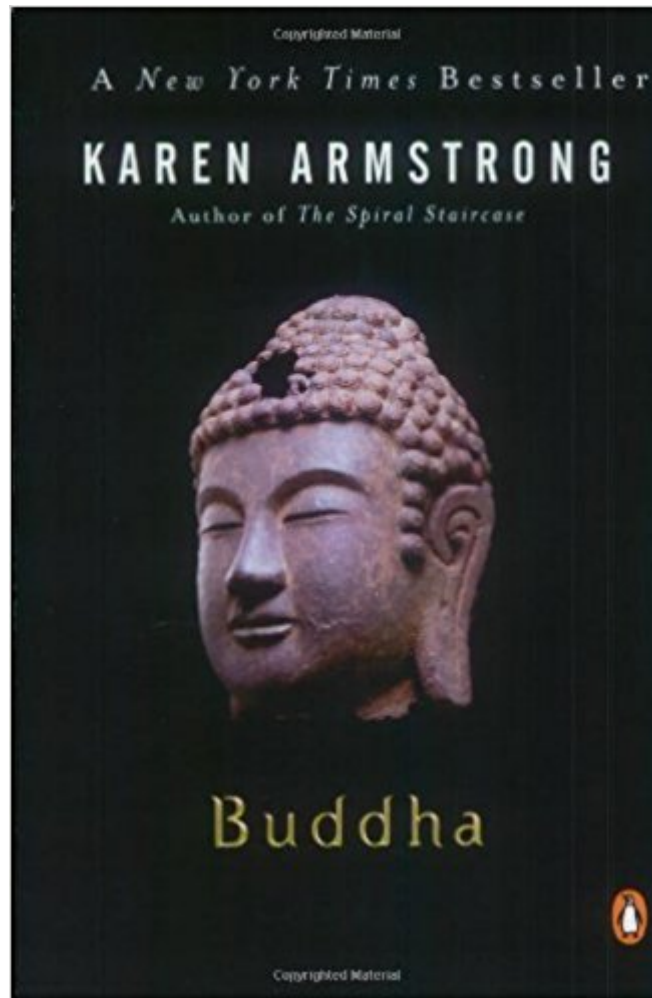




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Buddha (Penguin Lives Biographies)



Synopsis

With such bestsellers as *A History of God and Islam*, Karen Armstrong has consistently delivered "penetrating, readable, and prescient" (*The New York Times*) works that have lucidly engaged a wide range of religions and religious issues. In *Buddha* she turns to a figure whose thought is still reverberating throughout the world 2,500 years after his death. Many know the Buddha only from seeing countless serene, iconic images. But what of the man himself and the world he lived in? What did he actually do in his roughly eighty years on earth that spawned one of the greatest religions in world history? Armstrong tackles these questions and more by examining the life and times of the Buddha in this engrossing philosophical biography. Against the tumultuous cultural background of his world, she blends history, philosophy, mythology, and biography to create a compelling and illuminating portrait of a man whose awakening continues to inspire millions.

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Customer Reviews

Books on Buddhism may overflow the shelves, but the life story of the Buddha himself has remained obscure despite over 2,500 years of influence on millions of people around the world. In an attempt to rectify this, and to make the Buddha and Buddhism accessible to Westerners, the beloved scholar and author of such sweeping religious studies as *A History of God* has written a readable, sophisticated, and somewhat unconventional biography of one of the most influential people of all time. Buddha himself fought against the cult of personality, and the Buddhist scriptures were faithful,

giving few details of his life and personality. Karen Armstrong mines these early scriptures, as well as later biographies, then fleshes the story out with an explanation of the cultural landscape of the 6th century B.C., creating a deft blend of biography, history, philosophy, and mythology. At the age of 29, Siddhartha Gautama walked away from the insulated pleasure palace that had been his home and joined a growing force of wandering monks searching for spiritual enlightenment during an age of upheaval. Armstrong traces Gautama's journey through yoga and asceticism and grounds it in the varied religious teachings of the time. In many parts of the world during this so-called axial age, new religions were developing as a response to growing urbanization and market forces. Yet each shared a common impulse--they placed faith increasingly on the individual who was to seek inner depth rather than magical control. Taoism and Confucianism, Hinduism, monotheism in the Middle East and Iran, and Greek rationalism were all emerging as Gautama made his determined way towards enlightenment under the boddhi tree and during the next 45 years that he spent teaching along the banks of the Ganges. Armstrong, in her intelligent and clarifying style, is quick to point out the Buddha's relevance to our own time of transition, struggle, and spiritual void in both his approach--which was based on skepticism and empiricism--and his teachings. Despite the lack of typical historical documentation, Armstrong has written a rich and revealing description of both a unique time in history and an unusual man. Buddha is a terrific primer for those interested in the origins and fundamentals of Buddhism. --Lesley Reed --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Armstrong's esteemed works, including such standards as *A History of God* and *The Battle for God*, have primarily focused on the monotheism of the Middle East. Now she turns farther eastward to craft this short biography for the Penguin Lives series. Armstrong carefully ties the Buddha's time to our own and champions his spiritual discoveries with an understated dignity that even the Buddha might bless. While exercising a scholar's restraint, she reveals a detectable compassion for Sidhatta Gotama, the radical who walked away from a pleasure palace because he refused to "remain locked in an undeveloped version" [of himself]. Armstrong overcame peculiar challenges to write about this historical figure who became "a type rather than an individual," as his personality and life particulars evaporated into the power of his selflessness. She turned this lack of details for a conventional biography to our advantage, opting to enhance Gotama's story with the broad canvas of his time and culture, thus making him accessibly human. This handsome and solid portrait is sure to become a classic; it is a refined and readable biography of a pivotal character in human history. It is likely true that when the 80-year-old Buddha died he had, as the sutra says, "gone beyond the

power of words," but in this thoughtful and revealing study, Armstrong has come near to proving the scriptures wrong. (Feb.) Forecast: Despite the plethora of Buddhist books on the market, few recent Buddha biographies have been written for a general audience. Armstrong's superb reputation should help sales, and Viking plans a six-city author tour and national publicity. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Of all the books I have read on Buddha this short little book does the best job of putting the dharma into focus, clarifies the many aspects of its origin and the various facets of the meditative practices and teachings from the earlier practices learned by Gotama to his complete understanding of enlightenment and how he taught it. It really gives meaning to many things from Goenka who often refers accurately to the early Pali texts. The history and the story are full of interesting passages taken from the earliest writings. In the end though the book is finished, just like the Buddha and everyone else leaving his karma and his work behind. I bought a hard copy for my library. Interesting that an ex Catholic nun did such a great job writing this book. Funny thing is that Gotama originally refused to let women in to the sangha probably due to the complications possible from sexual desire and even refused his step-mother who raised him. But he thought better of it fortunately. It is also interesting to muse that Chairman Mao, whose mother was a devout Buddhist, elevated all women to full social status during the revolution. Was this partly because of Buddha's teaching and things he learned from his mother? Is the successful communal nature of the Buddhist sangha over thousands of years a model for socialist societies? Could be. Everything is connected. So long, Buddha. Good bye, Buddha. (Haha there was even a Judas in the story.)

This is a compelling look at Buddha's life and lessons. Armstrong explores the subject in depth and makes it understandable and a pleasure to read. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in eastern spirituality.

Have had a long interest in Buddhism and love the secular and respectful tone of this book. Seems well researched and cohesive. I would recommend to anyone with an interest in Buddha. I have read it several times and still notice new things, has depth.

There was something about this book that made it difficult for me to read. The subject is extremely interesting, but I had difficulty getting through it. The life of the Buddha is extremely rich and it's

retold very well in this book. I have friends who read this, and they absolutely loved it!

Academic writing typical of KA. Informative, extremely well researched and organized and pretty inspirational due largely to the "subject matter.". I've studied Buddhism with Geshe Sopa (a Tibetan monk) and prefer the Sanskrit terms but she was apparently working more with the Pali scriptures and used those terms - maybe this was the language of the Buddha himself. Her writing might have had a little more sparkle but am very satisfied with this book that I've been planning to read for a long time.

This book reads like a very compelling story, yet has profound depth. Karen Armstrong brings the ancient times to life in her scholarly way and conveys her gift of getting the bigger picture. I read it in little increments only because I wanted to savor the profound wisdom and information pouring from each chapter's pages. There is much information one will not want to miss.. as it all seems is so important in helping the reader to absorb the magnitude of what the Buddha accomplished for mankind. A truly worthwhile read. I've already handed many copies out as gifts.

Gorgeous writing and wonderful entree into the context of WHY the Buddha left his luxurious home to become the Buddha.

Needed for school, came in on time, great read

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