Places of Worship in Buddhism Summary Sheet

(Pages 48-49 in the Buddhism textbook)

This summary sheet is to help you learn the different types of places of worship used in Buddhism and the various ways in which they are used. According to the AQA specification you need to know the following things:

‘• 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.’

Terminology

**artefacts** - objects (in this case ones used in worship)

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

**Buddha rupa** - a statue of Buddha of the type found in a place of worship

**gompa** - a hall or a building where Tibetan Buddhists meditate

**incense** - a substance that smells very sweet when it is burned

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

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

**relics** - special objects left over from a holy person e.g. their bones

**shrine**  - an area which provides a focal point for worship and meditation

**stupa**  - a building (often in a monastery) that often has holy relics

**temple** - In Buddhism, a place where people practise (worship, meditate etc.)

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

Temples

There are many different types of building that are temples. A temple can be a single building or a group (complex) of buildings. A temple may include:

1. a **main hall** where people practise; This will have a Buddha rupa (and statues of Bodhisattvas in a Mahayana temple).
2. a **meditation hall**; In Tibetan Buddhism this is called a **gompa**.
3. a **study hall** for lectures;
4. **shrines** dedicated to Buddha (and Bodhisattvas in Mahayana temples);
5. a pagoda or **stupa** which is often a tiered tower or a domed building that can contain relics which are holy items associated with Buddha himself.

Shrines

These can be found in a **temple**, **monastery** or **home** of a Buddhist. A shrine will have a Buddha rupa which is the main focus. Mahayana shrines may have a statue of a Bodhisattva.

**Offerings** are made in gratitude for the Buddha’s teachings. These may be:

* **a candle**, symbolising the light of wisdom driving away the darkness of ignorance;
* **flowers**, symbolising anicca or impermanence (they wither);
* **incense**, symbolising purity of thoughts, speech and actions.

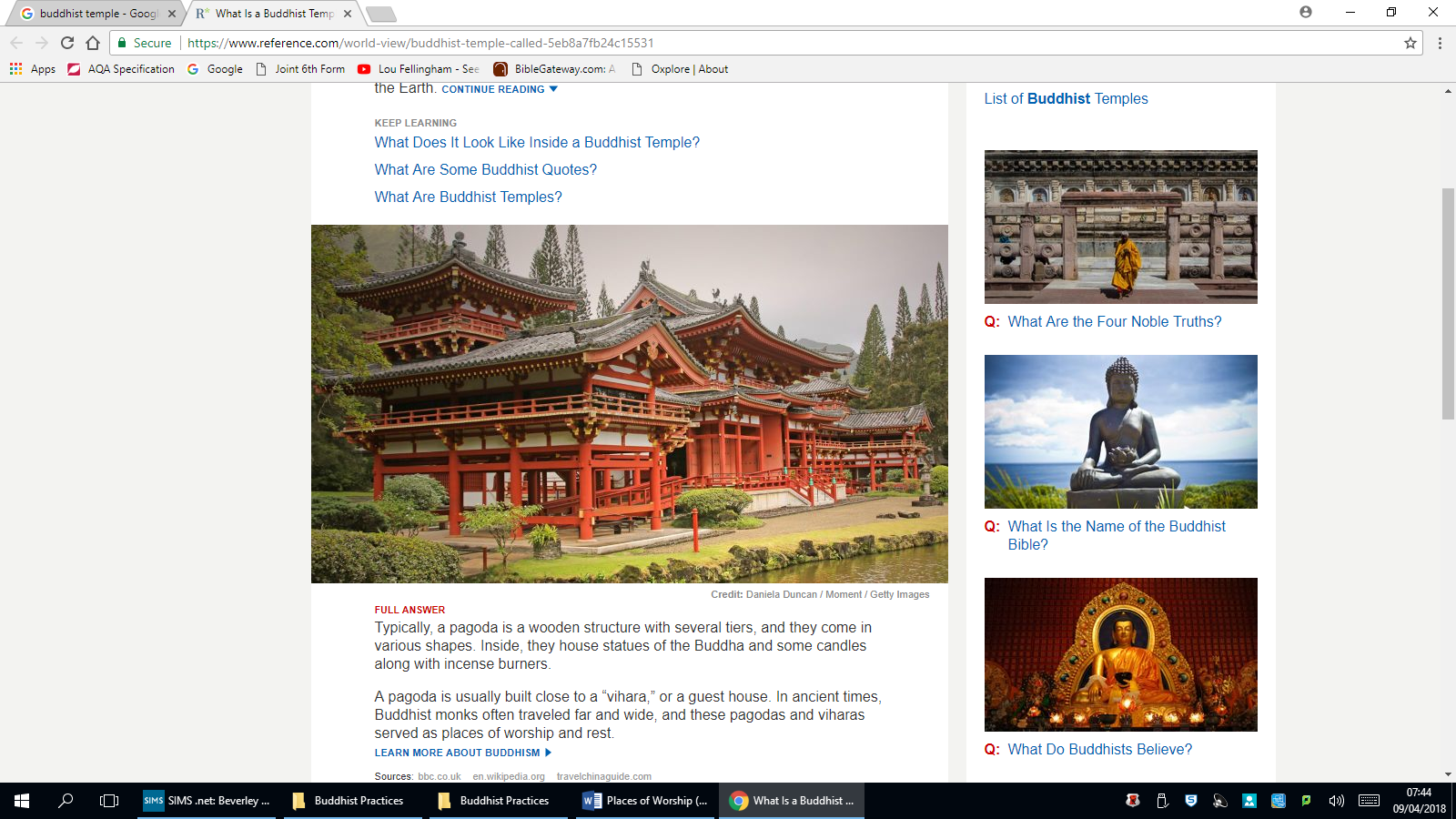
Monasteries

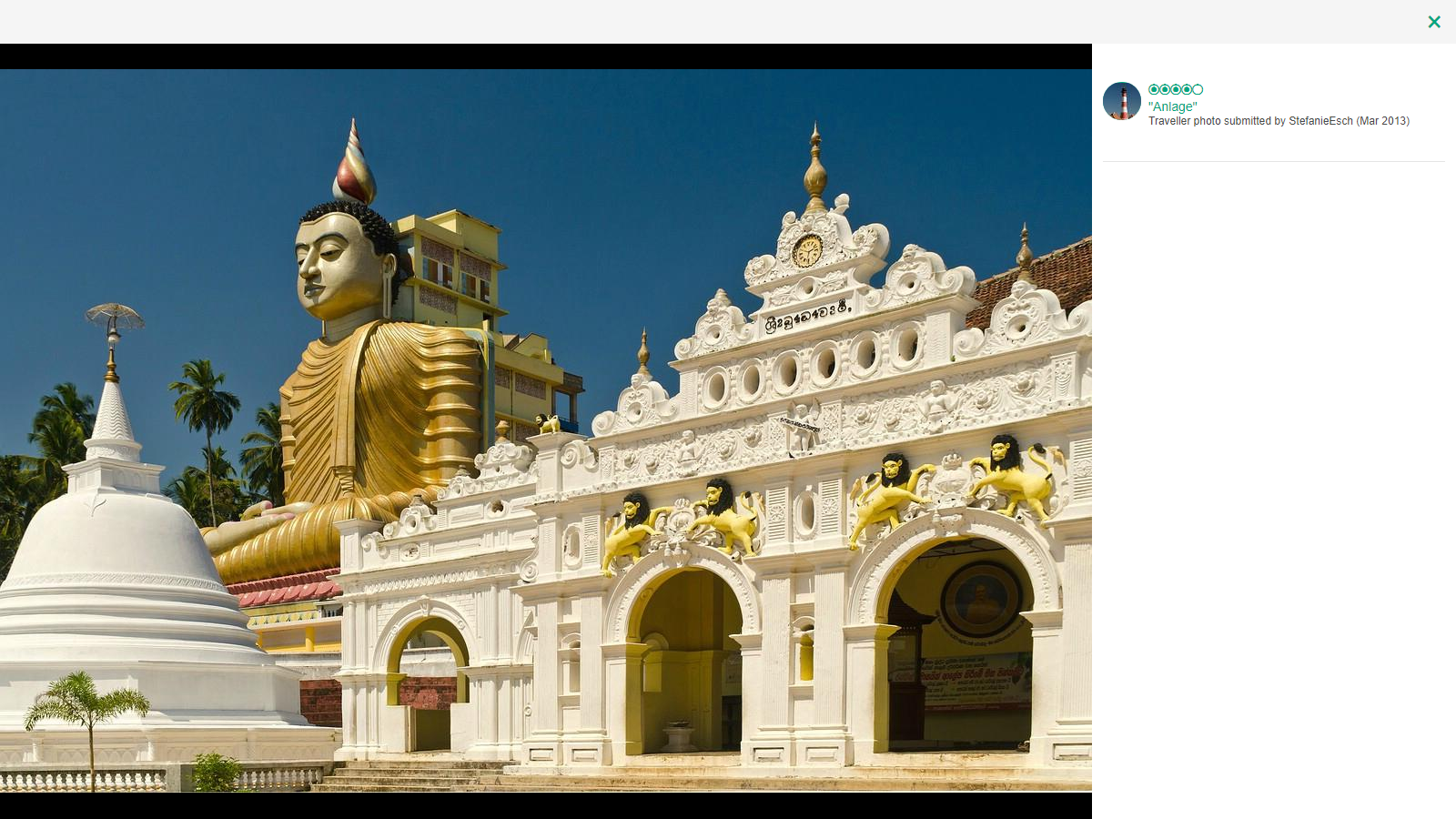
**Viharas** are buildings where a community of **monks or nuns** live. These are people who have decided to dedicate themselves full time to Buddhist spiritual practice. They study, meditate, eat, sleep and worship in their community. They have very simple lifestyles and have given up many things. A vihara will also have a **stupa** which contains relics from Buddha (or a Bodhisattva in a Mahayana vihara). Stupas are therefore very important.

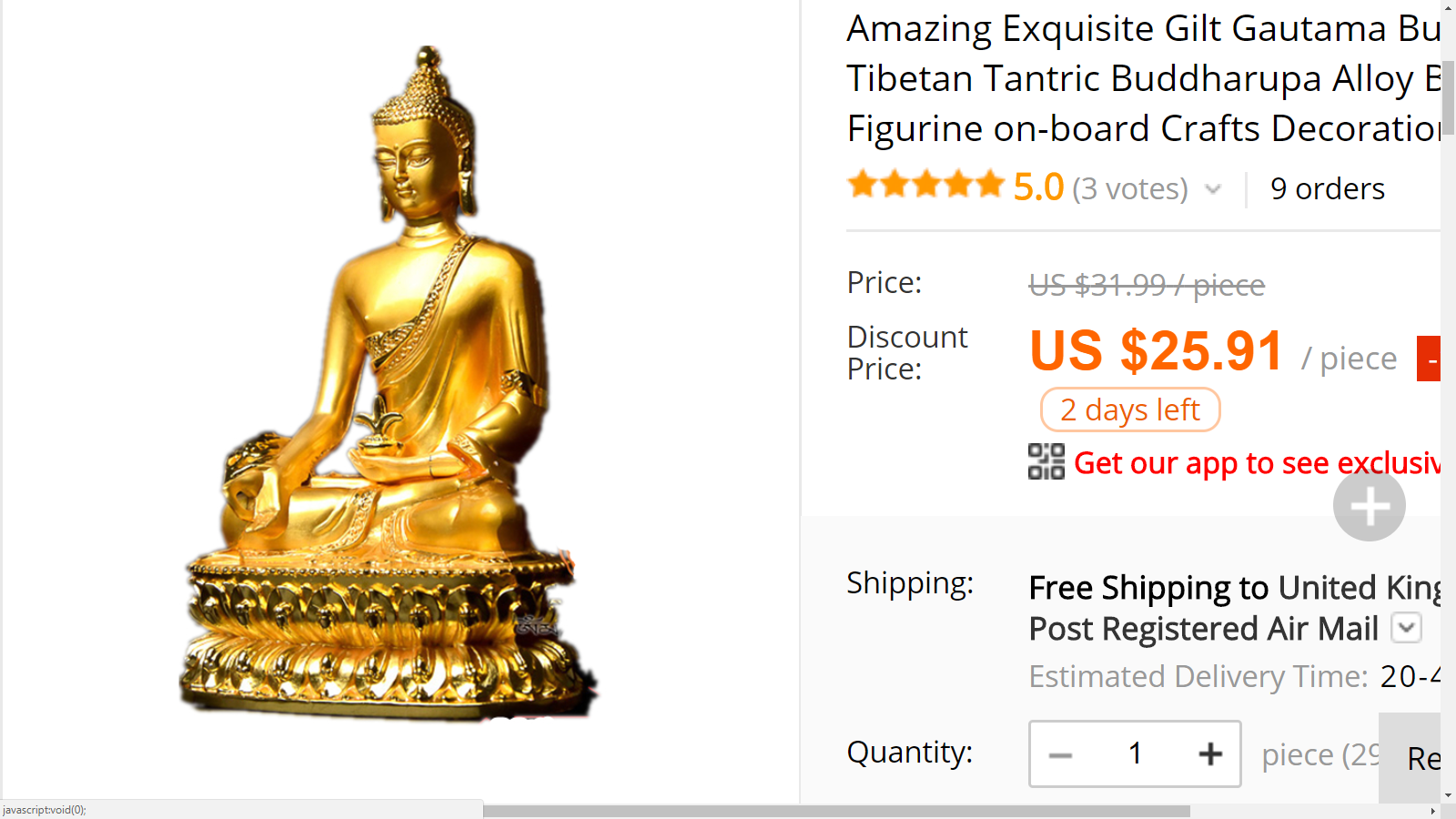
Artefacts in places of worship

Candles, flowers, incense (all offerings), relics, Buddha rupas, statues of Bodhisattvas, pictures

Pictures

temples

shrine  vihara stupa 

Buddha rupa  gompa 

Possible exam questions:

1. Explain two purposes of a Buddhist shrine. (4 marks)
2. Explain two reasons why temples are important in Buddhist worship. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks) **From the textbook p.75.**
3. Explain the purpose of two buildings in a Buddhist monastery. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks)
4. Explain two Buddhist beliefs about Buddha reflected in worship practices. In your answer you must refer to scripture. (5 marks) **[Note: Buddha is not a god.]**
5. ‘There is no need for temples; Buddhists can just worship at home.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
6. ‘Buddhist worship achieves nothing.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
7. ‘Worship in a Buddhist temple is the best way to achieve peace.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)
8. ‘Buddhist worship offerings are a waste of candles, flowers and incense.’ Do you agree? (12 marks)