



Buddhist Denominations

Belief Study Guide Version 3.1

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An introduction to the two major branches of Buddhism and some sub-denominations.

Denomination	Details
<u>Theravada</u> [teh-rah-vah-dah]	"School of the Elders;" a very old and conservative school; most important texts are the Pali Canon , named for the language in which they are written; common in southeast Asia
<u>Mahayana</u> [mah-hah-yah-nah]	" Great(er) Vehicle ;" more widespread than Theravada, and with many subdivisions (see below); differs from Theravada in the fundamental belief that any person may strive for buddhahood
<u>Pure Land</u> Buddhism	practitioners repeat the name of Amitabha Buddha in the hopes of reaching the Pure Land , a different plane of existence where they can achieve buddhahood, after death; in some Chinese Pure Land schools, the "bodhisattva of compassion," Guanyin (the Chinese name for Avalokiteshvara) guides soul to the Pure Land after they die
<u>Tibetan</u> Buddhism	named for the country where it is primarily practiced; led by the Dalai Lama , an inherited religious position that is passed on through reincarnation; the current (14th) Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatzo ; traditionally led from the Potala Palace in Lhasa
<u>Zen</u> Buddhism	commonly practiced alongside Shinto in Japan; focuses on spiritual calm through meditation , often aided by the repetition of koans , which are syllables, words, phrases, or questions that focus the mind