance movements that have freed their people—as Mohandas Gandhi did in India. After World War II, as peoples yearned to become free, David Ben-Gurion in Israel, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam fought for and achieved their country's independence in different ways. Nelson Mandela in South Africa is yet another story of resistance—sometimes armed and sometimes peaceful. He was jailed from 1964 to 1990 by his apartheid government, which legally discriminated against the overwhelmingly black population in favour of minority whites, before being released, helping end apartheid, ushering in a peaceful transition to democracy, and becoming the first black president of the new, multiracial South Africa.

Some of the world's greatest leaders have earned their place here from victories—and defeats—on the battlefield. Alexander the Great won a vast 4th-century-BCE empire that eventually stretched from Europe to India.

Attila commanded the Huns, leading them in invasions against the Balkans, Greece, and Italy. His empire, however, died shortly after he did in 453 CE. Charlemagne had himself crowned Holy Roman emperor in 800, following military conquests that expanded his kingdom outward from what is modern-day Germany. A millennium later, Napoleon led French forces in Europe to stunning victories, but his defeats in Russia and, later, at Waterloo proved his downfall. Outside of Europe, Chinggis Khan was one of the greatest warriors the world has ever seen, leading his Mongols in amassing an empire that stretched from Mongolia to the Adriatic Sea in the 12th–13th century. At about the same time, Saladin, founder of the Ayyūbid dynasty, fought in the Middle East against Christian Crusaders, capturing Jerusalem to end nearly nine decades of occupation by Christians.

The 20th century brought advances in technology—making war even more devastating than it was during Napoleon's time. It is estimated that some 35 to 60 million people died during World War II, and for this reason the leaders of the major combatants usually top any list of influential leaders. Italy's Il Duce, Benito Mussolini, the world's first fascist dictator, joined an alliance in Europe with Germany's Adolf Hitler under whose dictatorial rule most of Europe fell and some six million Jews died in the Holocaust. Together, Hitler and Mussolini formed the Axis with Japan in the Pacific. Hirohito, emperor of Japan, though playing a limited political role, was the symbolic leader of his country. His national radio address in 1945, the first time many Japanese had heard his voice, announced the country's surrender, and the next year he renounced his quasi-divine status, helping to engineer Japanese democracy after the war. Franklin D. Roosevelt, though afflicted with debilitating polio, managed to win

re-election to four terms as president of the United States and led the Allies. He was joined by Winston Churchill, whose steely nerves helped calm Britain during relentless bombing by the German Luftwaffe, while Charles de Gaulle led the Free French against German occupation. A fourth ally was Joseph Stalin, whose rule in the Soviet Union resulted in purges, famine, and the deaths of some 20 million; initially signing a pact with Hitler, he joined the Allies following Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union.

From the ashes of World War II came dreams to build a Europe that would be free from the traditional English-French-German rivalry that had plunged the continent into two world wars. Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman may never have led a government, but they helped found the European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of today's European Union. The EU now encompasses 27 countries—from Portugal in the west, Malta in the south, Finland in the north, and Romania in the east—helping to integrate the continent both politically and economically and ward off war.

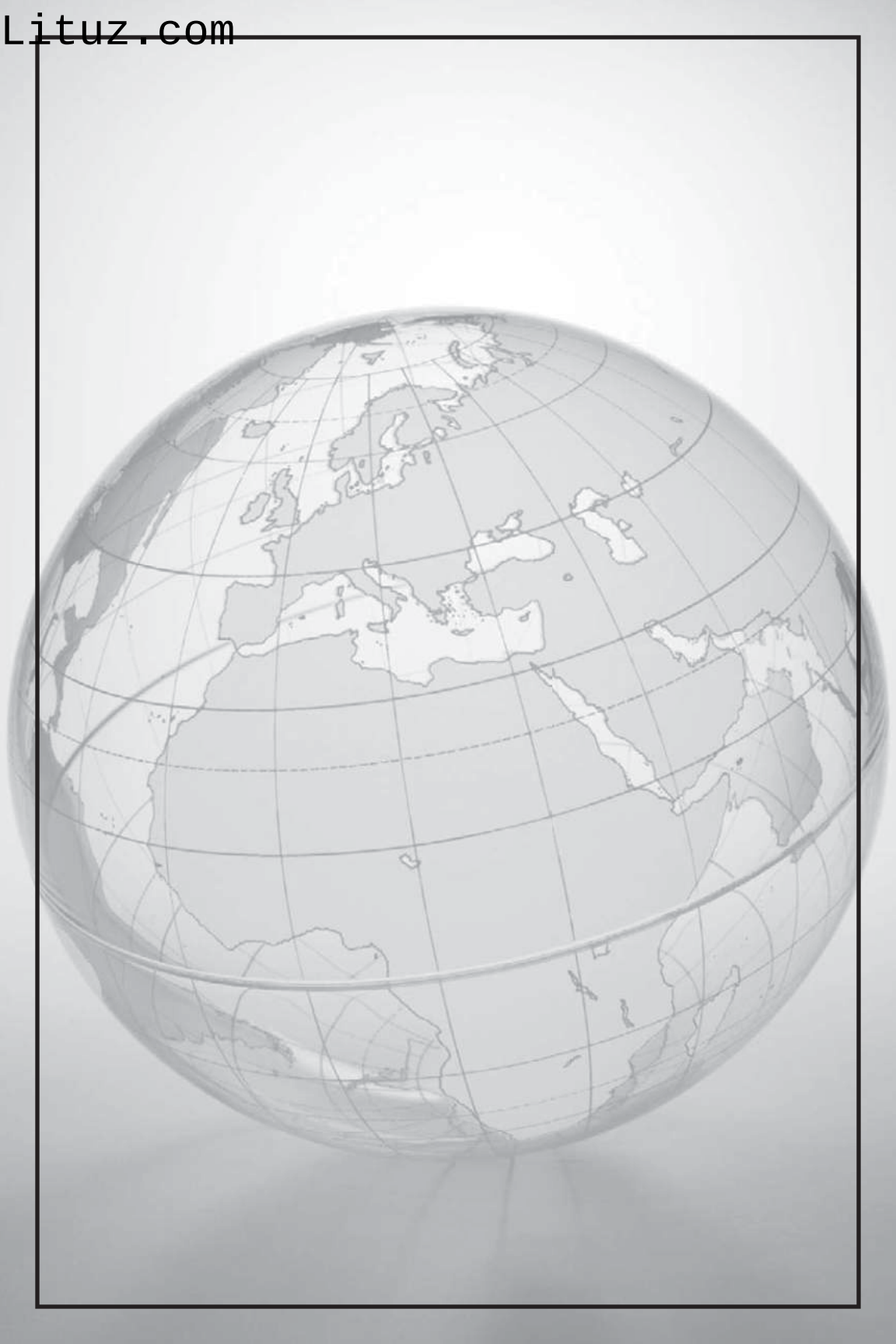
Upholding the European ideal was but one way in which statesmen and activists have influenced the arc of history without ever possessing formal power. Frederick Douglass, one of the greatest human rights leaders of the 19th century, helped lead the American abolition movement. Though slavery had been abolished in the United States in 1865, African Americans still suffered from discrimination, so in the next century Martin Luther King, Jr., used nonviolent protest and civil disobedience, modeled on Gandhi's movement in India, to achieve political equality before he was struck down by an assassin's bullet in 1968. Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Franklin, was a tireless campaigner for human rights, playing a major role in drafting and gaining adoption of the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights—considered humanity's Magna Carta (Great Charter) to many.

Eleanor Roosevelt was but one woman whose imprint has been made on a society traditionally dominated by men. One of her predecessors as first lady, Abigail Adams, wrote in 1776 in a letter to her husband, John Adams, the great revolutionary and the second president of the United States, "I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." (Neither Adams nor her husband made the list of 100.) Too often, however, women have not been remembered in history. Still, their contributions have been enormous. Cleopatra, who ruled as queen of Egypt for decades, eventually committed suicide, and history was rewritten to portray her as predatory and immoral rather than as the woman she was: strong and smart, a philosopher and a scientist. Women were also discriminated against in the hereditary monarchies of Europe, which favoured males in deciding who would rule. Though her father, Henry VIII, had divorced or had killed several wives to find one who would produce a male heir, Elizabeth I eventually became queen of England, ruling for 45 years and giving her name to an age. Catherine II the Great of Russia was empress for more than three decades, and during her time she brought Russia into full participation in the political and cultural life of Europe. While Elizabeth and Catherine ruled from palaces, Joan of Arc earned her mark on the battlefield. She died at age 19, burned at the stake, but before then she led the French to win improbable battles, mostly due to the confidence that her men had in her, despite her youth, gender, and lack of military know-how. Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady," became Britain's first woman prime minister in 1979 and helped win the Cold War. Other strong women have reached the

pinnacle of power only to be murdered. Indira Gandhi of India served four terms as prime minister of the world's largest democracy but then was assassinated by extremists, while Benazir Bhutto, in neighbouring Pakistan, was the first woman in modern history elected to lead a predominantly Muslim country, and while campaigning in 2007 for what would most likely have been another term as prime minister was killed by an assassin. Today, Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, continues the fight for freedom, the face of hope in an authoritarian Myanmar (Burma) whose leadership has mostly kept her under house arrest.

Selecting the most influential anything is inherently fraught with difficulties, and choosing those individuals who have left a lasting impression on the world—both during their times and long after they perished—was nearly impossible. The stories that follow represent both the best—and worst—of humanity and provide a journey across time and across the globe—a trek that will provide keen insight into the art of leadership and the countless followers who were drawn into a cause, an upheaval, or a new dawn.



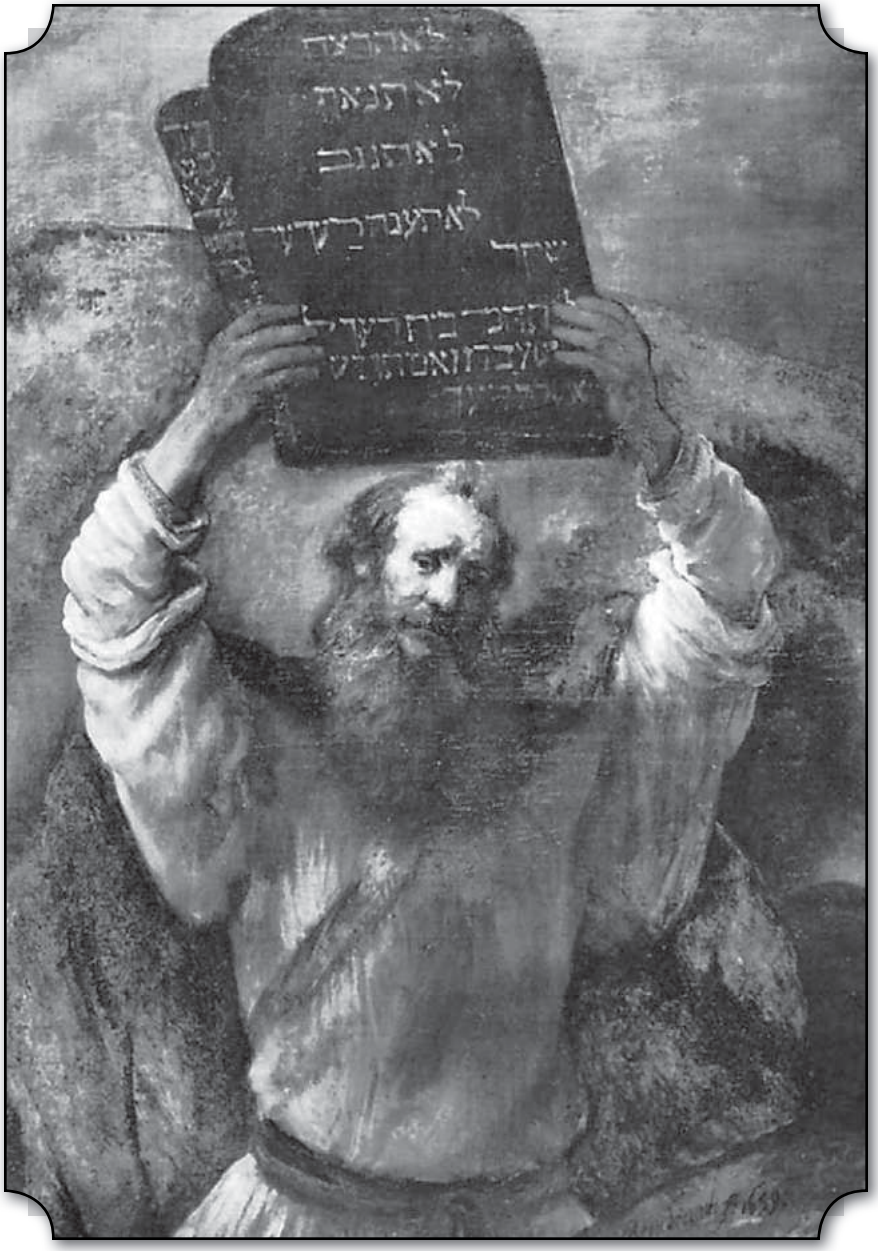
MOSES

(flourished 14th–13th century BCE)

Moses, a Hebrew prophet, teacher, and leader, delivered his people from Egyptian slavery and founded the religious community known as Israel, based on a covenant relationship with God. As the vehicle and interpreter of the Covenant, including the Ten Commandments, he exerted a lasting influence on the religious life, moral concerns, and social ethics of Western civilization.

According to the biblical account in Exodus and Numbers, Moses—whose Hebrew name is Moshe—was a Hebrew foundling adopted and reared in the Egyptian court. Raised there, according to the biblical account, by his biological mother, who was hired to be his nanny, Moses came to know of his Hebrew lineage. As an adult, while on an inspection tour, Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave. Fearing the wrath of the pharaoh, Moses fled to Midian (mostly in northwest Arabia), where he became a shepherd and eventually the son-in-law of a Midianite priest, Jethro. While tending his flocks, he saw a burning bush that remained unconsumed by the flames and heard a call from the God—thereafter called Yahweh—of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to free his people, the Hebrews, from their bondage in Egypt. Because Moses was a stammerer, his brother Aaron was to be his spokesman, but Moses would be Yahweh's representative.

Ramses II, who reigned 1279–13 BCE, was probably the pharaoh of Egypt at the time. He rejected the demand of this unknown God and responded by increasing the oppression of the Hebrews. The biblical text states that Moses used plagues sent by Yahweh to bend Ramses' will. Whether the Hebrews were finally permitted to leave Egypt or simply fled is not clear. According to the biblical account, the pharaoh's forces pursued them eastward to the Sea of



Moses Showing the Tables of the Law to the People, *oil painting by Rembrandt, 1659.* Courtesy of Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz Gemaldegalerie, Berlin

Reeds, a papyrus lake (not the Red Sea), which the Hebrews crossed safely but in which the Egyptians were engulfed. Moses then led the people to Mount Sinai (Horeb), which lies at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. Yahweh appeared to Moses there in a terrific storm, out of which came the Covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel, which included the Ten Commandments. Moses began issuing ordinances for specific situations and instituted a system of judges and hearings of civil cases.

After leaving Mount Sinai and continuing the journey toward Canaan, Moses faced increasing resistance and frustration from the Hebrew people and once got so angry at them that, according to tradition, Yahweh accounted it as a lack of faith and denied him entrance into Canaan. As his last official act, Moses renewed the Sinai Covenant with the survivors of the wanderings and then climbed Mount Pisgah to look over the land that he could not enter. The Hebrews never saw him again, and the circumstances of his death and burial remain shrouded in mystery.

Tradition states that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch, but this is untenable. Moses did formulate the Decalogue, mediate the Covenant, and begin the process of rendering and codifying interpretations of the Covenant's stipulations. In a general sense, therefore, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible can be described as Mosaic. Without him there would have been no Israel and no collection known as the Torah.

BUDDHA GOTAMA

(fl. *c.* 6th–4th century BCE, Lumbini, near Kapilavastu, Śākya republic, Kosala kingdom [India]—d. Kusinārā, Malla republic, Magdha kingdom [India])

Buddha Gotama (also called Siddhārtha) was the founder of Buddhism. The term *buddha*, literally meaning

"awakened one" or "enlightened one," is not a proper name but rather a title, and Buddhists traditionally believe that there will be innumerable buddhas in the future as there have been in the past and that there are other buddhas in other presently existing cosmos as well. The Buddha who belongs to the present era of the cosmos in which we are living is often referred to as Gotama. When the term the Buddha is used, it is generally assumed that it refers to the Buddha Gotama.

According to virtually all Buddhist traditions, the Buddha lived many lives before his birth as Gotama; these previous lives are described in Jātakas (birth stories), which play an important role in Buddhist art and education. Most Buddhists also affirm that the Buddha's life was continued in his teachings and his relics. The Pāli Tipitaka, which is recognized by scholars as the earliest extant record of the Buddha's discourses, and the later Pāli commentaries are the basis of the following account in which history and legend are inextricably intertwined.

The Buddha was born in the 6th or 5th century BCE in the kingdom of the Śākyas, on the borders of present-day Nepal and India. Gotama is said to have been born of the king and queen of the Śākyas, Suddhodna and Mahāmāyā. The Buddha's legend, however, begins with an account of a dream that his mother, Mahāmāyā, had one night before he was born. A beautiful elephant, white as silver, entered her womb through her side. Brahmins (Vedic priests) were asked to interpret the dream, and they foretold the birth of a son who would become either a universal monarch or a buddha. The purported site of his birth, now called Rummindei, lies within the territory of Nepal. (A pillar placed there in commemoration of the event by Aśoka, a 3rd-century BCE Buddhist emperor of India, still stands.) The child was given the

name Siddhattha (Siddhārtha in Sanskrit), which means "one whose aim is accomplished."

Gotama is said to have led a sheltered life of great luxury, which was interrupted when, on three excursions outside of the palace, he encountered an old man, an ill man, and a corpse. Each time he asked a servant to explain the phenomenon and was told that all men are subject to such conditions. Gotama then met up with a wandering ascetic and decided that he must discover the reason for the man's display of serenity in the midst of such misery. Renouncing his princely life, Gotama went in search of teachers who could instruct him in the way of truth. He took up the practice of various austerities and extreme self-mortifications, including severe fasting. These experiences eventually led Gotama to the conviction that such mortifications could not lead him to what he sought.

Buddhist mythology states that the Buddha went to meditate beneath a pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*), now known as the bodhi tree. There he was tempted by Mara (the Buddhist Lord of the Senses), but Gotama remained unmoved. Later that night the Buddha realized the Four Noble Truths, achieving enlightenment during the night of the full moon day of the month of May (Vesakha) at a place now called Bodh Gayā.

After this enlightenment, the story continues that the Buddha sought out five companions and delivered to them his first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* ("Sermon on Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth"), at Sarnath. An ancient stupa marks the spot where this event is said to have occurred. The Buddha taught that those in search of enlightenment should not follow the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. Avoiding these two extremes, the Thatāgata ("He Who Has Thus Attained") discovers the middle

path leading to vision, knowledge, calmness, awakening, and nirvana.

This middle path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path and consists of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right living, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The First Noble Truth is that sentient existence is *dukkha*, always tainted with conflict, dissatisfaction, sorrow, and suffering. The Second Noble Truth is that all this is caused by selfish desire—craving or *tanha*, "thirst." The Third Noble Truth is that there is nirvana—emancipation, liberation, and freedom for human beings from all this. The Fourth Noble Truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, is the way to this liberation.

After this sermon the five companions became the Buddha's first disciples, were admitted by him as monks (bhikkhus), and became the first members of the *sangha* ("community," or "order"). After the Buddha had trained followers, his mission was fulfilled. At Kusinara (now called Kasia) on the full moon day of the month of Vesakha (May), the Buddha Gotama entered *parinirvāṇa*—an end to the cycle of being reborn. His body was cremated by the Mallas in Kusinara, but a dispute over the relics of the Buddha arose between the Mallas and the delegates of rulers of several kingdoms. It was settled by a venerable Brahmin on the basis that they should not quarrel over the relics of one who preached peace. Stupas were then built over these relics.

CONFUCIUS

(b. 551 BCE, Qufu, state of Lu [now in Shandong Province, China]—d. 479 BCE, Lu)

Confucius (originally named Kong Qiu) is China's most famous teacher, philosopher, and political theorist, and

his ideas have influenced the civilization of East Asia and some other parts of the surrounding area.

Confucius's life, in contrast to his tremendous importance, seems starkly undramatic, or, as a Chinese expression states, it seems "plain and real." Confucius's humanity was not revealed truth but an expression of self-cultivation and the ability of human effort to shape its own destiny. The faith in the possibility of ordinary human beings to become awe-inspiring sages and worthies is deeply rooted in the Confucian heritage, and the insistence that human beings are teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavour is typically Confucian.

Although the facts about Confucius's life are scanty, they do establish a precise time frame and historical context. Confucius was born in the 22nd year of the reign of Duke Xiang of Lu (551 BCE). The traditional claim that he was born on the 27th day of the eighth lunar month has been questioned by historians, but September 28 is still widely observed in East Asia as Confucius's birthday. It is an official holiday in Taiwan, referred to as "Teacher's Day."

Confucius was born in Qufu in the small feudal state of Lu in what is now Shandong Province, which was noted for its preservation of the traditions of ritual and music of the Zhou civilization. His family name was Kong and his personal name was Qiu, but he is referred to as either Kongzi or Kongfuzi (Master Kong) throughout Chinese history. The adjective "Confucian," derived from the Latinized *Confucius*, is not a meaningful term in Chinese—nor is the term *Confucianism*, which was coined in Europe as recently as the 18th century.

Confucius's ancestors were probably members of the aristocracy who had become virtual poverty-stricken commoners by the time of his birth. His father died when

Confucius was only three years old. Instructed by his mother early in life, Confucius then distinguished himself as an indefatigable learner in his teens. He recalled toward the end of his life that at age 15 his heart was set upon learning. A historical account notes that, even though he was already known as an informed young scholar, he felt it appropriate to inquire about everything while visiting the Grand Temple.

Confucius had served in minor government posts, managing stables and keeping books for granaries before he married a woman of similar background when he was 19. It is not known who Confucius's teachers were, but he made a conscientious effort to find the right masters to teach him, among other things, ritual and music. His mastery of the six arts—ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic—and his familiarity with the classical traditions, notably poetry and history, allowed him to become a teacher himself in his 30s.

Confucius is known as the first teacher in China who wanted to make education broadly available and who was instrumental in establishing the art of teaching as a vocation and as a way of life. Before Confucius, aristocratic families had hired tutors to educate their sons in specific arts, and government officials had instructed their subordinates in the skills needed to perform their jobs. But Confucius was the first person to devote his whole life to learning and teaching for the purpose of transforming and improving society. He believed that all human beings could benefit from self-cultivation. He inaugurated a humanities program for potential leaders, opened the doors of education to all, and defined learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but also as character building.

For Confucius the primary function of education was to provide the proper way of training exemplary persons