

3 Buddhism: beliefs and teachings

3.1 The birth of the Buddha and his life of luxury

RECAP



Essential information:

- The Buddha was born near the border of India and Nepal some 2500 years ago.
- Stories of his life combine facts with legends to express spiritual truths.
- He was born into a privileged life.

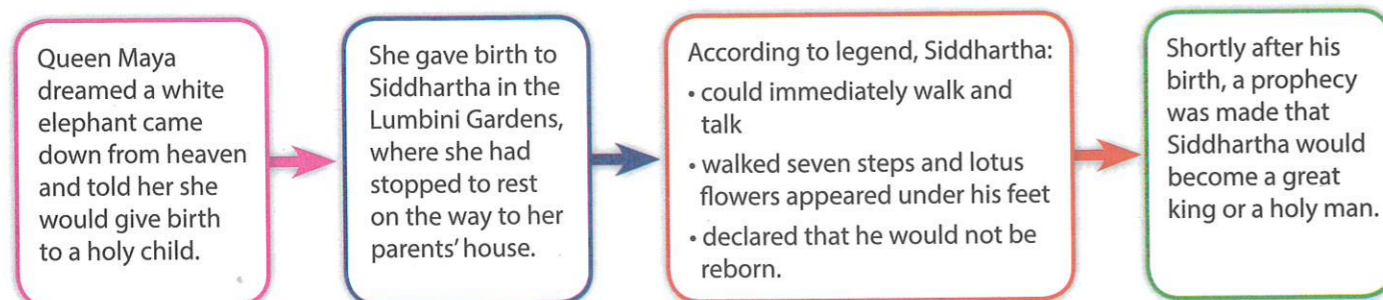
The Buddha's birth

- **Buddhism** is a religion founded around 2500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama.
- Siddhartha was born around 500 BCE in southern Nepal. His parents were King Suddhodana and Queen Maya.
- After Siddhartha was enlightened he became known as the **Buddha**, which is a title meaning 'awakened one' or 'enlightened one'.
- There are many stories of Siddhartha's life, recording different events or details. These include legendary or miraculous events which communicate spiritual truths.



TIP
Use pictures to create a narrative of key events in the Buddha's life, to help you remember them.

The following traditional story is commonly told about Siddhartha's birth:



Siddhartha's life of luxury

- Queen Maya died seven days after the birth of Siddhartha.
- King Suddhodana wanted to protect Siddhartha from hardship. Siddhartha grew up in a palace surrounded by luxury, and his father prepared him to become a king.
- The *Anguttara Nikaya* describes how he was 'delicately nurtured': he was entertained by female dancers, there were lotus ponds of many colours, he was always protected by a sunshade, and he had three mansions (one each for the winter, summer, and rainy seasons).



APPLY



- A** Give **two** ways in which Siddhartha lived a life of luxury. **Refer to sacred writings** in your answer.
- B** Read the following response to the statement, 'Stories of Siddhartha's early life cannot be accepted as being true.' **Explain how this answer could be improved.**

"We cannot believe the Buddha could immediately walk and talk when he was born, or that he took seven steps and lotuses popped up to cushion his feet. These stories are just made up to make the Buddha seem more impressive. There are many different stories that tell of the Buddha's life and they all have different details, which proves they can't all be true."

3.2 The four sights

RECAP







Essential information:

- The four sights** (old age, illness, death, and a holy man) inspired Siddhartha to renounce his life of luxury.
- The four sights can be seen as spiritual insights into the nature of suffering and the spiritual path.
- The four sights can be divided into two sections: the first three show a deepening awareness of the problem of suffering, while the fourth shows the solution.

What are the four sights?

- As he got older, Siddhartha grew more curious about life outside the palace walls.
- One day he decided to leave the palace grounds and travel with Channa, his attendant and chariot driver, to the nearby city.
- This story is found in *Jataka 75* (the **Jakata** tales are popular stories about the lives of the Buddha).
- Siddhartha encountered four sights while he was outside the palace:

Old age	Illness
Siddhartha saw a frail old man and realised that everyone will age. 	Siddhartha saw someone lying in the road in agony and realised that illness is a reality of life. 
Death	A holy man
Siddhartha saw a dead man being carried through the streets in a funeral procession and realised that everyone will die. 	Siddhartha wanted answers to the problems of old age, illness and death. He saw a holy man walking through the streets with a peaceful expression. This inspired Siddhartha to believe that a spiritual answer to suffering was possible. 

Leaving the palace

- Siddhartha realised he wouldn't find answers to the problem of suffering by living his life of luxury. Leaving the palace, he abandoned his horse, cut off his hair, and gave back his jewellery and comfortable clothes.
- Siddhartha left behind his newborn son and wife to pursue spiritual enlightenment.
- The four sights resulted in Siddhartha's renunciation. Renunciation means letting go and is an important aspect of the Buddhist life.



TIP
The first three sights communicate painful aspects of human life. They express the idea of dukkha or suffering. See page 52 to link this story with the idea of dukkha.

APPLY



- A** Explain the importance of **two** of the four sights.
- B** 'Seeing the four sights was the most important event in the Buddha's life.' **Evaluate** this statement using **two** arguments to support the statement and **two** arguments to support a different point of view.

3.3 The Buddha's ascetic life

RECAP



Essential information:

- Siddhartha lived as an ascetic for six years to seek the solution to the problem of suffering.
- He concluded that asceticism by itself was not the path to spiritual wisdom and so stopped following ascetic practices.
- He began to think in terms of a 'middle way' between the extremes of indulgence and self-denial.



Living as an ascetic

Ascetics live a simple and strict lifestyle with few pleasures or possessions. They believe extreme self-discipline and self-denial can lead to spiritual wisdom.

Siddhartha was impressed by the sense of peace he felt coming from the holy man (who was an ascetic) before he left the palace. This inspired him to follow ascetic practices for six years to try to overcome the problem of suffering. He practised:

- living in dangerous and hostile forests which were too hot in the day and freezing at night
- sleeping on a bed of thorns
- eating so little that he looked like a skeleton.

“When the Great Being was practising severe austerities for six years **it was to him like a time of intertwining the sky with knots.**”

The Jataka, vol. 1, p. 67

TIP

You could use this quote in your exam to show that for Siddhartha, asceticism did not provide the solution to suffering.

Siddhartha also learnt meditation under the guidance of various masters.

Meditation is the practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings to penetrate their true meaning.

Turning away from ascetism

- As a result of his ascetic practices, Siddhartha became very thin and weak, and could not meditate effectively.
- He learnt discipline and willpower, but did not find the answer to the problem of suffering.
- He decided finally to reject asceticism as ineffective.
- He accepted rice and milk from a cowgirl and restored his health and strength.
- The *Jataka* describes how he then returned to the life of collecting alms from villagers.

“Realising the practice of such austerities was not the path to Enlightenment he went about gathering alms in villages and townships.”

The Jataka, vol. 1, p. 67

Spiritual understanding

- Siddhartha had previously realised that a life of luxury was not the path towards spiritual wisdom.
- He now realised that suffering through self-denial was not the path either.
- This inspired him to follow a middle way between the two extremes.

APPLY



- A** Give **two** ways in which Siddhartha practised asceticism.
- B** Here are some arguments that could be used to evaluate the statement, 'Siddhartha's asceticism was a necessary part of his path to enlightenment.' Sort them into arguments in support of this statement, and arguments in support of different views. **Write your own justified conclusion.**

1. Asceticism taught Siddhartha self-discipline	4. Asceticism was a waste of time because it did not provide an answer to suffering
2. He became too weak to meditate	5. Through asceticism Siddhartha learnt a middle way
3. He confronted his fears	6. He learnt various meditation techniques

3.4 The Buddha's enlightenment

RECAP



Essential information:

- After rejecting asceticism, Siddhartha thought meditation might help him to gain **enlightenment** (spiritual wisdom that arises from understanding the true nature of reality).
- Siddhartha meditated under a peepul tree (a kind of fig tree). Here he was tempted by **Mara** (a demon that represents spiritual obstacles, particularly temptation), who tried to prevent him from reaching enlightenment.
- His enlightenment took place during **the three watches of the night**, which refer to the three realisations that Siddhartha made in order to achieve enlightenment.

Siddhartha's meditation

“[...] not until I attain the supreme Enlightenment will I give up this seat of meditation.” *The Buddha in the Jataka, vol. 1, p. 71*

Traditional stories tell how Siddhartha was determined to meditate until he found enlightenment. The demon Mara used various tactics to try to distract Siddhartha from his meditation, including:

- sending his beautiful daughters to seduce Siddhartha
- sending his armies to throw arrows and other weapons at Siddhartha
- offering Siddhartha control of his kingdom
- questioning Siddhartha's right to sit at the seat of enlightenment.

In response, Siddhartha stayed focused on his meditation:

- He was not swayed by the charms of Mara's daughters but continued meditating.
- The arrows and other weapons turned to lotus flowers before reaching him.
- He touched and called on the earth to witness his right to sit at the seat of enlightenment. The earth shook to acknowledge his right.



TIP

The stories about Mara's temptations show that Siddhartha used his discipline to overcome negative emotions such as fear, lust and doubt to remain focused on his meditation.

The enlightenment

According to legend, Siddhartha's enlightenment took place during three parts (or 'watches') of the night:

First watch	Second watch	Third watch
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siddhartha gained knowledge of all his previous lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He understood the repetitive cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. • He understood how beings are reborn according to their kamma or actions (see page 75). • He understood that nothing has an unchanging essence (anatta) (see page 54). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He understood that beings suffer because of desire and attachment (see page 57). • He understood that suffering can be overcome through the path to enlightenment (see page 59).

After he became enlightened, Siddhartha:

- became known as the Buddha (the enlightened or awakened one)
- taught his spiritual wisdom to **the five ascetics**, who became his first disciples
- asked his followers to choose a middle way between the two extremes of luxury and asceticism.

APPLY



- A** Give **two** ways in which Mara tried to distract Siddhartha from enlightenment.
- B** 'The Buddha's enlightenment can be best described as a state of knowledge.'

Develop one argument to support this statement and one argument against it. Then **write a conclusion** where you decide whether you agree with the statement or not and explain your reasons why.

TIP

Some questions in the exam will require you to combine your knowledge from different topics. Here you could refer to material from other sections to fill out your picture of enlightenment.

3.5 The Dhamma

RECAP



Essential information:

- Dhamma** (or Dharma) refers to the truth the Buddha realised when he became enlightened, and to the path of training he recommended.
- The Dhamma is one of the three refuges, which are the central values in a Buddhist's life.
- The Dhamma is important to Buddhists as they believe by following it they will reduce their own suffering and the suffering of others.

What is the Dhamma?

Dhamma generally refers to **the Buddha's teachings**, but it also has the following meanings:

The 'truth' about the nature of existence, as understood by the Buddha when he became enlightened.	The path of training the Buddha recommended for anyone who wants to get closer to enlightenment.	A universal 'law' that governs how reality works, i.e. the way that things are.
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In his book *Old Path White Clouds*, the monk Thich Nhat Hanh tells how the Buddha thought of his teachings as something to be practised but not to be worshipped or held on to. In this sense his teachings are like a raft used to cross the river: it is necessary for crossing the river itself (or for reaching enlightenment), but a person should not become so attached to the raft that they cannot leave it behind once they reach the other shore.



The Buddha described his insights into reality as the 'truth', but still encouraged his followers to test and question his teachings themselves.

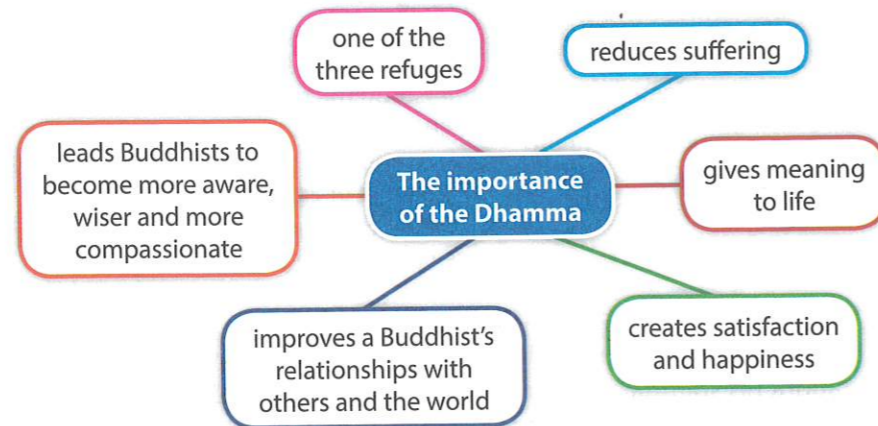
The importance of the Dhamma

- There are three refuges (or jewels) in Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha (the Buddhist community).
- For a Buddhist, the three jewels are the **central values** in their life. A Buddhist could be defined as someone who goes for refuge to the three jewels. This means trusting the three jewels as **sources of relief from suffering**.
- In Buddhist rituals it is common to recite the three refuges. They are also recited in the ceremony where a person becomes a Buddhist.

“To the Buddha for refuge I go
To the Dhamma for refuge I go
To the Sangha for refuge I go”

TIP

A Buddhist might use these words when reciting the three refuges. You could use this quote in your exam to show that the Dhamma is important to Buddhists because it is a 'refuge' from suffering.



APPLY



- A** Give **two** ways in which Buddhists understand the term 'Dhamma'.
- B** **Evaluate** this argument in response to the statement, 'The Dhamma is the most important of the three refuges.'

"The Dhamma is the most important refuge because it is the raft or the means to enlightenment, which is the goal of Buddhism. In addition, it does not depend on the Buddha but can be discovered by anyone at any time. By practising the Dhamma, Buddhists gain meaning, purpose and happiness in their lives."

3.6 The concept of dependent arising

RECAP




Essential information:

- Dependent arising** is the idea that everything arises in dependence upon conditions.
- Dependent arising is illustrated in the Tibetan Wheel of Life and other Buddhist teachings.
- It expresses the Buddhist view or vision of the nature of reality.

What is dependent arising?

- Dependent arising is the idea that **everything depends on supporting conditions**: nothing is independent.
- Dependent arising also means that everything is in a **constant process of change**, because everything is dependent on conditions which are themselves continually changing.

“All events and incidents in life are so intimately linked with the fate of others that a single person on his or her own cannot even begin to act.”
Tenzin Gyatso (the Dalai Lama)

Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tree depends on soil, rain and sunshine to survive. • These conditions change as the weather changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wave depends on how strong the wind is, which is always changing. <p>“[A wave] is something made temporarily possible by wind and water, and [...] is dependent on a set of constantly changing circumstances [...] every wave is related to every other wave.” <i>Sogyal Rinpoche</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kamma is an example of dependent arising that shows how someone's happiness and suffering depend on conditions, especially their previous actions (see page 75). • The type of world a person is born into in their next life (for instance, human, animal or heavenly being) depends on their kamma.

The Tibetan Wheel of Life

- **The Tibetan Wheel of life** is an image that illustrates dependent arising as applied to the birth, death and rebirth of beings (**samsara**).
- The outer wheel shows 12 links or stages (**nidanans**). These illustrate how human beings are subject to birth, death and rebirth.
- This process of birth, death and rebirth continues for many lifetimes until the cycle is broken by following the Buddhist path.
- When the cycle is broken (particularly by breaking free from the habit of craving – see page 57), this allows the possibility of **nibbana** (liberation and a state of complete enlightenment, happiness and peace).



APPLY



- A** Give **two** examples which show dependent arising.
- B** **Develop** this argument to support the statement, 'Dependent arising is the essence of the Buddha's teaching.'

"Dependent arising is very important as it is what the Buddha understood in his enlightenment, and it underpins all other Buddhist teachings."

TIP

You could develop this argument by explaining how dependent arising applies to other Buddhist teachings. The rest of this chapter will help with this.

3.7 The three marks of existence: dukkha

RECAP

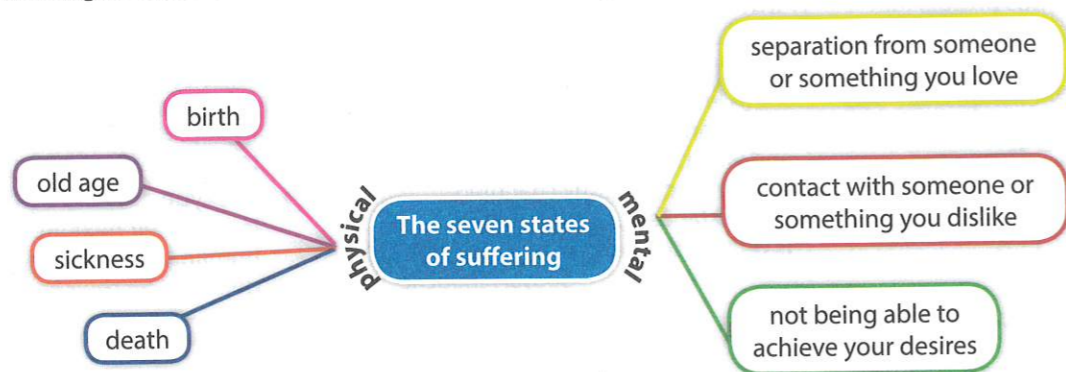
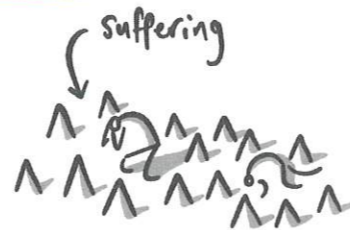


Essential information:

- Buddhism draws attention to three aspects of experience: suffering (dukkha), impermanence (anicca), and having no permanent, fixed self or soul (anatta). These are **the three marks of existence**.
- Dukkha** means suffering, dissatisfaction or unsatisfactoriness.
- Buddhism teaches that dukkha is an inevitable part of life, but can be overcome by attaining enlightenment.

What is dukkha?

- Buddhism teaches that suffering is an **inevitable part of life**.
- The main reason why the Buddha left his life of luxury in the palace was to discover an answer to the problem of suffering.
- Buddhists try to reduce suffering through following the Buddha's teachings. They believe that when they finally achieve enlightenment they will no longer suffer.
- The Buddha taught that there are **seven states of suffering**, of which four are physical and three are mental:



“[...] what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering.” *The Buddha in the Majjhima Nikaya, vol. 1, p. 140*

Different types of suffering

As well as the seven states of suffering, the Buddha also talked about three different kinds of suffering:

Type of suffering	Meaning	Examples
Ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkhata)	Physical and mental pain	Breaking a leg, missing someone, being upset at failing an exam.
Suffering because of change (viparinama-dukkha)	Caused by losing something good	Getting older, moving to a new city, the weather turning bad.
Suffering because of attachment (samkhara-dukkha)	Dissatisfaction with life as a result of craving and attachment	Trying to hold on to things a person is attached to. Always present as a dissatisfaction with life; feeling unhappy for no reason.

APPLY



- A** Give **one** example of ordinary suffering and **one** example of suffering because of change.
- B** **Develop** the following argument to oppose the statement, 'Emphasising suffering makes Buddhism seem pessimistic.'

"While Buddhism emphasises the inevitability of suffering, the aim is not to cause depression but to help people wake up and see that they and others are suffering."

TIP

To develop this argument you could explain why Buddhists believe it is important to accept suffering as a fact of life (see page 56). You could also explain how Buddhists aim to reduce suffering and eventually overcome it altogether (see page 59).

3.8 The three marks of existence: anicca

RECAP



Essential information:

- Anicca** means impermanence. It refers to the idea that everything constantly changes.
- Buddhism teaches that suffering arises when people resist change because they are too attached to things.
- Awareness of anicca leads to the letting go of attachment and so lessens suffering.

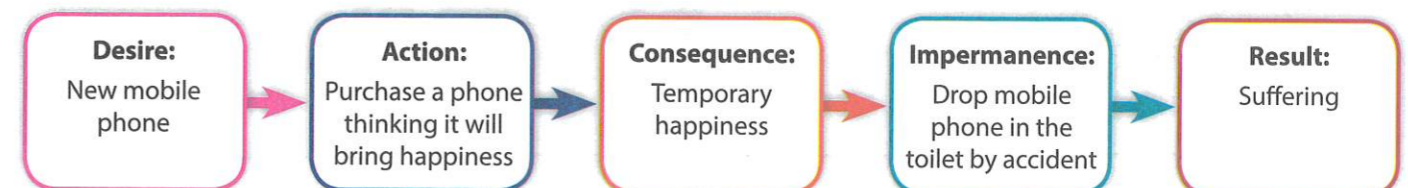
What is anicca?

Anicca affects the world in three different ways:

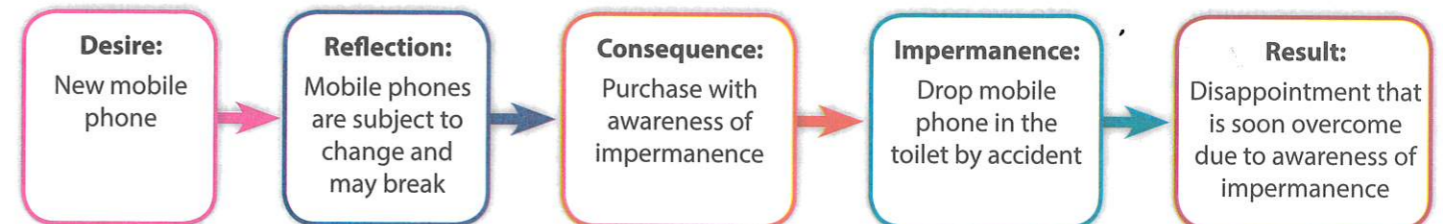
What is affected	Example
Living things	A tree sprouts from a seed, grows, and eventually dies
Non-living things	An iron nail will rust if left out in the rain
People's minds	A person's thoughts and feelings change throughout their lives

The relationship between anicca and dukkha

Buddhism teaches that when people expect things to remain unchanged, they become attached to them. Therefore when things do change (anicca), people experience suffering (dukkha) as a result of their attachment. For example:



Awareness of impermanence helps to overcome attachment (and therefore reduces suffering). For example:



The story of Kisa Gotami teaches about suffering because of anicca. This is a traditional Buddhist story that can be found in the *Therigatha*. The main events in the story are as follows:

- Kisa Gotami's child died at a young age, and she went out of her mind with sorrow.
- The Buddha told her she should visit all the houses in the village and ask for a mustard seed from any house in which no one had died.
- She could not find a house where no one had died.
- Eventually she realised that death is inescapable and buried her child.

TIP

When Kisa Gotami realised that death (a result of anicca) is something that everyone has to experience, her suffering became more bearable. You could use this story in your exam as an example of how an awareness of impermanence helps to reduce suffering.

APPLY



- A** Explain **two** Buddhist teachings about impermanence. **Refer to scripture or sacred writings** in your answer.
- B** Here is an argument to support the statement, 'Impermanence causes suffering.' **Write an argument** to support another view.

"Impermanence causes suffering because everything changes and, because of our attachment to things, we don't want that to happen. We cling on to things and so, when they change, we suffer. For instance, I love my mobile phone and if it were to break I would suffer a lot."

3.9 The three marks of existence: anatta

RECAP



Essential information:

- Anatta** is the idea that people do not have a fixed self or soul. This means there is no unchanging essence to the human being that is permanent or eternal.
- The Buddha taught that a person is made up of five aspects, called **the five aggregates** (skandhas). These show how there is no unchanging self.

What is anatta?

The Buddha taught that there is no fixed part of a person that does not change. This idea of anatta is illustrated in the story of Nagasena and the chariot:

- One day a monk called Nagasena arrived at the court of King Milinda.
- The king asked Nagasena what his name was.
- Nagasena answered but said there was no person behind the name.
- The king was confused and asked who then was standing before him.
- Nagasena answered using the analogy of the chariot:
 - A chariot is made up of a number of different parts.
 - The term ‘chariot’ is a name used to refer to all of these parts.
 - There is no chariot independent of its parts.
 - Likewise, a person exists but only because of the parts they are made up from.
 - There is no separate ‘self’ that is independent to these parts.



TIP
This story about Nagasena and King Milinda is a source of Buddhist teaching and could be used in your exam to help explain the idea of anatta.

The five aggregates

Buddhists divide the ‘self’ into five parts (the five aggregates or skandhas) to show there is no unchanging essence or core to a person. The Buddha taught that as these parts are constantly changing, the ‘self’ is also constantly changing.

Aggregate	Meaning	Example
Form	Our bodies	My knee
Sensation	Our feelings	My knee hurts
Perception	Our ways of interpreting and understanding things	My knee hurts because I bashed it against the door
Mental formations	Our thoughts	I want my knee to stop hurting; I don't like it
Consciousness	Our general awareness of things	Awareness of my knee

TIP
The five aggregates are discussed in more detail on page 60.

APPLY



- A** Explain **two** of the five aggregates.
- B** Evaluate this argument to support the statement, ‘Anatta shows that nothing has a fixed self.’

“Anatta means that nothing really exists because we don't see things properly. We think we do but really we don't. Everything is just in our mind and not really there. We are kind of making it all up. Buddhism talks about five things that show this and one of them is the body, which doesn't really exist either. There was a monk who talked to a king about this.”

3.10 An introduction to the Four Noble Truths

RECAP

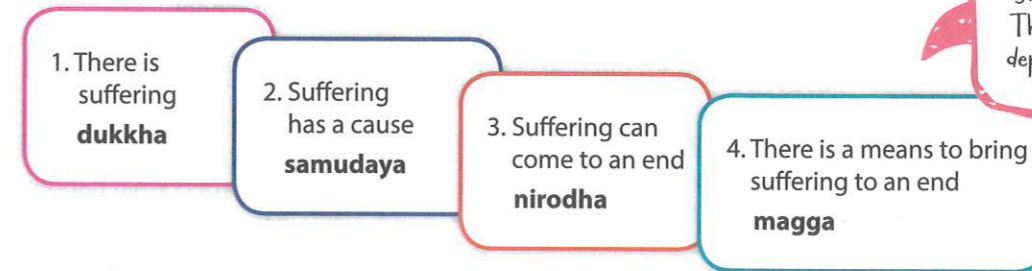


Essential information:

- The Four Noble Truths** are the four truths the Buddha taught about suffering. They explain why people suffer and how they can overcome it.
- The Four Noble Truths are part of the Dhamma (see page 50), and said to be the Buddha's first teaching after his enlightenment.
- Full understanding of the Four Noble Truths leads to enlightenment for Theravada Buddhists.

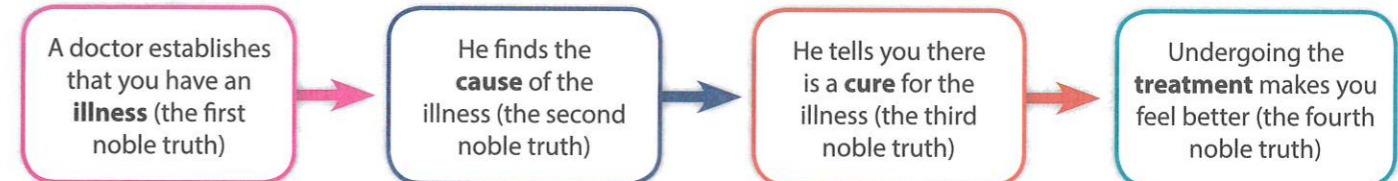
What are the Four Noble Truths?

The Four Noble Truths were discovered by the Buddha while he was meditating under the peepul tree (see page 49). The Four Noble Truths are:



TIP
The Four Noble Truths apply the concept of dependent arising (see page 51) to the experience of suffering. They show how suffering arises in dependence on conditions and how suffering can end.

The Four Noble Truths are sometimes explained using the idea of illness, where the Buddha is compared to a doctor:



“The truth of suffering is like a disease, the truth of origin is like the cause of the disease, the truth of cessation is like the cure of the disease, and the truth of the path is like the medicine.” *The Visuddhimagga, p. 512*

- Buddhists aim to come to understand the Four Noble Truths through study, reflection, meditation and other practices.
- For Theravada Buddhists (see page 60), understanding the Four Noble Truths leads to enlightenment.
- In Mahayana Buddhism (see page 61), other teachings such as the development of compassion are also very important in addition to understanding the Four Noble Truths.

TIP
The ‘cure’ to overcome suffering is the Eightfold Path – see page 59.



APPLY



- A** Explain how the Four Noble Truths can be compared to the idea of a doctor treating an illness.
- B** Here are some arguments that could be used to evaluate the statement, ‘The Four Noble Truths are the most important Buddhist teaching.’ Sort them into arguments in support of the statement, and arguments in support of different views. **Write your own justified conclusion.**

1. The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths in his first sermon	5. They seem rather pessimistic
2. Compassion is also important for enlightenment	6. Dependent arising is the most important teaching
3. Understanding the Four Noble Truths leads to nibanna	7. The Eightfold Path is the way to enlightenment
4. The Four Noble Truths don't include anatta	8. The second noble truth shows why we suffer

3.11 The first noble truth: the existence of suffering

RECAP

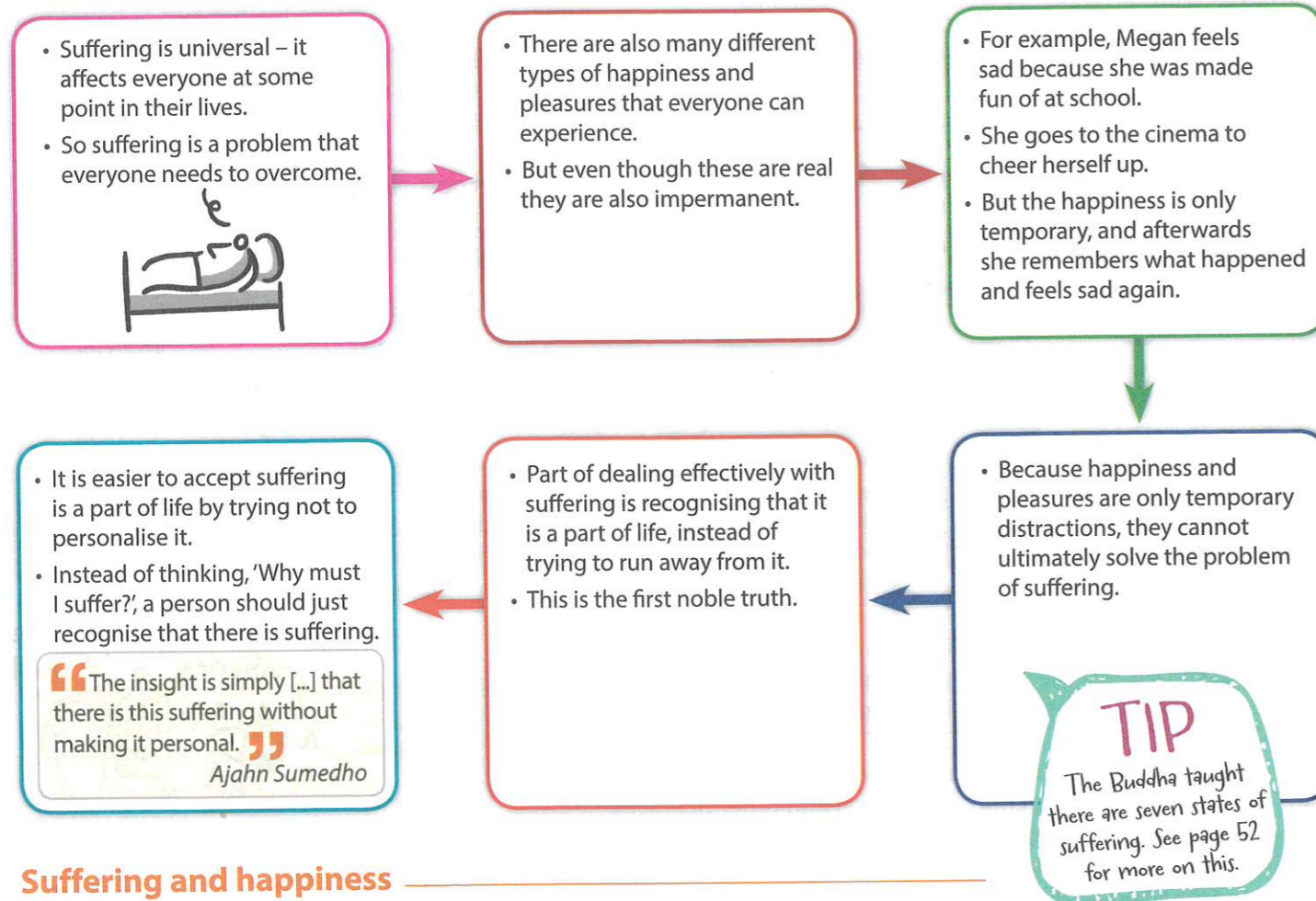


Essential information:

- The first noble truth is that suffering (dukkha) exists and it is something everyone experiences.
- Buddhism teaches that accepting suffering is a part of life is the first step to overcoming it.

How do we respond to suffering?

Buddhism teaches the following about suffering and how to respond to it:



Suffering and happiness

- Some people think that to focus on suffering is pessimistic.
- Buddhists would say the Buddha's teachings are not pessimistic but realistic, as suffering affects everyone at some point in their lives.
- Buddhism also teaches that suffering *does* have an end, which can be reached by following the Buddhist path.
- Buddhists feel that reflecting on suffering helps people to understand what it truly important and to connect with others.

APPLY



A Give **two** ways in which beliefs about dukkha influence Buddhists today.

B Prepare an **essay plan** that includes arguments to support and oppose the statement, 'Seeking pleasure is not the solution to suffering.' In your plan include:

- arguments to support this statement
- arguments to support a different point of view
- reference to Buddhist teachings
- a justified conclusion.

TIP

Writing a series of bullet points is one way to create an essay plan.

3.12 The second noble truth: the causes of suffering

RECAP



Essential information:

- The second noble truth explains why people suffer. It teaches that one of the main causes of suffering is **tanha** (craving).
- The three poisons** of greed, hatred and ignorance keep people trapped in the cycle of samsara and prevent them from overcoming suffering.
- Buddhism teaches that understanding why people suffer is important if suffering is to be reduced.

The concept of tanha

Tanha means craving (wanting or desiring something). The Buddha taught there are three main types of craving:

1. Sensory craving

- Craving things that please the senses
- E.g. craving pleasant smells or tasty foods

2. Craving for being

- Wanting to become something you are not
- E.g. craving to become smart, attractive or successful

3. Craving for non-being

- Wanting to stop experiencing something
- E.g. not wanting to feel pain or embarrassment

- Buddhism teaches that people suffer because they become attached to things they like.
- But the things they like are impermanent, so will change or disappear.
- As a result, attachment leads to suffering.
- The temporary pleasures that people crave cannot last or make them feel permanently happy.

“ Now this [...] is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: **it is this craving which leads to renewed existence** [...] craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.”

The Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya, vol. 5, p. 421

Suffering and the three poisons

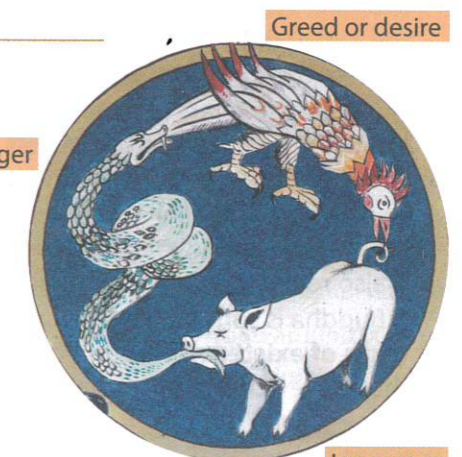
Buddhism teaches that people are driven by the three poisons:

- **greed or desire** (represented by a cockerel)
- **hatred or anger** (represented by a snake)
- **ignorance** (represented by a pig).

These three poisons trap people in the cycle of samsara and prevent them from achieving enlightenment. They sit in the centre of the Tibetan Wheel of Life and keep it turning.

The Buddha taught that the three poisons are linked to craving:

- Craving **leads to greed and hatred**.
- Craving is also **rooted in ignorance**. Ignorance is not simply a lack of general knowledge, but a deeper ignorance about the world and the nature of reality. It is a kind of deliberately ignoring the truth of the way things are.
- Because people do not wake up to the truth of things (the three marks of existence), they continue spinning round the Wheel of Life and continue to suffer.



TIP

The Tibetan Wheel of Life is an image that symbolises the repeating cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. See page 51 for more on this.

APPLY



A Give **two** ways in which beliefs about craving influence Buddhists today.

B 'Buddhism teaches that all desire leads to suffering.' Using bullet points, **prepare some notes** to oppose this statement.

3.13 The third noble truth: the end of suffering

RECAP



Essential information:

- The third noble truth is that there is an end to suffering, which anyone is capable of achieving.
- The third noble truth teaches that suffering can be ended by overcoming craving and ignorance.
- When a person overcomes suffering they become enlightened and reach **nibbana**, which is a state of complete freedom, happiness and peace.

Overcoming craving and ignorance

The third noble truth teaches that a person can end their suffering through their own actions and efforts. This is important for Buddhists because it means it is possible for anyone to overcome suffering and achieve happiness.

The third noble truth teaches that suffering can be ended by **overcoming craving and ignorance**:

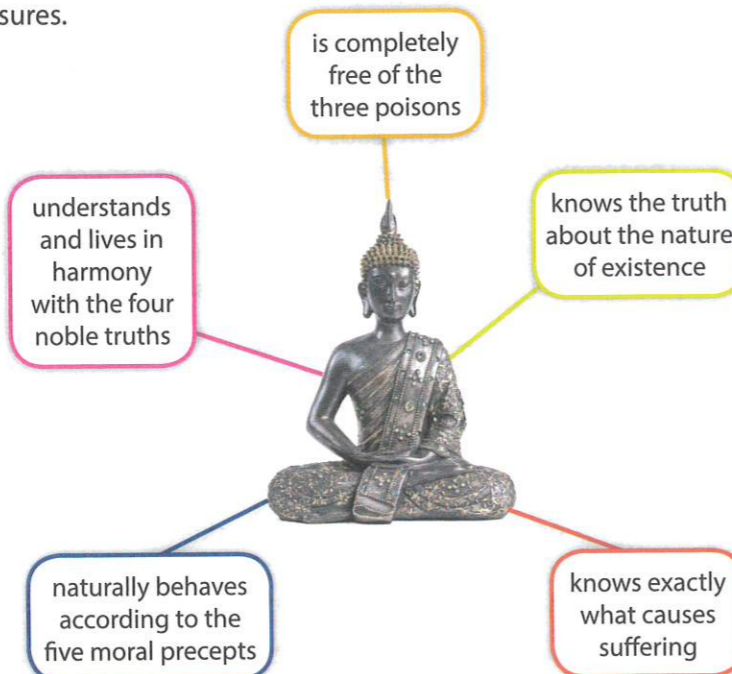
- People suffer because of their **craving and attachment** to things that are impermanent.
- This doesn't mean people should just avoid the things they enjoy.
- Instead they should enjoy things but recognise they can't last, and be ready to let go of them.
- **Ignorance** makes people think that impermanent pleasures are sources of complete fulfilment.
- But by **overcoming this ignorance** – by realising that temporary pleasures cannot bring true happiness – people can **overcome their craving** for these pleasures.
- This helps them to end their suffering.

“[...] the noble truth of the cessation of suffering [...] is the remainderless **fading away and cessation of that same craving.**”

The Buddha in the Samyutta Nikaya, vol. 5, p. 421

Interpretations of nibbana or enlightenment

- Nibbana literally means 'extinction'. It refers to the **extinction of the three poisons** (or three fires) of greed, hatred and ignorance.
- Nibbana also refers to a **state of complete liberation, peace and happiness**. This is reached when a person becomes enlightened.
- Another word for enlightenment is 'bodhi', which means 'awakening' – like waking up from a sleep. It also refers to a state of knowing.
- A Buddha is someone who has **woken up to the truth of existence**. Through becoming enlightened, they have achieved the characteristics shown in the diagram on the right.



TIP
Remember that while most Buddhists believe the Buddha knew the truth about the nature of existence, they do not believe he gained knowledge of everything when he became enlightened. This would imply he was omniscient and had supernatural powers, which most Buddhists do not think is true.

TIP
Try to learn the key Buddhist terms (such as 'enlightenment' and 'nibbana') so you can use them in your answers to demonstrate your knowledge.

Evaluate the following argument. Then note down the arguments you would use to oppose this point of view.

"Buddhism says desire is bad because it leads to suffering. For instance, if I eat an ice cream, I suffer. So you have to stop liking things which means not to be attached. Then you don't suffer and reach nibbana."

APPLY



- A** Which Buddhist word means extinction and refers to enlightenment?
- B** 'Non-attachment means not caring about anything.'

3.14 The fourth noble truth: the cure for suffering

RECAP

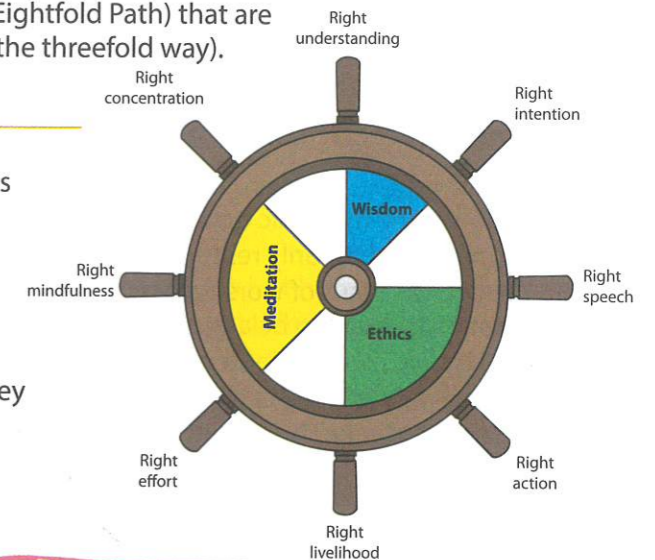


Essential information:

- The fourth noble truth is a series of practices that Buddhists can follow to overcome suffering.
- This is known as the middle path or middle way, as the Buddha taught that people should lead a moderate life between the two extremes of luxury and asceticism.
- The path consists of eight practices (the Eightfold Path) that are sometimes grouped into three sections (the threefold way).

The Eightfold Path and the threefold way

- **The Eightfold Path** consists of eight aspects that Buddhists practise and live by in order to achieve enlightenment.
- The Eightfold Path is sometimes split into three different sections (ethics, meditation and wisdom), which make up **the threefold way**.
- The Eightfold Path can be understood as a range of practices that can all be developed at the same time, as they are all interlinked and reinforce each other.



“But if any one goes to the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Order as a refuge, he perceives with proper knowledge the four noble truths: Suffering, the arising of suffering, and the overcoming of suffering, and the noble eightfold path leading to the cessation of suffering.”

The Buddha in the Dhammapada, verses 190–191

TIP
Make sure you understand this quote. It refers to the three refuges (see page 50) and the Four Noble Truths (see pages 55–59). It essentially says that if someone follows the three refuges (including the Buddha's teachings), they will come to understand the Four Noble Truths. This will end their suffering.

Section of the threefold way	Aspect of the Eightfold Path	Explanation
Ethics (sila) Emphasises the importance of having good morals and behaviour, and living in an ethical way.	Right speech	Speaking truthfully, helpfully and kindly. Avoiding lying and gossiping about others.
	Right action	Practising the five moral precepts (especially not causing harm to others).
	Right livelihood	Earning a living in a way that does not harm others (e.g. not doing work that exploits people or harms animals).
Meditation (samadhi) Emphasises the importance of meditating effectively in order to develop wisdom.	Right effort	Putting effort into developing and sustaining skilful mental states.
	Right mindfulness	Developing awareness of yourself and the world around you.
	Right concentration	Developing the concentration and focus that is required to meditate effectively.
Wisdom (panna) Emphasises the importance of overcoming ignorance in order to achieve enlightenment.	Right understanding	Developing a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings, especially the Four Noble Truths.
	Right intention	Following the Eightfold Path with the correct intention and a sincere attitude.

APPLY



- A** Two elements of the threefold way are meditation and wisdom. Referring to Buddhist teaching, **explain** how these can be linked to the Eightfold Path.
- B** 'The Eightfold Path is the most important of the Four Noble Truths.' Prepare **one** developed argument either for or against this statement.

TIP
Remember that a developed argument includes a statement of opinion, and some further explanation or examples to support that opinion.

3.15 Theravada Buddhism

RECAP



Essential information:

- **Theravada Buddhism** is one of the oldest schools of Buddhism, practised mainly in southern Asia.
- Theravada Buddhism teaches that the human personality is made up of five parts or aggregates: form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Theravada Buddhism

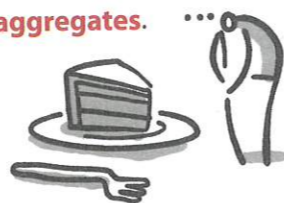
Some of the main characteristics of Theravada Buddhism include the following:

- Ordination in the monastic community is emphasised.
- Full ordination is primarily reserved for men (see page 145).
- The Buddha is a focus of worship and is seen as the teacher and guide, but is not considered to be a god.
- The goal is to achieve enlightenment and reach nibbana.
- Some Theravada Buddhists believe that good fortune (or merit) may be transferred to others. This practice is emphasised when someone has died (see page 73).



The human personality in Theravada Buddhism

- Theravada Buddhism teaches that people are made up of five parts, called **the five aggregates**.
- These interact with each other to make up a person's identity and personality.
- The purpose of thinking about a person in this way is to help understand that nothing has a fixed, unchanging nature (see page 54).
- These categories also aid understanding of the processes of sense perception, craving, and how people form habits.



Aggregate	Explanation	Example
Form	• A person's body, or objects in the world (including other people).	You enter a room and see a slice of cake (a physical object).
Sensation	• The feelings or sensations that occur when people come into contact with things. • Can be physical (e.g. a sensation of pain after tripping over) or emotional (e.g. feeling joy after seeing a friend).	Seeing the cake gives you a feeling or sense of anticipation.
Perception	• How people recognise (or perceive) what things are , based on their previous experiences.	You recognise it's a slice of cake, from having seen other slices of cake in the past.
Mental formations	• Thoughts and opinions – how a person responds mentally to the things they experience. • Includes likes and dislikes, and a person's attitude towards different things.	You form an opinion about whether or not you want to eat the cake.
Consciousness	• A person's general awareness of the world around them.	Your underlying awareness of all of the above processes.

APPLY



A Using examples, **explain** the differences between 'sensation' and 'mental formations'.

B 'The idea that people consist of five aggregates is the most useful Buddhist teaching to help explain the concept of anatta.'

Develop one argument to support this statement and one argument to support a different point of view.

TIP

The concept of anatta is discussed on page 54. The story of Nagasena and King Milinda might help you to answer this question.

3.16 Mahayana Buddhism

RECAP



Essential information:

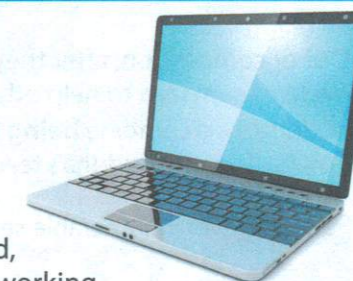
- **Mahayana Buddhism** is a term used to describe a number of different Buddhist traditions that share some overlapping characteristics. It includes Pure Land Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.
- Mahayana Buddhism emphasises the teaching of **sunyata** (emptiness): the idea that nothing has a separate, independent 'self' or 'soul'.
- **Buddha-nature** is also important in some Mahayana traditions. This is the idea that everyone has the essence of the Buddha inside them.

Sunyata

- Sunyata (emptiness) is an important concept in Mahayana Buddhism.
- It is a restatement of anatta (see page 54), but applies to all things rather than just human beings.
- It teaches that **nothing has a fixed, independent, unchanging nature**. Everything exists in relation to, or because of, other things.
- For Buddhists, realising that everything depends on everything else can lead to trust, compassion and selflessness.

Example: the empty laptop

- A laptop does not have a 'soul' – a separate, independent bit that forms the essence of the laptop.
- Instead, the word 'laptop' is just a name given to a collection of parts.
- These parts all rely on each other in order for the laptop to function.
- The laptop is impermanent: one of the parts will eventually break down and, because the other parts rely on it to function properly, the laptop will stop working.
- The laptop has the nature of sunyata (empty of independent existence).



Buddha-nature and attaining Buddhahood

Buddha-nature is an important concept in some Mahayana traditions. It refers to the following teaching:

Everyone has the essence (or nature) of a Buddha already inside them.



A person's Buddha-nature is hidden by desires, attachments, ignorance and negative thoughts.



When a person truly comes to understand the Buddha's teachings, they experience their inner Buddha-nature.



The *Uttaratantra Shastra* uses the following metaphor: Buddha-nature is like honey surrounded by a swarm of bees. The honey is sweet and tasty, but as long as it is surrounded by bees it isn't possible to eat it, even though it's been there all the time. The only way to experience the honey is to get rid of the bees.

Mahayana Buddhists aim to achieve **Buddhahood**: to become Buddhas (enlightened beings). They believe everyone has the potential to do this because of their inherent Buddha-nature.



APPLY



A Which term in Mahayana Buddhism refers to the potential of all people to become Buddhas?

B 'Sunyata is a different idea from anatta.'

Develop one argument to oppose this statement.

3.17 The Arhat and the Bodhisattva

RECAP



Essential information:

- Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism have different ideas of the ideal Buddhist.
- A Theravada Buddhist aims to become an Arhat by following the Eightfold Path.
- A Mahayana Buddhist aims to become a Bodhisattva by developing six spiritual qualities (the six perfections).

Becoming an Arhat

- An **Arhat** is a 'perfected person' who has overcome the main sources of suffering – the three poisons – to become enlightened.
- When someone becomes an Arhat, they are **no longer reborn when they die**.
- They become free from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (samsara) to reach nibbana.
- This goal is achieved by **following and fulfilling the Eightfold Path** (see page 59).
- It is said that many of the Buddha's disciples became Arhats.

Becoming a Bodhisattva

- A **Bodhisattva** sees their own enlightenment as being bound up with the enlightenment of all beings.
- Out of compassion, after they achieve enlightenment, they **choose to remain in the cycle of samsara** to help others achieve enlightenment too.
- Bodhisattvas combine **being compassionate with being wise**. They believe the original emphasis of the Buddha's teachings was to 'go forth for the welfare of the many'.

“However innumerable sentient beings are; I vow to save them.” A Bodhisattva vow



A person becomes a Bodhisattva by practising the six perfections:

Attribute	Aim
Generosity	To be charitable and generous in all that is done
Morality	To live ethically by following the moral precepts
Patience	To practise being patient in all things
Energy	To cultivate the energy and perseverance needed to keep going
Meditation	To develop concentration and awareness
Wisdom	To obtain wisdom and understanding

TIP
The six perfections are discussed in more detail on page 79.

Mahayana Buddhists believe there are **earthly and transcendent Bodhisattvas**:

- Earthly Bodhisattvas continue to be reborn into the world, to live on earth and help others.
- Transcendent Bodhisattvas are purely spiritual beings beyond time and space. They may appear in different forms in the world, to help others and lead beings to enlightenment. Mahayana Buddhists may pray to these Bodhisattvas in times of need.

APPLY



A Explain **two** differences between an Arhat and a Bodhisattva. **Refer to Buddhist teachings** in your answer.

B Prepare an **essay plan** to evaluate the statement, 'Becoming a Bodhisattva is harder than becoming an Arhat.' In your plan include:

- arguments to support this statement
- arguments to support a different point of view
- reference to Buddhist teachings
- a justified conclusion.

TIP
Your conclusion should say whether or not you agree with the statement and why. (It's possible you may **partly** agree with the statement, in which case you can say this and explain why.)

3.18 Pure Land Buddhism

RECAP



Essential information:

- Pure Land Buddhism** is a tradition within Mahayana Buddhism. It is based on faith in **Amitabha Buddha** and his paradise.
- Pure Land Buddhists hope to be reborn and gain enlightenment in the Pure Land.
- The main practice in Pure Land Buddhism is the recitation of Amitabha's name.

Amitabha Buddha and the Pure Land

- Pure Land Buddhism is one of the main forms of Buddhism in Japan today.
- It is based on faith in Amitabha Buddha, who is believed to have created a paradise or pure land called **Sukhavati** when he became enlightened.
- Pure Land Buddhists hope to be reborn into this world, in which it is considered to be easier to achieve enlightenment.



Amitabha Buddha in Sukhavati

How to reach the Pure Land

- T'an-luan (the founder of Pure Land Buddhism in China) recommended five practices: reciting scriptures, meditating on Amitabha and his paradise, worshipping Amitabha, chanting his name, and making praises and offerings to him.
- As Pure Land Buddhism developed, the most important practice became reciting Amitabha's name.

Pure Land Buddhism contrasts with Theravada Buddhism in the following ways:

Pure Land Buddhism	Theravada Buddhism
Faith in Amitabha is the focus of practice, and more important than a person's actions and behaviour.	A person can only gain enlightenment through their actions and behaviour (e.g. by following the Eightfold Path).
Amitabha will help people to be reborn in the Pure Land.	People cannot rely on any outside help to achieve enlightenment.

Pure Land Buddhism offers a simple practice (the recitation of Amitabha's name), and the promise of receiving Amitabha's help to reach enlightenment. This has helped the tradition to gain a popular following.

APPLY



A Referring to a relevant scripture, give **two** characteristics of Amitabha's Pure Land.

B 'Pure Land Buddhism offers an easy way to gain enlightenment.'

Write a developed argument to support this statement.



Test the 1 mark question

- 1 Which **one** of the following is **not** one of the Four Noble Truths? [1 mark]
 A Suffering exists B Suffering can be overcome
 C Not everyone suffers D Following the Eightfold Path can end suffering
- 2 Which **one** of the following is one of the three marks of existence? [1 mark]
 A Anicca B Metta C Peace D Sunyata

Test the 2 mark question

- 3 Give **two** of the six perfections. [2 marks]
 1) _____
 2) _____
- 4 Give **two** reasons why Siddhartha decided to turn away from asceticism. [2 marks]
 1) _____
 2) _____

Test the 4 mark question

- 5 Explain **two** ways in which belief in the Buddha's enlightenment influences Buddhists today. [4 marks]

● Explain one way.	One way is that it makes Buddhists believe they can also achieve enlightenment.
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example/reference to a religious teaching or quotation.	So they will put more effort into Buddhist practices, such as following the Eightfold Path or five moral precepts.
● Explain a second way.	A second way is that it makes Buddhists more respectful of the Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings).
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example/reference to a religious teaching or quotation.	For example, Buddhists respect the Dhamma as one of the three refuges, which are the three central values to a Buddhist's life.

TIP
 If a question asks you about how a belief influences people today, you need to make sure your answer focuses on how people today are affected. For example, how does their approach to the religion or practice of it change as a result?

- 6 Explain **two** ways in which learning about the four sights influences Buddhists today. [4 marks]

● Explain one way.	
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example/reference to a religious teaching or quotation.	
● Explain a second way.	
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example/reference to a religious teaching or quotation.	

- 7 Explain **two** differences between an Arhat and a Bodhisattva. [4 marks]

Test the 5 mark question

- 8 Explain **two** Buddhist beliefs about the third noble truth. Refer to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching in your answer. [5 marks]

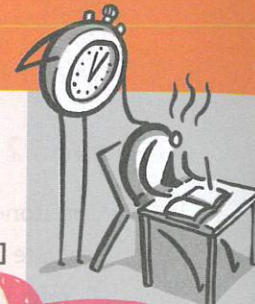
● Explain one belief.	The third noble truth is the end of suffering. It teaches that suffering can be ended by overcoming craving.
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example.	Buddhism teaches that if people become less attached to things, they suffer less when those things change or disappear (as a result of impermanence).
● Explain a second belief.	The third noble truth teaches that the end of suffering is nibbana or enlightenment.
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example.	Nibbana means 'extinction', and it refers to the extinction of the three poisons: greed, hatred and ignorance.
● Add a reference to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief. If you prefer, you can add this reference to your first belief instead.	In the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha says that the third noble truth is the 'fading away and cessation of that same craving'.

TIP
 'Another source of Buddhist belief and teaching' could be the words of Buddhist leaders and teachers, such as the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh.

- 9 Explain **two** realisations the Buddha made during the three watches of the night, when he became enlightened. Refer to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching in your answer. [5 marks]

● Explain one realisation.	
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example.	
● Explain a second realisation.	
● Develop your explanation with more detail/an example.	
● Add a reference to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief. If you prefer, you can add this reference to your first realisation instead.	

- 10 Explain **two** Mahayana teachings. Refer to sacred writings or another source of Buddhist belief and teaching in your answer. [5 marks]



Test the 12 mark question

11 'The stories of the Buddha's birth have no relevance for Buddhists today.'

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:

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

[12 marks]
Plus SPaG 3 marks

REASONED ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE STATEMENT

- **Explain why some people would agree with the statement.**
- Develop your explanation with more detail and examples.
- Refer to religious teaching. Use a quote or paraphrase or a religious authority.
- **Evaluate the arguments.** Is this a good argument or not? Explain why you think this.

Some Buddhists might argue that stories about the Buddha's birth have no relevance because they are not believable. For example, the stories say that as soon as the Buddha was born, he could walk and talk. Also that he walked seven steps and lotus flowers bloomed beneath his feet. For modern Buddhists today who don't believe in miracles, it might be hard to see any point to these stories.

Buddhists might also say that stories about the Buddha's birth are much less relevant than stories about his enlightenment and teachings. These stories might actually help Buddhists to become closer to their own enlightenment, whereas stories about the Buddha's birth don't really help them to follow the Buddha's teachings. They are more like fairy stories than a guide to practice.

TIP
Including specific examples will help to support your arguments in the 12-mark question. Here, the student has given specific stories about the Buddha's birth. These help to support the argument that the stories are not believable.

REASONED ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING A DIFFERENT VIEW

- **Explain why some people would support a different view.**
- Develop your explanation with more detail and examples.
- Refer to religious teaching. Use a quote or paraphrase or a religious authority.
- **Evaluate the arguments.** Is this a good argument or not? Explain why you think this.

Other Buddhists might argue that the stories about the Buddha's birth symbolise how special he was, and help to show that he is worth following as a teacher.

The stories also help to give context to the Buddha's life and teachings. For example, the stories show that the Buddha was born into a royal family and a life of luxury. This helps to explain why the Buddha later rejected a life of luxury for a life of asceticism, and then he also rejected that to teach a middle way between the two extremes. This middle way wouldn't have been developed without first being born into a royal family. So the stories help to make sense of the Buddha's teachings.

CONCLUSION

- **Give a justified conclusion.**
- Include your own opinion together with your own reasoning.
- **Include evaluation.** Explain why you think one viewpoint is stronger than the other or why they are equally strong.
- Do not just repeat arguments you have already used without explaining how they apply to your reasoned opinion/conclusion.

The stories about the Buddha's birth may be hard to believe, but they do not have to be taken literally. They can still express spiritual truths. I think many Buddhists might say there are more relevant stories - such as stories about the Buddha's enlightenment and teachings - but it is not true the stories have no relevance. They show how special the Buddha was, and they help to give context to the Buddha's teachings.

12 'Achieving enlightenment is not that difficult.'

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:

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

[12 marks]
Plus SPaG 3 marks

REASONED ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE STATEMENT

- **Explain why some people would agree with the statement.**
- Develop your explanation with more detail and examples.
- Refer to religious teaching. Use a quote or paraphrase or a religious authority.
- **Evaluate the arguments.** Is this a good argument or not? Explain why you think this.

REASONED ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING A DIFFERENT VIEW

- **Explain why some people would support a different view.**
- Develop your explanation with more detail and examples.
- Refer to religious teaching. Use a quote or paraphrase or a religious authority.
- **Evaluate the arguments.** Is this a good argument or not? Explain why you think this.

CONCLUSION

- **Give a justified conclusion.**
- Include your own opinion together with your own reasoning.
- **Include evaluation.** Explain why you think one viewpoint is stronger than the other or why they are equally strong.
- Do not just repeat arguments you have already used without explaining how they apply to your reasoned opinion/conclusion.

TIP
In your answer to this question, consider what different Buddhist traditions teach about how to achieve enlightenment. For example, you could compare Theravada Buddhism with Pure Land Buddhism. Do some of the different 'paths' to enlightenment seem easier than others?

13 'Buddhism teaches that in order to achieve enlightenment, it is most important to overcome ignorance.'

Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should:

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

[12 marks]
Plus SPaG 3 marks



Check your answers using the mark scheme on page 163. How did you do? To feel more secure in the content you need to remember, re-read pages 46-63. To remind yourself of what the examiner is looking for, go to pages 6-11.