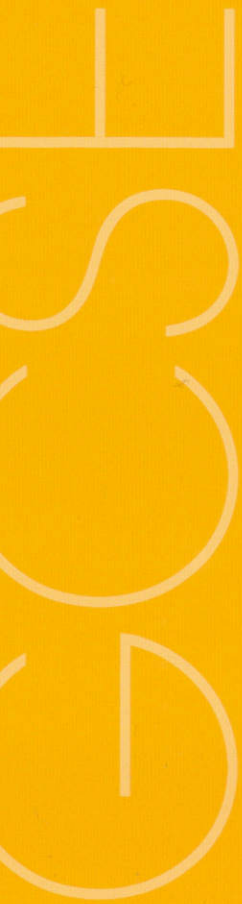


AQA

Religious Studies A Buddhism



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Religion, crime and punishment

7.1

Crime and punishment

■ What are crime and punishment?

A **crime** is any action which is against the laws that have been put in place by the rulers of a state. In the UK, the police arrest people who are suspected of having broken the law by committing crimes. If after questioning the police are confident they have got the right person, they charge the person with having committed the crime.

Once someone is charged of a crime, they usually appear before a court where a judge or a jury will determine what their **punishment** should be. The most serious crimes such as murder and rape result in a life sentence in prison, although this rarely means that offenders spend the



▲ In the UK, punishments are usually determined by a judge or jury in a court

rest of their lives in prison. Less serious offences might result in a shorter time in prison, community service or a fine. There are no circumstances in the UK where a court can impose a punishment that causes physical harm (corporal punishment) or death (capital punishment).

■ Good and evil intentions and actions

Buddhism tends not to speak in terms of 'good' and 'evil' but rather in terms of '**skilful**' and '**unskilful**' actions. A skilful action is rooted in generosity, kindness and understanding, whereas an unskilful action is rooted in selfishness, hatred and ignorance.

The principle of kamma teaches that what is most important for Buddhists is the intention that drives an action. However, sometimes it is difficult for a person to know what their motives really are, and so a further way to understand if their actions are skilful or not is to work out whether their actions cause harm to themselves and/or others. The five moral precepts can also be used to help identify unskilful and skilful actions.

What counts as a crime is defined by the government of each country. There are many unskilful actions that are not crimes, and there may

Objectives

- Know the definitions of crime and punishment.
- Examine Buddhist attitudes towards good and evil intentions and actions.

Key terms

- **crime**: an offence which is punishable by law, for example stealing or murder
- **punishment**: something legally done to somebody as a result of being found guilty of breaking the law
- **skilful**: good, ethical actions or behaviour
- **unskilful**: bad, unethical actions or behaviour

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner whether you think there are any circumstances where it may be acceptable to cause suffering.

even be crimes that are not unskilful from a Buddhist perspective. For instance, it would be unskilful to lie but most lies are not considered crimes. Yet a lie could potentially cause much more suffering than a minor crime (such as trespassing).

Generally, Buddhists believe that it is correct to follow the law, but that it is even more important to cultivate skilful actions and abandon unskilful ones. There might be some circumstances where Buddhists feel compelled to disregard or disobey a law that they consider to be unjust, but probably not in a violent way. For instance, if a law were made that said it was illegal to meditate, many Buddhists would feel justified in ignoring that law, even if it meant that they might be punished for doing so. They would consider it a matter of principle to resist a law that restricted spiritual development.

■ Buddhist views on punishment

The idea of punishment, in any form, goes against Buddhist ethics, since punishment involves causing suffering to someone who has made others suffer. To some degree it is rooted in the idea of vengeance, and the idea that someone must 'pay' for their crimes. Buddhism seeks to relieve suffering rather than to increase it.

However, Buddhists do believe that there are consequences for a person who acts in an unskilful way. First, there will be consequences for themselves. The principle of kamma teaches that unskilful actions lead to suffering both now and even in future lives. Equally, people who act in unskilful ways usually have few friends.

According to Buddhists, everyone can change, and so even if someone has committed a crime there is always the possibility of rehabilitation. No one should ever be beyond hope or redemption, even if they have done terrible things. Without excusing or ignoring seriously unskilful actions, Buddhists aim to avoid feeling hatred towards criminals. Instead they try to show compassion towards the victims of crime, to understand the causes of crime, and to develop a constructive response to criminals. How can the criminal be rehabilitated so that they do not continue to commit further crimes? How can the suffering of the victims be healed?

Buddhism considers the practice of confession to be very important. If someone has acted unskilfully, it is important for them to recognise this and to try to make amends.

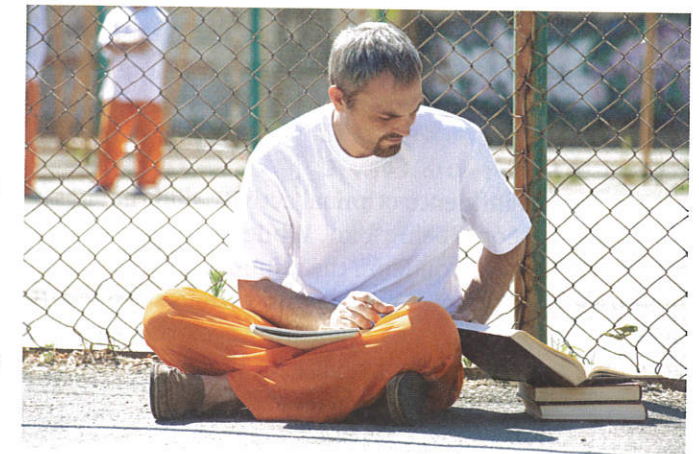
A famous example from the Buddhist scriptures is Angulimala ('Finger garland'), whose name derived from the fact that he had killed many people and took a finger from each of them, which he hung around his neck. When he met the Buddha, the Buddha did not seek to punish him for his crimes, but instead encouraged him to live a better life. Angulimala renounced violence and became a follower of the Buddha.

Links

Read more about the relationship between intentions, actions and kamma on page 71.

Activities

- 1 What happens to someone when they are caught committing a crime in the UK?
- 2 Explain how a Buddhist can determine whether an action is 'good' ('skilful') or 'evil' ('unskilful').
- 3 How might Buddhists deal with criminals?



▲ Buddhism teaches that all criminals have the potential to redeem themselves

★ Study tip

It helps to remember Buddhist teachings about kamma when thinking about crime and punishment.

Summary

You should now know more about the meanings of crime and punishment. You should also be able to explain Buddhist attitudes towards good and evil intentions and actions, and Buddhist views on punishment.

7.2 Reasons for crime

Reasons why people commit crimes

There are many reasons why people commit crimes. These range from specific, immediate reasons – such as stealing someone's wallet to pay for a drug addiction – to more complex reasons to do with the way that society is structured, which affect, for example, people's upbringing and education.

For Buddhists, while some actions that are considered crimes may arise from a skilful motive, such as defying a law that causes harm, crimes usually involve a lack of kindness or awareness of others. However, Buddhism

recognises that various factors influence criminal activity, and that it is not simply a question of people being 'bad'. While Buddhism might condemn a crime, it would not condemn the criminal. Instead it would recognise that there were complex reasons and various outside influences that led the person to commit a crime. However, this does not mean that criminals are free of responsibility for their actions.

Poverty

There are many people living in **poverty** around the world who cannot afford basic necessities. This can sometimes lead people to steal food and other essentials that they do not have the money to buy. While poverty in itself is not a motive for crime, Buddhist scriptures make it clear that poverty is one of the underlying drivers of crime.

The quotation to the right from the Digha Nikaya indicates that if people do not have basic necessities, crime is likely to follow. While breaking the law for such reasons is understandable, it is still likely to cause harm to others. For Buddhists, stealing contradicts the second moral precept (to abstain from taking what is not freely given).

Upbringing

If a child has a troubled upbringing – for example, because of violence, addiction or neglect within the family – this could affect them negatively in a number of different ways, and they might turn to crime as a result. Buddhism recognises that various conditions influence people's



▲ Education and upbringing can affect whether children later turn to crime

Objectives

- Understand some of the reasons why people commit crimes.
- Examine Buddhist attitudes to the reasons why people commit crimes.

Key terms

- **poverty:** being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)
- **mental illness:** a medical condition that affects a person's feelings, emotions or moods and perhaps their ability to relate to others
- **addiction:** a physical or mental dependency on a substance or activity that is very difficult to overcome
- **greed:** selfish desire for something

“... from goods not being bestowed on the destitute poverty grew rife; from poverty growing rife stealing increased, from the spread of stealing violence grew apace, from the growth of violence the destruction of life became common, from the frequency of murder both the span of life in those beings and their comeliness also wasted away ...”

The Buddha in the *Digha Nikaya*, p. 67

behaviour and values, and that in order to live an ethical life, people need supportive conditions that encourage sensitivity to others.

Mental illness

Mental illness, such as anxiety and depression, does not often lead to crime. Even more serious mental health problems are responsible for only a fraction of violent crimes. Treatments such as therapy and medication can usually bring control, if not a cure, for mental illness.

According to Buddhism, everyone sees reality in a distorted way, which leads people to inflict suffering on themselves and others.

Addiction

Addiction to drugs means that the human body becomes dependent on them and cannot cope without them. Addicts face the choice of not taking drugs – an action they know will make their life physically and mentally very hard – or spending money to acquire more drugs. They may commit crimes to be able to fuel their addiction.

The drug that causes more crime than any other is alcohol. People who have drunk too much alcohol lose control of their thoughts and actions to such an extent that they may commit acts of violence or other crimes.

The fifth moral precept teaches that Buddhists should abstain from taking drugs (including alcohol). People who are under the influence of drugs lose their awareness. This means they are less sensitive to others and so are more likely to cause them harm.

Greed

If the material rewards to be gained by committing crime are much greater than any possible punishment, then people may be tempted to break the law. In places where personal possessions and wealth are seen as signs of status, this can help to fuel crime that is committed because of **greed**. Buddhism teaches that acting out of greed is unskilful and leads to suffering.

Hate

Hatred is a negative feeling or reaction that can lead to prejudice and violence against whoever or whatever the offender hates. According to Buddhism, hatred is one of the three poisons and one of the main causes of suffering. Buddhists believe it is important not to feel hatred towards others, even when provoked.

Opposition to an unjust law

According to lawmakers, breaking the law is always wrong. However, throughout history people have broken laws that they believed to be unjust. Buddhists might want to disobey a law that expresses prejudice and hatred, such as a law that supports racial discrimination.



▲ Places where wealth is seen as a sign of status may help to fuel crime committed because of greed

Activities

- 1 Pick three of the reasons for crime mentioned on this page, and explain some of the ways you think these reasons could be solved. For example, how might society solve the problems of drug addiction or poverty?
- 2 Which of the reasons for crime do you think Buddhists would be most accepting and understanding of, and which do you think they would be least accepting of? Give reasons for your answers.

Discussion activity

With a partner, try to think of any other reasons why people might commit crime that are not already mentioned here.

★ Study tip

Check that you can list and explain the main causes of crime.

Summary

You should now understand some of the main reasons why people commit crimes. You should also have considered Buddhist attitudes towards these reasons.

7.3 Different types of crime

■ Buddhist views about different types of crime

For Buddhists, one way in which the seriousness of a crime might be evaluated is through the degree of harm that it causes: the more harm, the worse the action. However, motivation would also be a significant factor. Committing a crime unintentionally is different to deciding to commit a crime. In addition, it might be possible to commit a crime with a skilful motivation, in which case Buddhism would not consider the action wrong, even if the law did.

■ Hate crimes

A **hate crime** expresses hostility or prejudice towards someone, or even a group of people. It might be because of their disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. Hatred is one of the three poisons, and the direct opposite of the emotions that Buddhists want to cultivate: loving-kindness and compassion. In Buddhism, there is therefore no justification for acting on the basis of hatred or intolerance.



▲ People gather in London to remember victims who were killed at a gay nightclub in Orlando, USA, in 2016

Hate crimes are often rooted in fear, insecurity and even envy. For Buddhists, the idea that causing harm to others will make someone happier is wrong. A person who acts from hatred causes suffering both for others and for themselves, so nobody wins.

The Buddha encouraged his followers to avoid falling into conflict with others based on differences of religious belief, because he recognised that this led to unskilful speech and even violent behaviour.

Objective

- Examine Buddhist attitudes towards different types of crime, including hate crimes, theft and murder.

Key terms

- **hate crimes:** crimes, often including violence, that are usually targeted at a person because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender
- **theft:** stealing the property of another person
- **murder:** the taking of a life by deliberate intention

“Whoever is not hostile among those who are violent, not clinging among those who are clinging, him I call a [holy man].”

The Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verse 406

Discussion activity

Can killing someone in order to prevent that person from harming others ever be justified? With a partner, discuss whether you think there are any situations where killing might be the best course of action.

■ Theft

Theft can cause great upset to the person whose property is stolen, but the crime is usually more about the property and not about the victim, who is often unknown to the offender. Greed and poverty are two of the main causes of theft.

Theft breaks the second moral precept, which is to abstain from taking what has not been freely given. It strengthens the habit of greed, and weakens any tendency towards generosity. It leads people to place their needs and interests above those of others.

For Buddhists, theft expresses the delusion that people will be happier simply through acquiring something they do not have. Buddhism says that this is not the case. In fact, if a person steals something then they will suffer, because this undermines the trust that exists between people. Stealing expresses a lack of respect and empathy for others. If the criminal does not know the person they are stealing from, it may seem as if there is no real victim, but this point of view expresses a lack of awareness, and often disguises a person's own selfishness.

For Buddhists, stealing from a monk or other revered person may be seen as even more unskilful, because it expresses a lack of reverence for the spiritual order of things.

■ Murder

In many people's eyes, the most serious crime is **murder**. Murder means the unlawful and deliberate killing of another person, and clearly contradicts the most basic Buddhist precept, which is not to take life. Traditionally, killing another human being is one of the causes for expulsion from a Buddhist monastery.

While it might seem obvious that murder is wrong, some people argue that murdering an 'evil' person can be justified in certain situations, particularly if this prevents them from harming or even killing others. There is a story in the Buddhist scriptures that tells of an incident during a previous life of the Buddha, in which he was a captain of a ship carrying 500 merchants. One of those passengers was a bandit who was planning to kill all the other passengers. The Buddha concluded that the most skilful thing to do in this circumstance was to kill the bandit to prevent all of the other people from being harmed.

Murdering someone involves not only inflicting suffering on the victim, but also on their family and friends. Perhaps the person has a spouse and children who depend on them. The consequences of a murder can impact on a whole community.



▲ Poverty is one of the main causes of theft

Activities

- 1 Why do Buddhists think that hate crimes are wrong?
- 2 Do you think there are ever circumstances where theft is acceptable? Give reasons for your answer.

★ Study tip

Make sure you can explain what Buddhists think about different types of crime.

Summary

You should now understand what Buddhism teaches about different types of crime, including hate crimes, theft and murder.

7.4 The aims of punishment

Whenever a punishment is imposed by a court, the judge has to consider what purpose the punishment will serve. In the UK, no matter how severe the punishment, it is usually intended as a positive action – to protect society, to assist the offender, to stop others from making the same mistakes, or a combination of these. Three of the main aims of punishment are retribution, deterrence and reformation.

■ Retribution

Retribution is one of the least positive aims of punishment. In simple terms, it means wanting to make a criminal pay for what they have done wrong. People who believe that retribution is important tend to think that criminals should be made to suffer in proportion to how serious their crimes are. This means that more serious crimes should have more serious punishments. For example, some people argue that murderers should be put to death because they need to be severely punished for what they have done.

According to Buddhism, retribution is a form of violence that contradicts basic ethics. Committing violence against the offender does not wipe away the suffering caused by a crime, nor does it encourage the criminal to accept responsibility for their actions in order to act better in the future. Instead, it usually creates bitterness and breeds further violence and crime.

The Buddhist thinker David Loy once said, 'We are not punished for our sins but by them.' According to the principle of kamma, a person's unskilful deeds will cause them to suffer. Consequently, there is no need to inflict further suffering on those who have acted badly.

On the other hand, it might be argued that without lawful retribution, people would want to punish the criminals themselves, possibly more seriously than the criminals deserve. Lawful retribution helps to reduce the urge towards vengeance on the part of the victims.

■ Deterrence

One of the aims of punishment is to prevent other people from committing crimes. If someone knows they will be punished as a result of committing a crime, they might be less likely to commit it. For example, the threat of being banned from driving might prevent people from driving while drunk. This is called **deterrence**.

While deterrence may be effective in controlling some people's behaviour, many doubt whether people have been persuaded not to commit murder because they don't want to spend many years in prison. The United States, for instance, has a huge prison population but still has a high crime rate. Reasons why people commit serious crimes are more complex than a simple fear of punishment. However, people considering committing less serious offences may be influenced by possible punishment.

Objectives

- Understand the meanings of retribution, deterrence and reformation.
- Examine Buddhist attitudes towards the aims of punishment.

Key terms

- **retribution:** an aim of punishment – to get your own back
- **deterrence:** an aim of punishment – to put people off committing crimes
- **reformation:** an aim of punishment – to change someone's behaviour for the better

“ We should not seek revenge on those who have committed crimes against us, or reply to their crimes with other crimes. ”

Tenzin Gyatso
(the Dalai Lama)

Research activity

Use the internet to find out about the Buddhist organisation Angulimala. What does the organisation do? Why do you think the founder of the organisation decided to name it Angulimala?

Traditionally, the belief that a person might be reborn in a realm of suffering if they act badly in this life has functioned as a deterrent in Buddhism. But this seems to only go so far. If criminals are in the grip of greed, hatred and delusion, they can lose sight of what may happen afterwards. People need to train their minds to imagine the consequences of their actions, and criminals often seem unable to imagine the damage they may cause.



▲ Buddhism teaches that people who act badly may be reborn in a realm of suffering.

Buddhists might agree that it is important to protect society from certain criminals. For this reason they may support putting criminals in prison. However, the motive would not be to punish or even to deter, but to ensure the welfare of society.

■ Reformation

The UK punishment system emphasises the importance of **reformation**. It is hoped that punishment will encourage offenders to change their attitude and become responsible, law-abiding members of the community. In order for this to work, the offender needs to realise that their behaviour is wrong before they can hope to be reformed. This may involve group therapy sessions, individual counselling and treatment (if required), meeting their victims so they realise the harm they have caused, or working in the community (community service).

According to Buddhism, a criminal should be encouraged to recognise the suffering they have caused and to apologise to the victims, perhaps even face-to-face. It might also be appropriate to do some corrective action, for instance, to repair damage caused by vandalism. The overall aim of a Buddhist approach to justice is to encourage the transformation of the criminal so that they begin to act in a more sensitive and responsible way. This will rehabilitate the criminal in their own eyes, and in the eyes of society and of the victim. In addition, the victim may need help to recover from the suffering caused by the crime, and to let go of any anger or resentment towards the criminal.

Discussion activities

- 1 Discuss with a partner whether you think the main aim of prison should be retribution, deterrence or reformation. If you were in charge of a prison, what changes would you make to try to make sure you were successful in your main aim?
- 2 With a partner, design a plan to help reform a criminal who has stolen a car. What would you do to help the criminal not to commit the same crime in the future?

Activities

- 1 Three main aims of punishment are retribution, deterrence and reformation. Put these in order of which you think is most important to Buddhists and which is least important. Give reasons for your answer.
- 2 How important do you think retribution is as an aim of punishment? Explain your answer.

★ Study tip

Learn some of the reasons why Buddhists might support some forms of punishment more than others.

Summary

You should now understand Buddhist attitudes towards the different aims of punishment.

7.5 The treatment of criminals

In UK law, there are many ways that criminals can be legally punished, and several ways that they cannot. How severe the punishment is depends on the seriousness of the crime. Punishment can range from a long-term stay in prison for a serious crime, to a fine or community service for a less serious one. In the UK, all people who are tried in a court are treated equally, have the same rights, and face the same range of punishments. This is one of the principles that underpins the UK legal system.

Prison

Prison is reserved for people who have committed serious crimes. The main punishment of imprisonment is a loss of liberty. Prisoners are locked in cells for some of the day, are fed at set times, and have to do manual work for little money.

For Buddhists, the primary purpose for putting someone in prison is to protect society from them. If someone is a serial killer, for instance, it would be irresponsible to allow them to live freely in society. A further reason for using prison might be to give the criminal time and space to reflect on their actions and so rehabilitate themselves.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment involves punishing an offender by causing them physical pain, for example by whipping them or striking them with a cane. Corporal punishment was allowed in all schools in the UK until 1987, and using a cane was a common method of disciplining children until it was banned. Today many people believe corporal punishment is a breach of human rights. It is illegal in the UK, but exists in some other parts of the world.

For Buddhists, corporal punishment expresses violence, and is likely to encourage resentment rather than reformation. It does not solve the underlying motives for crime.

Community service

Criminals who have committed less severe crimes, such as vandalism or benefit fraud, might be punished with **community service**. Community service offers the offender a chance to make up for what they have done, and to receive help in reforming their behaviour. In the UK, it might involve anywhere from 40 to 300 hours of unpaid work in the local area, doing tasks such as removing graffiti, clearing wasteland or decorating public buildings.

Most Buddhists approve of community service that helps to rehabilitate the criminal. For this to work, the community service needs to address their crime directly, and help them to recognise its negative impacts.

Objectives

- Examine Buddhist attitudes towards different types of punishment.
- Understand arguments for and against the death penalty.

Key terms

- **prison:** a secure building where offenders are kept for a period of time set by a judge
- **corporal punishment:** punishment of an offender by causing them physical pain
- **community service:** a way of punishing offenders by making them do unpaid work in the community
- **death penalty:** capital punishment – a form of punishment in which a prisoner is put to death for crimes committed
- **principle of utility:** philosophical idea that an action is right if it promotes maximum happiness for the maximum number of people affected by it

Discussion activity

Discuss with a partner which forms of punishment you think are the most effective and why. Does it depend on the particular crime?

Community service that directly addresses the needs of the victim might be more effective.



▲ Painting and decorating public buildings or areas may form a part of community service

The death penalty

Some people and countries feel very strongly that someone who has taken a life must pay by having their own life taken away, and that this is the only real deterrent to murder. Others think that no one has the right to take the life of another person. In the UK, the **death penalty** was abolished in 1965 as a temporary experiment, and then permanently banned in 1969.

Most Buddhists are against the death penalty for a number of reasons. It breaks the first moral precept, and does not allow the possibility of rehabilitation. In addition, it makes revenge part of the system, which is unskillful. It should also be remembered that people are sometimes wrongly convicted.

Some people argue for the death penalty because of the philosophical **principle of utility**. This states that the best action is the one that creates the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. This could be applied to the death penalty by arguing that only the criminal suffers (and to some extent the criminal's family and friends), while the victim's family and friends, and any future victims (and their family and friends) are happier.

Most Buddhists disagree with this approach, because Buddhism teaches that it is not possible to create happiness by making other people suffer. This encourages vengeance and cruelty, which express hatred (one of the three poisons). Thailand, which is a Buddhist country, legally allows capital punishment for more than 30 crimes, including drug trafficking. This shows that Buddhist ethics don't necessarily impact on government policy.

Activities

- 1 What does Buddhism teach is the most important purpose of prisons?
- 2 Give three reasons why most Buddhists are against the death penalty.

Contrasting beliefs

Most Christians are against corporal punishment and the death penalty. This might be because they believe it is unacceptable to cause physical pain to someone, or because only God has the right to take away life, or because Jesus taught that forgiveness is important.

Find out more about Christian teachings on corporal punishment and the death penalty. Do Christian beliefs agree or contrast with Buddhist beliefs on these issues?

Links

To connect the idea of the sanctity of life with arguments about the death penalty, see page 95.

★ Study tip

When thinking about Buddhist attitudes to different types of punishment, remember that reformation is very important in Buddhism.

Summary

You should now be able to explain Buddhist attitudes towards prison, corporal punishment, community service and the death penalty.

7.6 Forgiveness

What is forgiveness?

Buddhism teaches that it is important for someone to show **forgiveness** when they are holding on to a sense of being wronged, which leads them to feel angry or resentful. Forgiving involves letting go of these feelings, and also letting go of the desire to see the other person being punished or suffering for what they have done. Forgiveness does not imply that a person's actions are acceptable. Instead, it shows a willingness to move on, and recognises that the other person can change.

Buddhism teaches that if people do not forgive then they will suffer, because they will continue to be angry and resentful. As the Dhammapada says:

“He abused me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me.’
Of those who wrap themselves up in it hatred is not quenched.”
The Buddha in the *Dhammapada*, verse 3

This means that people should forgive for the sake of their own health and welfare.

If someone is close to a person who has suffered from a serious crime, they may think that forgiveness involves betraying the victim. However, forgiving a criminal does not mean that their actions will not have consequences. It may still be the case that the person is punished by the law or by someone else for what they have done. In addition, Buddhism says that unskilful actions lead to suffering, so whether or not criminals are punished, they will face the consequences of their behaviour.

It is easier to forgive if the other person confesses their wrongdoing and apologises. If the offender is not sorry for what they have done, or even thinks that they have done nothing wrong, it is much more difficult to forgive. Sometimes, offenders may find it difficult to forgive themselves for what they have done. This results in more guilt and suffering. It can even result in further criminal behaviour.

Apology and forgiveness can sometimes bring about reconciliation. Reconciliation helps the offender and the victim learn to trust one another. However, unless the offender recognises that they have done wrong, there can be no reconciliation, even if the victim forgives the offender.

► The Buddha taught that anyone should be forgiven if they are genuinely sorry for what they have done

Objective

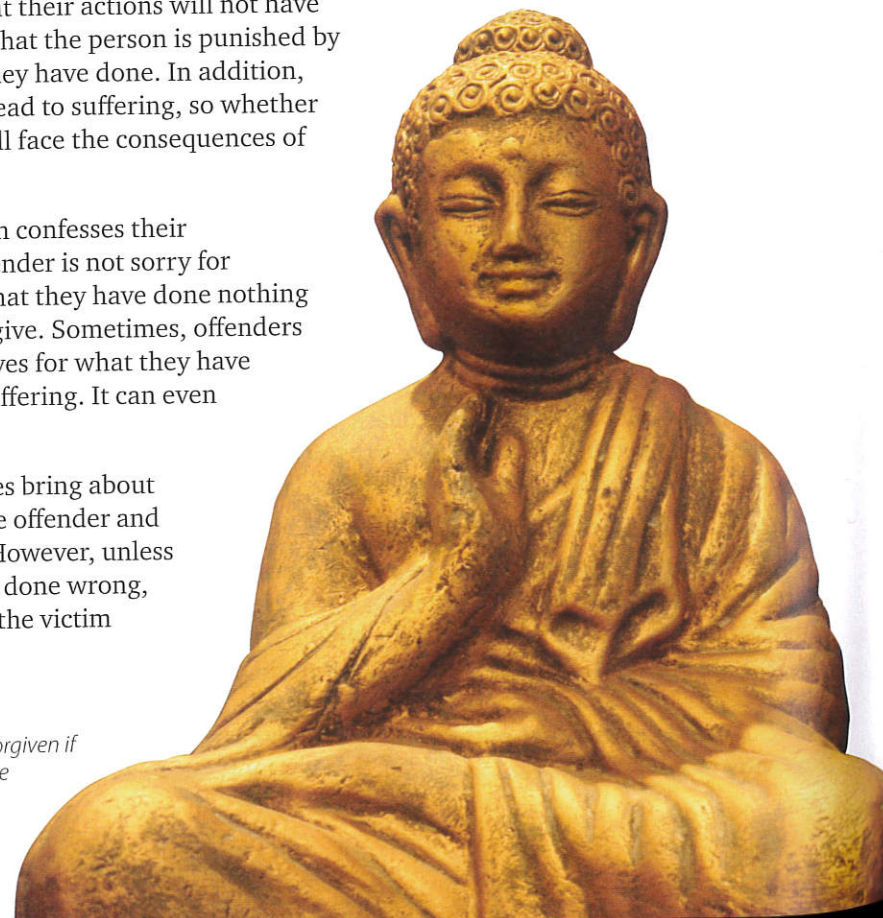
- Examine Buddhist teachings and attitudes about forgiveness.

Key term

- forgiveness:** showing compassion, and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong

Study tip

Remember that many Buddhists may practise confession and seek forgiveness for things they have done wrong. By doing this, they free their minds from the burden of secrecy and guilt, but they still experience the consequences of their actions.



One Buddhist scripture says:

“Bhikkhus [monks], there are these two kinds of fools. What two? One who does not see his transgression as a transgression and one who does not, in accordance with the Dhamma, accept the transgression of one who is confessing. These are the two kinds of fools.

Bhikkhus [monks], there are these two kinds of wise people. What two? One who sees his transgression as a transgression and one who, in accordance with the Dhamma, accepts the transgression of one who is confessing. These are the two kinds of wise people.”

The Buddha in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, vol. 1, p. 59

Anh-Huong Nguyen on forgiveness

Anh-Huong Nguyen is a Zen Buddhist from Vietnam. She spent ten months in a refugee camp in Malaysia before going to the USA. In the refugee camp, she came across many girls and women who had been raped by pirates – men who had boarded their boats while they were in the waters near Malaysia.

To begin with, Anh-Huong was very angry with the pirates, but through meditation she came to understand that the pirates were themselves victims of their own upbringings and local environments. She realised that if she had been born as a male into a family where piracy was accepted and expected, she might well have become a pirate herself.

Anh-Huong recognises that suffering can sometimes make it very hard to forgive someone. But she thinks that understanding and compassion can help lead to forgiveness. She believes that a helpful question to ask is, ‘How can I better understand myself and the other person?’

By trying to understand the pirates, Ann-Huong learnt to forgive them.

Are some crimes unforgivable?

Some crimes are so bad that it might seem impossible to forgive them. How can we forgive mass murder, for instance? Elie Wiesel, a Jewish survivor of the Nazi holocaust, once said, ‘I cannot and I do not want to forgive the killers of children; I ask God not to forgive.’ He believed that he would dishonour all the murdered Jews if he forgave the Nazis, and he would find it hard to live with himself. Buddhism teaches that even in these circumstances it is best to learn to forgive, but this does not mean to excuse or forget what has happened.

Summary

You should now understand Buddhist teachings about forgiveness.

Discussion activity

There is a Tibetan Buddhist story about two monks who were tortured by their captors in prison. They met each other again a number of years after they were released. The first monk asked the second monk, ‘Have you forgiven them?’ The second monk replied, ‘I will never forgive them!’ The first monk then said, ‘Well, I guess they still have you in prison, don’t they?’

Discuss with a partner what you think the first monk meant.

Activities

- ‘If you forgive someone, it means you approve of their behaviour.’ Evaluate this statement. Include more than one point of view, and refer to Buddhist teachings and beliefs in your answer.
- Using Buddhist teachings, suggest some ways that people can learn to forgive others.

Contrasting beliefs

Forgiveness is a core belief in Christianity, and one that Jesus emphasised in his teachings. For example, even while he was dying on the cross, Jesus asked God to forgive the people who had crucified him. Christians believe they should follow the example of Jesus and forgive those who do wrong things.

Find out more about Christian teachings on forgiveness. Do Christian beliefs agree or contrast with Buddhist beliefs on this issue?

Religion, crime and the causes of crime – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about good and evil intentions and actions, including whether it can ever be good to cause suffering
- ✓ explain different reasons for crime, including poverty and upbringing, mental illness and addiction, greed and hate, and opposition to an unjust law
- ✓ explain views about people who break the law for these reasons
- ✓ explain views about different types of crime, including hate crimes, theft and murder.

Religion and punishment – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about the aims of punishment, including retribution, deterrence and reformation

- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about the treatment of criminals, including prison, corporal punishment and community service
- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about forgiveness
- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about the death penalty
- ✓ explain ethical arguments related to the death penalty, including those based on the principle of utility and sanctity of life
- ✓ explain similar and contrasting perspectives in contemporary British society to all of the above issues
- ✓ explain similar and contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society to the three issues of corporal punishment, the death penalty and forgiveness, with reference to the main religious tradition in Britain (Christianity) and one or more other religious traditions.

Sample student answer – the 4-mark question

1. Write an answer to the following practice question:

Explain **two** contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about corporal punishment.

In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions. **[4 marks]**

2. Read the following student sample answer:

"Most people in Britain disagree with corporal punishment. It is not a loving action because it harms people, some of whom may be innocent, and doesn't reform them. Buddhists follow the first precept, which is to not harm any living being, so do not agree with corporal punishment. Some Christians might quote from the Bible where it says, 'He who spares the rod hates his son.'"

3. With a partner, discuss the sample answer. Can you identify two contrasting beliefs? Is there reference to the main religious tradition in Great Britain (Christianity) and at least one other religious tradition? Can it be improved? If so, how?
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** religious beliefs about the reasons why some people commit crimes.

Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. **[5 marks]**

2. Read the following student sample answer:

"If a person has a mental illness, such as difficulty controlling anger, minor assaults on people who upset them can be excused even though they are still wrong. Offering them help to control their anger is a loving action that Christians favour. Buddhists would say that metta, which means loving kindness, can be offered to a criminal. If a person steals because they are greedy, greed is wrong and one of the three poisons in Buddhism and should be avoided. Buddhists would be against punishment for the person who committed the crime, but would rather want to reform the person."

3. With a partner, discuss the sample answer. Can you identify two religious beliefs about the reasons why people commit crimes? Are the beliefs detailed, and is the teaching relevant and accurate? Can it be improved? If so, how?
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.

Practice questions

- 1 Which **one** of the following is not a cause of crime?
A) Hate B) Forgiveness C) Addiction D) Poverty **[1 mark]**
- 2 Give **two** different aims of punishment. **[2 marks]**
- 3 Explain **two** contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about whether a person can commit a crime to oppose an unjust law.
In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. **[4 marks]**
- 4 Explain **two** reasons why religious believers believe forgiveness is important for criminals. Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. **[5 marks]**

★ Study tip

You are asked to write reasons why religious believers believe forgiveness is important for criminals. If you give reasons why some people think criminals should not be forgiven, you will not be given credit.

- 5 'It is never right to punish a murderer by killing them.'

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you:

- should give reasoned arguments to support this statement
- should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
- should refer to religious arguments
- may refer to non-religious arguments
- should reach a justified conclusion.

[12 marks]
[+ 3 SPaG marks]

Glossary

A

abortion: the removal of a foetus from the womb to end a pregnancy, usually before the foetus is 24 weeks old
adaptation: a process of change, in which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment
addiction: a physical or mental dependency on a substance or activity that is very difficult to overcome
adultery: voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not their spouse (husband or wife)
Amitabha Buddha: the Buddha worshipped by Pure Land Buddhists
anatta: the idea that people do not have a permanent, fixed self or soul
anicca: impermanence; the idea that everything changes
Arhat: for Theravada Buddhists, someone who has become enlightened
ascetic: living a simple and strict lifestyle with few pleasures or possessions; someone who follows ascetic practices
atheist: a person who believes that there is no God

B

benevolent: all-loving, all-good; a quality of God
Big Bang: a massive expansion of space which set in motion the creation of the universe
biological weapons: weapons that use living organisms to cause disease or death
Bodhisattva: for Mahayana Buddhists, someone who has become enlightened but chooses to remain in the cycle of samsara to help others achieve enlightenment as well
Buddha: a title given to someone who has achieved enlightenment; usually used to refer to Siddhartha Gautama
Buddhism: a religion founded around 2500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama
Buddha rupa: a statue of the Buddha, often sitting cross-legged in a meditation pose
Buddhahood: when someone achieves enlightenment and becomes a Buddha
Buddha-nature: the idea that everyone has the essence of a Buddha inside them

C

chanting: in Buddhism, reciting from the Buddhist scriptures
chemical weapons: weapons that use chemicals to harm humans and destroy the natural environment

civil partnership: a legal union of a same-sex couple
cohabitation: a couple living together and having a sexual relationship without being married to one another
community service: a way of punishing offenders by making them do unpaid work in the community
contraception: the artificial and chemical methods used to prevent a pregnancy from taking place
corporal punishment: punishment of an offender by causing them physical pain
crime: an offence which is punishable by law, for example stealing or murder

D

death penalty: capital punishment – a form of punishment in which a prisoner is put to death for crimes committed
dependent arising: the idea that all things arise in dependence upon conditions
Design argument: the argument that God designed the universe, because everything is so intricately made in its detail that it could not have happened by chance
deterrence: an aim of punishment – to put people off committing crimes
Dhamma (Dharma): the Buddha's teachings
discrimination: actions or behaviour that result from prejudice
divine: that which relates to God, gods or ultimate reality
divorce: legal ending of a marriage
dominion: dominance or power over something; having charge of something or ruling over it
dukkha: the first noble truth: there is suffering

E

Engaged Buddhism: a movement in Buddhism that is particularly concerned with applying the Buddha's teachings to matters of social and environmental injustice
enlightenment: the gaining of true knowledge about God, self or the nature of reality, usually through meditation and self-discipline; in Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh traditions, gaining freedom from the cycle of rebirth
environment: the natural world; the surroundings in which someone lives
equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities
eternal: without beginning or end

ethics (sila): a section of the threefold way that emphasises the importance of skilful action as the basis for spiritual progress
euthanasia: killing someone painlessly and with compassion, to end their suffering
evil: the opposite of good, a force or personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God
exploitation: misuse of power or money to get others to do things for little or unfair reward
extended family: a family which extends beyond the nuclear family to include grandparents and other relatives

F

family: a group of people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption
family planning: using contraception to control how many children couples have and when they have them
festival: a day or period of celebration for religious reasons
First Cause argument: also called the cosmological argument; the argument that there has to be an uncaused cause that made everything else happen, otherwise there would be nothing now
forgiveness: showing compassion and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong
free will: belief that God gives people the opportunity to make decisions for themselves
freedom of religion: the right to believe or practise whatever religion one chooses
freedom of religious expression: the right to worship, preach and practise one's faith in whatever way one chooses

G

gender discrimination: acting against someone on the basis of their gender; discrimination is usually seen as wrong and may be against the law
gender equality: the idea that people should be given the same rights and opportunities regardless of whether they are male or female
gender prejudice: unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group based on their gender
general revelation: God or the divine as revealed through ordinary, common human experiences

gompa: a hall or building where Tibetan Buddhists meditate
greed: selfish desire for something

H

hate crimes: crimes, often including violence, that are usually targeted at a person because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender
heterosexual: sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex
holy war: fighting for a religious cause or God, often inspired by a religious leader
homosexual: sexually attracted to members of the same sex
homosexuality: being sexually attracted to members of the same sex
human rights: the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings should be entitled
human sexuality: how people express themselves as sexual beings

I

immanent: the idea that God is present in and involved with life on Earth and in the universe; a quality of God
impersonal: the idea that God has no 'human' characteristics, is unknowable and mysterious, more like an idea or force

J

Jataka: the Jataka tales are popular stories about the lives of the Buddha
just war theory: a set of criteria that a war needs to meet before it can be justified
justice: bringing about what is right and fair, according to the law, or making up for a wrong that has been committed

K

kamma (karma): a person's actions; the idea that skilful actions result in happiness and unskilful ones in suffering
karuna: compassion; feeling concerned for the suffering of other people and wanting to relieve their suffering

M

magga: the fourth noble truth: the way to stop suffering; the Eightfold Path
Mahayana Buddhism: an umbrella term to describe some later Buddhist traditions, including Pure Land Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism and Zen Buddhism
mala: prayer beads that are used to count the number of recitations in a mantra
mandala: an intricate, circle-shaped pattern that is used for meditation
mantra: a short sequence of sacred syllables

Mara: a demon that represents spiritual obstacles, especially temptation
marriage: a legal union between a man and a woman (or in some countries, including the UK, two people of the same sex) as partners in a relationship
meditation: a practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings to penetrate their true meaning
meditation (samadhi): a section of the Threefold Way that emphasises the role of meditation in the process of spiritual development
mental illness: a medical condition that affects a person's feelings, emotions or moods and perhaps their ability to relate to others
metta: loving-kindness; showing a benevolent, kind, friendly attitude towards other people
mindfulness of breathing: a meditation practice focusing on the experience of breathing
miracle: a seemingly impossible event, usually good, that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws, and is thought to be the action of God
monastery (vihara): a place where Buddhist monks and nuns live
murder: the taking of a life by deliberate intention

N

natural resources: materials found in nature – such as oil and trees – that can be used by people
nibbana (nirvana): a state of complete enlightenment, happiness and peace
nidanas: 12 factors that illustrate the process of birth, death and rebirth
nirodha: the third noble truth: suffering can be stopped
nuclear family: a couple and their dependent children regarded as a basic social unit
nuclear weapons: weapons that work by a nuclear reaction, devastate huge areas, and kill large numbers of people

O

omnibenevolent: all good; a quality of God
omnipotent: almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God
omniscient: knowing everything; a quality of God

P

pacifism: the belief of people who refuse to take part in war and any other form of violence
Pali: the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures

Parinirvana Day: a Mahayana festival that commemorates the Buddha's passing away
peace: an absence of conflict, which leads to happiness and harmony
peacemaker: a person who works to establish peace in the world or in a certain part of it
peacemaking: the action of trying to establish peace
people-trafficking: the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation
personal: the idea that God is an individual or person with whom people are able to have a relationship or feel close to

pollution: making something dirty and contaminated, especially the environment
polygamy: the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time
positive discrimination: treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated against in the past or have disabilities
poverty: being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)
prejudice: unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group
principle of utility: philosophical idea that an action is right if it promotes maximum happiness for the maximum number of people affected by it

prison: a secure building where offenders are kept for a period of time set by a judge
procreate: produce children
protest: an expression of disapproval, often in a public group
puja: an act of worship
punishment: something legally done to somebody as a result of being found guilty of breaking the law
Pure Land Buddhism: a Mahayana form of Buddhism based on belief in Amitabha Buddha

Q

quality of life: the general wellbeing of a person, in relation to their health and happiness; also, the theory that the value of life depends upon how good or how satisfying it is

R

reconciliation: when individuals or groups restore friendly relations after conflict or disagreement; also a sacrament in the Catholic Church

reformation: an aim of punishment – to change someone's behaviour for the better

remarriage: when someone marries again, after a previous marriage or marriages have come to an end

responsibility: a duty to care for, or having control over, something or someone

retaliation: deliberately harming someone as a response to them harming you

retreat: a period of time spent away from everyday life in order to focus on meditation practice

retribution: an aim of punishment – to get your own back

S

samatha meditation: calming meditation'; a type of meditation that involves calming the mind and developing deeper concentration

same-sex marriage: marriage between partners of the same sex

same-sex parents: people of the same sex who are raising children together

samsara: the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth

samudaya: the second noble truth: there are causes of suffering

sanctity of life: the belief that all life is holy or deeply valuable, and should not be misused or abused

Sanskrit: the language used in later Indian Buddhist texts

self-defence: acting to prevent harm to yourself or others

sex before marriage: sex between two single unmarried people

shrine: an area with a statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, which provides Buddhists with a focal point for meditation and devotion

skilful: good, ethical actions or behaviour

social justice: ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy; protecting people's human rights

special revelation: the revelation of God, or the divine, through direct personal experience or an unusual specific event

stewardship: the idea that believers have a duty to look after the environment on behalf of God

stupa: a small building in a monastery that sometimes contains holy relics

Sukhavati: the paradise where Amitabha Buddha lives, and where Pure Land Buddhists aim to be reborn

sunyata: emptiness; the concept that nothing has a separate, independent 'self' or 'soul'

T

tanha: craving (desiring or wanting something)

temple: a place where Buddhists come together to practise

terrorism: the unlawful use of violence, usually against innocent civilians, to achieve a political goal

thangka: a detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva

the Eightfold Path: eight aspects that Buddhists practise and live by in order to achieve enlightenment

the five aggregates: the five aspects that make up a person

the five asectics: the Buddha's first five students; five monks who followed ascetic practices

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

the Four Noble Truths: the four truths that the Buddha taught about suffering

the four sights: old age, illness, death, and a holy man; these Four Sights led the Buddha to leave his life of luxury in the palace

the four sublime states: the four qualities of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity which the Buddha taught that Buddhists should develop

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

the theory of evolution: the theory that higher forms of life have gradually developed from lower ones

the three poisons: greed, hatred and ignorance; the main causes of suffering

the three watches of the night: the three realisations that the Buddha made in order to achieve enlightenment

the threefold way: the Eightfold Path grouped into the three sections of ethics, meditation and wisdom

the Tibetan Wheel of Life: an image that symbolises samsara, often found in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples

theft: stealing the property of another person

Theravada Buddhism: 'the school of the elders'; an ancient Buddhist tradition found in southern Asia

transcendent: the idea that God is beyond and outside life on Earth and the universe; a quality of God

U

unskilful: bad, unethical actions or behaviour

V

vegan: a person who does not eat animals or food produced by animals (such as eggs); a vegan tries not to use any products that have caused harm to animals (such as leather)

vegetarian: a person who does not eat meat or fish

violence: using actions that threaten or harm others

vipassana meditation: 'insight meditation'; a type of meditation that involves developing understanding of the nature of reality

visualisation: imagining or 'seeing' an object in one's mind

W

war: fighting between nations to resolve issues between them

weapons of mass destruction: weapons that can kill large numbers of people and/or cause great damage

Wesak: a Theravada festival that celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away

wisdom (panna): a section of the threefold way that deals with Buddhist approaches to understanding the nature of reality

wonder: marvelling at the complexity and beauty of the universe

Z

zazen meditation: a type of meditation in Zen Buddhism that requires awareness of the present moment

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