

2

Practices

2.1

Places of worship

Buddhists can practise at home or in a communal space such as a temple. Pages 50–51 explore how Buddhists express devotion; here we will take a look at the different places and types of buildings that are used by Buddhists to practise their faith.

■ Temples

A **temple** is often at the heart of a Buddhist community. Buddhist temples can be found in many different shapes and sizes. Some consist of just one building, while the larger ones consist of a number of different buildings grouped together on one site.

Depending on its size and function, a Buddhist temple (or temple complex) may include the following:

- a main hall or building, where Buddhists practise together; this will contain a statue of the Buddha (Mahayana temples may also include statues of various Bodhisattvas)
- a meditation hall or building, which is a quiet space where Buddhists can meditate; in Tibetan Buddhism this is known as a **gompa**
- a study hall or building, for meetings and lectures
- a shrine or number of shrines dedicated to the Buddha (or, in Mahayana temples, to a Bodhisattva)
- a pagoda or **stupa**, which is a tiered tower or mound-like structure that is sometimes used to contain holy relics (items associated with the Buddha that are considered to be holy).

Pagodas and stupas are generally designed to symbolise the five Buddhist elements of earth, water, fire, air and wisdom. The base of the building symbolises the earth, then the building extends upwards with different segments stacked on top of each other to represent the other elements. These reach upwards to a point or spire that symbolises wisdom.

Temples are important centres of religious life where Buddhists can study, meditate and practise together. Buddhists may listen to talks given by members of the monastic community, and lay people may take offerings, including food, to support them.

■ Shrines

A Buddhist **shrine** is an area where the focus is a statue of the Buddha (a **Buddha rupa**), usually sitting cross-legged

Objective

- Understand what temples, shrines and monasteries are used for in Buddhism.

Key terms

- **temple**: a place where Buddhists come together to practise
- **gompa**: a hall or building where Tibetan Buddhists meditate
- **stupa**: a small building in a monastery that sometimes contains holy relics
- **shrine**: an area with a statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, which provides Buddhists with a focal point for meditation and devotion
- **Buddha rupa**: a statue of the Buddha, often sitting cross-legged in a meditation pose
- **monastery (vihara)**: a place where Buddhist monks and nuns live



▲ Many temples are beautiful, peaceful places that are designed to support reflection and meditation

in a meditation pose. (In Mahayana Buddhism, there are also shrines where the focus is a statue of a Bodhisattva rather than the Buddha). Shrines can be found in a temple or in a home; they provide a focal point for Buddhists to meditate or practise.

Buddhists will also make offerings at a shrine, as a way of paying respect to the Buddha and expressing gratitude and thanks for his teachings. The offerings also remind Buddhists of the Buddha's teachings, because they symbolise different aspects of them. For example:

- An offering of light (such as a candle) symbolises wisdom, because the light of the candle drives away the darkness of ignorance.
- An offering of flowers (which will wilt and decay) reminds Buddhists that all things are impermanent.
- An offering of incense symbolises purity, reminding Buddhists of the importance of practising pure thoughts, speech and conduct.



▲ Buddhists make offerings at a shrine to express thanks to the Buddha, and to remind them of his teachings

“ The time and effort required to keep the shrine clean and replenished with flowers and other offerings is considered a skilful activity to focus one's mind in the spiritual practices. ”

Lama Choedak Rinpoche (Tibetan Buddhist monk)

■ Monasteries

A **monastery (vihara)** is a building (or group of buildings) where a community of Buddhist monks or nuns live. These are Buddhists who have chosen to dedicate their lives full time to their spiritual practice; they spend their days studying, practising



▲ The Taktsang Palphug Monastery in Bhutan sits on the side of a cliff and is one of the least accessible Buddhist monasteries in the world

and meditating on the Buddha's teachings. Buddhist monks and nuns generally live a simple lifestyle, but the monastery still has to provide for all of their needs because it is where they live, eat, study and sleep. Some Buddhist monasteries are like small villages in themselves, while the smaller ones consist of one building only.

A stupa is a particularly important part of a monastery. When the Buddha died, his body was cremated and parts of his ashes are said to have been sent to different places. Stupas were then built to hold his ashes. Today, a stupa is a small, dome-shaped building that usually contains holy relics, such as the remains of monks and nuns or items associated with important Buddhists.

Activities

- 1 Explain why temples are important for Buddhists.
- 2 Explain the purposes of a Buddhist shrine.
- 3 Imagine that you have been asked to create a leaflet to attract people to go to a Buddhist temple that has just been built in your community. Design a leaflet that provides information about the types of activities that take place in a Buddhist temple, and explains why Buddhists might want to visit this one.

★ Study tip

Many Buddhists may feel a personal relationship with the Buddha. They may bow to a figure of the Buddha and make offerings to him in gratitude for his example and his teachings. However, it is important to remember that he is not a god. No Buddhist would ever claim that he had created them or the Earth.

Summary

You should now be able to describe the main features of a Buddhist temple, shrine or monastery. You should also understand why these places are important to Buddhists.

2.2

How Buddhists worship

■ The purpose of worship

Worship (**puja**) allows Buddhists to express their gratitude and respect for the Buddha and his teachings. It gives them an opportunity to acknowledge how important the Buddha is in their lives. It also allows them to focus on their faith (their confidence in the path the Buddha taught), and to deepen their understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

Through performing puja and reciting verses of scripture, Buddhists acknowledge the Buddha's qualities and their commitment to following his example. They remind themselves of his teachings on the nature of existence and the way of life, leading to the wisdom and compassion of enlightenment. Through dwelling on these teachings, they may absorb them more deeply and find their lives changing for the better, as they become wiser and more compassionate towards themselves and others.

■ How Buddhists worship

Puja may include rituals and ceremonies carried out in groups, or private worship in the home. It often involves the following activities: meditation, making offerings, **chanting**, reciting **mantras**, and bowing.

Chanting

In the early days of Buddhism, before the invention of typewriters or computers, the only way to share Buddhist texts and teachings was to memorise them and pass them on orally. Monks would chant the texts in order to learn and remember them. Today, Buddhists still chant from sacred texts: written records of what the Buddha taught. Examples might include chanting the three refuges, the five moral precepts, or the Bodhisattva vows.

Chanting is a devotional practice: it may increase a Buddhist's receptivity towards the Buddha and his teachings. It can also be used to help calm and concentrate the mind.

Mantra recitation

A mantra is a sequence of sacred syllables that is usually chanted over and over, sometimes spoken, or experienced silently in the mind. Some Buddhists believe that mantras have transformative powers. They can be used in meditation to focus the mind.

Objective

- Understand how and why Buddhists worship.

Key terms

- **puja**: an act of worship
- **chanting**: in Buddhism, reciting from the Buddhist scriptures
- **mantra**: a short sequence of sacred syllables
- **mala**: prayer beads that are used to count the number of recitations in a mantra

Links

For more on Buddhist offerings, see page 49.



▲ Buddhists making water offerings at a temple in Myanmar

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Mantras often call on the spiritual qualities of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. The most common mantra, used by Tibetan Buddhists, is *om mani padme hum*. This represents the sound of compassion, and is associated with the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara. By chanting this mantra, Buddhists may hope to invoke the presence of Avalokiteshvara. They may feel that the mantra helps them to become more receptive to compassion, helping them to better express this quality in their lives.

Buddhists may recite a mantra hundreds or even thousands of times, often using a **mala** (a string of prayer beads) in order to count the number of recitations. A mala usually has 108 beads.



▲ Buddhists practising puja at a temple in New York, USA

Research activity

Find videos online of Buddhists performing puja in different traditions. (Search for 'Buddhist worship' or 'Buddhist puja' and 'Tibet' or 'Thailand', for example.) Write down some of the similarities and differences that you notice between how puja is carried out in the different videos.

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner whether the Buddhist practices described here are best described as 'worship' or something else.

Activities

- 1 Why do Buddhists recite the mantra 'om mani padme hum'?
- 2 Below are some of the main elements involved in Buddhist worship. Match up the correct elements with the correct definitions:

Offerings	Reciting a passage from a Buddhist text
Mala	A spiritual practice of reflecting deeply on the Buddha's teachings and the nature of reality
Bowing	Repeating 'om mani padme hum' over and over again
Chanting	A chain of beads used to count recitations
Sacred text	Bending the body three times in front of a shrine, to recall the three refuges
Reciting mantras	A text containing the Buddha's teachings
Meditation	Flowers and incense on a shrine

Summary

You should now understand the significance of worship for Buddhists. You should also be able to explain some of the ways that Buddhists carry out worship.

Links

Read more about meditation on pages 52–57.

★ Study tip

'Worship' (worth-ship) means to acknowledge what is truly valuable. Buddhist worship is not the worship of a creator God, but an acknowledgement of what is most valuable to a Buddhist.

2.3 Meditation

We have seen that Buddhist worship includes a variety of practices such as chanting, making offerings, and reading from scriptures. Another important practice in most Buddhist traditions is **meditation**. This is a spiritual exercise that calms the mind and body, and leads to the development of insight into the nature of existence.

■ The practice of meditation

Before they begin meditating, Buddhists might recite verses praising the three refuges: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. For Theravada Buddhists it is then customary to recite the five moral precepts (these are discussed on pages 70–71). Meditating itself usually involves the practice of mindfulness of the body and breath. The meditator settles their attention on these physical sensations, developing calm and stability. Whenever they notice their mind has wandered, they simply return to their physical experience.

“ you should so train yourself that with respect to the seen there will be merely the seen, that with respect to the heard there will be merely the heard, that with respect to the sensed there will be merely the sensed, that with respect to the cognised there will be merely the cognised. ”

The Buddha in the *Udana*, p. 8

There are many different forms of meditation. Theravada Buddhists often use samatha meditation to develop calm and positive emotion, and vipassana meditation to develop understanding and wisdom. Buddhists may focus on a variety of different objects, processes, character traits



▲ Students meditating at a Buddhist monastery in Myanmar

Objective

- Gain an overview of the Buddhist practice of meditation.

Key term

- **meditation:** a practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings to penetrate their true meaning

Links

You can learn more about samatha meditation on pages 54–55, and vipassana meditation on pages 56–57.

Extension activity



Some Buddhists believe that developing states of bliss (jhanas) is important in meditation. Research this online and write a brief summary about what the jhanas are.



▲ Buddhists meditating at a retreat centre in the UK

or emotions when they meditate, from a candle flame to the process of breathing to the quality of compassion.

In Tibetan Buddhism, students in the monastic community are sometimes given part of the Buddhist scriptures to learn by heart. They then go through two main stages of meditation: the analytical stage where they have to think carefully about the details of the teaching given in the text, followed by a more concentrated stage where they aim to fully understand the teaching.

Another common type of meditation in Buddhism is loving-kindness meditation, where the aim is to develop a sense of compassion towards oneself and others, and to let go of ill will and resentment. This helps to create a sense of calmness and positivity.

■ The purpose of meditation

Broadly speaking, meditation has two aims. The first is to develop a still, calm and focused mind. The second is to develop greater awareness and understanding of the Buddha's teachings in order to gain a deeper insight into the nature of reality. This deeper insight naturally brings about deeper compassion and less suffering, and leads eventually to enlightenment.

Although Buddhism does not include belief in a creator God, some forms of Mahayana Buddhist meditation involve visualising, and sometimes even praying to, the Buddha or other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Activities

- 1 Explain why you think meditation is so important to Buddhists.
- 2 Describe the similarities and differences between prayer and meditation.
- 3 Find out about the Buddhist centre or vihara closest to your home or school. How does it help people to meditate? What else does it teach, and why?

“ Even the gods envy those awakened and mindful ones who are intent on meditation, wise, delighting in the peace of the absence of desire. ”

The Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verse 181

Discussion activity

Why do you think some schools and businesses offer meditation for their students and workers? Do you think this is a good thing to do? Discuss your thoughts with a partner.

Research activity

Divide a sheet of A3 paper into four quarters. At the top of each quarter add the following headings: 'Aims and purposes of meditation', 'Techniques and methods of meditation', 'Types of meditation' and 'Objects or things used to help meditation'. Do some research online or in a library to help you to start completing the chart. Continue to fill it in as you read pages 54–57.

★ Study tip

Try to understand why meditation is important for Buddhists; learn the 'aims and purposes of meditation' from your Research activity list.

Summary

You should now be able to discuss some of the different types of meditation, and understand the purpose of meditation.

2.4 Samatha meditation

What is samatha meditation?

Samatha meditation is an important meditation practice in Buddhism, and one of the two main types of meditation used in Theravada Buddhism. Samatha means 'calming'. Calming meditation can lead to a more tranquil, settled, restful mind, enabling deeper concentration. There are a number of different ways to do samatha meditation, but many Buddhists focus on the technique called **mindfulness of breathing**.

Mindfulness of breathing

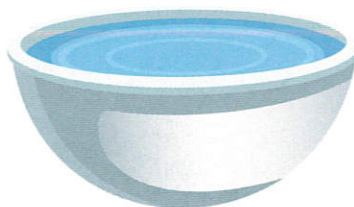
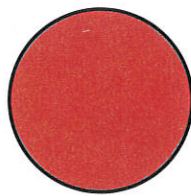
Breathing is something most people do without paying any attention to it, but the idea in samatha meditation is to become more 'mindful', or aware, of your breathing. This means paying attention to the sensation of breathing, and all the tiny movements it brings about in your body: feeling your chest expand and contract, the air flowing in and out of your nose, feeling how your shoulders rise and fall, and so on.

Normally a person's attention is divided between many things at the same time, and when they meditate they may naturally find their mind wandering. When this happens they simply and gently return their attention to their breathing.

“ Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again. ”

Thich Nhat Hanh (Vietnamese Buddhist monk)

Breathing is a popular focus of samatha meditation, but other objects may also be used, including kasinas. The Buddha mentioned ten kasinas: earth, water, fire, wind, blue, yellow, red, white, space and consciousness. For example, if a Buddhist wanted to meditate using



▲ Different types of kasinas that could be used in samatha meditation

Objective

- Understand the technique and purpose of samatha meditation.

Key terms

- **samatha meditation**: 'calming meditation'; a type of meditation that involves calming the mind and developing deeper concentration
- **mindfulness of breathing**: a meditation practice focusing on the experience of breathing

Research activities

- 1 Research some of the main postures used in samatha meditation. What do they have in common? State why you think it is important to have the right posture when you start to meditate.
- 2 The image on page 55 is a famous Tibetan painting that shows the process of samatha meditation. Research this painting online and write down some of the ways that it represents samatha meditation.

Discussion activity

It has been said that to engage in samatha meditation, your mind has to be as alert as it would be if you were in a life-or-death swordfight. Discuss with a partner what you think this means.

'water' as a kasina, then they might focus on a bowl of water in front of them; if they wanted to use 'red' as a kasina then they might focus on a red circle. As with breathing, the object simply gives the person something to rest their attention on.

■ The purpose of samatha meditation

Learning to focus gently on one object helps to develop a calm and concentrated mind. This is a preparation for developing wisdom and understanding of the nature of reality. For this reason, samatha meditation is often seen as a preparation for vipassana meditation, which is discussed on the next page.

Buddhists emphasise that distraction is a normal aspect of meditation, and that it is important not to become discouraged or self-critical. There is no question of failure – simply the need to keep practising.

“ You must show energy. The Tathagatas [Buddhas] are [only] teachers. Those who have entered [on the path], meditative, will be released from Mara's fetter. ”

The Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verse 276



▲ This Tibetan painting shows the different stages of samatha meditation; a monk chases and finally gains control of an elephant, which represents the mind

Activities

- 1 Describe how a Buddhist could use mindfulness of breathing to practise samatha meditation.
- 2 The Tibetan monk Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche once said, 'Do not encumber your mind with useless thoughts. What good does it do to brood on the past or anticipate the future? Remain in the simplicity of the present moment.' Explain what you think Dilgo meant by these words. Are they good advice for someone trying to practise samatha meditation?
- 3 What is the main purpose of samatha meditation?

Summary

You should now be able to understand how Buddhists practise samatha meditation, and why it is important to them.

★ Study tip

Mindfulness meditation is becoming common in British schools, prisons, hospitals and other places, as a method of dealing with conditions such as stress, depression and anxiety. While many Buddhists are happy about this, they often point out that the Buddha taught that wisdom comes from a way of life that involves ethics as well as meditation.

2.5

Vipassana meditation

■ What is vipassana meditation?

Vipassana meditation is often called ‘insight meditation’, and it is the second main type of meditation practised in Theravada Buddhism. The idea of this type of meditation is to try to penetrate and gain insight into the true nature of reality – to see things as they really are. It may consist of reflecting on the three marks of existence: that all experience is characterised by impermanence, that nothing has an independent, unchanging identity, and that attachment leads to suffering.

The main difference between samatha and vipassana meditation is not in the techniques or methods used, but in the objects being studied. Like samatha meditation, vipassana also uses the technique of mindfulness: concentrating and focusing on specific objects, in a calm and detached manner, without letting the mind get distracted by other things. The difference is in what the meditator focuses on.

In samatha meditation, the meditator focuses on one neutral, simple object or process, such as a blue triangle, a candle flame, or the process of breathing. In vipassana meditation, everything can be explored objectively, including things that are more personal to the meditator. For example, they might reflect on the body and how people can become attached to their bodies. They might meditate on the more unattractive aspects of the body to help develop a detachment from their body. While meditating, they might feel an emotion such as nervousness or annoyance. Then they might try to consider this emotion with mindful kindness. They might hear a sound such as the rain falling outside, and concentrate solely on that sound.

In samatha meditation, the aim is to focus solely on one object for an extended period of time. This helps to develop powers of concentration. In vipassana meditation, the meditator might switch their attention between lots of different things one after the other. The aim is to give their full attention to whatever they are thinking about at any one particular time, to consider it mindfully, and to try to understand its true nature.

Vipassana meditation helps Buddhists to understand how all things are characterised by the three marks of existence, and to develop greater wisdom and awareness about the world. This makes

Objectives

- Understand the purpose and technique of vipassana meditation.
- Understand the practice of zazen meditation.

Key terms

- **vipassana meditation:** ‘insight meditation’; a type of meditation that involves developing understanding of the nature of reality
- **zazen meditation:** a type of meditation in Zen Buddhism that requires awareness of the present moment

Links

Read about the three marks of existence on pages 20–25.



▲ Buddhists practising walking meditation

meditation an essential part of the Eightfold Path, with the goal of developing complete understanding and achieving enlightenment.

Zazen

Zazen is a Japanese word, literally meaning 'seated meditation'. It is a form of meditation practised in Zen Buddhism, which originated in Japan.

Zazen is intended to lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of existence. Though the method varies across the traditions within Zen Buddhism, it generally begins with sitting, relaxing and a period of mindfulness of breathing (see page 54). The meditator then simply sits with awareness of the present moment. Thoughts and experiences come and go, and the meditator returns again and again to the present moment.

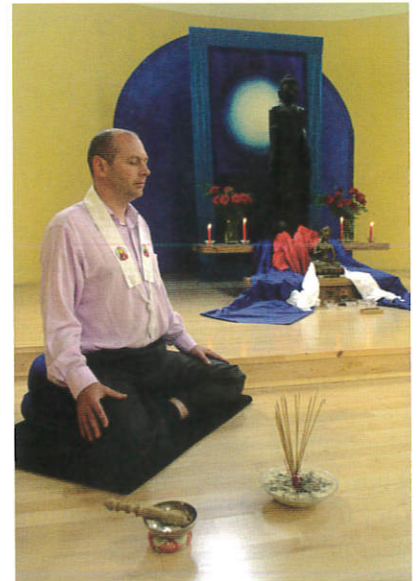
How to practise walking meditation

Often Buddhists sit to meditate, but it is also possible to meditate while walking. Henepola Gunaratana, a Theravada Buddhist monk, explains one way to practise meditation while walking:

'The physical directions are simple. Select an unobstructed area and start at one end. Stand for a minute in an attentive position. Your arms can be held in any way that is comfortable – in front, behind your back, or at your sides. Then while breathing in, lift the heel of one foot. While breathing out, rest that foot on its toes. Again while breathing in, lift that foot, carry it forward and while breathing out, bring the foot down and touch the floor. Repeat this for the other foot. Walk very slowly to the opposite end, stand for one minute, then turn around very slowly, and stand there for another minute before you walk back. Then repeat the process. Keep your head up and your neck relaxed. Keep your eyes open to maintain balance, but don't look at anything in particular. Walk naturally. Maintain the slowest pace that is comfortable, and pay no attention to your surroundings. Watch out for tensions building up in the body, and release them as soon as you spot them. Don't make any particular attempt to be graceful. This is not an athletic exercise or a dance; it is an exercise in awareness. Your objective is to attain total alertness, heightened sensitivity and a full, unblocked experience of the motion of walking. Put all of your attention on the sensations coming from the feet and legs. Try to register as much information as possible about each foot as it moves. Dive into the pure sensation of walking, and notice every subtle nuance of the movement. Feel each individual muscle as it moves. Experience every tiny change in tactile sensation as the feet press against the floor and then lift again.'

Activities

- 1 Give two differences between samatha and vipassana meditation.
- 2 Why is vipassana meditation important to Buddhists?



▲ A Buddhist meditating at the Sheffield Buddhist Centre in the UK

Extension activity



Using the information given on these pages, and any extra research you might wish to do online, create a beginner's guide to Buddhist meditation. Include a series of basic steps that a person could follow to start meditating.

★ Study tip

Meditation is often mistakenly described as emptying the mind. It would be more helpful to see it as a method of calming, settling and focusing the mind.

Summary

You should now be able to describe how Buddhists practise vipassana meditation, and understand what they hope to achieve through vipassana meditation.

2.6

The visualisation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

■ What is visualisation?

Various Buddhist traditions will use **visualisation** as a part of meditation; it is particularly common in Tibetan Buddhism, but is also practised in other Mahayana traditions. It requires the meditator to visualise (imagine) an object in their mind.

Visualisation is a bit different to using a kasina in samatha meditation (see pages 54–55). When Buddhists meditate with a kasina, the kasina is physically present in front of them (for example, a Buddhist might place a bowl of water on the floor in front of them, to look at and focus on as they meditate). In contrast, visualising involves imagining the object in your mind.

The meditator might first look at an image of an object to gain inspiration. They will then get rid of the image and simply imagine or visualise that object in their mind. They will try to imagine the object with as much detail as possible, and examine in their mind all the tiny intricacies of the object. They will try to perceive the object as fully as they can, imagining and examining all the qualities and characteristics of that object. They will try to hold a detailed picture of the object in their mind for as long as possible.

■ Deity visualisation

Tibetan Buddhists will often visualise a 'deity' when they meditate. For Buddhists, a 'deity' is not a god but a being who has become fully enlightened, such as a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. The meditator will focus not just on what the deity looks like, but also on its qualities and characteristics. They might even imagine themselves as that deity, with its particular qualities, in order to gain those qualities and become more like that deity themselves. The idea here is that you imagine what you want to be, in order to understand it better and therefore become more like it.

Some Mahayana Buddhists also believe that visualising themselves as a Buddha helps them to stimulate and awaken their Buddha-nature.

Some of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas that a Buddhist might focus on include:

- The 'Medicine Buddha': this Buddha is related to healing. Buddhists believe that visualising the Medicine Buddha will heal them and reduce their suffering, and may even increase their own healing powers.
- Avalokiteshvara: one of the most popular Bodhisattvas, who is related to compassion. Visualising

Objectives

- Understand the practice of visualisation.
- Understand why some Buddhists visualise Buddhas and Bodhisattvas when they meditate.

Key terms

- **visualisation:** imagining or 'seeing' an object in one's mind
- **thangka:** a detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva
- **mandala:** an intricate, circle-shaped pattern that is used for meditation



▲ A thangka of the Medicine Buddha

this Bodhisattva helps Buddhists to develop their own sense of compassion, which is considered to be an important quality to cultivate in order to achieve enlightenment.

- **Buddha Amitabha:** we saw on pages 42–43 that Pure Land Buddhists worship Buddha Amitabha in the hope that he will help them to be reborn in the pure land and achieve enlightenment quicker. Pure Land Buddhists might visualise Buddha Amitabha while meditating.

■ Using thangkas or mandalas

Sometimes Buddhists use paintings or patterns to help them visualise a deity. They might use a **thangka**: a detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Or they might use instead a **mandala**: an intricate, colourful, circle-shaped pattern. These patterns can symbolise different things; some symbolise the universe, others the Buddha, and others still a paradise or pure land. They are sacred diagrams that represent Buddhist principles or teachings. Buddhists who are highly skilled in visualisation can study a thangka or mandala and then imagine it in their mind, visualising all the tiny details and intricacies of the painting or pattern.



▲ A monk creating a mandala at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in India

In Tibetan monasteries, monks often make mandalas out of brightly-coloured sand. It can take weeks to make a sand mandala, because many different colours of sand have to be delicately placed next to each other to form a complex, intricate pattern. Even though they may take a long time to complete, mandalas are always brushed away once they are finished, to try to encourage the monks to focus on the impermanence in life. They are never kept as a piece of art, as the attachment which that might lead to goes against the Buddha's teachings and one of the main aims of meditation, which is to see how everything is impermanent.

Links

For more on Buddha-nature, look back to page 39.

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner why you think some Buddhists find it helpful to visualise certain Buddhas or Bodhisattvas as part of their meditation.

Extension activity

Research other Buddhas or Bodhisattvas that are often used by Buddhists for visualisation. (Examples could include Manjushri, Maitreya and Vajrapani.) Make some notes on each of their particular characteristics, and why Buddhists meditate on them.

Activities

- 1 Explain how using a kasina in samatha meditation is different to the practice of visualisation.
- 2 Why do Tibetan monks brush away their sand mandalas once they are finished?

★ Study tip

Learn the definition of the key term 'visualisation'.

Summary

You should now be able to explain the practice of visualisation, and understand why some Buddhists visualise Buddhas or Bodhisattvas when they meditate.

2.7

Ceremonies and rituals associated with death and mourning

■ Buddhist beliefs about death

Buddhist tradition teaches that when a Buddhist dies, their kammic energy leaves their body and is reborn in a new one. Death therefore is not seen as an end, only a transition from one form to another. While Buddhists will naturally grieve the loss of people they loved, they also bear in mind what the Buddha taught about impermanence being a natural part of life. Funerals are a valuable reminder of this teaching of impermanence. Nothing lasts, and people suffer less if they are able to accept this fact.

Funeral customs differ between the various Buddhist traditions and from one country to the next. Some funerals can be very elaborate and even noisy rituals, while others are simple, reflective and calm.

■ Theravada funerals

In Theravada communities, very little money is usually spent on a funeral. Instead the family and friends may donate to a worthy cause and transfer the merit to the deceased. (We saw on page 36 how some Theravada Buddhists believe it is possible to transfer the kamma created by your own good actions and deeds to someone else. In this case, the good kamma that is created by donating to a worthy cause is transferred to the dead person, to help them have a more favourable rebirth.)

Rituals that transfer merit to the deceased may also be performed by family members or other mourners. For example, they might offer cloth to make new robes to a senior monk of a nearby monastery on behalf of the deceased person.

“ At the hour of death, the king and the beggar are exactly equal in that no amount of relatives or possessions can affect or prevent death. But who is the richer at the time of death? If the beggar has created more merits, then although he looks materially poor he is really the rich man. ”

Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (Nepalese Buddhist monk)

A shrine may be set up to display the deceased's portrait, along with offerings to the Buddha of candles, incense and flowers. An image of the Buddha is usually placed beside or in front of the shrine. Monks will often attend a funeral of a lay person. They may give a sermon and perform Buddhist rites.

The deceased may be cremated or buried, although cremation is traditional and more common. Monks will perform the last rites before the casket containing the dead person is sealed. Family members may assist in lifting the casket as a final act of service, while others present observe a moment of respectful silence. During the funeral procession,

Objectives

- Understand Buddhist teachings about death.
- Know about different Buddhist ceremonies and rituals associated with death and mourning.



▲ A Buddhist funeral in Thailand with a shrine to the deceased person

family members may walk behind the hearse. All mourners should be sending good thoughts to the family and contemplating the impermanence of life.

■ Ceremonies and rituals in Tibet and Japan

Ceremonies and rituals associated with death differ greatly between the various Tibetan and Japanese traditions, and between geographical areas. One of the best-known Tibetan traditions is that of 'sky burial', in which the body is left in a high place as a gift to the vultures. In a mountainous country short of firewood and often too frozen for grave-digging, giving away one's body was seen as both a practical and generous act. However, it is increasingly customary to burn the body instead. Revered teachers have always been cremated, and the remains placed in a chorten (a memorial structure also known as a stupa) to become a site of worship. In all cases, ceremonies involving prayers and offerings of yak-butter lamps may be made every seven days for 49 days after the death.

In Japanese Pure Land traditions, the coffin may be placed with the head pointing west, while those assembled chant 'Namo Amida Bu' as they process around it. Nichiren Buddhist funerals include readings from the *Lotus Sutra*. It is common across all Japanese traditions for relations to gather after the cremation and pick out the bones from the ashes, using chopsticks. As in Tibet, these remains may be kept for 49 days and prayers offered every seventh day.



▲ Tibetan monks at a funeral

Discussion activity

Do you think that Buddhist teachings about the naturalness of impermanence could make it easier to accept the fact that someone you love has died?

Extension activity

Research what Buddhists believe happened to the Buddha when he died. How did he die, and what was his view of an afterlife?

★ Study tip

Buddhism is enormously diverse across and within traditions and countries. One can never say that all Buddhists believe or do exactly the same thing.

Summary

You should now have some understanding of Buddhist teachings about death and impermanence. You should also have some idea of the variety of rituals and ceremonies associated with death and mourning in Tibet, Japan, and Theravada communities.

Activities

- 1 Read the following statements. Which do you think Buddhists would agree with and which do you think Buddhists would disagree with? Give reasons for your answers.
 - a 'There is no life but this one. When you die, that's it. What is important is making the most of this life because it's all you've got.'
 - b 'I believe life is the same as all energy; it never ends but rather passes from one living thing to another.'
 - c 'My Nan died five years ago but somehow I feel that she is still with me at times. Your spirit has to live on after death.'
 - d 'I know that I believe in a heaven. I want to go there when I die. I can pray to God and he will take me there at my death.'
- 2 Some Theravada Buddhists believe they can transfer merit to another person. Explain what this means, and how this belief can be seen in a Theravada funeral.
- 3 Write out a script for a radio interview with a Buddhist monk. What questions about death and mourning would you like to put to this monk, and what answers do you think he would give?

2.8

Wesak and Parinirvana Day

■ Buddhist festivals and retreats

Buddhist **festivals** are usually a time for joy and celebration, although some festivals (such as Parinirvana Day) are more solemn occasions. They give Buddhists an opportunity to remember and celebrate the Buddha's life and his teachings, and an opportunity to meet and practise together.



▲ Monks lighting candles at a temple in Thailand for Wesak

Some festivals are specific to a certain tradition or country. For example, Mahayana Buddhists might celebrate the birthdays of certain Bodhisattvas. Most of the major festivals celebrate significant events in the Buddha's life, such as his first sermon after his enlightenment (celebrated by Theravada Buddhists as Asalha Puja Day).

Retreats are popular in the West. There are many places in the UK, for example, that offer Buddhist retreats. Many of them give an opportunity to spend a weekend or week away from everyday life, with a group of people who are similarly interested in the religion. They might be held in a monastery or Buddhist centre. Retreats vary in structure and focus on different aspects, but they generally give people an opportunity to deepen their understanding of Buddhist practice. They might involve meditation, talks and study groups, workshops, and taking part in rituals.

In Theravada communities, monks observe Vassa, an annual retreat that lasts for three months during the rainy season. During these three months, monks only leave their temples when necessary, and dedicate more time to meditation and study.

■ Wesak

Wesak (also known as Vesak or Buddha day) is probably the best known and most important of all the Buddhist festivals. It is celebrated on the full moon during the month of Vesak (which usually falls in May). The festival commemorates three major events in the Buddha's life: his birth, his enlightenment and his passing into parinirvana (the final state of nibbana). All three of these events are said to have happened on a full moon. Wesak is a festival to honour and remember the Buddha and his teachings. It has been celebrated since at least the early twentieth century, although only became a public holiday in the 1950s.



▲ Thousands of lanterns are lit at the Maha Vihara temple in Malaysia for Wesak

Objectives

- Understand what festivals and retreats mean to Buddhists.
- Understand the origins, celebrations and importance of Wesak and Parinirvana Day.

Key terms

- **festival:** a day or period of celebration for religious reasons
- **retreat:** a period of time spent away from everyday life in order to focus on meditation practice
- **Wesak:** a Theravada festival that celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away
- **Parinirvana Day:** a Mahayana festival that commemorates the Buddha's passing away

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To celebrate Wesak, Buddhists may light up their homes with candles, lamps or paper lanterns, and put up decorations. They will make offerings to the Buddha, and may give gifts such as food, candles and flowers to the monks in the local monastery. In return, the monks may lead some meditation, chant from the Buddhist scriptures, or give sermons about the Buddha's teachings. These will focus on the Buddha's life, in particular his enlightenment.

Wesak celebrations vary from country to country. In some places, such as Singapore, there are ceremonies where caged birds and animals are released as a symbol of liberation, and to signify the release from past troubles and wrong-doings. In countries such as Indonesia, giant paper lanterns are lit to float up into the night sky. Light is an important symbol during this festival, and is associated with a number of different meanings: the idea that light can be used to overcome darkness or ignorance, the fact that the Buddha showed people how to become enlightened, and as a symbol of hope.

■ Parinirvana Day

Parinirvana Day is a Mahayana festival that is celebrated during February to remember the Buddha's passing into parinirvana. As might be expected, the festival is a more solemn occasion than Wesak. For Buddhists, it is a chance to reflect on the fact of their own future death, and to remember friends or relatives who have recently passed away. The idea that all things are impermanent, which is central to Buddhist teaching, has a real focus for the day.

The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* is an important Buddhist scripture that describes the Buddha's last days, and passages from it are often read on Parinirvana Day. Buddhists might spend the day reading this text and meditating at home, or joining others in temples and monasteries for puja and meditation.

Some places will organise retreats, because the day is seen as a suitable occasion for quiet reflection and meditation.

Parinirvana Day is also a traditional day for pilgrimage, and many Buddhists will visit the city of Kushinagar in India, which is where the Buddha is believed to have died.

Activities

- 1 Explain the difference between a festival and a retreat.
- 2 Light is an important symbol in Wesak celebrations. Think about the properties of light and explain why light is used as a symbol during this festival.
- 3 Do you feel it might be helpful to spend a day focusing on the topic of death and impermanence? Give reasons for your answer.
- 4 'Religious festivals are just an excuse for people to have a good time and nothing more.' Evaluate this statement. Remember to include more than one point of view, and refer to Buddhist teachings in your answer.

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner why you think festivals might be important to many Buddhists.

Extension activity

Research the history behind Wesak Day and Parinirvana Day, and make your own notes on how the festivals started and then developed.



▲ 'The reclining Buddha' is a type of statue that shows the Buddha lying down during his final illness, about to enter parinirvana

★ Study tip

There is not a single festival that is common to all Buddhist traditions worldwide. The festivals described here are just some examples.

Summary

You should now be able to explain why festivals and retreats are important to Buddhists. You should also be able to describe what happens during Wesak and Parinirvana Day, and explain the significance of these festivals.

2.9

Kamma (karma) and rebirth

■ The concept of kamma in Buddhism

It is sometimes said that **kamma (karma)** means ‘actions have consequences’, but its meaning is more precise than that. It is a principle that explains how the ethical impulses behind a person’s actions lead in the direction of either suffering or happiness. Buddhism speaks of ‘**skilful**’ actions, which are rooted in generosity, compassion and understanding, and ‘**unskilful**’ actions, which are rooted in their opposites: craving, hatred, and ignorance. Put basically, skilful actions lead to happiness and unskilful actions lead to suffering.

The consequences of a person’s actions can be understood in different ways. First, through repeated actions people develop habits. For example, if someone regularly acts with anger, they become an angry person. Anger is not a pleasant state and so this leads to suffering. In addition, a state of mind leads to action: angry people shout, break things, beep their horn when driving and create a situation where no one wants to be around them. This is kamma. Kamma shows not that people are punished or rewarded *for* their actions, but rather *by* them.

According to Buddhist tradition, a person’s actions in this life will not only impact on their happiness and suffering right now, but will also sow the seeds for a future rebirth. Depending on a person’s kamma, they may be reborn in one of six realms: the realm of the gods, the realm of the angry gods, the realm of the animals, the realm of the tormented beings, the realm of the hungry ghosts, or the human realm. The human realm is said to be the best realm within which to reach enlightenment.

For Buddhists the idea of kamma is empowering, because it means they can



▲ Buddhism teaches that the human realm is the best realm in which to achieve enlightenment

Objectives

- Understand the concept of kamma.
- Understand how the concept of kamma forms the basis of Buddhist ethics.

Key terms

- **kamma (karma):** a person’s actions; the idea that skilful actions result in happiness and unskilful ones in suffering
- **skilful:** good, ethical actions or behaviour
- **unskilful:** bad, unethical actions or behaviour

Activity

Imagine you are trying to teach a young child about the concept of kamma.

Write a short story that illustrates how a Buddhist’s actions cause either suffering or happiness, and how this affects their rebirth.



▲ Helping those in the local community is one way that Buddhist monks can act ethically

change the future through their own actions. By cultivating skilful mental states and actions, they can not only live a happier life but can lay the ground for a favourable rebirth.

■ Buddhist ethics

We saw on page 34 that ‘right action’ is one of the eight practices in the Eightfold Path. Acting morally and ethically – choosing to do the right things – is therefore very important for Buddhists, both in order to reduce suffering in this life for themselves and others, and to eventually achieve enlightenment. A few of the many ways that they might do this is in acting compassionately towards others, not taking part in any work that harms animals, showing patience in their teachings, and helping the poor in the local community.

The concept of kamma is central to Buddhist ethics. The fact that a person’s own behaviour causes their happiness and suffering is an incentive to cultivate a more skilful way of life. This means that not only does the person benefit (because they experience greater happiness as a result of their skilful behaviour), but also that others benefit (because they will experience a person’s generous, kind and wise actions rather than their greedy, hateful and ignorant ones).

Activities

- 1 Do you think the motivation behind an action matters the most, or are the consequences of that action more important? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 Explain how believing in kamma might affect the way a Buddhist lives their life.

Extension activity



Kamma is represented in the Tibetan Wheel of Life. Research which bit of the wheel illustrates the concept of kamma, and what it teaches Buddhists.

★ Study tip

Remember that in Buddhist ethics, the motivation behind any action is very important.

Summary

You should now be able to explain what kamma means, and understand how it is an important part of Buddhist ethics.

2.10

Compassion (karuna)

■ What is karuna?

After the Buddha became enlightened, he faced the question of what to do next. Should he keep the knowledge and understanding he had discovered about enlightenment to himself? Or should he share what he had found with the rest of the world, by teaching it to others? He would have known that some people would have difficulty accepting his teachings and might even ridicule his beliefs. The Buddha was asking people to accept concepts that might be seen as difficult, such as the idea of anatta (no self or soul). However, the Buddha could see there was much hardship in the world, and he wanted to share his knowledge of how to overcome it out of compassion for everyone who was suffering.

This compassion is called **karuna** by Buddhists. Karuna refers to the compassion that Buddhists show for the sufferings of everyone in the world. For Buddhists it means feeling concern for the suffering of others, almost as if it were their own suffering. It means wanting others to be free of suffering and being moved to do whatever is possible to relieve the suffering of others. It also means recognising when you yourself are suffering and acting with compassion towards yourself. Above all, it means recognising that a person cannot be truly happy while there are others in the world who are still suffering.

■ The importance of karuna in Buddhism

Karuna is one of **the four sublime states** in Buddhism, which are: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy (being happy for others) and equanimity (maintaining stability and calm in the face of both happiness and suffering). These are four qualities that the Buddha taught were important for all Buddhists to develop. Together, they explain how Buddhists should act towards themselves and others. Compassion is an important quality for all Buddhists to develop. In Mahayana Buddhism it is a crucial quality required to become a Bodhisattva.

“ I believe that at every level of society, the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion. We all share an identical need for love and on the basis of this commonality, it is possible to feel that anybody we meet, in whatever circumstances is a brother or sister. If we are to protect this home of ours, each of us needs to experience a vivid sense of universal compassion. ”

Tenzin Gyatso (the Dalai Lama)

Objective

- Understand the concept of compassion (karuna) in Buddhism.

Key terms

- **karuna:** compassion; feeling concerned for the suffering of other people and wanting to relieve their suffering
- **the four sublime states:** the four qualities of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity which the Buddha taught that Buddhists should develop



▲ The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who represents compassion

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner how people in your school could show more compassion to each other. What sort of things could they do in an ordinary school day to help others?

Buddhists believe that wisdom and compassion should be developed together, and it is not really possible to have one without the other. To take one example, a very clever scientist might develop a new type of explosive, but without the wisdom to understand the power and potential of his invention, and without a sense of compassion for others, he might sell the formula to someone who can turn it into a deadly weapon. For Buddhists it is therefore important to develop the wisdom for how to help others, along with the compassion to want to help others.

Extension activity



Research how Brahma Sahampati convinced the Buddha to show karuna and teach others what he had discovered. Write a brief summary of your findings.

ROKPA

The Tibetan word 'rokpa' means 'help' or 'friend', and it is the name given to an international charity that was set up in 1980 based on the premise of showing compassion to others. ROKPA is involved in projects in Zimbabwe, Nepal, and Tibet. The charity helps to run schools and provide education to thousands of children each year. The aim is to help families out of poverty through better education, but also to teach children about the value of compassion. ROKPA believe that learning how to be kind and developing a desire to help others is the way to bring about real and lasting change.



▲ ROKPA helps to provide education for orphans and children whose families are too poor to pay for their schooling

Activities

- 1 Why do Buddhists believe it is important to develop wisdom *and* compassion?
- 2 Have you ever done something to help someone you didn't know? If so, why do you think you did this? Did this change the way you felt about yourself? Explain your thoughts.
- 3 Pick any two of the following topics. Imagining you are writing for a Buddhist newspaper, create a headline and write a short news story about each one, based on a compassionate response to the world:

a world poverty	d asylum seekers
b racism	e hunting foxes or deer
c homelessness	
- 4 Do you agree with what the Dalai Lama says in the quotation on page 66? Give reasons for your answer.

Summary

You should now be able to explain what karuna means and why it is important to Buddhists.

★ Study tip

Compassion in Buddhism is not just a good way to live. According to the Buddha, compassion is inseparable from wisdom. The more a person understands suffering and the nature of existence, the more compassion they will feel.

2.11

Loving-kindness (metta)

■ What is metta?

We saw on the previous page how karuna (compassion) is one of the four sublime states. These are four ideal qualities that Buddhists try to develop over their lifetimes. Another one of these states is **metta** or 'loving-kindness'. Buddhists try to develop a loving, kind, friendly attitude towards themselves and all other beings. It is a wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering, without expecting anything in return. It does not even depend on the goodness of others; metta is cultivated even towards people who act unskillfully.

Metta and karuna might seem like the same thing but they are in fact a little different. One way to think about it is that metta is a general desire to want people to be happy. It is an attitude of warmth and kindness that Buddhists try to cultivate towards all people in general. Karuna arises when metta comes into contact with a specific person who is suffering. For example, a person might wish for their friend to be happy: this is an example of metta. However, if the friend has an accident, the person's goodwill towards them transforms into compassion – the urge to alleviate their suffering.

■ The importance of developing metta

Buddhists cultivate loving-kindness towards themselves and others in order to dissolve away the tendency to act out of greed, hatred, jealousy or any other negative emotions. We saw on pages 30–31 that greed and hatred are two of the three poisons, which the Buddha taught were the main causes of suffering. Therefore, developing metta helps Buddhists to overcome suffering and to eventually achieve enlightenment.

Buddhism teaches that someone who has cultivated metta will not be so easily angered. They will be more caring, more loving, and more likely to love unconditionally (without expecting anything in return). Buddhists believe that those who cultivate metta will feel at peace because they see no need to possess any ill will or hostility towards others. Radiating metta is thought to contribute to a world of love, peace and happiness.

■ Loving-kindness meditation

Loving-kindness meditation is a common form of meditation in Buddhism. Its aim is to help the meditator develop an attitude of metta, firstly towards themselves and then towards everyone else in the

Objective

- Understand the concept of loving-kindness (metta) in Buddhism.

Key term

- **metta**: loving-kindness; showing a benevolent, kind, friendly attitude towards other people



▲ Metta means showing a kind and friendly attitude towards all people

“ Just as a mother would protect with her life her own son, her only son, so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings, and loving-kindness towards all the world. ”

The *Sutta Nipata*,
verses 149–150



▲ *Metta can be developed through loving-kindness meditation*

world. It often consists of five steps, which involve cultivating loving-kindness towards:

1. yourself
2. a good friend
3. a 'neutral' person (someone you come into contact with on a regular basis, but who does not give rise to strong positive or negative emotions)
4. a 'difficult' person (someone you dislike)
5. all four of these people, gradually followed by everyone else in the world.

The meditator might visualise or imagine one of these people looking happy. They might reflect on the positive qualities of the person and any acts of kindness they have done. They might start by saying phrases such as, 'May I be happy. May I be well. May I be safe. May I be peaceful.' Then they will apply these phrases to other people as part of their meditation.

Activities

- 1 Explain how metta is different to karuna.
- 2 'Metta is impossible to show towards everyone in the world.' Do you agree? Evaluate this statement, showing that you have thought about more than one point of view.
- 3 In loving-kindness meditation, the aim is to develop an attitude of loving-kindness first towards yourself, then a good friend, then a neutral person, then a difficult person, then everyone in the world. Why do you think this order is used?
- 4 Explain how, if you practised metta in your life, it could affect you and those around you. Give examples to help explain what you mean.

Discussion activity

Discuss how you think the Buddha showed metta after he became enlightened.

Research activity

Buddhist scriptures say that there are eleven benefits or advantages of practising metta. Find out what these eleven benefits are and make a list of them.

“ Just as compassion is the wish that all sentient beings be free of suffering, loving-kindness is the wish that all may enjoy happiness. As with compassion, when cultivating loving-kindness it is important to start by taking a specific individual as a focus of our meditation, and we then extend the scope of our concern further and further, to eventually encompass and embrace all sentient beings. ”

Tenzin Gyatso (the Dalai Lama)

★ Study tip

Cultivating metta is not just about being 'nice' and avoiding conflict or difficulty. For example, in the fourth step of loving-kindness meditation, the meditator is simply remembering that whatever the person has done, they are still a suffering human being who needs love and care, just like everyone else.

Summary

You should now be able to explain what metta means and why Buddhists think it is important to cultivate it. You should also be able to give an overview of loving-kindness meditation.

2.12

The five moral precepts

■ What are the five moral precepts?

Most religions have their own code of ethical behaviour, and Buddhism is no different. Most Buddhist traditions have a set of precepts. The most common list of precepts found across the Buddhist world is that of **the five moral precepts**: a series of five commitments that Buddhists undertake. The five precepts are:

1. to abstain from taking life
2. to abstain from taking what is not freely given
3. to abstain from misuse of the senses or sexual misconduct
4. to abstain from wrong speech
5. to abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind.

Let us look at these in a little more detail.

The first precept means that Buddhists undertake not to harm or kill any living being, including animals. It is for this reason that many Buddhists, particularly in the West, are vegetarian or vegan.

The second precept means that Buddhists undertake not to take things that have not been given to them. As well as not stealing, this means they wish to avoid manipulating or exploiting other people (i.e. taking advantage of others by taking more from them than they are giving freely).

The third precept means that Buddhists undertake not to abuse or overindulge in sensual pleasures, or to use sex harmfully. For example, they should not engage in sexual activity that causes harm to others, such as adultery, rape or incest.

The fourth precept means that Buddhists undertake not to lie or gossip about other people. Buddhists aim to speak truthfully, kindly, helpfully and at the right time.

The fifth precept – not taking alcohol or drugs – is important for Buddhists who have committed themselves to developing calm, clear awareness.

■ Following the five moral precepts

Some religions have laws or commandments from a god which, if broken, are believed to result in punishment by the god. However, Buddhism does not include belief in a god who rewards or punishes. The five precepts are principles that Buddhists voluntarily practise more and more deeply as the progress.

Objective

- Understand what the five moral precepts are.

Key term

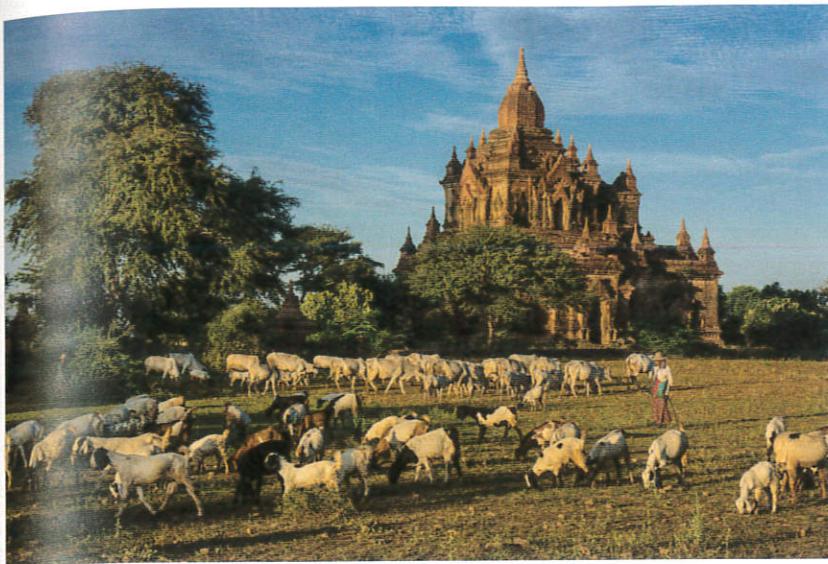
- **the five moral precepts**: five principles that Buddhists try to follow to live ethically and morally



▲ The fifth moral precept recommends that Buddhists should not drink alcohol

“Whoever destroys a living creature, and speaks untruth, takes what is not given in the world, and goes to another’s wife, and whatever man applies himself to drinking liquor and intoxicants, that person digs up his own root here in this very world.”

The Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verses 246–247



▲ The first moral precept teaches that Buddhists should not harm any living beings, including animals

The precepts need to be applied sensitively. Sometimes Buddhists have to balance one precept against another. For example, what if being truthful may lead to harm? Sometimes it could be more ethical to lie, if this is motivated by genuine kindness.

The root precept is the first one – not to cause harm. The others are all expressions of this. The precepts can be practised on ever deepening levels, especially at the level of the mind (for example, wanting to hurt someone is still unskilful even if you don't actually hurt them).

This attitude links in with the Buddhist belief in kamma. Intentions and the reasons for doing things are very important in Buddhism. Good or skilful intentions lead to good or skilful actions, which have positive consequences in this life and (according to tradition) in future lives. Therefore the first step in following the five precepts is to *want* to follow them. Over time, this will enable a Buddhist to practise the precepts at ever deeper and more subtle levels. This will purify their mind of greed, hatred and ignorance, as they move towards the wisdom and compassion of enlightenment.

Activities

- 1 Which of the five moral precepts do you think most Buddhists in the West would find hardest to follow? Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 'The five moral precepts should be treated as strict rules that Buddhists should always obey.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer. Think about more than one point of view.
- 3 The five moral precepts are usually written as a series of principles about what Buddhists should *not* do, for example they should *not* harm others or *not* tell lies. Rewrite the five moral precepts as a series of positive guidelines telling Buddhists what they *should* do.

“ We just keep on working, we are patient with ourselves, and on and on it goes. Little by little our life comes more into alignment with the wisdom that gives rise to the precepts. As our minds get clearer and clearer, it's not even a matter of breaking or maintaining the precepts; automatically they are maintained. ”

Jan Chozen Bays
(Zen meditation teacher)

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner whether or not you think that a person's intentions behind an action are as important as the action itself.

Extension activities

- 1 Research the concept of ahimsa. It is an ancient Indian idea that was further developed within Buddhism. How does this concept apply to the five moral precepts?
- 2 Novice monks and nuns in Theravada Buddhism agree to live by the five moral precepts and an extra five rules, which together form the ten moral precepts. Find out what the extra five precepts are.

★ Study tip

The five moral precepts apply to the way a Buddhist treats him or herself, as well as others.

Summary

You should now be able to explain what each of the five moral precepts is, and understand how Buddhists view them more as a series of guidelines rather than strict rules.

2.13 The six perfections

■ What are the six perfections?

The six perfections are six qualities that express how a Bodhisattva lives, according to Mahayana Buddhists. In contrast to the five precepts, which are concerned with avoiding doing unskillful things, the six perfections define the qualities that ought to be developed in order to live in an enlightened way. For Mahayana Buddhists, spiritual life consists of the cultivation of these qualities.

The six perfections are:

1. generosity or giving
2. morality
3. patience
4. energy
5. meditation
6. wisdom.

We will look at these in a bit more detail below.

Generosity

The first perfection is concerned with the cultivation of giving or generosity. Tibetan Buddhists talk about three main types of giving. The first is to give material goods such as food, clothes and money. This helps to give immediate relief to people's suffering, but does not present a long-term solution. The second is to give protection from fear. They should help somebody if they are in trouble or in a situation that is making them afraid. The third is to give the Dhamma, the Buddha's teachings. This is seen as a gift that helps the recipients to help themselves, and therefore has a longer-lasting impact.

For Buddhists, the intention behind giving is very important. Buddhists should give without expecting anything in return. It is therefore not only important to give, but also to develop awareness of the motives behind giving, and to gradually purify these motives in order to give more freely.

Morality

The second perfection concerns the cultivation of morality. Most Buddhists try to follow the five moral precepts: not to kill or harm others; not to steal; not to abuse or misuse sex; not to lie; and not to abuse alcohol and drugs. Mahayana Buddhists try to follow a further five precepts: not to talk about other people's errors or faults; not to praise

Objectives

- Know what the six perfections are.
- Understand how Buddhists can develop these perfections within themselves.

Key term

- **the six perfections:** the six qualities or virtues that Mahayana Buddhists try to develop in order to live as Bodhisattvas



▲ For monks, sharing and explaining the Buddha's teachings is one way to show generosity

Extension activity



Theravada Buddhism also has the idea of perfections. There are ten perfections in Theravada Buddhism, some of which are the same. For example, both sets have generosity as the first perfection. Use the internet to find out about the ten perfections in Theravada Buddhism. What are the similarities and differences between these and the six perfections in Mahayana Buddhism?

oneself and speak badly of others; not to be stingy; not to be angry; and not to speak badly of the three refuges.

In trying to develop this perfection, a Buddhist might begin by feeling as if they have to restrain themselves from doing immoral things, and it may require a great deal of self-discipline. However, the aim is to stop feeling that behaving morally is a restraint, and to feel that it is something that one genuinely wants to do out of compassion and concern for others. Buddhists use meditation and the practice of mindfulness to help with this.

Patience

A Bodhisattva embodies patience, which is expressed through tolerance and endurance. This means that Buddhists should learn to endure personal hardship or suffering, to practise compassion towards those who show them anger, and to have patience with others.

An important first step for developing this perfection is to accept the first noble truth, the existence of suffering. Understanding that suffering is an intrinsic part of life helps Buddhists to cultivate the patience needed to endure it.

Energy

The fourth perfection consists of the cultivation of mental energy and strength. Buddhists should put as much effort and enthusiasm into their practice of the Dhamma as possible. They should cultivate the courage and energy needed to strive for enlightenment over many years (or indeed lifetimes).

A Buddhist can develop this perfection in different ways. They might look after their own health, decide to deepen different aspects of their practice (such as meditation), or study the Buddha's teachings.

Meditation and wisdom

The fifth perfection is concerned with meditation. We have already seen on pages 52–53 how important meditation is to Buddhists. It helps them to develop the concentration and awareness needed to achieve the sixth perfection, which is wisdom.

All of the first five perfections contribute to the development of the sixth one. Through meditating and studying the Buddha's teachings, and through living morally and ethically, Buddhists aim to develop a full understanding of the nature of reality. Mahayana Buddhists believe that the Bodhisattva, who is the ideal Buddhist, combines wisdom with compassion.

Summary

You should now understand what each of the six perfections is, and be able to explain some of the ways that Buddhists aim to develop these perfections during the course of their lifetime.

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner what qualities or virtues you would like to perfect in your lives. Do you think it is possible to perfect them during your lifetimes?

Activities

- 1 Which of the six perfections do you think might be easiest for Buddhists to develop? Which do you think might be the hardest? Give reasons for your answers.
- 2 Describe the three different types of generosity.
- 3 Read this story and then explain which of the six perfections you think it demonstrates, and why.

'A group of people were travelling through a burning hot desert. Two of them strayed away from the others and got lost. As they walked on they became desperate to find water, and were eventually delighted to come across a well. They both rushed over to it. The first man to arrive drank his fill of the beautiful clear water. He drank so much that he could no longer move, and sank down on the ground beside the well. The second man looked at the well, turned around and then went off in search of his fellow travellers, to guide them back to the well!'

★ Study tip

The Buddha's teaching of the six perfections and five moral precepts indicates that every single person (whether Buddhist or not) has the potential to make progress in wisdom and compassion. This is an expression of his teaching of anatta: that nothing has any fixed essence or self, and therefore people have limitless potential for change for the better. This is useful to remember when learning about Buddhist attitudes towards crime and rehabilitation.

Worship and festivals – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain the nature, use and importance of Buddhist places of worship, including temples, shrines, monasteries (viharas), halls for meditation or learning (gompas) and their key features including Buddha rupa, artefacts and offerings
- ✓ explain how Buddhists perform puja in the home and in the temple, including chanting, mantra recitation, and the use of malas
- ✓ explain the aims, methods and significance of different types of meditation, including samatha meditation, vipassana meditation, and the visualisation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
- ✓ explain the practice and significance of different ceremonies and rituals associated with death and mourning in Theravada Buddhism, and in Japan and Tibet
- ✓ explain how Buddhists celebrate the festivals of Wesak and Parinirvana Day, including their origins and significance; understand the importance of festivals and retreats to Buddhists in Great Britain today.

Buddhist ethics – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain Buddhist teachings about kamma (karma) and rebirth, compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta)
- ✓ explain Buddhist teachings about the five moral precepts
- ✓ explain Buddhist teachings about the six perfections in the Mahayana tradition.

Sample student answer – the 4-mark question

1. Write an answer to the following practice question:

Explain two contrasting types of Buddhist meditation.

[4 marks]

2. Read the following sample student answer:

“Some Buddhists practise samatha meditation, which is all about focusing on one thing, like your breathing. The purpose is to clear the mind of emotions and thoughts and just focus your attention on one thing. This helps Buddhists to learn how to concentrate, and also to calm the mind.

A different type of meditation is called metta or loving-kindness meditation, where a Buddhist will try to think loving thoughts firstly to family, then acquaintances, then strangers and even enemies, which would be very hard to do.”

3. With a partner, discuss the sample answer. Is the focus of the answer correct? Is anything missing from the answer? How do you think it could be improved?
4. What mark (out of 4) would you give this answer? Look at the mark scheme in the Introduction (AO1). What are the reasons for the mark you have given?
5. Now swap your answer with your partner’s and mark each other’s responses. What mark (out of 4) would you give the response? Refer to the mark scheme and give reasons for the mark you award.

Sample student answer – the 5-mark question

1. Write an answer to the following practice question:

Explain two reasons why temples are important in Buddhist worship.

Refer to Buddhist teaching in your answer.

[5 marks]

2. Read the following sample student answer:

“Buddhists can worship at home with a personal shrine, or they can go to a temple where they can be with fellow Buddhists. This is one of the reasons why temples are important for Buddhist worship, because all the focus is there with the right atmosphere for worship with like-minded followers.

Another reason is so that a lay Buddhist can meet a monk and ask for help and guidance with their meditation. They might feel that they can only gain this specialist help at a Buddhist temple.”

3. With a partner, discuss the sample answer. Is the focus of the answer correct? Is anything missing from the answer? How do you think it could be improved?
4. What mark (out of 5) would you give this answer? Look at the mark scheme in the Introduction (AO1). What are the reasons for the mark you have given?
5. Now swap your answer with your partner’s and mark each other’s responses. What mark (out of 5) would you give the response? Refer to the mark scheme and give reasons for the mark you award.

Sample student answer – the 12-mark question

1. Write an answer to the following practice question:

'The most important religious festival for Buddhists is Parinirvana Day.'

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:

- refer to Buddhist teaching
- give developed arguments to support this statement
- give developed arguments to support a different point of view
- reach a justified conclusion.

[12 marks]

2. Read the following sample student answer:

"Parinirvana Day is a very popular festival in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. It remembers the death of the Buddha and although it may seem odd to celebrate someone's death, for Buddhists this day is very important as they believe that when the Buddha died he entered nibbana and became free from all sufferings in the world, and they want to achieve this too. The fact that the Buddha managed to do this gives Buddhists hope that the same thing can happen for them.

On Parinirvana Day, passages are read from the Nirvana Sutra and Buddhists visit monasteries and temples. It is a social occasion and presents are bought for family and friends, and people can reflect on death and remember those who have already died.

On the other hand, the most important festival for Buddhists is probably Wesak. This is usually in May when there is a full moon, and remembers the birth of the Buddha, without which there would be no Buddhism. This festival remembers his enlightenment too and the day he died, so there are many aspects to this day which make it more important for Buddhists than Parinirvana Day.

Buddhists will visit the temple where they live and listen to monks and nuns giving talks, where they can think about the Buddha's message. Everybody who attends meditates and they decorate the shrine rooms. They put candles and flowers on the Buddha shrine too.

I don't think there is too much difference between the two days but the festival of Wesak celebrates more about the Buddha so I think that this one is the most important."

3. With a partner, discuss the sample answer. Consider the following questions:

- Does the answer refer to Buddhist teachings and if so what are they?
- Is there an argument to support the statement and how well developed is it?
- Is a different point of view offered and how developed is that argument?
- Has the student written a clear conclusion after weighing up both sides of the argument?
- What is good about the answer?
- How do you think it could be improved?

4. What mark (out of 12) would you give this answer? Look at the mark scheme in the Introduction (AO2). What are the reasons for the mark you have given?

5. Now swap your answer with your partner's and mark each other's responses. What mark (out of 12) would you give the response? Refer to the mark scheme and give reasons for the mark you award.

Practice questions

- 1 Which one of the following is the Buddhist word for compassion?
A) Metta B) Karuna C) Kamma D) Anicca [1 mark]

- 2 Give two of the six perfections in the Mahayana tradition. [2 marks]

★ Study tip

This question only requires the naming of two of the six perfections. Do not waste time by answering in sentences.

- 3 Explain two contrasting Buddhist rituals associated with death and mourning. [4 marks]

★ Study tip

Do not forget to develop the points you are making. This may be done by referring to examples and giving detailed information.

- 4 Explain two ways that Buddhists can perform puja in the home.
Refer to Buddhist teaching in your answer. [5 marks]

- 5 'Meditation is the most important practice for Buddhists.'
Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:
- refer to Buddhist teaching
 - give developed arguments to support this statement
 - give developed arguments to support a different point of view
 - reach a justified conclusion. [12 marks]

★ Study tip

You should aim to refer to Buddhist teaching in your arguments, for example scripture, religious writings or the teaching of modern Buddhists.