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Buddhism in America
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Today, the United States is home to more forms of Buddhism than any other country in the world. Founded in India by Siddhartha Guatama more than five centuries before the birth of Jesus, Buddhism spread to many countries in Asia. But Buddhist populations in Asia are declining today, while the number of Americans and Europeans interested in Buddhist philosophy and practice is increasing. No longer an exotic tradition viewed as incomprehensible to Westerners, Buddhism is adapting to American culture, even as Americans are learning from it. Home to many Asian Americans whose identification with Buddhism goes back for generations, the United States is also home to a growing number of people, raised as Christians or Jews, who are interested in Buddhism. For many of these Americans, Buddhism forms a supplement to Christianity or Judaism rather than an alternative. More than a few churches and synagogues offer opportunities to study Buddhist texts or meditation. While many forms of Buddhism can be identified in the United States, three types are especially influential--Zen, Insight Meditation, and Tibetan Buddhism. Zen came to the United States from Japan, where it developed as part of the culture of samurai warriors. The word "Zen" means meditation, which includes sitting as well as formal arts ranging from calligraphy to swordsmanship. Centering on the experience of enlightenment in which the dualism of self and other disappears, Zen often attracts artists and intellectuals. Insight Meditation (vipassana) developed from monastic traditions in Burma and Sri Lanka as a way to help lay people cope with the problems of the modern world. Insight Meditation centers on mindfulness, which involves monitoring anger and cultivating compassion. In the United States, it often attracts psychotherapists seeking to supplement their

Western training. Tibetan Buddhism is often identified with the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, who was driven out of Tibet in 1959 when his country was taken over by the Chinese. Through his efforts in behalf of world peace, recognized by a Nobel Prize, the Dalai Lama inspires many non-violent peace and environmental activists in the United States. His writings focus on compassion as a mental discipline that leads to both happiness and peace.