

Course Companion for GCSE AQA (Short Course)

Section A: Buddhism

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Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been designed to support the learning and teaching of **AQA GCSE Religious Studies Short Course**. Buddhist 'Beliefs and Teachings' are covered, and questions and activities are included to test students' knowledge and ability, and to help them engage with the topics.

The information is comprehensive, and images help to illustrate concepts. Keywords and quotes from Scripture and modern scholars are included to help students to understand the material and to further their grasp of the subjects. The topics are presented in a different order to that given in the specification, i.e. *The Buddha and the Four Noble Truths* are covered before *The Dhamma*, I feel this is a better order in which to cover the information. There is also an *Introduction to Buddhism* at the start that covers the historical context of the Buddha, the spread of Buddhism, a note about different Buddhist traditions, Scripture and reference to Buddhism in Great Britain.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

This course companion can be used in full as an alternative or complement to a textbook, as a class text or for independent learning or revision. Alternatively, teachers might use a section for a specific classroom activity or homework.

We have sought a balance between explaining relevant concepts in sufficient detail without oversimplification, while not going beyond GCSE level and becoming too complicated. Throughout we have tried to present all views in a neutral and informative way. Hopefully this resource will encourage students in their learning and help to prepare them for their exams. It should take the pressure away from teachers by providing the bulk of the content which they want to teach to their class.

- **Language:** Where the English transcription of Sanskrit and Pali spellings differs, we have followed the AQA specification in giving both, with one in brackets.
- **Philosophy and ethics themes:** Because teachers of the AQA specification are likely to reference the religions they have studied when teaching the philosophy and ethics 'Themes A–F' part of the course, an appendix has been provided here discussing the Buddhist perspective on the exam-relevant elements of each theme.
- **The use of modern scholars:** Modern Buddhism scholars are quoted throughout this resource to help students widen their understanding by reading expert insights. Scholars and books quoted are:

Cush D, *A Student's Approach to World Religions: Buddhism*, Hodder Education, 1991

Gethin R, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, 1998

Harvey P, *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history & practices*, Cambridge University Press, 1990

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Rahula W, *What The Buddha Taught*, Oneworld, 1959

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Snelling J, *The Elements of Buddhism*, Element Books Limited, 1990

Thompson M, *101 Key Ideas: Buddhism*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2000

Scriptural sources

Mascaró J (trans), *The Dhammapada*, Penguin Classics, 2015

Mendis N K G (ed), *The Questions of King Milinda*, Buddhist Publication Society, 1993

July 2017

Update v.1.1, 22 March 2019

Section on Buddhist Ethics added
(pp. 35–42 and pp. 47–48)

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* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

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Introduction to the Course

This course aims to cover many aspects of Buddhism and to assess your understanding. You need to be aware that although Buddhism is the dominant religion in several countries, including Tibet and Thailand, it is a relatively new and still growing religion in one of many different beliefs and traditions in Great Britain today – others include the religious tradition of Great Britain), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

At the end of the course:

- ☐ Make sure that you understand all the material, the content and theme
- ☐ Check that you are confident with answering the questions.
- ☐ If you are unsure about anything, revisit topics, or practice answering questions.



The range of material covers several subject areas: what Buddhists believe, and what Buddhists may take part in, including how they should behave. There will be a range of various aspects of Buddhism to Buddhists and to different traditions within Buddhism, reinforced with reference to Scripture, particularly the main Buddhist Scriptures and scholarly ideas.

This course companion is designed to equip you with the information you need to develop your knowledge and ability to answer related questions. Not all the questions here are exam-style, but those which are should be answered in particular ways.

Further recommended resources

Films: *Little Buddha* (1993), *Kundun* (1997), *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997)

Documentaries: *Genius of the Ancient World: The Buddha* (2015), *Doing Time*

Websites: www.buddhanet.net; www.britannica.com/topic/Buddhism; www.dharmafarer.org



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Hopefully this so far will be interesting, informative, and help you to achieve good results.

The **12-r. question** is the longest, and there is a little more to remember. You will need to give arguments and justifications **for** and **against** the statement (so agreeing with it, and disagreeing with it, from your point of view). Make sure you have good reasons for all the points you make and link them together to come to a conclusion, picking the most convincing side of the argument (based on the evidence you have). You need to explain **why** you think this is the case. You need to refer to Buddhist teaching.



Introduction to Buddhism

Buddhism is recognised as one of the six largest world religions, together with Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. Worldwide there are approximately 240 million Buddhists and it is a well-established religion in Great Britain, with around 2 million followers today. Buddhism can be traced back 2,500 years to north-east India and began with the teachings of the Buddha.

Historical context – traditions at the time of the Buddha

Keywords:

- ♦ **Asceticism** – severe self-discipline, enduring hardship in pursuing spiritual goals
- ♦ **Ahimsa** – non-violence or non-harm
- ♦ **Atman** – Hindu word for the soul
- ♦ **Kamma (karma)** – ('deed', 'action') deliberate actions have consequences
- ♦ **Mahayana** – branch, tradition or school of Buddhism
- ♦ **Pali** – traditional language of Buddhist Scripture
- ♦ **Reincarnation** – belief that after bodily death the soul is born again into a new body
- ♦ **Sanskrit** – traditional language of Buddhist Scripture
- ♦ **Shramana** – religious movement made up of wandering holy men
- ♦ **Theravada** – branch, tradition or school of Buddhism
- ♦ **Tipitaka / Pali Canon** – main Buddhist Scripture
- ♦ **Varna** – hierarchy dividing up Vedic society, also called the caste system in Hinduism
- ♦ **Vedas** – sacred Scriptures of the Vedic religious tradition and modern-day Hinduism
- ♦ **Vedic** – a religious movement introduced to India by Aryan invaders from the west

Vedic religious tradition

The Vedic religion was introduced to India by Aryan invaders from the west based on Scriptures known as the **vedas**. The vedas were written in the sacred Sanskrit language and were considered to be the universal and eternal truth. In this religious tradition many of whom were connected to natural elements and forces, such as Surya the sun god, Indra the god of rain, and Agni the god of fire. Rituals, prayers, chanting, animal sacrifice and the taking of intoxicants to increase the power of the rituals were common.

Vedic society was organised into four **varnas**. These were social/religious classes and the varna you were born into was for life. The members of each varna had a profession that was appropriate for that class.

Varnas:

- **Brahmins** – priests
- **Kshatriyas** – warriors, kings
- **Vaishyas** – farmers, merchants
- **Shudras** – servants

The varna a person was born into determined their status in society; the Brahmins had the highest status, whereas the Shudras or servants experienced the lowest. The Brahmins were the most powerful and influential in society, whereas Shudras lived separately and were not allowed to take part in religious rituals due to their low social, moral and religious status.

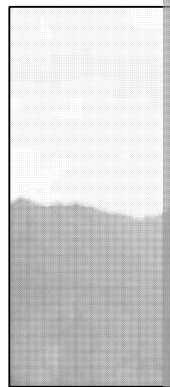
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Shramanas

The **Shramana** movement rejected the Vedic tradition and the teachings of the Brahmins. Shramanas were wandering holy men, mendicants (beggars) who renounced (abandoned) society in order to seek the truth – also known as ‘Forest Dwellers’. Shramanas believed in **reincarnation, the soul** and **kamma (karma)**, they practised yoga, meditation and **asceticism**. Ascetics subject themselves to physical suffering through practices such as maintaining painful postures, denying themselves food, living naked in the wild. The aim of this ‘self-mortification’ is spiritual development, seeking to free the mind from the desires of the body.



Jainism

The religion of Jainism grew out of the Shramana movement at the same time as Buddhism. Jainism exists today, with around 4 million followers. Jains practise non-violence (ahimsa), believe in reincarnation and the existence of a soul. Their goal is liberation (freedom) from the cycle of rebirth.

Hinduism

Between 700–500 BCE modern Hinduism grew out of the Vedic religious tradition. It incorporated many Vedic ideas, including the varnas (or the ‘caste system’ in Hinduism), the practices of yoga and meditation, and the beliefs of the Shramanas. Hinduism also developed its own beliefs and practices based on the Upanishads. The Upanishads describe God (Brahman) and the soul (atman). They contain teachings on **reincarnation, kamma (karma)** and the **atman** or soul.

Ordinary people also had their own folk traditions involving ancient beliefs. They performed spells and believed in omens and predictions of the future.

Buddhism

Buddhism began around 2,500 years ago and arose from the teachings of the Buddha. He was critical of many of the beliefs and practices in the Vedic religious tradition and Hinduism, although there were other ideas that he accepted and modified from these traditions.

The Buddha rejected:

- the varnas / the class or caste system, claiming that all people could participate in the spiritual life, regardless of their social class (the Buddha was especially critical of Brahmins who held that the family and class they were born into determined their spiritual fate)
- the notion of an eternal soul (**atman**)
- animal sacrifice, which he believed was cruel and unnecessary
- the use of intoxicants; the Buddha believed that they only serve to cloud the mind
- spells, omens and predicting the future

The Buddha accepted:

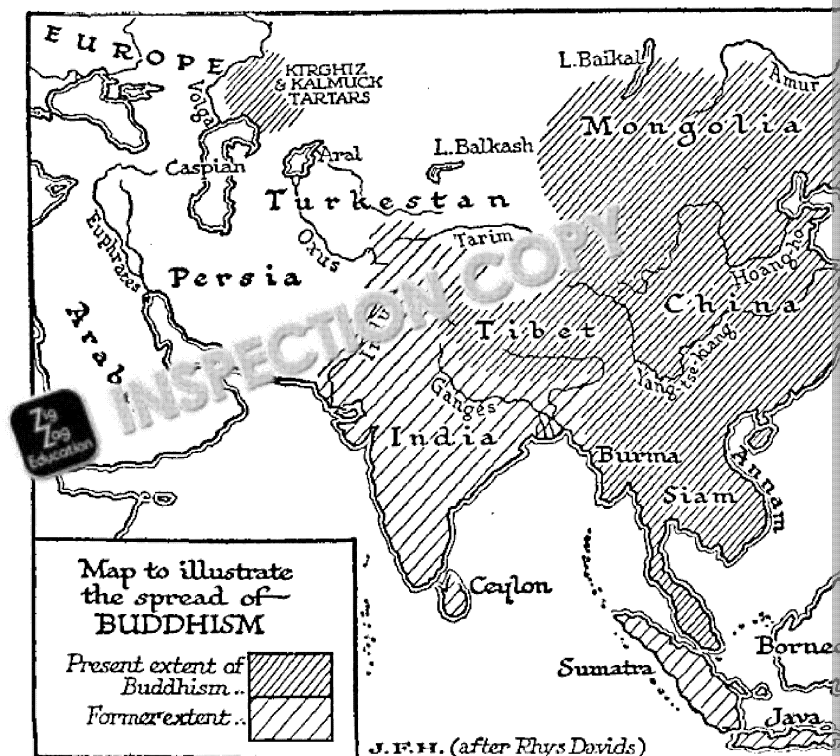
- that we are born again many times
- our rebirths are determined by how we have behaved in our previous lives
- that life involves suffering, which is a consequence of ignorance
- the ultimate goal was to escape from the cycle of suffering through becoming a Buddha

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Spread of Buddhism

From its origins in north-east India, Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, south-east Asia, China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, and the West in the first 1,000 years, then to Japan and Tibet.



Map illustrating the spread of Buddhism

Different Buddhist traditions

As is the case with many religions, the expansion into different countries led to different Buddhist traditions arising that reflected the cultural backgrounds of those countries. Buddhism is commonly divided into two main schools or traditions: **Theravada** and **Mahayana**.

Theravada Buddhism ('the way of the elders') – also called 'southern Buddhism'.

- Theravada Buddhism is a conservative tradition that has stayed the same over time. It claims to stay true to the original teachings of the Buddha in the *Pali Canon*. There are very few differences wherever Theravada Buddhism is practised. Monks wear saffron robes. Key Theravada countries are Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos.

Mahayana Buddhism ('the great vehicle') – or 'northern Buddhism'.

- Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, contains a variety of traditions, including Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism accepts a more flexible and authoritative interpretation of the Buddha's teachings differently to Theravada. Monks wear saffron robes. Key Mahayana countries are China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Nepal and Bhutan. Tibetan Buddhism is often classed as a tradition within Mahayana Buddhism.
 - Pure Land Buddhism** – Began around the second century CE in China. It focuses on describing the Buddha Amitabha and his Pure Land (see below for more on Pure Land). This is the main form of Buddhism in Japan.
 - Zen Buddhism** – Zen Buddhism began in China in the sixth century. It emphasizes the importance of insight gained through meditation, rather than scriptural study.

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Buddhist Scripture

The teachings of the Buddha were never written down during his lifetime, in fact they were written down until the first century BCE. They were carefully memorised and passed on through sermons and chanting by monks and nuns (a method known as the oral tradition).

Most of the early Buddhist Scriptures are written in the traditional language of the region, i.e. the language of Theravada Scripture and Sanskrit of many of the Mahayana Scriptures. Different languages give rise to different spellings for the same word, e.g. Dhamma (Pali) and Dharma (Sanskrit) meaning 'truth', the Buddha's teachings or the universal law.

There are more Scriptures in Buddhism than in any other religion. However, Theravada Buddhists accept the **Tipitaka**, otherwise known as the **Pali Canon**, as the authoritative collection of texts. *Tipitaka* means 'three baskets' and refers to the three different types of written texts:

1. **Vinaya Pitaka** – rules for Buddhist monks and 337 for nuns
2. **Sutta Pitaka** – the teachings of the Buddha; includes the teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the past lives of the Buddha and the *Dhammapada* (a well-known collection of the Buddha's teachings, presented in poetic verse)
3. **Abhidhamma Pitaka** – philosophical teachings and discourse

Mahayana Buddhists accept the *Pali Canon* as authoritative, but also recognise other Scriptures and teachings, such as the **Lotus** and **Heart Sutras**.

Buddhism in Great Britain

Great Britain is a traditionally Christian country. In the early 1900s Buddhism was a small religion (otherwise known as a 'living faith') with a small group of Buddhists. By the 1960s it experienced rapid growth. Today Buddhism is a well-established religion with different traditions represented in addition to Western forms of Buddhism. The **Triratna Buddhist Community** (formerly the 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Society')

2011 Census for England and Wales – Religion:

- Christianity 33.2 million people (59.3 per cent of the population)
- Islam 2.7 million people (4.8 per cent)
- Hinduism 817,000 people (1.5 per cent)
- Sikhism 423,000 people (0.8 per cent)
- Judaism 263,000 people (0.5 per cent)
- **Buddhism 248,000 people (0.4 per cent)** – London contains the highest concentration of Buddhists in the UK
- Other religions 240,000 people (0.4 per cent)
- 14.1 million (25.1 per cent) did not associate with a religion

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Beliefs and Teachings: The Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's life and its significance

Keywords:

- ♦ **Buddha** – a title meaning 'the enlightened one', an 'awakened or enlightened one'
- ♦ **Deer Park** – site of the Buddha's first sermon on the Four Noble Truths
- ♦ **Dhamma (Dharma)** – ultimate truth, also refers to the teachings of the Buddha
- ♦ **Ehipassiko** – 'come and try' or 'come and see', recommends personal experience
- ♦ **Enlightenment** – wisdom and clarity; in Buddhism it leads to escape from rebirth
- ♦ **Four Sights** – old age, illness, death, and rebirth
- ♦ **Jataka Tales** – part of the *Pali Canon* containing tales of the Buddha's previous lives
- ♦ **Jhana** – state of deep meditation
- ♦ **Law of karma** – law of cause and effect, deliberate actions = consequences
- ♦ **Meditation** – a calm, focused state to promote awareness and higher consciousness
- ♦ **Middle Way** – to live moderately, avoiding both luxury and extreme hardship
- ♦ **Nibbana/nirvana** – (literally: 'to blow out') state of perfect peace, free from rebirth
- ♦ **Renounce** – to leave behind, e.g. possessions, family
- ♦ **Samsara** – the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth
- ♦ **Sangha** – Buddhist community, or specifically the order of monks and nuns
- ♦ **Shakya** – the tribe Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born into
- ♦ **Parinibbana/parinirvana** – nibbana after death; final release from Samsara

Birth of the Buddha and his life of luxury

Context

It is not known exactly when the Buddha lived; dates range from the traditionally accepted 566–486 BCE to more recently researched dates such as 448–368 BCE (Harvey 1990, p. 9). We do know, however, that he was born in what is now modern-day Nepal, towards the end of the Vedic religious period (which spanned 1500–500 BCE) and during the emergence of modern Hinduism (700–500 BCE). His family belonged to the **Shakya** (Sakya) tribe who were part of the Kshatriya class of rulers, possessing both power and wealth. The early part of the Buddha's life is interwoven with much mythology, which serves to emphasise his special nature and sets the scene for later events. The following is the traditionally accepted account of the Buddha's life; however, the story of his life in particular should not necessarily be considered factual.

Birth

The Buddha was born **Siddhartha Gautama** (or Shakyamuni) to King Suddhodana. When Queen Maya conceived him, she dreamt of a white elephant entering her womb. Then pregnant for 10 months, she gave birth in the Lumbini gardens. Mary described the birth of the Buddha:

- As Mary prepared to give birth (which she did standing up) the branches of a tree supported her.
- Siddhartha was born from his mother's side and immediately took seven steps and said: *'I am the last of my last birth. There will be no further rebirth.'*
- Heavenly beings attended the birth.
- The natural world responded to Siddhartha's birth with jets of water from the four directions bathing mother and son; the earth shook and flowers grew where Siddhartha stood.

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The story of the birth of the Buddha and the miraculous events surrounding the importance of the child who would become the Buddha. Soon after his birth, a prophet prophesied that Siddhartha would grow up to be either a great ruler or a holy man. His father, King Shuddhodana, knew that the life of a holy man was one of suffering, so he tried to protect his son from any experience that might inspire him to follow the spiritual path. Siddhartha had a very sheltered upbringing, growing up in a palace surrounded by luxury and comfort, about the realities of old age, illness and death or what it meant to suffer.



Birth of the Buddha

The Four Sights (Jataka 075)

After 29 years at the palace Siddhartha grew curious about life outside. One day he asked his charioteer, Channa, to take him out; Siddhartha witnessed four new sights that changed his view on him.

1. Old age

Siddhartha saw an old man. Before this point he had never seen an elderly person. This brought with it the realisation that people grow old, that bodies age and decay.

2. Illness

Then he saw a sick man; this was the first time the Siddhartha had seen someone who was ill.

3. Death

The third sight was of a corpse; here Siddhartha witnessed death.

4. Holy man

Finally he encountered a holy man or ascetic, who had renounced all worldly pleasures to pursue a life of truth and happiness.

Siddhartha realised through his experience of the first three sights that life is impermanent, everything changes, nothing lasts forever, and that suffering is an inevitable part of our existence. The holy man showed Siddhartha a possible lifestyle that could be adopted to achieve true happiness.

The Four Sights are written about in the *Jataka Tales*. These tales describe the life and past lives of the Buddha in his various forms. There are 500 such tales found in the *Tipitaka* / *Pali Canon*.

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Ascetic life

The first three sights troubled Siddhartha. He became disillusioned with his luxury and wanted to find a resolution to the suffering of existence. The fourth sight inspired him to pursue a similar path to the holy man in order to achieve enlightenment. Siddhartha decided to leave the palace to become a wandering ascetic; this was known as his '**Great Renunciation**'. Not only did he leave the luxury of the palace and all his possessions, but also his wife (Yasodhara) and new-born baby son (Rahula). Leaving his life of luxury also marked the fulfilment of the prophecy at Siddhartha's birth: that he would become a holy man.

Siddhartha sought out religious teachers who could guide him in how to live a spiritual life, and under their supervision he became skilled in meditation and fasting. However, he did not find the truth he was looking for through these practices. He tried extreme **ascetic practices** including denying himself food and becoming emaciated through starvation. It was believed that by denying the body what it needed and depleting it, one could free the mind from the body and achieve spiritual purification. Siddhartha committed himself to this lifestyle for six years.

'Many of the ascetic groups believed that harsh treatment of the body would lead to a purified soul...' (Cush 1991, p. 15)

[About the author – Denise Cush is Professor of Religion and Education at Bath Spa University]

Although Siddhartha learnt a great deal from his ascetic practice, such as self-discipline, he was going to achieve his goal of solving human suffering this way. At the end of his extreme fasting, and following an insight from a period of calm meditation, he realised that his path was not the way. The end of his life of asceticism was marked by accepting a meal of rice and milk from a woman. Siddhartha realised that he needed to follow a 'middle way' between punishing denial to achieve his goal of enlightenment. Siddhartha's fellow ascetics saw this as a sign of weakness and abandoned him.

The Middle Way – Siddhartha grew up surrounded by great luxury and then chose to live through asceticism. He ultimately rejected both paths and opted instead for a 'middle way' between extremes, believing one should neither overindulge, nor needlessly suffer. It was this middle way that the Buddha achieved enlightenment.

The Enlightenment (achieving the state of nibbana/nirvana)

Sitting under a Bodhi Tree in **Bodhgaya**, Siddhartha spent the night in meditation and there until he achieved enlightenment. During his meditation Siddhartha was troubled by **Mara**, who tried to get him to abandon his goal and stay attached to worldly things. Mara sent his sons to anger Siddhartha and his daughters to seduce him. All attempts failed. In a final attempt to overthrow Siddhartha, Mara tried to undermine Siddhartha's right to achieve enlightenment by saying that even his right to sit on the ground he sat on. Siddhartha did not weaken (he had spent many lifetimes getting to this point); he touched the ground with his right hand to summon the earth goddess to acknowledge his right to be there. At this point there was an earthquake and the natural world acknowledged Siddhartha, leaving Mara defeated. Siddhartha then went on to achieve enlightenment; his experience is divided into **Four Watches** that occurred throughout the night:

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- *First Watch* – He achieved the four stages of **jhana** (deep meditation) in past lives. Siddhartha also realised that all beings are trapped in a cycle of **cycle of Samsara**).
- *Second Watch* – Next he saw beings born and reborn into different forms due to the **law of kamma/karma** (cause and effect) and saw that suffering was caused by beings behaving.
- *Third Watch* – During the third watch he understood how to end suffering and the way to achieve liberation (freedom) from the cycle.
- *Fourth Watch* – Finally, as the sun rose in the morning, Siddhartha experienced a deep understanding of the truth of existence and a release from suffering and was fully enlightened and had achieved the state of **Nibbana/nirvana** (bliss). He could now be called 'Buddha'.

Buddha is a title, not a name. It means 'enlightened' or 'awakened' one.

Teaching

Following his enlightenment, the Buddha spent time reflecting on his experience. He was reluctant to teach, believing it would be too difficult to teach a truth that was beyond reason. The Buddha also observed that people may be reluctant to listen to him as he was concerned with worldly interests and attachments. However, the Buddha was urged by the god Brahma who urged him to do so out of compassion, claiming that he was showing them the path to enlightenment.

The Buddha then spent the next 45 years teaching. His first sermon was to five ascetics, at the Deer Park in Benares; here he spoke about the **Four Noble Truths** (*Four Noble Truths*). During the Buddha's early sermons, all five ascetics achieved enlightenment as a result of hearing his teachings. The Buddha travelled through north-east India, teaching people. His followers (disciples) grew and even included his own family. The disciples or monks gradually became organised into the **sangha** and were responsible for teaching Dhamma to the lay community. They were also subject to additional moral rules set by the Buddha.

Although the Buddha never wrote down his teachings, he is believed to have been a charismatic speaker, teaching through parables as well as sermons. There were certain questions, however, that the Buddha would not answer, such as how the world was created and what happens to a Buddha when they die. The Buddha did not feel such questions were helpful in the journey to enlightenment, instead he taught about things we can know and experience, as well as practical strategies to resolve suffering. The '**Parable of the Poison Arrow**' in the *Pali Canon* (*Majjhima Nikaya* i. 429) illustrates the importance of focusing on the matter at hand and prioritising what we can do something about.

The Parable of the Poison Arrow

A man had been struck by a poisoned arrow. His friends and family wanted to call for a doctor, but he refused, knowing the answers to all sorts of irrelevant questions before he would accept treatment. He asked the man who shot him, his name and height, etc., all the time delaying treatment; he died before his questions and died.

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Death



Reclining Buddha

The Buddha died at the age of 80 (this was due to poisoning). He was attended to by his disciple Ananda. On seeing that Ananda was upset, the Buddha told him that he must not have listened to his teachings. He said that all things are impermanent and that death is inevitable.

'Enough, Ananda, do not sorrow, do not lament. Have I not formerly explained to you that all things are impermanent, that we must be divided, separated, and parted from all that is beloved and dear? Now is the time for you to do as I have said. (Digha Nikaya ii. 114 in the *Pali Canon*)

The Buddha entered a calm meditative state, reclined on his side (a pose of which is still used by Buddhists today) and on his death achieved **parinirvana**, which means 'nibbana'. His death was a six-day walk before the cremation of his body. The Buddha's remains are still housed in special monuments called **stupas**.

Why is it important for Buddhists to know about the life of the Buddha?

- His life offers a model for the path to enlightenment, to avoid the extremes of indulgence and asceticism and pursue the **Middle Way**.
- The Buddha's life helps people to understand suffering and the human condition. He himself experienced suffering in the four sights and contemplated how to overcome it.
- The Buddha's life is an example to others that humans can become enlightened through their own efforts with hope and confidence in following the path.

Something extra to think about... the value of pilgrimage

Buddhists are not expected to go on pilgrimage (religious journeys to sacred places) but many do. Those who try to go on Hajj at least once during their lives. However, visiting special sites connected to the Buddha can help Buddhists reaffirm their beliefs and feel more connected to the life of the Buddha. Emperor Ashoka (304–232 BCE), who was responsible for the spread of Buddhism, was particularly devoted to the Buddha and connected to the Buddha with monuments. One key site is Bodhgaya, where the Buddha is believed to have achieved enlightenment.

Wider research opportunity

Find out about Bodhgaya today and other sites connected with the Buddha. Research any special monuments or shrines that are recognised as places of pilgrimage.

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The Four Noble Truths

Keywords:

- ♦ **Dukkha** – first noble truth, suffering; unsatisfactoriness of life
- ♦ **Eightfold Path** – fourth noble truth, **magga**: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration
- ♦ **Four Noble Truths** – dukkha, samudaya, nirodha and magga
- ♦ **Magga** – fourth noble truth; the way to end dukkha is by following the **Eightfold Path**
- ♦ **Nirodha** – third noble truth; dukkha can cease (stop), by achieving **nibbana**
- ♦ **Samadhi** – meditation section of the Eightfold Path
- ♦ **Samudaya** – second noble truth; there are causes of dukkha, which are **tanha**
- ♦ **Sila** – ethics section of the Eightfold Path
- ♦ **Tanha** – cravings or desires
- ♦ **Three Fires/Poisons** – ignorance, greed, hate
- ♦ **Threefold Way** – the three sections of the **Eightfold Path**: wisdom (**panna**), ethics (**sila**) and meditation (**samadhi**)
- ♦ **Panna** – wisdom section of the Eightfold Path

The Buddha came to understand the **Four Noble Truths** during his enlightenment. To emphasise their importance, he chose them as the basis of his first sermon. This sermon is a 'wheel of Dhamma in motion'. The Four Noble Truths can be found recorded in the *Pali Canon*. The Truths are observations of the way things are and are a framework for offering a framework for all other concepts in Buddhism.

The Four Noble Truths are often presented using the **analogy of a doctor**. The Buddha can be seen as the doctor diagnosing and treating an illness as follows:

Doctor-patient analogy	Noble Truth
The illness	1. There is suffering
There is a cause of the illness	2. There is a cause of suffering
There is a cure for the illness	3. Suffering can stop
The prescription/medicine	4. The solution is to follow the Eightfold Path

The Dhammapada records the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths. 'He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Teaching and his Order, has attained transcendental wisdom the Four Noble Truths – suffering, the cause of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering' (*The Dhammapada* v. 190-191).

First Noble Truth – dukkha (suffering)

The First Truth is that 'life is suffering' or **dukkha**. The word dukkha is translated in many ways. Some scholars prefer to translate it as 'unsatisfactoriness', 'dissatisfaction', 'incompleteness'. It refers to the unavoidable suffering that is a part of life, something that everyone experiences, however happy or blessed their lives may be.

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The Buddha witnessed suffering in the Four Sights when he saw old age, illness, death and rebirth. This motivated him to give up his privileged life to find a solution to dukkha. The Four Noble Truths explain the nature of dukkha or ways to suffer and several are given in the Buddha's teaching.

'...birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering, sorrow is suffering, unhappiness, and unease are suffering; being united with what is not liked is suffering, being separated from what is liked is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering...'
(Samyutta Nikaya 5 v. 421–422 in the *Pali Canon*)

Dukkha can also be categorised into three types:

1. **Ordinary suffering**, e.g. pain, death, frustration, exploitation, natural forces
2. **Suffering through change, loss (impermanence)**, e.g. a pleasurable experience ending, the loss of a friendship, the loss of a loved one
3. **Suffering over attachment to self**, e.g. anxiety over our place in the world, dissatisfaction with our lives

Second Noble Truth – samudaya (the cause of dukkha) is tanha (craving)

Like a good doctor, the Buddha identifies the cause of suffering/dukkha. It is caused by desires or cravings (**tanha**). This craving is itself caused by **The Three Poisons/Three Fires** of greed, hatred and ignorance; these are illustrated in the centre of the **Tibetan Wheel of Life** by a cockerel (greed), a pig (ignorance) and a snake (hatred). The animals are all chasing after one another's tails, around in a circle, and are the driving force of **Samsara**, the cycle of life, death, rebirth and suffering. Buddhism teaches that by craving we perpetuate the cycle and stay trapped in Samsara; therefore, people should stop craving if they hope to escape.

'...whoever in this world overcomes his selfish cravings, his sorrows fall away from him, like drops of water from a lotus flower.'
(*The Dhammapada* v. 336)

Often the causes and effects of suffering are obvious, e.g. overeating leads to illness, someone through anger results in guilt and punishment. Buddhists believe that craving causes us to be reborn, which in turn brings with it more suffering.

Tanha can be categorised into three types:

1. craving for sense experiences – e.g. worldly pleasures
2. craving for existence – e.g. craving to continue this existence and for a better one
3. craving for non-existence – e.g. wanting life to end, suicidal wishes

Buddhists teach that we are the cause of our own suffering because we 'crave'. For example, is to set ourselves up for suffering when those experiences inevitable (because all things are impermanent – *anicca*) or if we do not receive the desired pleasures.

'Be therefore not bound to pleasure for the loss of pleasure is pain.' (*The Dhammapada* v. 216)

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Something extra to think about... what do you crave?

In groups, generate a list of things that you crave in your own lives (now and in the future). Consider how each thing that is craved makes you feel a) when you don't have it (and how you might feel if you do get the thing you crave; does it make you truly happy, is it as good as you imagine?)

Tanha and the causes of suffering should be understood in relation to the concepts of the **Five Aggregates** or **skandhas** (see below for these).

'...Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. If anything at all, it is realistic, a clear view of life and of the world. It looks at things objectively.' (Rahula 1959, p. 17)

[About the author – The Venerable Dr Walpola Sri Tanha is a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk]

The first two Noble Truths which make Buddhism appear to be a very pessimistic religion, emphasising that we suffer and the various causes of dukkha. However, in Buddhism, one must first understand the cause of dukkha if they are to follow the following two truths the Buddha presents a much more optimistic account of life for dukkha and a practical approach to stopping suffering.

Third Noble Truth – nirodha (cessation of dukkha) by achieving nibbana

In the Third Truth the Buddha claimed that there was a solution to the problem of suffering, **nirodha**, which is the ending or cessation of suffering. The Buddha claimed that he achieved suffering just as he did, by achieving **nibbana/nirvana**.

Nibbana/nirvana

'...There is no joy like NIRVANA.' (The Dhammapada v. 202)

Nibbana can be difficult to put into words because it is a state that is beyond words. The Buddha found it difficult to express the concept and was initially reluctant to talk about nibbana because of this. As Cush says, 'Nirvana cannot be understood, only experienced. It is like talking about colours to a blind person, or dry land to a fish.' (1991)

Nibbana is a state of perfect peace and absolute bliss or happiness; it is achieved when one is enlightened to the truth of the nature of existence. Once a person is enlightened, ignorance ceases, there will be no more dukkha for the enlightened being as they are free from it again. They have escaped the cycle of **Samsara** (see Samsara below) and are no longer bound by it.

The word nibbana means to 'blow out' or 'extinguish', which refers to the blowing out of the **Three Fires or Poisons** of greed, hatred and ignorance. A person must be free from these three fires, motivated by greed, hatred and ignorance, but should act out of generosity and wisdom.

Someone who has achieved nibbana in their lifetime will still experience pleasure and pain. Even though they still have a normal body, they also empathise with the pleasures and pains of the world. For an enlightened being is their attitude to those experiences; they are not affected by them like an 'unenlightened' person. The wisdom gained through enlightenment means that they do not get attached to pleasures or suffer when those pleasures end; neither do they fear pains; this is the true nature of the inevitable part of life.

'...When pleasure or pain comes to them, the wise feel above pleasure and pain.'

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Two stages or types of nibbana/nirvana

- **Nibbana in life** – Where enlightenment and the state of nibbana (perfect happiness) is achieved within the lifetime of the practitioner, e.g. the Buddha achieved nibbana and then went on to live and teach for another 45 years.
- **Parinibbana/parinirvana** – Means ‘nibbana after death’, e.g. the Buddha achieved this after his death, which is celebrated today in the Buddhist festival of Parinirvana. It is the final release from the cycle of Samsara and means there will be no more suffering).

Nibbana after death is not ‘nothingness’, but nor should it be equated with heaven (heaven presupposes a ‘self’ or soul that exists in it, but there is no self in Buddhism – see *Marks of Existence and anatta*). Heaven is also seen as something that is outside of existence, whereas nibbana is a state that can be achieved in life. Instead the Buddha taught the middle way between existence and non-existence.

Something to think about... questions the Buddha wouldn't answer

The Buddha rarely refused to answer questions about what happens to enlightened beings after death other than to say: ‘we cannot say they exist after death; do not exist; both exist and do not exist.’ This might seem very vague, but it hints at the Buddha’s position on the afterlife: that there was nothing after death (annihilationism, nihilism or materialism) but also that there was an eternal reality beyond this existence, e.g. a heaven (eternalism). The Buddha felt that questions about the creation of the world, life after death and eternity only served to cause confusion.

Nibbana is the end of suffering and the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path. For those practising Buddhism (particularly in the lay community) are not necessarily aiming for this in this life, they are aiming for a better rebirth in the next life to get them closer to achieving it.

Zen Buddhists have a somewhat different view of the achievement of nibbana. In many Buddhist traditions, they believe that enlightenment is achievable in this life and can be directly experienced; Cush describes this as ‘like getting a joke’ (1991, p. 145). However, they have a different understanding of what enlightenment is; for them there is no ‘special’ state beyond what we already experience. Zen Buddhism points to ordinary experience, such as work and chores, and describes the goal of meditation practice to be the meditative state of wisdom. Zen teaches individuals to be aware of the reality they are in and to reject the false expectations of enlightenment as a separate experience.

Fourth Noble Truth – magga (the way to end dukkha), the Eightfold Path

The Buddha taught the **Eightfold Path** as a practical way to end dukkha. By following the Path, also called the Middle Way, Buddhists believe they can remove the craving and ignorance that causes dukkha. The Eightfold Path is the route to nibbana.

‘The best path is the path of eight.’ (*The Dhammapada* v. 273)

‘Whoever goes on this path travels to the end of his sorrow.’
(*The Dhammapada* v. 275)

‘...the practice of the Eightfold Path is a kind of modelling process: the eight factors would live, and by living like a Buddha one gradually becomes one.’ (Keown 1992, p. 10)

[About the author – Damien Keown is Professor of Buddhist Ethics at the University of Oxford]

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There are eight parts to the Path (although 10 are given in some parts of S into three types of practice – the **Threefold Way: wisdom, ethics and meditation**

Wisdom (panna)

1. Right view

Having the right outlook, accepting the Dhamma, e.g. the Four Noble Truths

2. Right intention

Having the right attitude and intention, i.e. focusing on the goal of enlightenment

Ethics (sila)

3. Right speech

To avoid harmful speech such as lying, using cruel words, gossiping; instead to be truthful, honest, compassionate, kind and supportive of what one says. Silence may be helpful can be said.

‘Never speak harsh words, for once spoken they may return to you. Angry words are like a thorn that pierces the heart.’ (The Dhammapada v. 133)

‘Hurt not with words, but use your words well.’ (The Dhammapada v. 232)

‘Better than a thousand useless words is one single word that gives peace.’

4. Right action

To behave appropriately, e.g. not to steal, not to kill, to avoid sexual misconduct of others (also see *The Five Moral Precepts* below).

5. Right livelihood

The jobs Buddhists do must not harm other beings, e.g. avoid business in killing, gambling, selling weapons, involvement with alcohol or drugs. It can be any occupation that causes no harm whatsoever, which is one reason monks are not allowed to work, all this is left to the laity.

Meditation (samadhi)

6. Right effort

Followers of the Buddhist path must try hard. They must work to improve themselves by eliminating negative traits and developing positive ones.

7. Right mindfulness

To have control over the body, thoughts and feelings; to develop a state of awareness

8. Right concentration

Meditation techniques to deepen concentration and steady the mind for the attainment of the four jhanas (also see below for *Meditation: Samatha and Vipassana*).

The parts of the Path should not be practised in isolation, but developed together. It is argued that the **wisdom** part of the Path is more important than the other:

- **Wisdom**, for example, may be seen as more important because knowledge of the **Three Refuges (Jewels)** and understanding the truth of the Buddha leads to enlightenment.
- Alternatively, the Buddha emphasised the priority of **ethics** (particularly the Five Precepts) for a good rebirth; ethics also affects the daily life of Buddhists and contributes to the development of wisdom.
- The final stage, **meditation**, may be seen to be the most important because it was through meditation that the Buddha achieved enlightenment. Through meditation, one can calm the mind and gain a greater insight to the Dhamma. Meditation also helps to overcome greed and ignorance and think compassionately about other beings.

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However, it is really the combination of all three sections of the Path – wisdom, ethical conduct and meditation – that is the key to a good Buddhist life and the achievement of nibbana. The three are interdependent; for example, to be ethical (which can involve complex decision-making) requires wisdom, and controlling the mind through meditation, greater wisdom can be acquired, and a more ethical person can become more compassionate and therefore ethical.

Buddhism teaches that achieving enlightenment and the state of nibbana are dependent upon an individual's own efforts. The Buddha was an enlightened person and, therefore, cannot 'save' individuals from suffering. Buddhists can seek the teachings of the Buddha and the Buddhist community, but must ultimately realise their goal.

Summary of the Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

- The **Buddha** was born around 2,500 years ago in what is today modern-day Nepal into a wealthy and powerful family, living a sheltered and luxurious life. He prophesied that the Buddha would be a powerful leader or a holy man.
- When he was 29, the Buddha left the palace and experienced the **Four Sights**, illness, old age, death and a holy man (recorded in *Jataka* tales). These sights led to the Buddha renouncing both his wealth and family to pursue the holy life and seek a solution to **suffering**.
- The Buddha spent many years undertaking religious practices performed by the holy men of his day, including meditation, yoga and ascetic hardships such as extreme fasting. None brought him to his goal of **enlightenment**. He decided to pursue a way of life to follow the **Middle Way**.
- He achieved **enlightenment** during a night spent meditating under the Bodhi tree. Following his enlightenment he taught for 45 years the truths he had discovered. The Buddha gathered many followers during his teaching ministry and gradually a community comprising monks, nuns and lay Buddhists. The Buddha died at the age of 80 in a meditative state and achieved **parinibbana**.
- The life and person of the Buddha are significant because they give Buddhists a role model (role model). The experiences the Buddha had through his life help Buddhists understand suffering, and the Buddha also serves as an example of the possibility of achieving enlightenment.
- In his first sermon the Buddha taught the **Four Noble Truths**, later recorded in the **Pali Canon 190–191**. These are:
 - o **dukkha** – life is suffering or unsatisfactory
 - o **samudaya** – there is a cause of dukkha, this is **tanha** (meaning craving)
 - o **nirodha** – dukkha can cease (stop) by achieving the state of **nibbana**, a state of perfect peace, where the **Three Poisons** of ignorance, greed and hatred are destroyed and the individual is free from the cycle of rebirth.
 - o **magga** – the **Eightfold Path**; this is the way to end dukkha. The Eightfold Path is a 'Threefold Way', comprising **wisdom/panna** (right view, right understanding), **ethics/sila** (right speech, right action and right livelihood) and **meditation/samadhi** (right mindfulness and right concentration).

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Practice exam questions

The Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

1. Which one of the following is not one of the Four Sights?

A) holy man
B) old age
C) pain
D) death

2. Give **two** of the Three Poisons.
3. Explain **two** ways the Four Sights influenced the Buddha.
4. Explain **two** of the Four Noble Truths.
Refer to Scripture or sacred writing.
5. 'Ethics (sila) is the most important part of the Eightfold Path for Buddhists.'
 - Argue for *and* against this statement.
 - You must refer to Buddhist teaching.
 - Reach a conclusion which follows from your argument.

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The Dhamma (Dharma)

Keywords:

- ♦ **Bhavachakra (Tibetan Wheel of Life)** – visual representation of **Samsara**
- ♦ **Dependent arising (paticcasamupada)** – everything is interconnected; one thing affects another thing does; refers to the 12 **nidanas**
- ♦ **Dhamma (Dharma)** – ultimate truth, also refers to the teachings of the Buddha
- ♦ **Five Aggregates (skandhas)** – what a person is made up of: form, sensation, feeling, consciousness
- ♦ **Mara or Yama** – represents change and death; a demon
- ♦ **Nidanas** – 12 links or chains of dependent arising; each is the cause of the next
- ♦ **Samsara** – the continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth
- ♦ **Six realms** – six types of rebirth depicted in the Tibetan Wheel of Life
- ♦ **Three Marks of Existence** – anicca, anatta, dukkha
- ♦ **Anicca** – impermanence
- ♦ **Anatta** – no fixed self, no soul
- ♦ **Dukkha** – suffering; unsatisfactoriness of life
- ♦ **Three Refuges/Jewels** – Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha

The concept of Dhamma (Dharma)

The word **Dhamma** or **Dharma** has many meanings, but is most commonly

- the teachings of the Buddha
- the ultimate truth (of existence)
- the universal law (of nature)
- to follow the Buddhist path
- how to behave (our duty)

The concept of Dhamma is so central to the religion of Buddhism that Cush (1991) defines it as 'the Buddhist word for Buddhism' (1991, p. 26).

'According to Indian thought Dharma is that which is the basis of things, the universal law, the way things are; in short, it is the truth about things, the truth about the world, the way we should act...in a way that is true to the way things are...' (Gethin 1998, p. 10)

[About the author – Rupert Gethin is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Oxford]

The Dhamma is one of the **Three Refuges** or **Jewels** of the Buddhist faith; and as Buddhist they commit to these (they take refuge in them) to help them on their path.

- **the Buddha** (the historic Buddha and his ideal)
- **the Dhamma** (Buddha's teachings, the ultimate truth, e.g. the Four Noble Truths)
- **the Sangha** (Buddha's community; the order of monks and nuns and their ideal)

'...The wise find their delight in the DHAMMA, in the Truth...' (The Dhammapadam, verse 204)

Buddhists are not expected to simply accept the Dhamma without thinking about it or experiencing it. Buddhism encourages people to listen and reflect, to 'come to their own conclusions' (**ehipassiko**). For example, the First Noble Truth, that life involves suffering, is reflected upon within a person's own life and by observing suffering in the lives of others. The dukkha can be removed by practising the Eightfold Path of wisdom, ethics and meditation.

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'...knowledge of the Dharma is not something that is acquired simply by being told information or by reading the appropriate texts. This does not mean that such study is of no play, yet it can never be the whole story.' (Gethin 1998, p. 36)

Samsara

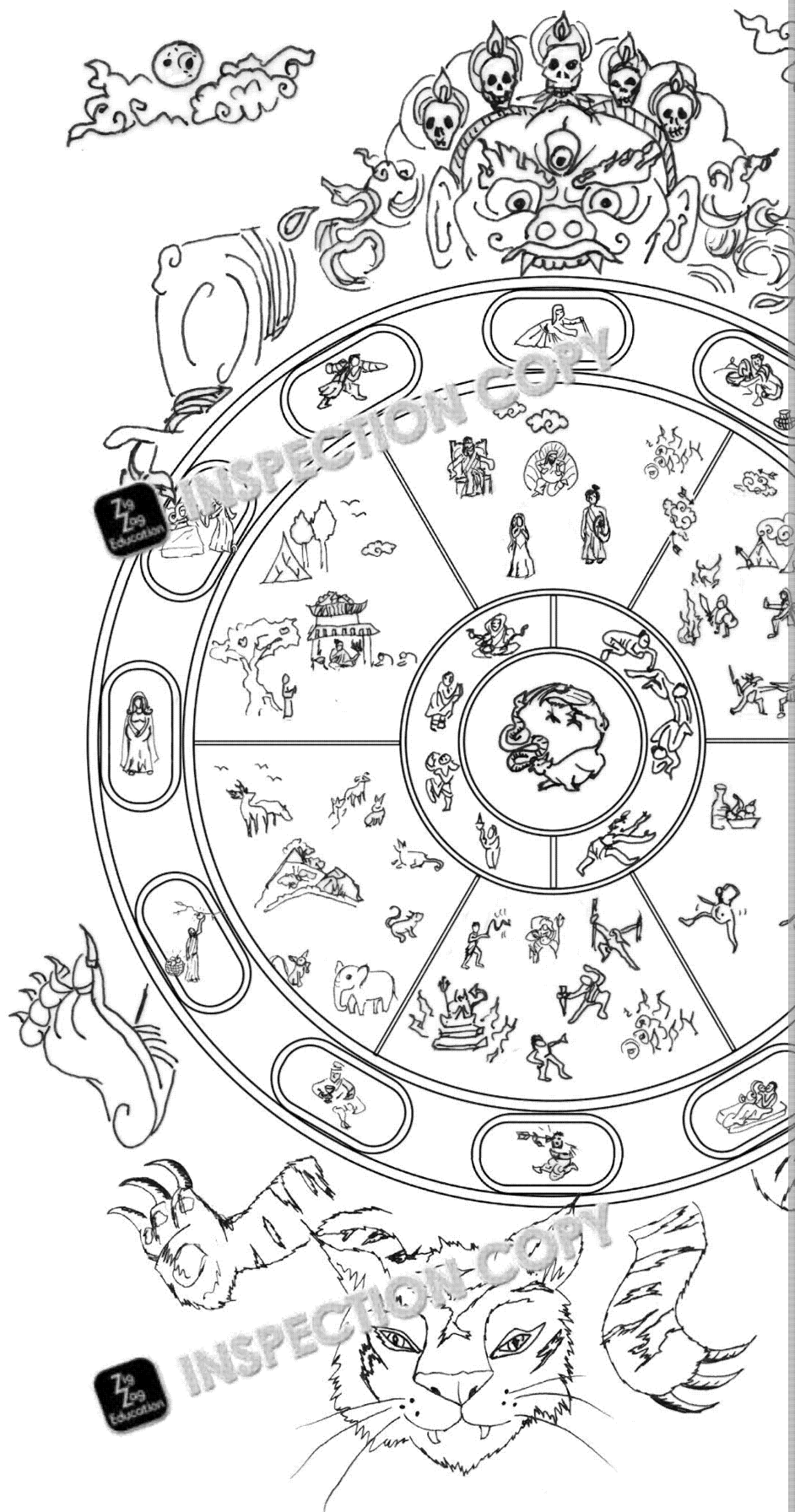
Samsara is the **continuous cycle of birth, death and rebirth**. Buddhism teaches that existence. So long as beings are trapped in Samsara they will experience dissatisfaction and an unsatisfactory situation. Buddhists believe that escape from Samsara (and therefore from pain and suffering) is possible by achieving nibbana.

The Tibetan Wheel of Life (or **Bhavachakra**) is a visual representation of Samsara.

- The outer ring shows the 12 signs of the **dependent arising (paticcasamuppada)**.
- Next are the **six realms** in which beings are reborn – the hells, hungry ghosts, asuras (or demi-gods), animals, humans and god realms. It is the **law of kamma** (cause and effect) that determines the realm a being is born into.
- The small internal ring represents the stage between one life and the next, with a light side representing favourable rebirths and a dark side representing unfavourable rebirths.
- At the centre of the wheel (the hub) are the **Three Poisons** or **Fires** of greed, hatred and delusion, represented by a cockerel, snake and pig biting each other's tails. These are considered by Buddhists to be the causes of all suffering.
- **Mara** or **Yama** is the demon of change and death, holding the wheel and preventing escape from the endless cycle of rebirth and suffering.

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Tibetan Wheel of Life or Bhavachakra

Wider research opportunity

See an interactive Wheel of Life at: <http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel>

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Significance of Samsara – symbolic vs a literal understanding

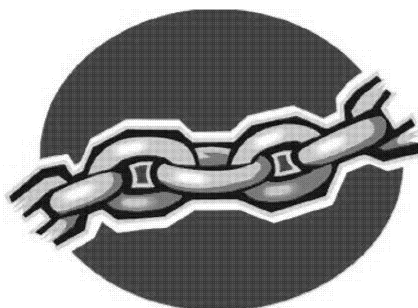
The wheel and its realms are considered by many Buddhists (particularly the Theravada) as **symbolic representations** of the truth of existence and the causes of suffering (actually existing), i.e. the realms may reflect a person's lifestyle or psychological state. A person may be said to be existing in the hell realm if they are constantly tormented by suffering; in the hungry ghost realm if they are constantly craving and never satisfied; they may reside in the animal realm if they are ignorant and indulge in selfish desires; in the human realm if they are always seeking to do better than the next person and are competitive; in the heaven realm if they are complacent and hedonistic (pleasure-seeking).

Samsara and enlightenment

The human realm is the best realm in which to achieve enlightenment as it is the most balanced of existence, one that includes pleasure and pain, ignorance and wisdom. By following the Buddhist path, beings can navigate through this existence towards enlightenment.

The concept of dependent arising (paticcasamupada)

Dependent arising or **paticcasamupada** is the belief that all things exist because of other things, that all things are interconnected. It is shown on the outer ring of the Tibetan Wheel of Life, sometimes described as the 'chain' of cause and effect that Buddhists believe governs Samsara. There are 12 links in the chain of dependent arising (paticcasamupada), each one being the cause of the one after it. In other words, each link is dependent on the previous one for its 'arising'. The last link returns to the first in an unending cycle.



	Nidanas – links or causes of dependent arising	Symbol
1	Ignorance	
2	Impulses	
3	Consciousness	
4	Name and form (Five Aggregates or Skandhas)	Boat
5	Senses	Horse
6	Contact	Man
7	Feeling	Man
8	Craving	Man
9	Grasping	
10	Becoming	
11	Rebirth	
12	Suffering, death	

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'Starting with a blind man, representing ignorance, and a potter expressing the... while in that state of ignorance, the nidanas trace the arising of sense experience world around it, and consequent contact with and clinging to experience, leading... (Thompson 2000, p. 88)

[About the author – Mel Thompson is a freelance writer on Buddhism, philosophy and...

The Tibetan Wheel of Life shows the nidanas in a continuous, unbroken circle to stop suffering and achieve **nibbana** (and therefore escape from Samsara the cycle, i.e. to stop being ignorant, greedy, craving, etc. For example, Budd genuinely stopped craving, then they would end the suffering that comes from that is caused by not getting things that are desired or from losing things that more a person 'cuts off' the causes of suffering (nidanas) the closer they get

Something extra to think about... a paradox

To achieve **nibbana** there can be no cravings/desires. But does that mean by desire never be achieved? On the Buddhist path some cravings will be more damaging than motivate positive action, e.g. the desire to become better at 'right speech'. However attachments, however virtuous, must be given up. Beings must even stop craving nibbana.

The Three Marks of Existence

The Three Marks of Existence (or Three Universal Truths) are **anicca**, meaning meaning 'no self' and **dukkha**, meaning that 'life is suffering/unsatisfactory' marks or characteristics of life are universally true for all beings.

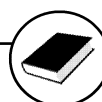
Impermanence (anicca)

Anicca is the teaching that everything changes. People are born, age and die start and end; possessions are acquired and lost; even mountains change over that this truth must be understood and accepted if a person is to remove suffering achieve the Buddhist goal of nibbana.

'...it is one of the great emphases of Buddhist teaching that the things of the world are unreliable.' (Gethin 1998, p. 26)

The importance of accepting the truth of anicca was emphasised by the Buddha's disciple Ananda (see *The Buddha's life and his death* above). Accepting the removing dukkha because most suffering is believed to be the result of using things change. People attach themselves to possessions, places, experiences suffer when they are taken away. The Buddha taught that if we accept that there will be no suffering when change inevitably happens.

"All is transitory." When one sees this, he is above sorrow.' (The Dhammapada v. 277)



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No fixed self (anatta)

Anatta is the teaching that there is no fixed self, no permanent soul.

'...the idea of the self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality. It is the source of all the harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the personal conflicts to wars between nations.' (Rahula 1959, p. 51)

What then is a person? For Buddhists a person is simply a collection of elements called **Aggregates** or **skandhas**. These are: form, sensation, perception, mental factors and consciousness (see *below for The human personality; Five Aggregates/skandhas*). There is no permanent self and these aggregates will change within a being's lifetime and are impermanent (subject to change).

Unsatisfactoriness of life – suffering (dukkha) (also see above *First Noble Truth*) Dukkha is one of the Four Noble Truths and one of the Three Marks of Existence. It is the unsatisfactoriness of life and that everyone suffers. Dukkha provided the motivation for the Buddha to start on his path towards nibbana following his experience of the Four Noble Truths. Similarly motivated by the unsatisfactory nature of things to follow the Buddha's teaching and to suffering.

The relationship between anicca, dukkha and anatta

Buddhism teaches that suffering occurs because of attachments made to objects, people and to ourselves; this is done in the false belief that those things are permanent. In Buddhism, the 'letting go' of such delusions, by accepting that things change and are impermanent, leads to the end of suffering.

The story of '**Kisa Gautami and the Mustard Seeds**' is an example of one who understood anicca and dukkha.

Kisa Gautami and the Mustard Seeds

Kisa Gautami had a baby son who died suddenly. The loss of her only child left Kisa inconsolable. She went from house to house with the baby in her arms, seeking someone to bring her son back to life, but was referred to see the Buddha. The Buddha listened to her story with compassion and offered to help solve her problem. He instructed her to bring him mustard seeds from a family that had never experienced the death of a person. Kisa set off immediately to complete the task, but quickly discovered that there was no family that had never experienced the death of a person. Kisa then realised what the Buddha had taught: suffering is a part of life and all things die. Once she had accepted this truth she was able to let go of her grief and became one of the Buddha's followers.

Is one Mark of Existence more important than the others?

Some may argue that understanding one or more of the marks is more important than the others.

- **Impermanence (anicca)** may be the most important to grasp because it helps to understand why things continue under the delusion that things are permanent and continue to suffer.
- **No fixed self (anatta)** may be the most important of the three marks because it helps to understand why we are pursuing self-interest when there is no self!
- Alternatively the understanding that life is **suffering (dukkha)** may be the most important because it inspired the Buddha's own quest for enlightenment and serves as the motivation for practising today.

However, it is through understanding all three marks together that Buddhists understand the truth of existence. As is taught in the Noble Eightfold Path, wisdom (pañña) is the most important on the path to nibbana. Buddhists should understand all of the marks of existence to inform the right approach to life.

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The human personality and human destiny

Keywords:

- ♦ **Annihilationism** – there is nothing after physical death
- ♦ **Arhat** – ‘perfected person’ or ‘worthy one’; has achieved nibbana (Theravada)
- ♦ **Atman** – Hindu word for the soul
- ♦ **Avalokiteshvara** – the bodhisattva of compassion
- ♦ **Bardo** – the 49-day period between death and the next rebirth; Tibetan Buddhism
- ♦ **Bodhicitta** – transformative moment marking start of the path of the bodhisattva
- ♦ **Bodhisattva** – being who postpones their Buddhahood to help others (Mahayana)
- ♦ **Buddhahood** – enlightenment
- ♦ **Buddha-nature** – all beings have a ‘Buddha-nature’ and enlightenment potential (Mahayana)
- ♦ **Eternalism** – there is a fixed self/soul that continues after physical death
- ♦ **Paramitas** – the Six Perfections of the bodhisattva path; generosity, morality, patience, vigour, concentration, wisdom (Mahayana)
- ♦ **Prajnaparamita sutras** – meaning ‘perfection of wisdom’; Mahayana Scriptures
- ♦ **Pure Land** – branch of Mahayana Buddhism based on teachings of Buddha Amitayus
- ♦ **Sunyata** – emptiness

The human personality, in the Theravada and Mahayana traditions

The understanding of the human personality in Buddhism is quite different (including those at the time of the Buddha). Most religions, for example, conceive of continuous personality, a soul, that continues on after death. For example, in Christianity, bodily resurrection – a new, perfected version of the earthly body is created. In Hinduism the soul, or atman, is reincarnated into an entirely new body (which is different from the old one). For Buddhists any notion of a fixed self or soul is simply an illusion, there is no permanent self.

The Five Aggregates (skandhas) of form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness

To explain what a person is (if not consisting of a soul) Theravada Buddhism uses the **Five Aggregates (skandhas)**, sometimes referred to as the five ‘heaps’. According to Theravada Buddhism, the person is comprised of five elements or skandhas, which are a mixture of physical and mental. They come together when we are born, as a result of the kamma/karma generated in previous lives (*for kamma/karma*).

• Form

Form refers to the physical body, including the senses. Bodies can be a source of pleasure, but also of craving and therefore of suffering. Buddhists practice breathing meditation to help increase awareness and gain control over the body and its craving. In Buddhism, ‘form’ is a good focal point when Buddhists want to contemplate the characteristics of the five aggregates (anicca (impermanence) because the form ages and dies; also for contemplation of anatta (no fixed self) because the body should not be considered to be a permanent self).

• Sensation

The senses provide experiences and **feelings/sensations** of the outside world. These can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, e.g. eating chocolate as a pleasant experience.

• Perception

An awareness arising from sensory information, forming ideas and concepts from these experiences, labelling them, e.g. identifying something as chocolate.

• Mental Formations

Our will, desires or **impulses**; things people want to do, e.g. desire to eat chocolate.

• Consciousness

To be aware of oneself as a thinking and feeling thing.

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The Questions of King Milinda is a well-known piece of Buddhist literature by the curious Greek king Milinda and a wise Buddhist scholar/monk, **Nagasena**. It is a dialogue between King Milinda and Nagasena towards the realisation that there is no separate self by using the analogy of a chariot.

The chariot analogy

(The Questions of King Milinda Bk. II Ch. 1)

[Nagasena to Milinda] '...did you come on foot or in a vehicle?'

'I, revered sir, did not come on foot. I came in a chariot.'

'If, sire, you came in a chariot, show me the chariot. Is the pole the chariot, sire?'

'No, revered sir.'

'Is the axle the chariot?'

'No, revered sir.'

'Are the wheels the chariot?'

'No, revered sir.'

'Is the body of the chariot... the pole, the axle, the yoke, the reins, the goad... are any of them the chariot?'

'No, revered sir.'

'Well then, sire, what is the chariot apart from the pole, the axle, the wheels, the body, the fenders, the reins, the goad?'

'No, sire.'

'Sire, though I have been asking you repeatedly, I do not see this chariot. Chariot is only a name. Chariot you say you came in? You, sire, have spoken a falsehood, an untruth. There is no chariot.'

'I am not, revered sir, speaking a lie. It is because of the pole, because of the axle, the wheels, the yoke, the reins and because of the goad that the 'chariot' exists as a mere designation.'

All there is to 'chariot' is simply the parts that make up the whole, there is no 'chariot' beyond this. Buddhists claim that the same is true of the 'self'; there is no 'self' beyond the Five Aggregates. 'Chariot' and 'self' are simply labels for a collection of elements, nothing more.

The importance of the skandhas in relation to anatta and anicca

It is with reference to the skandhas that Theravada Buddhists define a person. Human beings are simply a collection of changeable, physical and mental elements.

This concept of a human being is also relevant to the Buddha's teachings in the Four Noble Truths. The first truth is **Existence**:

- **Anatta** – Anatta is the idea that there is no fixed self; the skandhas and the five elements create the illusion of a 'self'.
- **Anicca** – Anicca is the teaching that all things that exist are subject to change and are impermanent. The skandhas change constantly. Our form changes over time and our mind is constantly changing.

The Five Aggregates are a part of the 12 links in the chain of **dependent co-arising**. Buddhists claim that if people stop clinging to the aggregates, the suffering will reduce and allow them to get closer to achieving **Nirvana**.

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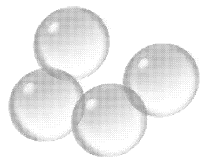
Sunyata

Mahayana Buddhism offers a different account of the human personality; this is based on their teachings on sunyata, meaning 'emptiness'. It is the belief that nothing has an intrinsic or essential essence and was a concept taught by the second-century CE monk Nagarjuna, based on the *Prajnaparamita sutras*. The *Heart Sutra*, contained within the *Prajnaparamita*, describes the Five Aggregates/skandhas (see above) as being 'empty'; the following extract focuses on the skandha of 'form' and the other skandhas:

Heart Sutra
(The Questions of King Milinda Bk. II Ch. 1)

'Form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness. Whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of feeling, perception, impulses, and consciousness'

Mahayana Buddhists believe that a person exists in the 'ordinary sense', that is, in the way we see things, such as objects, other people and so on, e.g. Joe is sitting at a desk next to me. But in the 'ultimate sense', people do not exist. People do not have an immortal soul, their body and life are dependent upon other things for their temporary existence.



The *Diamond Sutra* compares sunyata to 'a star at dawn, a flash of lightning, a dream...' These things exist, but not in a permanent way. They are dependent upon other things for their temporary existence.

'To call things 'empty' is a way of trying to express that no individual thing is absolute, but only in relation to others... In other words, nothing is self-existent, nothing has a unique set of characteristics by which it is totally distinguished from things, nothing possesses an independent essence or substance, nothing exists separately, independently, unchangingly. Everything exists in the interdependence of all things.' (Cush 1991, p. 107)

The teaching of sunyata is intended to emphasise the Buddhist belief that everything is empty and interdependent, things exist only in relation to one another, just like Nagarjuna's teachings (above). Furthermore, nothing – including the self – exists independently of other things. According to the teachings on sunyata, nothing has an intrinsic (essential) immortal essence.

'[Sunyata] ... is a medicine to remedy the compulsive illusion-making habits of ordinary people and their tendency to think of persons and things as separate, self-created and self-sustaining.' (Snelling 1990, p.55)

[About the author] - John Snelling was a practising Buddhist and editor of *Buddhism Today*

Something else to think about...

The concept of emptiness sits between two extreme viewpoints that the Buddha rejected: **eternalism** (the belief in a self that continues after physical death) and **annihilationism** (that there is nothing at all after death). According to the teaching of sunyata it would be correct to say both that 'I exist' and that 'I do not exist'. The self is not the same as 'nothingness' (where absolutely nothing exists).

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Buddha-nature

The Mahayana tradition teaches that all beings have the potential for enlightenment because they have within them a fundamental 'Buddha-nature'.

'...beneath all the changing and interconnected elements that make up our lives, in which the Buddha is within every being ... you (and all other creatures) are Buddhas' (Thompson 2000, p. 11)

The Buddha came to understand this during his own enlightenment and then he discovered their own Buddha-nature by showing them the path to enlightenment. He revealed their potential and reveal their Buddha-natures. It is necessary to commit to the path and rid of all false thoughts in order to achieve this. Buddhas are those who have achieved this Buddha-nature. An understanding of the Buddha-nature is considered to be beyond intellectual understanding and instead through the practice of **meditation**.

Buddhahood

Buddhahood is the realisation of the Buddha-nature, it is the state of being a Buddha. To be a Buddha or achieve Buddhahood is considered the highest state in Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism. As Cush notes, Mahayana Buddhism '... would identify the path towards Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings.' (1991, p. 85)

Buddhas become enlightened by their own efforts and then commit themselves to the path. Siddhartha Gautama Buddha is the most famous Buddha and founder of Buddhism. There were 27 other Buddhas before him, described in the *Buddhavamsa* in the *Pali Canon*. The next Buddha is named **Maitreya**. Why is it that there are so few Buddhas – doesn't everyone who becomes enlightened become a Buddha? Read the next section to find out.

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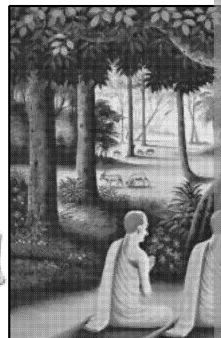


Human destiny

Different ideals in Theravada and Mahayana traditions

Arhat ideal

Becoming an **arhat** is the goal of Theravada Buddhism. The term 'Buddha' means 'enlightened one' and refers to someone who has discovered the truth (Dhamma) for themselves, as Siddhartha Gautama Buddha is believed to have done. However, those who achieve enlightenment and **nibbana** through instruction by a teacher are called **arhats**, meaning '**perfected person**' or 'worthy ones'. There are many accounts of people becoming enlightened after hearing the Buddha teach the Dhamma (such as the five ascetics during his early sermons); in these cases they have become arhats.



De

An arhat has only overcome the **Three Poisons** of ignorance, greed and hatred and the **Ten Fetters** (or 'chains') that keep them trapped in Samsara:

1	Attachment to self
2	Excessive scepticism
3	Reliance on rules and rituals
4	Sense desires
5	Hatred
6 and 7	Crave types of awareness that are achieved through meditation
8	Arrogance
9	Restlessness
10	Ignorance

There are different levels of spiritual development on the path to becoming

- **Stream enterer** – is committed to the Buddhist path and recognises that he has broken the first three fetters. There are seven more rebirths from this stage ahead.
- **Once returner** – has substantially reduced sense desires and hateful thoughts, leading to only one more human rebirth ahead.
- **Never returner** – has overcome sense desires and negative thoughts, leading to no more rebirths, just one rebirth in the heavenly realm.
- **Arhat** – the state of being free from all 10 fetters that bind a person to Samsara; a 'perfected person' and will not be reborn again.

According to the *Anguttara Nikaya* (p. 23) the five ascetics who became the Buddha's 'stream enterer' stage during his first sermon and then went on to achieve enlightenment during his second. It therefore seems to be possible for some beings described above and achieve arhatship in one life.

A Buddha, such as Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, and an arhat are in many ways different. Both have achieved enlightenment. However, a Buddha could be seen as superior to the former has achieved enlightenment without help. As Rupert Gethin puts it, 'the enlightened Buddha is 'the perfectly, fully awakened one' and the arhat is 'the disciple'. (1998, p. 32)

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Bodhisattva ideal

The goal of Mahayana Buddhism is to become a **bodhisattva**. Bodhisattvas seek enlightenment and Buddhahood, but postpone this final achievement to help others. They are motivated by deep **compassion** for the suffering of other living things, their desire to escape Samsara to help other beings achieve enlightenment. Such beings are sometimes called 'bodhisattvas'; they intervene to help those who are suffering and guide them towards enlightenment. Bodhisattvas also serve as a source of inspiration and a focus for worship. A significant bodhisattva that is worshipped in Buddhism (see examples below) is Guanyin. Buddhism also teaches that all people are 'bodhisattva', because everyone has a Buddha nature.

The Mahayana tradition views the goal of becoming an arhat and seeking nirvana as less worthy than the bodhisattva ideal, which is to attain enlightenment to save all beings.

'...the path to arhatship appears tainted with a residual selfishness since it lacks the great compassion of the bodhisattva...' (Gethin 1998, p. 228)

Bodhisattvas are willing to sacrifice themselves and to suffer for the benefit of others. They accumulate any **merit** (accumulated through good deeds and thoughts) they may acquire for others. They are perfectly compassionate and utterly selfless. The bodhisattva possesses perfect wisdom, knowing that nothing lasts, that all things are empty and nothing is as it appears; yet they understand that suffering is very real for ordinary beings and therefore compassionately seek to help them.

The bodhisattva path

- The path begins by becoming a devoted Buddhist, observing the teachings of the Buddha, helping others and worshipping.
- A spiritual event may then occur called the 'arising of **bodhicitta**'; this is the desire to move forward on the bodhisattva path. It is a moment of understanding the nature of existence and an initial grasp of enlightenment. Bodhicitta is the desire to attain enlightenment for the good of all beings.
- A vow is then taken before religious masters, the 'bodhisattva vow'; this is a commitment to the path. The vow applies not just for this life, but for many lifetimes.
- Practice of the perfections (**paramitas**) (see below for The Six Perfections).
- There are **10 stages** on the path to work through, representing the accumulation of the ten perfections and an increasing level of commitment. These stages are described as *light-giving, radiant, difficult to conquer, face-to-face, far-going, immaculate, cloud of Dhamma*. The final stage is Buddhahood.

Those who are further advanced on the path can help those less far along.

Buddhism recognises the existence of many bodhisattvas, each possessing different qualities of compassion, wisdom, friendliness, etc. Mahayana shrines will feature bodhisattva statues. The purpose of which is to symbolise those admirable qualities and inspire people to develop them in their own lives.

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Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

One of the most famous bodhisattvas is Avalokiteshvara, the '**Bodhisattva of Compassion**', who hears the cries of those who suffer and reaches down to help. In statues and artwork Avalokiteshvara may be depicted with many arms, which represents a willingness to help, or with one foot stepping down representing his willingness to become involved in the suffering of beings in the world. In Tibetan Buddhism Avalokiteshvara is believed to work through the earthly form of the Dalai Lama.

Other bodhisattvas include **Manjusri**, the 'Bodhisattva of Wisdom', and **Tara** 'the saviouress', a female bodhisattva who represents success and salvation from suffering.

Becoming a bodhisattva is the goal of Mahayana Buddhism, but bodhisattvas also serve as symbols of compassion and as role models for the Buddhist community.



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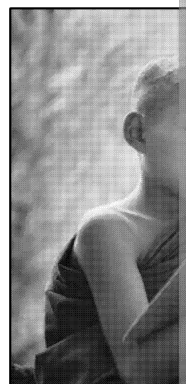
Buddhahood and the Pure Land

Pure Land Buddhism is a Mahayana Buddhist tradition established in China. It is based on devotion to the **Buddha Amitabha** or Amita (meaning 'infinite light'). The tradition begins when he was a monk called Dharmakara. Dharmakara made a vow that when he became enlightened he would create a land of perfect compassion for all beings. This 'land' would also be a favourable place for spiritual growth and for achieving enlightenment (Buddhahood). Entry to the Pure Land is straightforward, one only has to chant the name with sincerity to gain access. Devotion to Amitabha includes chanting and meditation.

Compared to the Theravada tradition there is less emphasis on intellectual study of life and even ethics in Pure Land Buddhism; devotion is the key to gaining enlightenment. This approach makes Pure Land Buddhism more accessible to ordinary people, as the devotional acts more easily fit in with their lives. For example, engaging in scriptural study, observing demanding ethical rules (such as right livelihood). Religious leaders in the normal job world. In addition to their religious duties, the same would not be true of Buddhist traditions or indeed for some religious leaders from other faiths, who must remain celibate.

Summary of the Dhamma (Dharma)

- **Dhamma (Dharma)** refers to the ultimate truth or law and the teachings of the Buddha; it should be studied and experienced. The Dhamma is one of the **Three Refuges** or Jewels of the Buddhist faith (along with the Buddha and the sangha).
- **Samsara** is the continuous **cycle of birth, death and rebirth**; Buddhism teaches that all beings are trapped in Samsara. Beings are reborn into one of the **six realms** (hells, hungry ghost, animal, human, titan and Gods) and suffer in each. To escape Samsara a person must become enlightened and achieve the state of **nibbana**. Samsara can be understood literally or, as is more common in Buddhism, as a metaphor.
- **Dependent arising (paticcasamupada)** is the belief that all things are dependent on other things. There are 12 links (**nidanas**) in the 'chain' of causation which lead to achieve enlightenment; they are: ignorance, impulses, consciousness, feelings, senses, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, rebirth, suffering.
- The Buddha taught the **Three Marks of Existence** or universal truths about life. They are: **impermanence (anicca)**; **no fixed self (anatta)**; **dukkha (suffering or pain of life)**.
- The human personality in the **Theravada** tradition is understood using the concept of **Aggregates (khandas)**. These are all there is to a person; they are: **form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness**.
- The analogy of the chariot presented in *The Questions of King Milinda* is used to describe the human personality as being comprised of parts, nothing more.
- The **Mahayana** tradition teaches the concept of **sunyata**, the belief that there is no kind of permanent, intrinsic, immortal essence, i.e. a soul.
- The concept of **Buddha-nature** is also central to **Mahayana** Buddhism. It teaches that all beings have a Buddha-nature, meaning the potential to become enlightened.
- Buddhahood is the goal of Buddhist practice, it is the achievement of enlightenment.



Novice monk

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- The two main branches of Buddhism have different views about the end of human destiny. **Theravada** Buddhists emphasise the **arhat ideal**, where one becomes an enlightened or 'perfected person'. Several stages must be achieved before becoming a stream enterer, once returner, never returner.
- Mahayana Buddhists, on the other hand, focus on the **bodhisattva ideal** of compassion' who defer their own enlightenment and escape from Samsara until all beings are enlightened and escape suffering. Those beings who commit to the path of the arising of **bodhicitta**, take a vow and practice the **Six Perfections**.
- A well-known bodhisattva is **Avalokiteshvara**.
- **Pure Land Buddhism**, which is a branch of **Mahayana** Buddhism, teaches that where suffering ceases and enlightenment (**Buddhahood**) is far more likely to be achieved through devotion to the **Buddha Amitabha** who created the Pure Land. Buddhists devote themselves to Amitabha with sincerity to gain a place in the Pure Land.

Practice Exam questions

The Dhamma (Dharma)

1. Which one of the following terms means 'perfected person'?

A) Bodhisattva
B) Buddha
C) Ascetic
D) Arhat

2. Give **two** of the Five Aggregates (skandhas).
3. Explain **two** ways the Three Marks of Existence may influence the life of a Buddhist.
4. Explain **two** beliefs about the human personality in Buddhism.
Refer to Scripture or sacred writing.
5. 'All Buddhists aim for the same final goal in following the Buddhist path.' Evaluate this statement.
 - Argue for *and* against this statement.
 - You must refer to Buddhist teaching.
 - Reach a conclusion which follows from your argument.

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Buddhist ethics

Keywords:

- ♦ **Ahimsa** – non-violence or non-harm
- ♦ **Fatalism** – the belief that the future is inevitable
- ♦ **Five Moral Precepts** – do not take life, do not take what is not given, do not marry while married, do not drink alcohol, do not use drugs, do not speak falsehoods, do not take intoxicants that cloud the mind
- ♦ **Kamma (karma)** – (literally: 'action'); deliberate actions have consequences
- ♦ **Karuna** – compassion (or pity)
- ♦ **Kusala** – means 'skilful' (good) action; acting skilfully
- ♦ **Merit** – good kamma; 'merit-making' is to acquiring good kamma
- ♦ **Metta** – loving kindness; pure, selfless love that seeks nothing in return
- ♦ **Predestination** – the belief that the future has been prearranged, e.g. by God
- ♦ **Rebirth** – the belief that when one dies, one is reborn again in another form
- ♦ **Six Perfections (Six Paramitas)** – in Mahayana Buddhism, the bodhisattva path; generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, wisdom

Ethical teaching

Ethics is at the heart of Buddhism, as the Buddha said 'Do not do what is evil. Do what is good.' (*The Dhammapada* v. 183). Buddhism is sometimes described as a 'way of life' rather than a religion, because of the centrality of ethics to Buddhist practice. The Buddha's teachings to the lay community paid particular attention to ethics, including how actions have consequences (**kamma**) and that there are moral rules to be observed, e.g. the five precepts. Buddhist ethics is not just about how people should behave, but also how they should view life, that is, with **compassion** (karuna) and **loving-kindness** (metta).

Kamma (karma)

Kamma means 'action' or 'actions producing consequences' and it refers to deliberate actions can produce good or bad karmic consequences; a charitable act would produce good kamma, for example, whereas a cruel act would produce bad kamma. Buddhist experiences one has in this life and in future lives (rebirths) are determined by the **law of kamma**.

'What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, our present thoughts will shape tomorrow... If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel follows the ox that draws the carriage.' (*Dhammapada* v. 1)

Kamma is different from fate or **fatalism** and **predestination**, which are beliefs that the future has been fixed in advance. Kamma is the cause of future experiences, but that is not destiny because a person's behaviour can change, people can generate different kamma and thus have a different future.

'...the idea of karma emphasizes the importance of human action and its effects on one's 'destiny' by their actions.' (Harvey 1990, p. 40)

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Kamma is often described in terms of 'seeds' and 'fruits'. 'Karmic seeds' are and from these seeds, karmic fruits will grow; these fruits are the consequences of actions. It is the intention behind the action that matters, this is what generates kamma. Accidentally bringing about harm to another being, for example, would not generate kamma (although in other religious traditions, such as **Jainism**, even accidental actions generate bad kamma and therefore Jains are especially careful not to harm anything, e.g. floors are carefully swept to avoid treading on insects).

'... karma is action. It is dynamic. But more than simply action because it is not just unconscious or involuntary action. It is intentional, deliberate, wilful action.'

[About the author – Dr Peter Santina was a practising Theravada Buddhist monk; he studied and taught Buddhism for many years.]

Merit and the lay Buddhist

Buddhists believe that we produce kamma through our deliberate actions and choices. Good kamma (good deeds) leads to good kamma. Bad kamma can be created by harmful actions and choices. 'The Five Precepts' (sila) are the basic guidelines for lay Buddhists. Good kamma is created by generous, compassionate and wise actions, which are described as 'merit' (good kamma), which can build up and lead to a better rebirth.

'...belief in karma leads to acceptance of the present situation, it also means one can influence one's future by collecting merit. Merit can be gained in three ways – by moral behaviour, by religious ceremonies and by supporting the sangha.' (Cush 1991, p. 76)

Rebirth (also see above for Tibetan Wheel of Life and six realms; Three Marks of Existence)

Buddhists believe that all beings are reborn and are trapped in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth (Samsara) until they achieve nibbana. The Tibetan Wheel of Life illustrates the cycle of rebirth. Buddhists believe we can be born into different realms. Some realms are more desirable than others. The human realm with all its pleasures would be a better rebirth than one into the hell realm. The goal in Buddhism is to not be reborn at all, because all the realms involve suffering. To achieve liberation is believed to be the human realm, because here there is the opportunity to pursue the path, whereas, in the hell realm, for example, the pain and suffering are constant.

According to the Three Marks of Existence and the mark of anatta, there is no permanent self. This can make understanding the concept of rebirth particularly difficult. How can one be reborn if not 'me'?

In The Questions of King Milinda, Nagasena describes the reborn individual as 'neither the same nor different' and offers three analogies to illustrate: firstly, a young boy growing up to be an adult man; secondly, a newly lit lamp, although lit by a previous lamp, is not the same flame; and thirdly, milk turns to curds, then to butter, then to ghee (clarified butter), none of which is the same but each is caused by a prior state. Therefore rebirth entails continuous causation between the past life and new life, but they are not one and the same.

There is some debate within Buddhism about exactly what it is that is reborn. Some describe the skandhas that make up a person coming apart at death and then being differently arranged for a new existence. Others argue that there is a formless consciousness that is reborn.

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(vijnana) that continues on between lives. In some accounts rebirth occurs whereas in Tibetan teachings rebirth is delayed as the stages of **bardo** are passed (see above).

Wider research opportunity

When an important Buddhist teacher (lama) dies in Tibetan Buddhism a search for their reincarnation (their tulku). Find out about what happens to identify the reincarnation and watch the film *Little Buddha* (1993).

Kamma and rebirth

Buddhism teaches that it is kamma that determines the types of rebirth we experience. Good and bad, have consequences from which there is no escape.

‘Neither in the sky, nor deep in the ocean, nor in a mountain-cave, nor anywhere else, the evil he has done.’ *The Dhammapada v. 127*



‘The law of karma is seen as a natural law inherent in the nature of things, like a law operated by a God, and indeed the gods are themselves under its sway. Good and bad are therefore, seen as ‘rewards’ or ‘punishments’, but as simply the natural results of actions.’ (Harvey 1990, p. 39)

Buddhism teaches that rebirth is determined by kamma and generating good kamma leads to a better rebirth, which can help Buddhists get closer to their goal of nibbana. However, kamma (both good and bad) must be shaken off in order to achieve nibbana.

Compassion (karuna)

The Buddha taught that both wisdom and compassion are required to achieve nibbana. Wisdom that a person understands that the right response to suffering is compassion involves understanding the pain of others, being sympathetic, selfless and sincere. The Buddha was an example of a compassionate being, who was motivated to help others. There are many stories of his compassionate acts performed through his various rebirths in the *Jataka Tales* (see below in the section on Loving-kindness for an example).

Compassion is also clearly promoted in the precepts (see below) with rules against killing and harming others. Compassion is particularly important in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and the concept of bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas dedicate themselves to helping others achieve enlightenment and are motivated to do so out of pure compassion and selflessness.

An example of Buddhist compassion in action can be seen in the work of the Buddhist Relief Trust. They manage projects aimed at improving the lives of people in Asia, targeted at poverty and discrimination.



Wider research opportunity

Find out more about the work of the Karuna Trust at www.karuna.org

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Loving-kindness (metta)

Metta is a pure, selfless love that seeks nothing in return. Cush describes the well to all beings "may all beings be happy and at their ease, may they be joyful" (1991, p. 62)

There is a special type of meditation, called **metta bhavana**, which trains the attitude of loving-kindness. The practitioner first develops loving-kindness wishes, and then gradually directs loving feelings towards all beings, so developing a loving and compassionate nature.

For Buddhists one can accumulate good kamma by acting out of compassion, which in turn leads to a favourable rebirth. The life of the Buddha and his teachings are full of karuna and metta; two examples come from the Buddha's early life and his cousin Devadatta.

Siddhartha, the Buddha, who is described as a kind and gentle child, was loved by all except his cousin Devadatta. When young Siddhartha walked around the palace grounds he saw a group of swans flying over a pond. One swan, badly injured with an arrow in its wing; it had been shot by Devadatta, who was hunting. Siddhartha refused and with the blessing of a holy man kept the swan. Filled with compassion, he nursed the swan back to health before freeing it. On a later occasion Devadatta set an elephant on the path of the Buddha. The elephant charged at him, but the Buddha managed to calm the elephant with the power of his mind.

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The Five Moral Precepts (pancha-sila)

The five precepts are a set of Buddhist moral rules or duties listing those actions people should refrain from; they apply to all Buddhists. The precepts are a part of the morality section (**sila**) of the **Eightfold Path**. When someone becomes a Buddhist, they formally accept the precepts during a simple ceremony and vow to follow them. The precepts can be understood in two ways: firstly, as a statement of things people *should not do*; secondly, as positive actions that people *should do*.

The Five Moral Precepts:

1. Do not take life.

The first precept is 'to refrain from killing' and applies to all animal life, not just human. It relates to the Buddhist belief in rebirth and that all living things may aspire to a human rebirth and ultimately to Nirvana. The law of kamma means that humans may have once been animals in a past life and may be so again, so all life ought to be respected. Furthermore, it is considered important not to cause fear and suffering in living things, and the first precept keeps Buddhists mindful of this. For these reasons many Buddhists choose to become vegetarian, a requirement (and may be impractical in some areas, e.g. Tibet due to the climate). Buddhists observe the precept to 'not take life' very strictly, e.g. sweeping floors to avoid killing insects and straining water before drinking it.

Something to remember

Ahimsa means non-violence and is an important principle in Jainism. Jainism is a religion that emphasizes not harming any living being. Jainism also includes practices like wearing masks over the mouth to avoid inhaling insects.

The positive side of this precept is to show compassion towards living things.

'The wise who hurt no living being... go to the immortal NIRVANA...' (The Dhammapadam)

2. Do not take what is not given.

The second precept can be taken to be a rule against stealing, although it is broader in terms including, for example, not returning borrowed items. It is considered morally wrong to cause anyone suffering when taking something that is not freely given. Following the second precept Buddhists avoid causing others suffering by not taking what is not freely given.

The positive aspect of this precept is to be generous towards others. This includes sharing of possessions, time, knowledge, etc.

3. Do not misuse the senses.

The third precept, 'to refrain from misuse of sensual pleasures', typically refers to sexual activity, gambling and prostitution. It can also refer to the misuse of the senses, such as overindulgence, e.g. excessive eating.

To observe the positive side of this precept Buddhists ought to take care of their senses and respect others.

4. Do not speak falsehoods.

The fourth precept requires Buddhists 'to refrain from false speech', which includes lying, gossip, arguing, etc.

The positive side of this precept involves speaking with kindness and honesty. Good can come from it!

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5. Do not take intoxicants that cloud the mind.

The fifth precept is also a practical one. Intoxicants, such as drugs and alcohol, cloud the mind and a person's ability to improve their awareness and acquire wisdom. Furthermore, morally bad actions can follow from being under the influence of intoxicants, such as harm to self and others. Keeping a clear mind means people make better judgements and choices.

A positive action in relation to this precept may involve meditation practice to improve awareness and wisdom.



The precepts offer a clear code of conduct which is particularly helpful to Buddhist practice. However, the ideal situation for Buddhists is one where more of a compassionate and wise nature.

'A man should control his words and mind and should not do any harm with his action are pure he can make progress on the path of the wise.' (*The Dhammapadam*)

Buddhism is described as a 'way of life' because of the focus on ethical behaviour which influence Buddhists throughout their daily lives in what they do and how they think. Theravada monks and nuns commit themselves to following five additional precepts to abstain from the following: food after midday, a luxurious bed, frivolous speech, e.g. jewellery and handling money.

The Six Perfections (paramitas) in the Mahayana tradition

Mahayana ethics are central to following the bodhisattva path, which is a path of compassion and selflessness. Buddhists must act according to 'skillful means' or *upaya* to take action based on compassion and wisdom.

The **Six Perfections (paramitas)** are an expression of ultimate wisdom, enlightenment, true nature and the enlightened mind. Much like the **Eightfold Path** (see page 38) is a set of virtues (good character traits) to be practised on the path to nibbana, they influence the way a person behaves in their life and towards others.

1. Generosity

Being generous is a demonstration of compassion and something that benefits all beings. People can be generous in different ways, such as with their time, knowledge. For example, Buddhists make offerings to monks and nuns with their time and money. The bodhisattva may even choose to give up an extreme act of giving, which is judged to be the compassionate thing to do.

2. Moral

Perfect morality involves following moral rules, such as the precepts, but also attitudes, such as a respect for life. One must act selflessly and not simply to gain merit.

3. Patience

Perfect patience encourages an acceptance of the nature of things and to suffer and endure difficulty. Buddhists should not crave change, because of *dukkha*.

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4. Energy

To have perfect energy or vigour means having a tireless enthusiasm for helping others.

5. Meditation

Perfect meditation requires a person to be accomplished in Buddhist meditation.

6. Wisdom

Perfect wisdom is an essential virtue because all the perfections already mentioned need wisdom to be properly practised. Wisdom may be gained in part from study (Dhamma), but it involves much more than this. To have wisdom is to see things as they are, as revealed through **experience** and **meditation**. Wisdom allows a person to see, for example, when acting morally. It provides the 'right view' and motivation for revealing that there is no difference between the one giving and the one receiving, between the one suffering and the one causing suffering, and the truth that there is no self to suffer or gain merit.

Developing these perfections requires dedication, mental strength and selfless effort, practised to perfection in order to achieve nibbana. One must become perfect in all and selfless. Some sources refer to 'Ten Perfections', adding: **conviction, strength, skilful means** as virtues to be perfected. These 10 perfections can be 'map' for development on the bodhisattva path (see *Bodhisattva ideal and Bodhisattva path*).

Something extra to think about... virtues and vices

Buddhism is not simply about following sets of moral rules because they have been given; it is about following the teachings of the Buddha to develop **good character traits** (virtues) and avoid bad ones (vices). Virtues such as compassion, generosity and wisdom gradually become a part of a person's character so that they can act compassionately, generously and wisely in all things. Vices such as hatred, greed and anger, on the other hand, are to be avoided or conquered. Virtues place the emphasis on the good, which is important in all religious traditions; Christianity, for example, emphasises the virtues.

Summary of Buddhist ethics

- **Ethics** are a vital part of Buddhist life. **Buddhists** believe in **kamma** (karma), which means that thoughts and actions produce consequences. Bad thoughts and actions produce bad kamma, while good thoughts and actions generate good kamma or **merit**. It is kamma that determines the **rebirth** a person has; the better the kamma, the better the rebirth – this is the law of karma.
- Buddhism teaches **compassion (karuna)**. Buddhists are expected to act with compassion, as the Buddha did, towards all living things. In Mahayana Buddhism the bodhisattva ideal emphasises compassion.
- Buddhism also teaches **loving-kindness (metta)**, which is a pure, selfless love, seeking nothing in return. Again, the Buddha is an example of this, seen in his actions over many various lives.
- The **Five Moral Precepts** in Buddhism provide a framework for correct behaviour. They are: do not take what is not given, do not misuse the senses, do not drink or use intoxicants, do not commit adultery, and do not kill.
- In the **Mahayana** tradition Buddhists observe the **Six Perfections** (paramitas) on the bodhisattva path. These are: generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. Wisdom is particularly important as it allows the other perfections to be practised correctly.

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Practice exam questions

Buddhist ethics

1. Which one of the following means compassion?

A) pancha-sila
B) ahimsa
C) karuna
D) metta

2. Give two of the Six Perfections.
3. Explain two of the following ways to practise ethics in Buddhism.
4. Explain the practices through which Buddhists may gain merit (good kamma). Refer to Buddhist teaching.
5. 'The Five Moral Precepts are simply a list of things Buddhists should not do.' statement.
- Argue for *and* against this statement.
 - You must refer to Buddhist teaching.
 - Reach a conclusion which follows from your argument.

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Practice exam questions

The Buddha and the Four Noble Truths

1. 1 mark:
C) pain
2. Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point (maximum 2).
Two from: ignorance, greed or hate
3. Accept any relevant points.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4)
Possible points:
 - The Buddha understood that suffering was an inevitable part of life when he experienced the first Noble Truth.
 - He understood that life is impermanent, that all things change and nothing is permanent.
 - The fourth sight, the holy man, showed the Buddha a different way of life and a solution to the suffering of existence.
 - Deeply moved by the Four Sights, the Buddha (then Siddhartha) renounced his royal life to follow the path of a holy man.
4. Accept any relevant points and reference to Scripture.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4), 1 mark for reference to Scripture.
If *only* one religious belief is mentioned, maximum 2 marks + 1 mark for scriptural reference.
May include some of the following, credit any relevant points.
 - Dukkha – ‘suffering’. The first Noble Truth is that life is suffering or unsatisfactory, that suffering is unavoidable, a truth the Buddha understood when he experienced the first Noble Truth. *The Samyutta Nikaya 5 v. 421–422* in the *Pali Canon* lists types of suffering, e.g. ‘old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, dying is suffering, sorrow, grief, pain, etc.’ The Buddha transformed suffering into ordinary suffering, suffering through change and suffering through craving.
 - Samudaya – ‘cause of suffering’. The second Noble Truth identifies the cause of suffering as craving. Craving is rooted in the Three Poisons/Fires of ignorance, greed and hatred. One is trapped in Samsara. *The Dhammapada v. 336* states that ‘...whoever in this world is overcome by his cravings, his sorrows fall away...’ Craving may be for sensory experiences, but the first two Noble Truths may be seen as pessimistic.
 - Nirodha – ‘cessation of suffering’. In the third Noble Truth the Buddha taught that suffering can be ended; it is possible; to end suffering a being must achieve nibbana/nirvana, which is a state of perfect happiness. As *The Dhammapada v. 202* puts it, ‘There is no joy like NIRVANA. Samsara and be free from suffering; this can be achieved within a life with the Buddha (parinibbana). Nibbana and ending suffering is the goal of Buddhist practice.’
 - Magga – ‘the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering’. The fourth Noble Truth is the way to end suffering, which is, by following the Noble Eightfold Path. *The Dhammapada v. 273 and 275* reiterate the path, ‘The best of the paths is the path of the Noble Eightfold Path. It leads to the end of his sorrow.’ There are three parts to the Path – wisdom (prajna), ethical conduct (sila) and meditation (samadhi) – and eight sections – right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. All parts must be followed (not one at a time). It is by following the Path Buddhists believe they can end suffering and eventually achieve nibbana.
 - Students may describe the Four Noble Truths using the doctor analogy.
 - The Four Noble Truths are stated in *The Dhammapada v. 190–191*.

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5.

One argument with justification
Different arguments for and against, with justification OR Several linked, justified arguments for one position This is the highest level which can be reached if only one point of view is considered there is no mention of religion
Good, well-justified arguments for and against, linked together Definite reference to religion
Very well argued; well-justified arguments for and against, linked together and a reasonable conclusion Appropriate reference to religion used to answer question

Points and justification for:

- The Buddha emphasised the importance of ethics to his followers, particularly in achieving a good rebirth, for example, by practising right livelihood and avoiding unwholesome actions.
- The Buddha exemplified ethical conduct in his life and teachings (e.g. in 7232), observing, for example, the precept of right action which incorporates ethical conduct.
- Karma is generated through deliberate actions. Practising ethics develops the ability to act appropriately, which generates good karma.
- Practising ethics (sila) is not only good for the individual Buddhist but also for society.

Points and justification against:

- Wisdom (panna) may be considered more important than ethics (sila) because it leads to Dhamma or truth. This is one of the Three Refuges and wisdom of the Dhamma leads to enlightenment.
- Meditation (samadhi) may be more important than ethics because this is essential for enlightenment. Through meditation Buddhists may calm their minds, reduce suffering, hatred and ignorance.
- However, it is the combined practice of the three sections of the Eightfold Path that is important, rather than to value one section over the others. The three sections are ethics, meditation and wisdom. By practising meditation, Buddhists can better understand their behaviour and act with wisdom.

Accept any relevant point or justification.

(Plus a possible 5 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG))

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The Dhamma (Dharma)

- 1 mark:
D) Arhat
- Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point (maximum 2).
Two from: form, sensation, perception, mental formations, consciousness
- Accept any relevant points.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4)

Possible points:

- Students may refer to all or some of the Marks of existence: dukkha, anicca and anatta.
- Dukkha – the understanding that life is suffering motivated the Buddha to seek enlightenment. This understanding may similarly motivate Buddhists to follow the Buddhist path.
- Anicca – is the view that existence is impermanent, that all things change. Buddhists may seek to contemplate anicca to achieve nibbana, because, by attaching to things that change, one is bound to suffering. An understanding of anicca may help Buddhists reduce suffering. For example, 'one who understands the inevitable change, e.g. ageing, end of a happy moment, loss of a loved one sees this he is above sorrow.' (*The Dhammapada* v. 277)
- Anatta – means no fixed self. Buddhists do not believe in the existence of a permanent self. A person is a collection of mental and physical 'aggregates'. This belief encourages Buddhists to let go of themselves to an idea of the self, meaning they may be less 'selfish'.
- Students may use the Buddha's 'Kisa Gautama and the Mustard Seeds' story to illustrate the concept of anicca.
- Belief in the Three Marks of Existence will influence the way Buddhists view the world. It encourages them to stop becoming attached to things that will inevitably change, and to accept that life involves suffering. Accepting these ideas is believed to lead to the end of suffering.

- Accept any relevant points and reference to Scripture.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4), 1 mark for reference to Scripture.
If *only* one religious belief is mentioned, maximum 2 marks + 1 mark for scriptural reference.

May include some of the following, credit any relevant points.

- Theravada tradition
 - The Five Aggregates (skandhas). A person is made up of a collection of five elements: form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness. There is no permanent soul (anatta) and the aggregates are formed at each new rebirth on the basis of karma. *The Questions of King Milinda* Bk. II Ch. 1 is presented the chariot analogy where Nagasena describes the person (like the chariot) as simply the collection of parts.
- Mahayana Buddhism
 - Sunyata is the concept of emptiness. Sunyata presents the view that persons are empty (they are empty). The concept is described in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Persons exist in a relative sense, e.g. interacting with the world, but are not independent. The *Diamond Sutra* refers to bubbles in a stream or a dream that are not real. Equally all things are dependent on other things.
 - Buddha nature is the idea that all beings have a specific nature that can be realised. A person is properly trained. Buddhahood is the realisation of this nature.

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Very well argued; well-justified arguments for and against, linked together and a reasonable conclusion Appropriate reference to religion used to answer question

Points and justification for:

- All Buddhists pursue the goal of escaping from Samsara, to be released from the cycle of rebirth.
- Buddhists aim to become enlightened and reach the state of nibbana to end suffering.

Points and justification against:

- Theravada Buddhists aim towards the arhat ideal as their goal and view of a 'perfected person' who has become enlightened through instruction. To achieve this, one must follow the Eightfold Path and free themselves from the Ten Fetters through four stages: stream enterer, once returner, never returner and the arhat.
- The Mahayana Buddhist tradition aims at the bodhisattva ideal as its goal. Bodhisattva means 'being of compassion' and is one who defers their own enlightenment to help others achieve enlightenment (such as bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara). The belief is that everyone has a Buddha-nature and the capacity to realise that nature. The goal is to achieve 'bodhicitta' (an awakening) and then the requirement to practise the Six Perfections (the bodhisattva path) to reach their goal.
- Pure Land Buddhists in the Mahayana tradition aim to gain access to the Pure Land of Amitabha. The goal of enlightenment is easier to obtain in the Pure Land.

Accept any relevant point or justification.

(Plus a possible 5 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG))

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Buddhist ethics

- 1 mark:
C) karuna
- Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point (maximum 2).
Two from: generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, wisdom
- Accept any relevant points.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4)

Possible points:

- Following the Five Moral Precepts (pancha-sila): *do not take life, do not take intoxicants, do not misuse the senses, do not speak falsehoods and do not take intoxicants*. These precepts are clear rules, or codes of conduct, which instruct Buddhists how to live.
- Practising the Six Perfections (paramitas) in the Mahayana tradition: *generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom*. These are virtues to be developed by Buddhists 'skilfully'.

- Accept any relevant points and reference to Scripture.
1 mark per simple point, 2 marks per developed point (maximum 4), 1 mark for reference to Scripture.
If *only* one religious belief is mentioned, maximum 2 marks + 1 mark for scriptural reference.

May include some of the following, credit any relevant points.

- Buddhists can gain merit by practising ethical behaviour, how they act, and how they treat others. Guidance on ethical practice can be found in the teaching section on ethics (sila), taught by the Buddha as the fourth of the Four Noble Truths in the Sermon (*The Dhammapada v. 190–191*). The Five Moral Precepts and the practice of ethical behaviour.
- Additional merit can be gained during festivals or special days, such as Vesak, which is observed.
- Merit can be gained through taking part in ceremonies and worship, which take place in the temple.
- By supporting the sangha Buddhists also gain merit, i.e., lay Buddhists make offerings to the sangha (*The Dhammapada v. 281*).

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Very well argued; well-justified arguments for and against, linked together and a reasonable conclusion Appropriate reference to religion used to answer question

Points and justification for:

- The Five Moral Precepts are positive features expressed as things 'not to do' *do not take life, do not take what is not given, do not misuse the senses, do not take intoxication, do not cloud the mind.*
- Buddhists commit to the Five Moral Precepts when they take the Buddhist code of conduct. Useful as guidance for those starting on the Buddhist path.

Points and justification against:

- Each of the Five Moral Precepts also implies a positive command, those that *be compassionate (value life), be generous, be respectful, be honest and be kind.*
- By following the positive commands Buddhists may avoid those things that are prohibited and the positive commands are also good in themselves.
- The Five Moral Precepts are more than a list of things not to do, they also tell us what they should do.

Accept any relevant point or justification.

(Plus a possible 5 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG))

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Appendix: Buddhism and the The

Component 2: Thematic studies – Religious, philosophical and e

The following information outlines Buddhist beliefs relating to the three iss

Candidates ‘...must be able to explain contrasting beliefs on ... three issue
religious tradition in Britain (Christianity) and **one or more other religio**

The section on **Buddhist Ethics** in the main part of this resource is particula
these themes. Any key words used below can be found in the main part of
‘Key word’ boxes.

Two additional scholarly sources have been used in this section:

- Harvey P, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge University Pre
- Morgan P & Lawton C, *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Edinb

Theme A: Relationships and families

*Buddhism promotes respectful relationships and the compassionate treatm
life is the ideal in Buddhism, although the Buddha placed great value on fa
opportunity for Buddhists to gain **merit** (create good **kamma/karma**).*

*Buddhism does not have strict rules on specific issues like contraception, se
homosexuality for its **lay followers**. This is in contrast with, for example, th
Roman Catholic Church for its followers on these matters. Buddhist **monks**
hand, are bound by many rules relating to relationships contained within th
monks and nuns). Buddhism, like other religious traditions, has different ex
monastic communities. The lay community (or householders) would have
while following the Buddhist path, whereas monks and nuns renounce thes
devoted to practising their faith.*

Contraception

Monks and nuns commit to living celibate lives without sexual relationships
Buddhist laity will have sexual partners, get married and start families. Ther
contraception that follow concern its use by the laity.

According to Peter Harvey, ‘Buddhist objections to contraception are limite
are not expected to start families, therefore contraception would not be see
terms of avoiding having children. There are also many practical benefits to
family planning, population control and sexual health.

Provided there are positive reasons for using contraception, such as those c
motivated by **wisdom** and **compassion**, then contraception may be entirel
widely used in many Buddhist countries.

Contraception that prevents conception, such as the pill or condoms, is gen
down to the judgement of the individual, although Buddhists would have co
contraception promoted promiscuity or its use was solely motivated by **cra**
Buddhists would, however, have great concerns about contraceptive metho

‘From lust arises sorrow and from lust arises fear.’ (*The Dhammapada* v. 215)

those that prevent the embryo implanting, for example, IUDs and the morn
used as emergency contraception and can result in an early abortion. Thes

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objectionable on the grounds that a life is destroyed, which goes against the principle of 'do not take life'. Despite this, many Buddhist countries still use these methods for practical justifications:

- fears over the reliability of condoms and the safety of the pill
- early abortions are better than later ones
- early embryos often fail to implant naturally anyway, i.e. miscarriages

Sexual relationships before marriage

Marriage is not a sacred ritual or sacrament in Buddhism; lay Buddhists may marry according to the customs of their country. However, this would be a civil rather than a religious ceremony. In Buddhism, marriage ceremonies do not carry religious significance. In Buddhism, it is not considered wrong to be in a relationship outside of marriage, i.e. before marriage or after divorce, provided both partners are consenting.

'Sexual relationships are acceptable for a lay person, provided it is within certain moral boundaries' (Harvey, 2000, p. 85)

Buddhist behaviour in sexual relationships can be guided by referring to the precepts set out in the 'code of conduct' that Buddhists are expected to observe.

- The **second moral precept** tells Buddhists, 'Do not take what is not given to you' (which includes sexual relations by stressing that they must be consenting and not forced on anyone who is already committed to another).

'Four things happen to the thoughtless man who takes another man's wife: his pleasure is restless, he is blamed by others, he goes to hell.' (*The Dhammapadam*)

- The **third moral precept**, 'Do not misuse the senses', prohibits sexual gratification and encourages respect for others and for one's own body.

Despite there being no requirement to marry, the cultural context will impact on attitudes to sex before marriage; for example, in the West and countries such as Great Britain, premarital sex is more acceptable than in Sri Lanka where, as Peter Harvey points out (2000, p. 72), it is considered a serious offence, breaking the third moral precept. John Snelling observes that '...the kind of sexual relationship that the Buddha and his followers was mainly of the basic marital sort with procreation as a primary purpose'. It is a question what these sages would have made of modern permissive sexuality which is disconnected with procreation and concerned mainly with sensual pleasure (1990, p. 69).

Snelling describes the Buddhist view of sex as 'not very positive' (p. 68). This is due to the value placed on celibacy as the ideal lifestyle for spiritual development (which is required for monks and nuns, but also the laity). It is also because of the **attachment** to worldly pleasures and relationships, preventing Buddhists practising the path to enlightenment.

Additionally, if there is any sexual misconduct, there is likely to be harm, which goes against the principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence/non-harm) and such actions would generate negative karma. Vietnamese Buddhist monk and activist **Thich Nhat Hanh** recommends that sexual relationships should be without love and commitment.

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Homosexuality

There is little direct reference to homosexuality in Buddhist Scripture although typically accepts only two sorts of sexuality: celibacy (practised by monks and nuns, and from all sexual relations, heterosexual or homosexual), and householders living in families.

However, on the matter of homosexuality there is a great variety of attitudes and cultures. Peter Harvey notes that, 'Among Tibetan laity, homosexuality is taken lightly...' (2000 p. 424). The **Dalai Lama**, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, has said that gay relationships to be wrong, although it is not homosexuality itself that is the problem, but to be an 'inappropriate use of the sex organs' that makes it so. However, as the Dalai Lama is concerned with peace and social justice, he would condemn any homophobia or discrimination of homosexual individuals.

Homosexual acts may be viewed by some Buddhists as breaking the **third precept** 'not to misuse the senses'. Harvey (2000 p. 421), however, has explored various schools of thought on whether homosexuality breaks this precept, but finds little evidence that it does.

Many Buddhists are entirely accepting of same-sex relationships provided they are committed. Western Buddhists, such as the **Triratna Buddhist Community**, accept gay and lesbian individuals into the sangha and may offer specific meditation and support. Ordained Buddhist Munisha describes sexuality as a non-issue in her Buddhist Ethics course at Manchester, explaining that its members feel entirely at ease and accepted.

Theme B: Religion, peace and conflict

*The religion of Buddhism is notable because of its associations with pacifism and non-violence. Key principles include the **first moral precept**, which is 'Do not take life through the use of weapons of mass destruction; this is also reflected in the **Path, right action**. The principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence/non-harm) also applies to non-violently towards other living things. The Buddha serves as an example for a pacifist life, rejecting violence and showing compassion towards other living beings. In Buddhism the notion of **skillful means** can sometimes permit killing if it is for compassionate grounds.*

Buddhists have been involved in violent action, usually caused by political or social issues. Any act of violence is against their fundamental principles.

Violence

Buddhists are interested in the intentions behind a person's action and see violence as arising from the **Three Poisons** of **ignorance, greed and hatred**.

- People are violent due to misunderstanding or failing to identify better alternatives. They act out of **ignorance**.

'Many people do not know that we are here in this world to live in harmony and not to fight against each other.' (*The Dhammapada* v. 6)

- People are violent because they want something the other person has, such as their country, or because they are attached to their own belongings; this is **greed**.

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- People can be violent when fearful or seeking revenge and have acted

'For hate is not conquered by hate: hate is conquered by love. This is a law of nature' (The Dhammapada v. 5)

Buddhism teaches that the Three Poisons need to be conquered and in their place develop **wisdom**, **generosity** and **compassion (karuna)**, which would promote peace. Violent acts also go against the principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence). Further, the law of **kamma/karma**, which keeps beings trapped in the cycle of **Samsara**.

'A man is not on the path of righteousness if he settles matters in a violent haste.' (The Dhammapada v. 10)

Weapons of mass destruction

The use of weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons, is usually justified on utilitarian grounds where the end justifies the means and the goal is to achieve the greater good. However, Buddhism does not operate on utilitarian principles (where the minority typically suffer) and instead Buddhism values all life, seeking to act out of compassion, wisdom and generosity.

Following the dropping of atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese Buddhists have been active in world peace movements at international level, e.g. the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

'Victory brings hate, because the defeated man is unhappy. He who surrenders man finds joy.' (The Dhammapada v. 201)

As with other acts of violence, Buddhists would consider using weapons of mass destruction at odds with the principle of **ahimsa** (non-violence). Weapons of mass destruction involve large scale taking of life, which also goes against the **first moral precept**, 'Do not kill'.

Peggy Morgan (2008, p. 107) observes that in addition to the destruction of human life, long term environmental harms following the use of weapons of mass destruction include habitats destroyed.

Those creating weapons of mass destruction would also be acting immorally as it goes against the fifth step of the Buddhist **Eightfold Path** to enlightenment, which is **right livelihood**. The *Anguttara Nikaya*, right livelihood prohibits Buddhists from participating in any business which is trading weapons.

Of right livelihood, Here someone, abandoning the destruction of life, abstaining from the taking of life; with sword and weapon laid aside, conscientious, merciful, he dwells composed, (Majjhima Nikaya 41)

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Pacifism

Buddhism does not promote the taking-up of arms and retaliating; rather, it can be seen in the actions and words of the Tibetan Buddhist leader in exile, the 14th Dalai Lama, who has advocated non-violent resolutions to conflict and was awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize** in 1989. Another Buddhist monk and activist **Thich Nhat Hanh**, who has campaigned extensively for non-violence, also points out that it is not worth losing lives to save external symbols of Buddhism. He believes that Buddhism will survive within individuals and through acts of compassion.

The power of Buddhist teachings on non-violence can also be understood by looking at the Indian **Emperor Ashoka** (emperor from approximately 268 BCE). Ashoka was a brutal and sadistic ruler, but after one especially violent military campaign he became a vegetarian and changed his actions and made a dramatic change. Ashoka adopted the religion of Buddhism and condemned all violence against living beings, including war and animal sacrifice. He promoted **compassion** and tolerance towards other religions and was largely responsible for the spread of Buddhism in India.

‘A man is not a great man because he is a warrior and kills other men; but because he is a man of compassion.’ (The Dhammapada v. 270)

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