

## **BUDDHIST BELIEFS AND LIFESTYLE**

AT1:

*Pupils will:*

- *Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain and their associated beliefs, experiences and practises.*
- *Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of some of the influences of life experiences, beliefs, values and faith traditions upon individuals, communities, societies and cultures,*

AT2:

*Pupils will:*

- *Respond to questions with reference to the teachings and practices of religions, and to their own understanding and experience.*
- *Develop awareness of some of the fundamental questions of life raised by human experiences, and of how religious teachings can relate to them.*
- *Reflect on their own beliefs, values, perceptions and experiences in the light of their study of religion.*
- *Develop positive attitudes of respect towards other people who hold views and beliefs that are different from their own.*

*Pupils will be enabled to:*

- *Consider their own beliefs about God's character and understand Buddhist beliefs and the teachings of Buddha (dhamma).*
- *Know about the enlightenment of the Buddha and the effect this had on his life.*
- *Understand that Buddhists turn to the 3 treasures for help and refuge – the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings (the Dhamma) and the Buddhist community (the Sangha).*

## **SESSION 1: Introduction**

- 1. Listen to the information about Siddattha Gotama (the Indian Prince who later became known as the Buddha).**
  - *Who was Siddatta Gotama and what was foretold at his birth?*
  - *What did Siddatta discover on his trips out from the palace?*
  - *How did the sights he saw, change him?*
  - *Why do you think people suffer?*
  - *What is life like, when everyone is selfish and greedy?*
  - *What did Siddatta decide to do with his life and why?*
  - *What do you think it would be like, to give up everything you have?*
  - *What do you think you would have done if you were Prince Siddatta?*
  - *If you were born into a royal family, what kind of person do you think you would be, and what would you do with all that power?*
  - *Why do you think Siddatta went to the forest to learn meditation?*
  - *What do you think happened when the Buddha received his enlightenment?*
  - *Discuss how Buddhists do not worship Buddha – he is not a God. Buddhism has no belief in God.*
- 2. Write (and draw) a description of what Siddatta's first few weeks might have been like, when he left the palace and his riches and power behind. What did he see and do when he headed off in the hope of finding answers to the problems of suffering and the unsatisfactoriness of life.**

## **SESSION 2: Dhamma – The Five Precepts**

- 1. Look at some of the Buddhist beliefs – the 5 precepts.**
  - *Why do you think the Buddha taught the Five Moral Precepts to his followers?*
  - *Do you think that having moral rules to live by, is a good or bad idea? Why?*
  - *If you had to make up five moral rules for everyone to keep, what would they be and why?*
  - *Are these rules similar to rules on Christianity or any other religion previously studied?*
- 2. Write and illustrate examples of Buddhists keeping each of the Five Precepts.**
- 3. Make up your own code of five moral precepts, to live by.**

## **SESSION 3: The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path**

- 1. Discuss the basics of Buddhist beliefs – 'The First Teaching'**
  - *What do Buddhists believe are the four Noble Truths?*
  - *What is the Noble Eightfold Path and why do you think it helps Buddhists out of suffering?*
  - *Which elements of the Eightfold Path do you most agree or disagree with? Why?*
  - *What values do Buddhists have? Are these similar or different to Christianity or other religions you have studied?*
- 2. Choose two of the eight teachings they most agree with and write about why they think they would be effective ways out of suffering. Give practical examples to illustrate their opinions.**
- 3. Draw an image for each of the aspects of the Eightfold Path – one on each spoke of the Dhamma wheel.**

## **SESSION 4: Buddhist Stories**

### **1. Listen to the stories about Buddha.**

- *Why do you think these stories are told to Buddhists? What do they tell us about Buddha and Buddhist values?*

### **2. Re-write one of the stories in cartoon form and write the moral of the story.**

### **3. Think of your own value of moral message you would like to get across to others, and create a story which illustrates the message. Dramatise it and perform to the rest of the class – can they guess what the moral or message is?**

## **SESSION 5: The Buddhist Community (The Sangha) and The Buddhist Temple (The Vihara)**

### **1. Discuss the Sangha and the Vihara.**

- *Explain that the Buddhist community is made up of ordained monks, nuns and priests and also of lay people, all of whom try to follow the example led by Buddha or how to live their lives, and to follow the Buddha's teaching.*
- *Discuss what teaching or example they think is worthy of following, and what ideals they try to follow themselves. Where have these come from? In what ways is it easy, and in what ways is it hard to live a good life?*
- *Discuss how Viharas have images of Buddha but they are not worshipped – they communicate tranquillity and compassion, and set an example to Buddhists who often meditate in the shrine room.*
- *What group or community do you belong to and how does it support or help you?*
- *Why do you think meditating in the Vihara, helps Buddhists?*

### **2. Use writing and pictures to present information about the Sangha and / or the Vihara.**

### **3. Try meditating whilst calming music plays.**

### **4. Make your own flags with prayers on.**

## **SESSION 6: Learning from Buddhism**

### **1. Recap on the topic**

- *What can be learnt from the Buddhist way of life and teaching?*
- *How does it relate to our own lives?*
- *How does belonging to a Buddhist family or community influence life?*

### **2. Work in pairs and role play a newspaper reporter interviewing someone who is thinking about becoming a Buddhist.**

- *What reasons do they give for wanting to become a Buddhist?*
- *What are their answers to the question "What does my faith mean to me"?*

### **3. Recap on the whole topic, by producing some writing and drawings.**



Buddhist Beliefs and Lifestyle

## Siddhattha Gotama

Siddhattha was probably born in about 563BCE. His father was the ruler of a small kingdom in northern India, near what is now Nepal, and his family were Hindus.

According to one legend, a fortune teller predicted that Siddhattha would be a great emperor, provided he did not see four sights:

- A sick man
- An old man
- A dead man
- A monk

If, however, he were to see these things, he would take up the life of a wandering holy man.

Siddhattha's father wanted his son to rule after him, so he vowed to keep him from such sights. Siddhattha lived in luxury at the palace, grew up kind and good, married and had a son. Just when his life seemed complete, he began to question the value of his idle, luxurious life. One day he went outside the royal park and saw the four sights.

Siddhattha realised that even the most rich and powerful ruler can not escape the suffering of illness, old age and death. He saw the fourth sight, a monk, as a sign that he should leave the palace and search for an answer to the problem of suffering. So, at the age of 29, he cut off his hair, put on beggars robes and became a wandering holy man.

Siddhattha studied with some holy men but this did not lead him to an answer. He then followed a strict fast for six years. This left him exhausted and near death. He realised that the problem would not be solved by going to extremes and he vowed to adopt what he called 'the Middle Way': neither indulging in luxuries, nor causing needless hardship to his body.

Tradition says that one evening, Siddhattha sat down in the shade of a banyan tree near a temple of the Hindu god Vishnu, at a place called Bodh Gaya in India. He stayed there all night, deep in meditation. Then, as dawn broke, he saw the meanings of all things unfold: he was enlightened. From this point on, Siddhattha was known as the Buddha.



Scriptures of the Buddha often show him meditating, sitting with his legs crossed and his hands resting in his lap.

At the moment when he achieved enlightenment, the Buddha attained *nirvana*. This is freedom from the cycle of rebirth, and so freedom from suffering. Buddhists say that *nirvana* can not be described in words, it lies beyond the definable.

The Buddha went on to live to the age of 80.

## The Five Precepts

The Buddha taught that the way to enlightenment was for people to take responsibility for their own actions.

He laid down five rules or precepts, that every Buddhist should obey in everyday life:

1. To avoid harming living things.
2. To avoid taking things that have not been given freely.
3. To live a decent lifestyle.
4. To avoid speaking unkindly or lying.
5. To avoid alcohol and drugs.

## The First Teaching

After gaining enlightenment, the Buddha passed on his new found knowledge to a group of monks. His first sermon took place in a deer park at Sarnath near Benares (Varanasi) in India.

For the Buddha, the need for an answer to the problem of suffering was too urgent to waste time in empty speculation. He did not try to answer the questions of whether God exists, or why and how the world was created. To do this, he said, would be like a man wounded by an arrow refusing to believe his pain until he knew how many feathers the arrow had. Having the answers to such questions does not help to relieve the suffering.

The Buddha's main teaching was made up of what are known as the **Three Universal Truths**, the **Four Noble Truths** and the **Eightfold Path**. Together these are known as *Dharma* or *Dhamma*.

### The Universal Truths

1. Everything in life is impermanent and is constantly changing.
2. Impermanence leads to suffering. The fact that nothing remains the same makes life unsatisfactory. People desire and become attached to things which can't last. Even if someone achieves a state of contentment, it won't last. Indeed knowing that the contentment must end is itself a source of suffering. (To a Buddhist, suffering means not only the great pain and tragedies which people experience. It also means all those things which make life less than perfect.
3. there is no unchanging personal self. What people call the self is simply a collection of changing characteristics. (The Buddha compared the self to a chariot, which is simply a collection of parts that are put together in a certain way but can be taken apart again.)

### The Noble Truths

1. All life involves suffering.
2. The cause of suffering is desire and attachment.
3. Desire and attachment can be overcome.
4. The way to overcome them is to follow the Eightfold Path.

### The Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path is the Middle Way followed by the Buddha in his own search for enlightenment. It is a code for living as a Buddhist

1. Right viewpoint: eg; understanding the Noble Truths.
2. Right intention: eg; trying to act considerately.
3. Right speech: eg; avoiding anger, lies and gossip.
4. Right action: eg; living honestly and not harming living things.
5. Right work: eg; avoiding jobs which harm anyone.
6. Right effort: eg; trying hard to overcome desire and attachment.
7. Right mindfulness: eg; thinking before speech and action.
8. Right meditation: eg; freeing the mind of distractions, leading to enlightenment and nirvana.

## The Dharmachakra

The **Dharmachakra** is a Buddhist symbol. The circle symbolizes the completeness of the Dharma and the spokes represent The Eightfold Path, leading to enlightenment:

*Right faith,*

*Right intention,*

*Right speech,*

*Right action,*

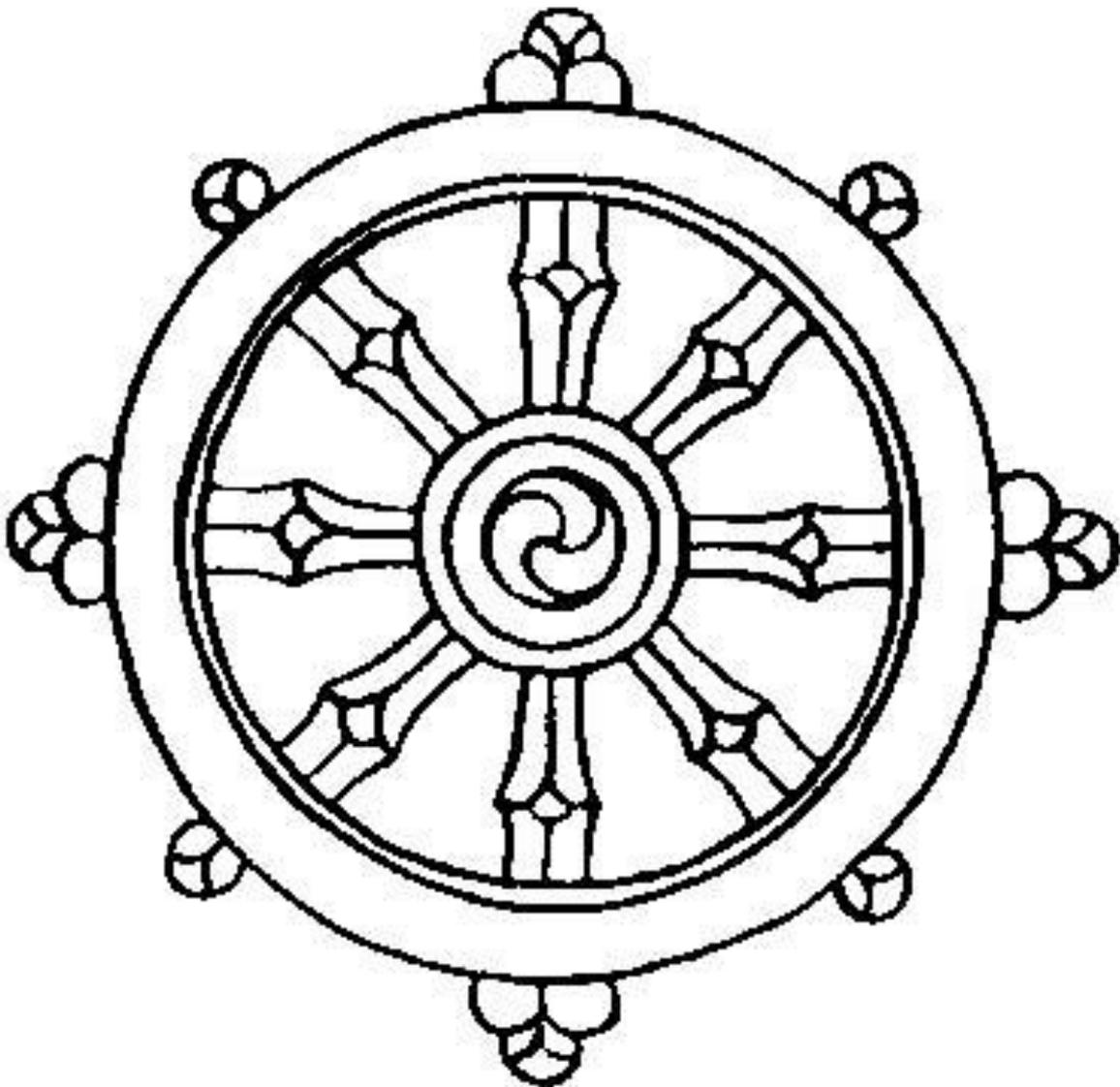
*Right livelihood,*

*Right endeavor,*

*Right mindfulness,*

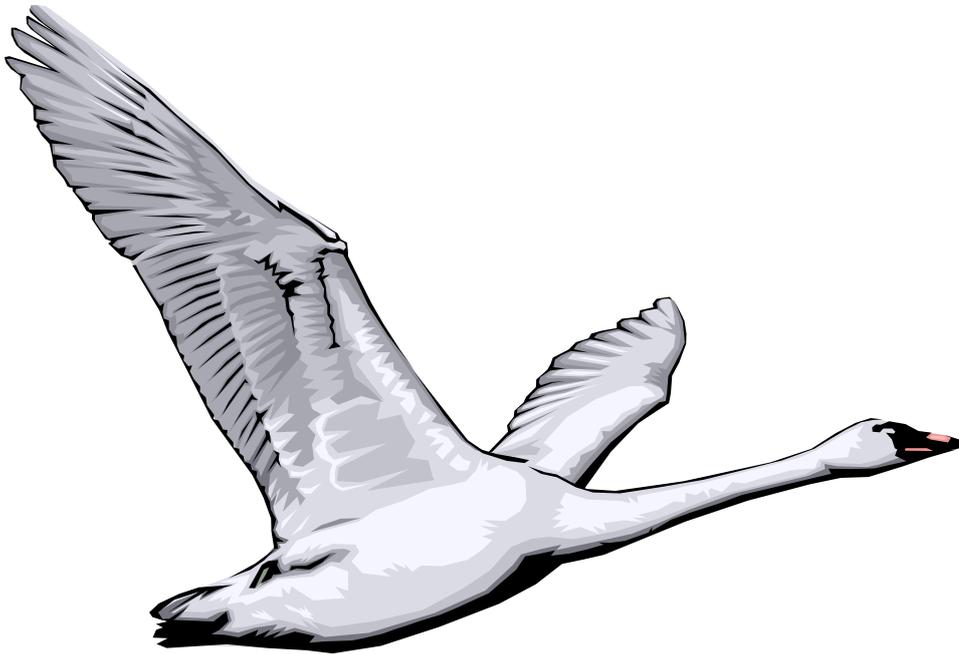
*Right meditation.*

Write each of the eight teachings by a spoke and then illustrate each teaching.



## The Buddha and the Wounded Swan

One day, Prince Siddhattha and his cousin Devadatta, were roaming in the park surrounding the palace, when Devadatta shot a swan with his bow and arrow. Both boys ran to the spot where the bird had fallen. When they found the wounded swan, Prince Siddhattha gathered the bird in his arms and nursed it, saying that it was his and he would look after it. Devadatta was not pleased. He insisted that the bird ought to be his, since he was the one who had shot it down. Their argument went on for some time. In the end, they took their dispute to a judge, who decided that life belonged to the one who preserved it, not to one who destroyed it.



## The Buddha and the Angry Elephant

Ever since he was young, Devadatta had been jealous of Prince Siddhattha, and even though he had become a monk, his jealousy persisted. He resented being in the Buddha's shadow, but he said nothing, hoping that if the Buddha died or got too old to lead his people, he had a good chance of taking over, as he was the Buddha's cousin.

One day, he made a plan to kill the Buddha with the help of his friend, Prince Ajatasattu. They sent a man to assassinate the Buddha and arranged to have the assassin to be murdered afterwards, so there would be no witnesses. However when the assassin got close to the Buddha, he found it impossible to kill him. In fact, the assassin got so upset, that he broke down and confessed to the Buddha, what he had planned to do. The Buddha forgave him and the assassin asked to become a Buddhist disciple.

When Devadatta heard about the assassin, he was furious and decided that if the Buddha was going to be killed, he would have to do it himself. When the Buddha was out walking up and down at the foot of a hill, he sent a large rock tumbling down towards him. Just before it reached the Buddha, it hit another rock which diverted it, although a splinter hit the Buddha, injuring his foot.

Some time later, Devadatta went to the royal stables, where a huge and fierce elephant named Nalagiri was kept. He approached the mahouts and said to them:

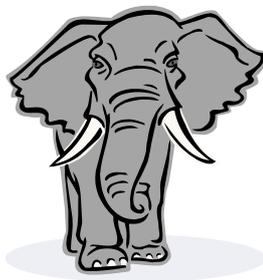
"I am close to the king. On my word, someone in a low position can be put in a high position and someone in a high position can be put in a low position. I want you to release this elephant into the Buddha's path when he is walking down the road".

The mahouts readily agreed and some versions of this story say that to make sure Nalagiri was really angry, Devadatta poured rice wine into his drinking bowl!

The next day, the Buddha and a small group of monks were walking in the city of Rajagaha, collecting alms. As they turned a corner into a narrow street, they found themselves confronted by an angry elephant. The monks called the Buddha to turn back, but he continued to calmly walk on. People looked out of their windows and climbed onto roofs of the houses to see what would happen.

Nalagiri charged down the street. People ran out of the way, while others gasped in horror. The Buddha calmed Nalagiri with thoughts of loving kindness, so that he quietened down, slowing the Buddha to approach him and stroke his head. When Nalagiri was totally calm, the Buddha continued walking with his monks, collecting alms.

Some versions of this story then say that Nalagiri then went looking for Devadatta and that when Devadatta saw Nalagiri, he was so scared of the elephant, that he climbed a tree to escape him!



## The Sangha

Most Buddhists are united in their belief in:

- the Buddha
- the *dharma* (his teachings)
- the monastic order of the *sangha*

These are called the three jewels because they are so precious.

*Sangha* is the name given to any community of Buddhist monks or nuns. The monks who heard the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath were converted and formed the first *sangha*. At first, the Buddha was unsure whether to have women in the *sangha* or not. He was persuaded by his mother-in-law, who begged to join.

Buddhist monks and nuns live in monasteries or nunneries. They live simply and own only eight items. These include: three robes, a razor and a begging bowl. Local people often give food to the monks in return for a blessing.

Monks spend their time studying sacred texts, meditating, seeing to the day-to-day running of the monastery, and working in the community - for example; teaching or caring for the sick.

They have to obey a code of over 250 rules. These include the ten precepts, which are the five precepts obeyed by all Buddhists, plus another five:

1. To avoid eating too much, or eating after midday.
2. To avoid dancing and frivolous singing.
3. To avoid wearing adornments and perfumes.
4. To avoid sleeping too much, or in a soft bed.
5. To avoid handling gold and silver (money).

### Meditation

Most Buddhists think that meditation is essential in achieving *nirvana*. It is through searching with the self during meditation, that a person can come to understand the truth of Buddha's teaching.

The basis for meditation is *samatha*. This is a peacefulness in which the mind is empty of all thoughts. A person can be helped to this calm state by concentrating on breathing or by focusing on an object such as a candle. Once the mind is quiet, a person may focus on the idea of impermanence and change.

Many Buddhists believe that almost anything can be a focus for meditation. They talk of doing things in a mindful way. By this they mean concentrating only on the present moment and so not being distracted by conflicting thoughts. Here are some ways that help Buddhists to meditate:

- People often sit with crossed legs or kneel or on cushions.
- They may offer flowers or incense to a statue of the Buddha.
- The statue, or a candle or picture may be used for meditation.
- Closing the eyes and counting breaths helps them to be calm.

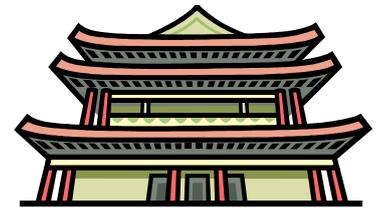
Buddhist Beliefs and Lifestyle



## Viharas / Stupas and Pagodas

- Many Buddhists visit temples, called *viharas* or shrines to pay their respects to the Buddha and to meet and meditate with other Buddhists.
- Places of worship vary greatly, from vast, ornately decorated temples to a room in an ordinary building that has been set aside for worship.
- The oldest style of Buddhist shrine is called a *stupa*. The very earliest *stupas* were sealed mounds containing the Buddha's ashes. Later *stupas* were built to house copies of the Buddha's teachings and relics of later Buddhist teachers and *bodhisattvas*. (*this name means 'Buddha-to-be' and it describes people who are on the path to enlightenment and who have dedicated their whole spiritual career over many lifetimes, to helping others towards the same state.*) Early *stupas* were simple mud-brick domes, but later ones were built from stone and were often bell-shaped.

- As Buddhism spread to China and Japan, the design of *stupas* changed and taller, thinner buildings called *pagodas* were built. These are in the form of a tiered tower, often with eight sides. The number of tiers can range from three to thirteen, but it is always an odd number.



- Some of the main Buddhist pilgrimage sites are associated with important events in the Buddha's life; eg; the place of his birth (Lumbini Grove), his enlightenment (Bodh Gaya), his first teaching (Sarnath) and his death (Kusinara).
- While on pilgrimage, Buddhists try extra hard to live according to the five precepts. They try to avoid behaving in a light-hearted way, and to keep their whole minds focused on their quest for enlightenment.
- Some walk barefoot, or crawl for part of their journey. This is to show their understanding that suffering is part of life.
- Buddhists often walk around a pilgrimage site three times, symbolising the three jewels.



- In Nepal and Tibet, prayers are sometimes written on flags and tied onto long strings near shrines and temples.
- The Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhists believe that as the flags flutter in the breeze, the prayers are blown to all parts of the Earth.