

Why do Buddhists meditate?

Video transcript for 'Finding nirvana' narrated by Bettany Hughes

It was while he was sat meditating under a tree that the Buddha attained enlightenment.

The story goes that Prince Siddhartha Gautama had given up a life of great wealth and privilege to wander, penniless as a holy man, seeking enlightenment.

Siddhartha sat and entered a state of subtle absorption, something he had perfected during his years of training. He began to closely examine his own mind, and even his former existences, searching for an understanding of how to be free.

Visions of pleasure and diabolic dread raced through his mind, but nothing could distract him. And then, after many days, it suddenly seemed as though he had been released from all the things that had been troubling him.

Siddhartha was able to see things as they truly were.

He was free from desire and attachment to existence.

He understood that all things are impermanent and are incapable of providing ultimate satisfaction in themselves. He had become the Buddha, the awakened one.

The ultimate goal for a Buddhist is to reach that state of enlightenment, or nirvana, and meditation is a key technique to achieve it.

But meditation isn't just a question of philosophy or faith or belief system. Now scientists are charting its quantifiable positive wider impact on both body and mind.

Whatever you think of Buddhism itself, clearly 25 centuries ago the Buddha was onto something.