



# The Five Vehicles of Buddhism

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The Five Vehicles of Buddhism were taught by Buddha Sakyamuni, in his forty-nine years of teaching, as expedient means, in order to cater to the different capacities of sentient beings for attaining enlightenment. The term vehicle is analogous to a conveyance that carries us from the present shore of suffering and affliction to the other shore of bliss and enlightenment.

A brief note on the Five Vehicles: To set forth on one's spiritual journey, a person may choose one of five vehicles. The choice depends on one's resources and abilities:

(1) **Humanity Vehicle:** The main objectives of this vehicle are to purify the human mind and to promote a blissful culture for humanity, so that one may realize a happy and blissful existence, and live in a wholesome state in this world. Confucianism is an example of this kind of vehicle.

(2) **Deva Vehicle:** All god-based religions belong to this deva/heaven vehicle. After death, one goes to heavens or hells, to the kingdom of one's choice or the result of one's karma. All Christian, Hindu, Muslim and any/all god-based religions belong to variations of this vehicle.

(3) **Small or Sravaka Vehicle:** Those who cultivate for the sake of personal liberation and aspiration for personal salvation. The highest level of attainment for cultivators of Small Vehicle Buddhism is the Arahat. This also refers to those who have heard the words of the Buddha and set forth with wisdom, not blind faith or beliefs. Existential questioning is a good example. All beliefs and dogmas are challenged, questioned, researched and meditated upon until one comes to a realization of liberation.

(4) **Mid-size or Pratyeka-Buddha Vehicle:** The awakening to co-operative causes (dependent originations) vehicle without hearing the words of the Buddha. Instead of hearing the Buddha's words, people who choose this vehicle enhance their lives over mundane living by observing/studying origins of life/the universe, cause and effect and teach others about these theories. Great scientists like Professor Steven Hawking are a good example because he became the world's top physicist exploring the origin of the universe unhampered by his physical handicap.

(5) **Large, Mahayana or Bodhisattva Vehicle:** The doctrines of the Bodhisattva Vehicle are for the salvation and enlightenment of one's self as well as for other sentient beings. The best example of this in modern times was Mother Teresa who was a Christian but sacrificed herself for the benefit of non-Christians.

The Five Vehicles are merely expedient means; their purpose is to direct people toward **Ekayana, the Buddhahood or One Vehicle**, the ultimate, complete and perfect enlightenment. One should not differentiate people on the basis of their religious beliefs but simply recognizes the vehicles they have chosen because all beings are on spiritual journeys one way or another.