

Buddhism

Four Main Schools of Buddhism

Buddhism originated in Northern India c. 560 BCE, as it took root in different countries it adapted to the different cultures and took many different forms, although all Buddhists will subscribe to the main beliefs listed below. You will probably meet up with:

- I. **Theravada** Buddhism - South and South East India - the yellow robed monks - living the Vinaya (monastic rule) is seen as the best way to Enlightenment.
- II. **Mahayana** Buddhism - North and North East India - known as "The Great Way" - great emphasis on compassion - includes idea of Bodhisattvas, leaders who help others strive to reach Enlightenment. Present in China as "Pure Land" Buddhism and in Japan as Zen Buddhism which has a high stress on meditation.
- III. **Vajrayana** Buddhism - "The Diamond Way" -Tibet - a significant number of artefacts available to schools, e.g. prayer wheels and flags, singing bowls, are unique to the Tibetan tradition.
- IV. **Western Buddhism** - Buddhism began to be appreciated in the West in the 1950's. The major traditions are all represented in this country as well as specifically western movements such as the **Friends of the Western Buddhist Order**. Members of the FWBO are neither monks and nuns nor lay people; they are "ordained" and given a Sanskrit name which has a significant meaning and is a name "to grow into". Members of the WBO wear a small white stole called a Kesa when teaching the Dharma, meditating or performing puja, they do not wear robes.

There are approximately 350,000,000 Buddhists in the world, most of them can be found in South East Asia.

You will find that sometimes the word **Sangha** is used to describe the worldwide community of Buddhists, sometimes only the monks and nuns. The former is more common in the West, the latter in the East.

There is no need for you to worry about the detail of the different forms of Buddhism in the primary school - use the material you find most appropriate for the work you are undertaking.



The Three Jewels. A special design, known as the Three Jewels, represents the core of Buddhist teaching. The red lotus represents growth and transcendence. The three jewels represent the Three "Refuges" (The Buddhist statement of faith; "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma" (Buddha's teaching). "I take refuge in the Sangha" (the community of believers). The yellow jewel symbolises the Buddha (it is the traditional colour of the Buddha's robes) blue symbolises the Dharma (the colour of depth and limitlessness as in the ocean and sky), red is the Sangha (warmth, passion, friendship). The jewels are surrounded by the flames of transformation.

The Buddha

The Buddha is revered and respected as the founder of the Buddhist way of thinking.

Summaries of the story of the life of the Buddha are now fairly easy to find and there are several versions written at the appropriate level for primary children available. The life story of a founder is always a good way of teaching about a religion. *Here it is also important that the different stories and legends which surround the life of the Buddha portray in an extended allegorical form the nature of mankind's spiritual journey and this could be brought out in teaching.* It is worth remembering that, despite the name of the faith, it is **not** the Buddha who is at the centre of Buddhism, but the truth or teaching of the **Dharma**.

The key features of the Buddha's story are:

- (i) Birth in North India, 6th Century BC, of wealthy aristocratic family. Born Prince Siddharta Gotoma.
- (ii) Predictions that he would be either a great ruler or a holy man. Parents' determination that he should not be exposed to suffering as they wished him to become a ruler..
- (iii) Siddharta's chariot rides on which he saw **The Four Sights**; old age, sickness, death, the holy man.
- (iv) Siddharta adopts the life of a wandering holy man and carries out severe ascetic practices. He searches for truth.
- (v) Realising that asceticism is not the answer he turns to meditation.
- (vi) 528 BC Siddharta sits to meditate under the (Bodhi) tree. He enters a deep state of meditation during which he gains insight into human nature and is able to perceive the Truth. He becomes **Enlightened**. Buddhists believe that everyone has the potential to become Enlightened.
- (vii) Siddharta is now "the Buddha", meaning "The Enlightened One". For the next forty five years he undertakes a teaching ministry. His first sermon is at the Deer Park in Benares (Sarnath) where he shares his knowledge with five ascetics with whom he had spent time earlier; these became his first disciples. In the 45 years following his enlightenment, Buddha travels around Northern India to teach the tenets of Buddhism. He is extremely successful and attracts first thousands, then ten thousands, and later hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life, who voluntarily decide to follow his teachings, the dhamma. During the monsoon, when travelling becomes difficult due to the weather, Buddha and his close followers interrupt their journey. During these months, monks, as well as laypeople, receive the teachings at a site selected for retreat. One such site is Sravasti in Nepal, which has become very famous since then. Buddha's success does not only attract admirers, but also provokes envy and ill will. Several attempts are made on his life, but all of them fail. Although he is being criticised and defamed, this does not affect the popularity of his teaching.
He dies at the age of eighty in a forest near Kusinagara, Nepal, in the company of his followers reclining on a bed where he speaks his last words: "All compounded things are ephemeral; work diligently on your salvation." With these words on his lips, he passes into the state of Nirvana.
- (viii) The Buddha did not write down any of his teachings – these were preserved by his disciples and passed down orally for five hundred years before being written down. The written sources do not contain a complete life of the Buddha, but this can easily be pieced together from the many references in the texts.

Buddha Rupa and Pictures A rupa is the statue of the Buddha. The position in which the Buddha is sitting, particularly the position of his hands, is significant. Reclining Buddhas are also found. The rupa is not intended to be a true representation of the Buddha but teaches us something about his special qualities which Buddhists seek to emulate. The Buddha's face will usually be depicted differently according to the rupa's country of origin, i.e. Indian, Japanese, Western, Chinese, etc. The appearance of the **Buddha rupa** is symbolic: long ears indicate spiritual wealth (just as ears are stretched with the physical wealth of heavy earrings); the topknot symbolises a flame, the sign of transcendental wisdom; the spot between the eyes symbolises the third eye which looks into enlightenment; the halo shows his specialness radiating into the world; often the rupa will be covered in gold leaf because the Buddha's skin shone when he became enlightened. These symbolic features should be taken together with the gestures (**mudras**) of the Buddha which tell us whether he is teaching, meditating, etc. Using the Buddha rupa as a focus for meditation helps the worshipper to key into the key values he represents and advances them on the road to enlightenment.

*It is important to remember that Buddhists do **not** regard the Buddha as a god; he is a human being who has acquired a state of perfection which all humans can emulate. He is thus **revered** as a symbol, but Buddhists do not see themselves as entering into any form of relationship with him.*

Special Places connected with the life of the Buddha are: **Lumbini** in Nepal, the place of his birth; **Bodh Gaya**, the place of his enlightenment; the Deer Park at **Sarnath** where he began his life as a teacher and **Kushinara** the place of his death.

All of these are now important centres of Buddhist pilgrimage. According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha himself identified these four sites in his last sermon as places to be visited by the faithful. These sites are marked by different features; a pillar at Lumbini; a stupa and monastery complex at Sarnath and a Temple at Bodh Gaya. Buddhist pilgrims follow the story of the Buddha's life as they move between these centres, more importantly, it is seen as following the Buddha along the path of enlightenment.

The Jataka Tales are stories of the previous lives of the Buddha. There are hundreds of these stories and they can be found in the Pali Canon. They are often animal stories with a strong moral message such as "the King's elephant" or "the monkey king". These stories are especially good to use with younger children who will recognise the moral message.

There is a full set of mudras (twelve in all) at
<http://www.thebigview.com/buddhism/mudra.html>

The Hands of the Buddha (Mudras)



Reassurance



Enlightenment



Meditation



Giving



Preaching

From his life experiences (The Four Sights) the Buddha came to teach “The Middle Way” of life, a path which avoids all suffering and involvement. The teaching (Dharma) of Buddhism is described as “like a finger pointing to the moon”, the moon being **Enlightenment**. It is very hard to explain Enlightenment because it is something which has to be **experienced** not learnt. It is the state in which someone (after many rebirths) achieves a point of perfection where all negative attributes have been overcome. To explain the concept is like trying to explain to a child how it feels to become an adult Thus really not something for the primary classroom!

Buddhism begins by tackling the problem of suffering, because it is believed that the world is a place of constant suffering. Simply put, the **Four Noble Truths** state:

- (i) **Suffering exists** (the word Dukkha means impermanence, it assumes that we want permanence in our lives, but, as we look around, nothing is truly permanent, all decays).
- (ii) **The cause of suffering is craving** (we long for things to give us happiness, but they cannot because they are not permanent).
- (iii) **Craving can be ended** (by following certain moral and spiritual disciplines man achieves Enlightenment and overcomes craving).
- (iv) **The way to the cessation of pain is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path**. The names of these Four Noble Truths are: Dukkha, Samudaya, Nirodha, Magga. It is interesting to work with the Four Noble Truths with pupils who have been brought up in a strongly materialistic culture; many of them will be used to looking for the answers to unhappiness in the acquisition of possessions or having their “cravings” readily satisfied (a new bike, CDs, computer games) yet finding the end result in itself unsatisfactory....

How can **attachment** bring us suffering?

We just have to think of chocolate and there is the temptation of eating more than is good for us.

Or as example, the way people used to catch monkeys in South India.

One takes a coconut and makes a hole in it, just large enough that a monkey can squeeze its hand in. Next, tie the coconut down, and put a sweet inside.

What happens next is pure attachment. The monkey smells the sweet, puts his hand into the coconut, grabs the sweet and ... the hole is too small to let a fist out of the coconut. The last thing a monkey would consider is to let go of the sweet, so it is literally tied down by its own attachment. Often they only let go when they fall asleep or become unconscious because of exhaustion.

Note that "suffering" is a most inadequate translation of the word "**Dukkha**", but it is the one most commonly found. "Dukkha" literally means "intolerable", "unsustainable", "difficult to endure", and can also mean "imperfect", "unsatisfying", or "incapable of providing perfect happiness". Interestingly enough, some people actually translate it as "stress".

"Suffering is a big word in Buddhist thought. It is a key term and it should be thoroughly understood. The Pali word is dukkha, and it does not just mean the agony of the body. It means that deep subtle sense of unsatisfactoriness which is a part of every mind moment and which results directly from the mental treadmill. The essence of life is suffering, said the Buddha. At first glance this seems exceedingly morbid and pessimistic. It even seems untrue. After all, there are plenty of times when we are happy. Aren't there. No, there are not. It just seems that way. Take any moment when you feel really fulfilled and examine it closely. Down under the joy, you will find that subtle, all-pervasive undercurrent of tension, that no matter how great this moment is, it is going to end. No matter how much you just gained, you are either going to lose some of it or spend the rest of your days guarding what you have got and scheming how to get more. And in the end, you are going to die. In the end, you lose everything. It is all transitory."

Henepola Gunaratana, from '[Mindfulness in Plain English](#)'.



The Buddha used a well known Indian medical formula to help explain the Four Noble Truths to his friends. Buddhists believe that the Buddha's teaching is a cure for the world's illnesses.

1. What is the illness?
2. What has caused the illness?
3. Does a cure exist?
4. The remedy - what does the patient need to do in order to be cured?

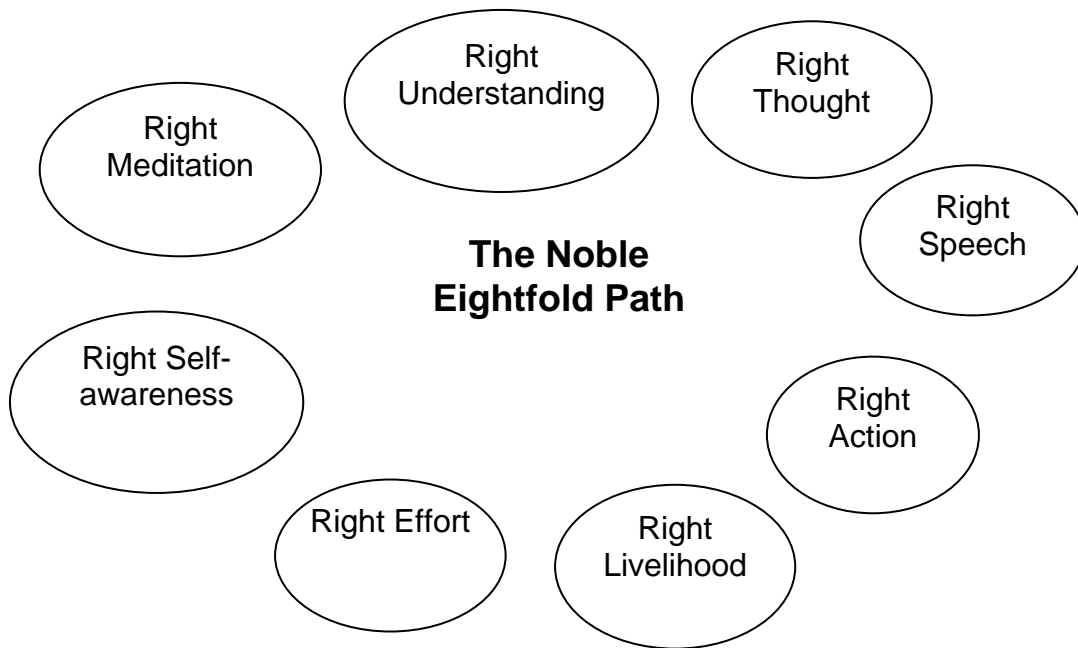
Noble Eightfold Path or Wheel of the Dharma.

The wheel of the Dharma or Dharmachakra has eight spokes, symbolising the **Noble Eightfold Path**. Although the path has eight separate steps they are **not** a progression to follow one after the other but a unity, so the wheel is perhaps a better symbol than a pathway. Following the Eightfold Path enables Buddhists to train themselves in every aspect of their lives.

The eight steps of the path are:

- (i) Right Understanding (seeing life as it really is, full of change and uncertainty, understanding that following the Noble Eightfold Path is the way to overcome suffering and obtain true happiness).
- (ii) Right Emotion (one's mind should be filled with love and compassion).
- (iii) Right Speech (speaking in positive and helpful ways, not gossiping, telling the truth).
- (iv) Right Action (living an ethical life, not killing, not stealing).
- (v) Right Livelihood (doing a job that doesn't harm others and is helpful).
- (vi) Right Effort (practising kindly and positive thinking).
- (vii) Right Awareness (be fully aware of everything both inside and outside yourself).
- (viii) Right Meditation (training the mind to be calm and positive in order to develop wisdom).

If you follow the Noble Eightfold Path you have clear guidance to cover all areas of your life.



The goal of life is **Nirvana** – what is Nirvana? From the Tripitaka:

“Nirvana is the area where there is no earth, water, fire and air; it is not the region of infinite space, nor that of infinite consciousness; it is not the region of nothing at all, nor the border between distinguishing and not distinguishing; not this world nor the other world; where there is neither sun nor moon. I will not call it coming and going, nor standing still, nor fading away, nor beginning. It is without foundation, without continuation and without stopping. It is the end of suffering.

The eight parts of the path fall into 3 groups:

Group	Step of the Path	What It Means – examples from Buddhist scriptures
Wisdom	<p>Right Understanding Right Understanding means to have a correct understanding of oneself and the world. Although we may have our own view of the world, it may not always be right. If we understand things as they really are, we would be able to live a happier and more meaningful life. For example, students who understand that it is to their own benefit to learn would work hard to learn more and do better. When they do well, everyone will be happy, including their parents and teachers.</p>	<p>"Just as when a sugar cane seed, a rice grain, or a grape seed is placed in moist soil, whatever nutriment it takes from the soil & the water, all conduces to its sweetness, tastiness, & unalloyed delectability. Why is that? Because the seed is auspicious. In the same way, when a person has right understanding... right release, whatever bodily deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever verbal deeds... whatever mental deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever intentions, whatever vows, whatever determinations, whatever fabrications, all lead to what is agreeable, pleasing, charming, profitable, & easeful. Why is that? Because the view is auspicious."</p>
	<p>Right Thought Right Thought means to think in the right way. Those who harbour thoughts of greed and anger will easily get into trouble. But if we think correctly, we would end up doing the right things. For example, if students harbour the right thoughts, they will know that being lazy may make them fail in exams. This would mean spending another year doing the same things. So they would decide to work hard rather than be grumpy about schoolwork.</p>	<p>And how is one made pure in three ways by mental action? There is the case where a certain person is not covetous. He does not covet the belongings of others, thinking, 'O, that what belongs to others would be mine!' He bears no ill will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. [He thinks,] 'May these beings be free from animosity, free from oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease!' He has right view and is not warped in the way he sees things: 'There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits & results of good & bad actions. There is this world & the next world. There is mother & father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are priests & contemplatives who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.' This is how one is made pure in three ways by mental action."</p>
Behaviour or Morality	<p>Right Speech Right Speech means to avoid lying, tale telling, gossip-ing, backbiting, idle talk</p>	<p>[The Buddha speaks to his son, Rahula:] "Whenever you want to perform a verbal act, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal act I want to perform — would it lead to self-affliction, to the</p>

	<p>and harsh words. Harsh words can wound more deeply than weapons, while gentle words can change the heart of a hardened criminal. This shows the effect on others in the way we speak. The Buddha said, "<i>Pleasant speech is as sweet as honey; truthful speech is beautiful like a flower; and wrong speech is unwholesome like filth.</i>" Therefore, we should speak words that are truthful, meaningful and with good will.</p>	<p>affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal act of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then any verbal act of that sort is fit for you to do.</p> <p>"While you are performing a verbal act, you should reflect on it: 'This verbal act I am doing — is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?' If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it.</p> <p>"Having performed a verbal act, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities."</p>
	<p>Right Action Right Action means not to harm or destroy any life, not to steal and not to use sex in a harmful way.</p>	<p>And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from unchastity. This is called right action."</p>
	<p>Right Livelihood (job) Right Livelihood means not to live on work that would in any</p>	<p>Herein, Vyagghapajja, a householder knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income.</p>

	<p>way bring harm to living beings. Buddhists are discouraged from engaging in the following five kinds of livelihood: trading people, weapons, animals for slaughter, intoxicating drinks and drugs. The Buddha said, <i>“Do not earn your living by harming others. Do not seek happiness by making others unhappy.”</i></p>	<p>"Just as the goldsmith, or an apprentice of his, knows, on holding up a balance, that by so much it has dipped down, by so much it has tilted up; even so a householder, knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income."</p> <p>"A lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison."</p>
<p>Mind or Meditation</p>	<p>Right Effort Right Effort means to do our best to become a better person. Examples of this are to work hard at school and to drop bad habits such as laziness, quick temper, smoking and drugs.</p>	<p>"One tries to abandon wrong view & to enter into right view: This is one's right effort..."</p> <p>"One tries to abandon wrong resolve & to enter into right resolve: This is one's right effort..."</p> <p>"One tries to abandon wrong speech & to enter into right speech: This is one's right effort..."</p> <p>"One tries to abandon wrong action & to enter into right action: This is one's right effort..."</p> <p>"One tries to abandon wrong livelihood & to enter into right livelihood: This is one's right effort."</p>
	<p>Right Self-awareness Right Mindfulness means to be always aware and attentive. We should always be aware of what we think, say and do. We must concentrate on everything we do before we can do it well. For instance, if we concentrate in class, we would not miss anything the teacher says.</p>	<p>"Suppose, monks, that a large crowd of people comes thronging together, saying, 'The beauty queen! The beauty queen!' And suppose that the beauty queen is highly accomplished at singing & dancing, so that an even greater crowd comes thronging, saying, 'The beauty queen is singing! The beauty queen is dancing!' Then a man comes along, desiring life & shrinking from death, desiring pleasure & abhorring pain. They say to him, 'Now look here, mister. You must take this bowl filled to the brim with oil and carry it on your head in between the great crowd & the beauty queen. A man with a raised sword will follow right behind you, and wherever you spill even a drop of oil, right there will he cut off your head.' Now what do you think, monks: Will that man, not paying attention to the bowl of oil, let himself get distracted</p>

		<p>outside?"</p> <p>"No, lord."</p> <p>"I have given you this parable to convey a meaning. The meaning is this: The bowl filled to the brim with oil stands for mindfulness immersed in the body. Thus you should train yourselves: 'We will develop mindfulness immersed in the body. We will pursue it, hand it the reins and take it as a basis, give it a grounding, steady it, consolidate it, and undertake it well.' That is how you should train yourselves."</p>
	<p>Right Meditation Right Meditation means to keep the mind steady and calm in order to see clearly the true nature of things. This type of mental practice can make us become more understanding and a happier person.</p>	<p>Get up! Sit up! What's your need for sleep? And what sleep is there for the afflicted, pierced by the arrow (craving), oppressed?</p> <p>Get up! Sit up! Train firmly for the sake of peace, Don't let the king of death, — seeing you heedless — deceive you, bring you under his sway.</p>

The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are not commandments, but ethical principles which Buddhists take on voluntarily. (Monks and nuns undertake **Ten Precepts**; see below). All practising Buddhists try to follow these precepts and chant them regularly. The Precepts, like all Buddhists ethics, are based on the **Law of Karma**, i.e. that **actions have consequences** and **we are responsible for our own actions**. Positive actions have positive consequences in the world and for oneself, negative actions have negative consequences. The Five Precepts are, therefore, usually presented in two different ways - a positive precept to aim for and a negative one to reject:

- (i) (a) Abstain from harming living beings
 (b) Cultivate loving kindness, care and concern for all life.
- (ii) (a) Abstain from stealing
 (b) Cultivate generosity of thought, word and action.
- (iii) (a) Abstain from sexual misconduct
 (b) Practise stillness, simplicity and contentment.

- (iv) (a) Abstain from false speech
- (b) Practise truthful speech that is kind and harmonious.

- (v) (a) Abstain from drink or drugs that cloud the mind
- (b) Practise awareness of thought, word and deed.

Monks and nuns (bhikkhus and bhikkhunis) affirm the Three Jewels and the Five Precepts. They also keep a further Five Precepts, i.e. to abstain from: food after midday; a luxurious bed; frivolous amusements; personal adornments; touching money. They live a life of self-discipline and spend much of their time in meditation. They are sustained through the generosity of the lay community who provide them with food and other necessities. They follow a code of 227 rules known as The Vinaya. They have a key role in teaching and assisting lay people, and conducting ceremonies and puja. Monks enter the monastery at first for a trial period before ordination; in the Theravadan tradition young men may become monks for a few weeks or months only and then return regularly to their monastery on retreat. Monks are always free to give up their robes and return to lay life whenever they wish.

The Law of Karma is also known as the **Law of Conditionality** and illustrates the Buddhist idea of interconnectedness. Everything is subject to change and the changes which take place will be dependant on conditions. It is probably easiest to explain this to children at a simple illustrative level using the world of nature as an example: a seed is planted, there are good soil conditions, enough sunshine and rain, the lettuce grows and it is eventually picked for your tea. Anywhere in this process something could have gone “wrong”; the plant could be scorched from too much sun, dry up from lack of rain, or a wild rabbit could get to it before you did! The problem with this illustration is that the Law of Karma is not really applicable to natural forces, **only to deliberate actions**, can the pupils create a parallel story with humans? The final line is: *ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES*.

Karma continues through the process of death and rebirth. Hindus believe that in the cycle of reincarnation a person’s unchanging soul moves on from one existence to the next, rather like water may be poured from one bowl into another vessel. In Buddhism there is no belief in a soul, rather a stream of energy continues throughout an accumulation of lifetimes. This is traditionally described as a new candle being lit from the stub of an old one; there is a new flame, but it has arisen out of the old one.

Buddhist Practices

At a superficial glance it may appear that Buddhists are worshipping the Buddha, but this is NOT the case; Buddhists respect him as a teacher and a guide, and an inspiration to follow and their actions in worship are intended to convey this.

The practices of Buddhists all focus on the key practice of **meditation** which is an important way of developing spiritually and moving towards the goal of enlightenment. The physical actions which accompany worship help the Buddhist to focus on the path s/he is following.

You will be able to find many different photographs of different styles of Buddhist shrines. The features that the shrines all have in common will be: (a) the presence of at least one Buddha rupa (b) it will be a place where teaching and meditation will take place (c) there will be accommodation attached for the resident monks and nuns and visiting members of the lay community. In the shrine room there will probably be prayer cushions and stools, scriptures will be kept nearby. You will probably have to remove your shoes before entering the room.

Temple shrine (simple)



When a Buddhist goes to a shrine s/he will probably make an offering. There will already be seven offering bowls (probably filled with water) before the rupa. The key offerings are (a) flowers – these wither and die, thus reminding us that all life is suffering and change (b) light – representing the light of wisdom which helps people through life (c) incense – reminding us as the smell spreads, so good deeds spread out and influence the world. Worship, as in Hinduism, is called **puja**.

Most Buddhists will make a small shrine in their homes by placing a Buddha rupa in a central

elevated position, usually flanking it with candles and flowers and burning an incense stick. To create a shrine you will need: a Buddha rupa, seven offering bowls, incense sticks and holder, flowers, lamp, cloth. Display the rupa on a small dais covered with the cloth (the Buddha is at a higher level than surrounding items as a mark of respect). The offering bowls represent the gifts given to an honoured guest (water for washing, water to drink, light, fragrance, flowers, music, food); Buddhists may offer real incense, food, flowers and light as well. You may wish to place real offerings in front of the Buddha and light an incense stick - this does not constitute worship as Buddhists do not worship the Buddha.

What is the purpose of making offerings to the Buddha?

- We make offerings not because the Buddha needs them - the Buddha is an enlightened being, He certainly does not need an incense stick to be happy!
- Nor do we make offerings to win the Buddha's favour. The Buddha developed universal loving-kindness and compassion long ago and won't be swayed by flattery and bribery the way we ordinary beings are.
- We make offerings to create positive energy and develop good qualities such as giving with a respectful attitude and gratitude.
- Moreover, the offerings remind us of certain teachings of the Buddha.

Offering of Light (Lamp/Candle)

- Light symbolizes wisdom.
- Light drives away darkness.
- Similarly, the light of wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Offering of Incense

- When incense is lit, its fragrance spreads.
- Incense symbolizes the fragrance of pure moral conduct.
- This reminds us to cultivate good conduct.

Offering of Water

- Water symbolizes purity, clarity and calmness.
- This reminds us to practise the Buddha's teachings, so as to cleanse our minds, which are full of desire, ill-will and ignorance, and to attain the state of purity.

Offering of Fruit

- Fruit symbolizes the ultimate fruit of Enlightenment which is our goal.
- Fruit also reminds us that all actions will have their effect.

Offering of Flowers

- The freshness, fragrance and beauty of flowers are impermanent.
- Fresh and beautiful flowers will soon become withered, scentless and discoloured.
- This reminds us of the Buddha's teaching that all things are impermanent.
- We should value what we have now and live in the present.

Meditation is NOT simply a means of relaxation (although this may be a by-product), it is a tool to transform the mind. It is said the mind is like an iceberg with 90% unconscious mind, meditation brings the iceberg into consciousness, making hidden treasures available to us and purifying the murky depths. There are two parts to meditation. The first is **Samatha** which is gaining calm by focusing on breathing; this type of stilling exercise can be undertaken in the classroom. The Buddhist then moves on to **Vipashyana** where they learn more of the truths of life and gain insight; this cannot be experienced in the classroom as it is something people choose to do as adults and needs the guidance of an expert meditation teacher. During meditation Buddhists sometimes listen to readings from the scriptures or chant from them. Meditation sessions will be marked by the use of e.g. meditation bells.

In any monastery daily life is very rigorous with days split between worship and hard physical labour. The first meditation session, lasting several hours, may begin as early as 3.00 am.

A meditation in the Tibetan tradition

REFUGE

*I go for refuge to the Buddha,
I go for refuge to the Dharma,
I go for refuge to the Sangha. (3x)*

SETTING THE MIND TOWARDS ENLIGHTENMENT (a prayer from the Mahayana tradition):

*By virtue of giving and so forth,
may I become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. (3x)*

Festivals

Wesak is the (Theravada) Buddhist festival which celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha; it is celebrated on the full moon in the month of Wesak (May/June). It is celebrated differently in different areas of the world but all Buddhists are showing gratitude that they have experienced the Buddha's teaching. Examples of practices include:

- (a) Thailand. Processions of decorated elephants. Houses and streets cleaned and decorated. Buddha statues brought out of the homes and washed. Temple statues moved into the courtyards and encircled with lights as symbols of hope. Worshippers circle the rupas and meditate. Gifts of candles and flowers given to the monks. Teaching takes place.
- (b) Sri Lanka. Huge lanterns decorated with stories of Buddha erected in streets and houses. Street performances of plays of the Jataka Tales.
- (c) Britain. Temples and shrines are decorated. Scriptures are read. Wesak cards.

- (d) Burma. Symbolic watering of Bodhi trees.
- (e) Meditation throughout the night

Buddhist Scriptures

Use of Story in Teaching. The **Jataka Tales** are a collection of more than 500 stories which refer to the Buddha's previous lives and are said to have been told by him (not all former lives would necessarily have been as a human being). They form the basis of much popular teaching and reflection. They help to show the way of life which leads one towards enlightenment and becoming a Buddha. Copies of different tales are readily available and a video of six stories has been brought out by the Clearvision Trust. There are also many stories of the Buddha which are excellent vehicles for teaching basic Buddhist principles.

The teachings of the Buddha were handed down orally for centuries and finally written down in the first century CE. They were originally written down in Sri Lanka in the **Pali** language, later they were written in **Sanskrit**.

The **Pali canon** is also known as the **Tripitaka** which means "three baskets" (perhaps referring to the three baskets the original palm-leaf books were kept in). The three sections are: (1) the **Vinyana Pitaka** for monks and nuns; (2) the **Sutra Pitaka** which contains the teachings of the Buddha and (3) the **Abhidharma Pitaka** which is a commentary on the Sutra Pitaka.

For most lay Buddhists the most important scripture will be the Sutra Pitaka. It contains the **Dhammapada** or "the path of virtue", i.e. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. It also includes the Jataka Tales.

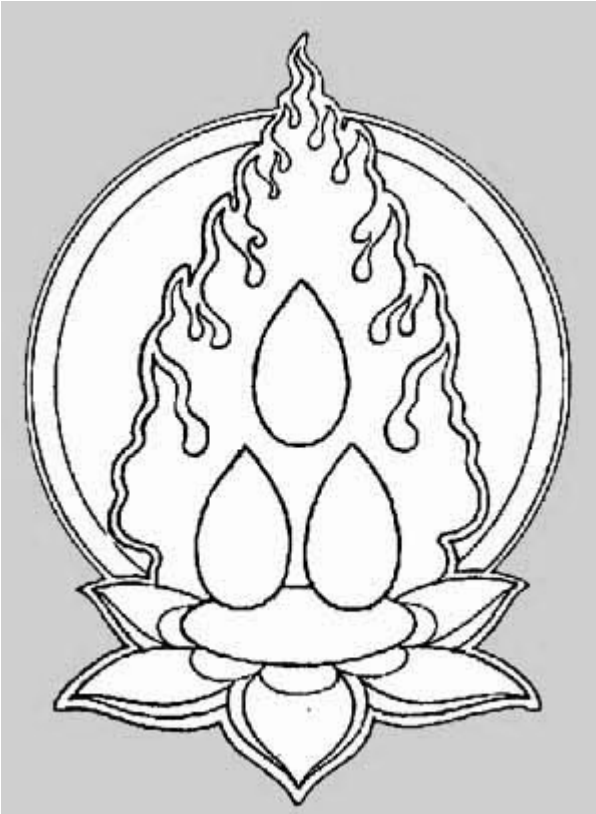
Buddhists do not think it is necessary to read the scriptures in order to be a good buddhist, as one can follow the principles of Buddhism without them. Zen Buddhists have no scriptures at all and hand all their teachings down orally. However, Buddhists often concentrate on, and chant, verses during meditation.

Within the monasteries a great deal of time is spent in studying the scriptures and learning texts by heart (in the original languages). One feature of Tibetan monastic training in particular is intensive debating on sacred texts. The monks and nuns continue the ancient tradition of teaching the laity about the message of the scriptures without using prepared notes; they sit quietly waiting until the right words enter their mind, this is known as "letting the dharma speak".

The Tripitaka was produced by the Theravada School of Buddhism. The Mahayana Buddhists used the Pali Canon as their source and developed their own scriptures in Sanskrit. The Vajrayana School of Tibet developed their scriptures from the Mahayanan; these are the most recent of the Buddhist scriptures.

Buddhist Artefacts or symbols:

The Three Jewels



This is a symbol for the Three Jewels.

The top jewel stands for the Buddha. When shown in colour, it is yellow, like the Buddha's robe.

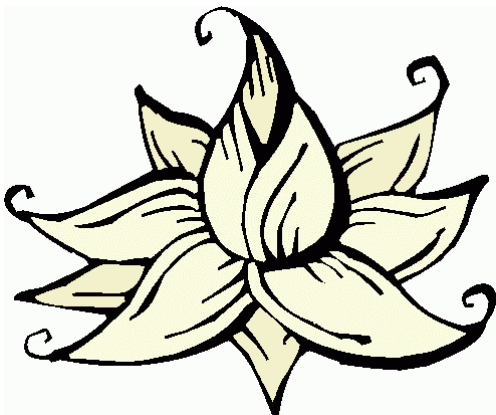
The left-hand jewel is blue, representing the vast, ocean-like freedom of the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings.

The right-hand jewel is red and stands for the Sangha, the community of Buddhists.

At his Enlightenment, the Buddha understood How Things Really Are. He also realised that anyone could reach this same understanding and become Enlightened, if they made the effort to understand and to change for the better.

The Dharma describes How Things Really Are, and the method by which anyone can gradually change themselves and come to understand it.

The Sangha is a fellowship of people learning to understand How Things Really Are, by following the Buddha's teachings and encouraging each other to change.



- **Lotus Flower.** The lotus symbolises enlightenment: the Buddha sits in meditation in a "lotus position"; prior to the Buddha's birth his mother dreamt of a white elephant carrying a lotus entering her side; the well known recitation "Om mane padme hum" means "O Jewel in the Lotus"; mandalas contain lotus petals in their designs; novice monks hold lotus buds when they attend their robing ceremony and the Lotus Sutra is one of the best known Buddhist Scriptures in the Far East. The lotus was chosen by the Buddha himself. It is a plant that grows up from mud through deep water into sunlight where it opens up to reveal

its true beauty. It thus mirrors the way a person grows from ignorance, struggles to understand life itself and finally attains enlightenment.

Mala (108 Beads)



- **Mala.** Prayer beads. There are 108 beads on a mala. They are used in chanting mantras as a counting device. They are usually made of sandalwood or bone. Some Buddhists wear them all the time around the neck or wrist.



- **Mandalas.** These are painted to aid meditation. It is a design within a circle which may be a geometric pattern or a picture with figures. Colours are used to bring different qualities of the Buddha to mind, e.g. white for purity, blue for the vastness and truth of his teaching, red for the warmth of his character. At the centre of the mandala is placed a design or representation of a bodhisattva (an enlightened person) which represents the quality you particularly aspire to. From this central



device four openings are represented, these indicate ways by which you can achieve the quality at the centre. The mandala can be used as a focal point for quiet times in the classroom. Use Google Images to find many beautiful mandala designs and photographs.

Singing Bowl (with hammer)



- **Meditation Bell or Gong.** The most easily obtainable forms of these are the meditation cymbals or the meditation bowl (often known as a "singing bowl"). These are essentially practical and are struck gently at the beginning and end of meditation to help quieten the mind. They are also used to mark devotional stages in worship. They come in all sizes and will be used differently within different traditions.

Stupa

The stupa is a symbolic grave monument where relics or the ashes of a holy monk are kept. It also symbolises the universe



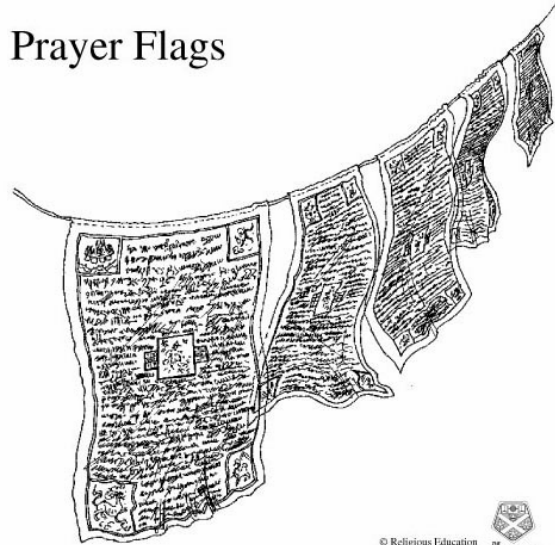
- **Prayer Wheel and Prayer Flags.** These both come from the Tibetan tradition. Both the wheel and the flags will have a **mantra** or prayer on them. (A mantra is the sound equivalent of a quality (e.g. compassion) which the worshipper is trying to engender in themselves; by chanting the mantra you develop the quality within yourself). Prayer wheels and flags as they are used send out the wish in your heart for this quality to be cultivated in the world - but you still have to cultivate it within yourself too!

Prayer Wheel



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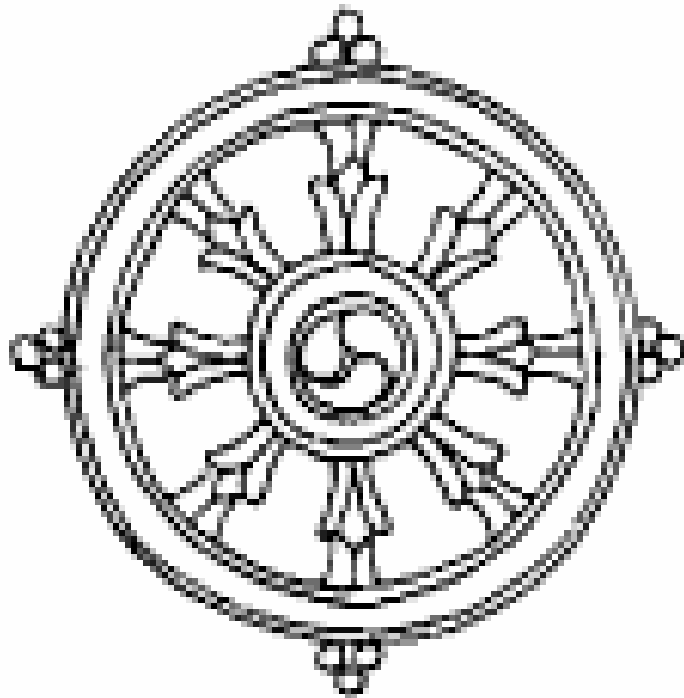
Prayer Flags



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Dharmachakra

The wheel of the law. The eight spokes represent the eightfold path.



There is additional material on Buddhist symbols at
http://buddhism.kalachakranet.org/general_symbols_buddhism.html#3j