Puja (Buddhist Worship) Summary Sheet

(Pages 50-51 in the Buddhism textbook)

This summary sheet is to help you learn about Buddhist worship. According to the AQA specification you need to know the following things:

 ‘• Puja, the significance and role of puja/devotional ritual in the home and in the temple, including chanting, both as a devotional practice and as an aid to mental concentration, mantra recitation, use of malas.’

Terminology

**Bodhisattva** - an enlightened person who chooses to return from death and help others (in Mahayana Buddhism only)

**compassionate** - caring about others

**devotion** - loving dedication

**Dhamma** - the teaching of the Buddha

**mala**  - a string of counting beads used for mantras

**mantra** - sacred words repeated over and over again

**meditation** - calmly focussing the mind on one idea for a long time

**offerings**  - food, flowers, candles, etc. given as part of worship

**practice**  - mediation, worship, etc.

**puja** - worship

**ritual**  - a ceremony/worship

**the Sangha** - the community of Buddhists

**vihara (monastery)** - a place where Buddhist monks and nuns live

The importance and the role of puja

Worship is important for Buddhists because:

1. it expresses **gratitude** for the Buddha’s teachings;
2. it **deepens their understanding** of the Buddha’s teachings;
3. by concentrating on the Dhamma it helps them **live better lives**, e.g. becoming more compassionate;
4. it helps them to achieve **enlightenment**.

This may be done at **home** or in a **place of worship** like a vihara or a temple. This means that it is an ordinary **part of daily life**.

What happens in puja?

Worship can be made up of the following things:

1. **meditation**;[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. **making offerings**;[[2]](#footnote-2)
3. **chanting** the scriptures;
4. reciting **mantras**;
5. **bowing**.

Chanting

In ancient times when information was not available on computers or smart phones, monks used to **memorise the scriptures by chanting** them. That way monks could **carry holy books** around in their **memory**. In puja today Buddhists still chant from sacred writings, e.g.:

* the Three Refuges (the Buddha, the Dhamma & the Sangha);
* the Five Precepts;
* the Bodhisattva vows.

**Chanting is important** because:

1. it shows **devotion** to the Buddha;
2. it is an **aid to mental concentration**, helping worshippers to think about the Buddha’s teaching.

Mantras

**Mantras** are **sacred words** that are **repeated over** and over again in worship. This may be done hundreds of times. They count how many times with a **mala** which is a string of 108 prayer beads.

The **purpose** of mantras is to **call on the spiritual qualities** of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva.

**An example** of a mantra is *om mani padme hum* chanted in Mahayana Buddhism to call on the presence of one particular figure associated with compassion. Worshippers believe this will help them to become more compassionate.

Possible exam questions:

1. Explain two ways in which Buddhists worship. (4 marks)
2. Explain two differences in worship between different Buddhist traditions. (4 marks)
3. Explain two ways in which Buddhist worship demonstrates what is valuable in Buddhism. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
4. Explain two ways that Buddhists can perform puja in the home. Refer to Buddhist teaching in your answer. (5 marks) **From the textbook.**
5. ‘Not everything that happens in puja is truly worship.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
6. ‘Chanting in worship is meaningless.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
1. For more on this, see the meditation summary sheet. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Offerings are mentioned in detail in the places of worship summary sheet. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)