

Buddhism: Practices

From the specification:

Worship and festivals

- The nature, use and importance of Buddhist places of worship including temples, shrines, monasteries (viharas), halls for meditation or learning (gompas) and their key features including Buddha rupa, artefacts and offerings
- Puja, the significance and role of puja/devotional ritual in the home and in the temple, including chanting, both as devotional practice and as an aid to mental concentration, mantra recitation, use of malas
- Meditation, the different aims, significance and methods of meditation:
 - Samatha (concentration and tranquillity) including mindfulness of breathing
 - Vipassana (insight) including zazen
 - the visualisation of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
- The practice and significance of different ceremonies and rituals associated with death and mourning in Theravada communities and in Japan and Tibet
- Festivals and retreats and their importance to Buddhists in Great Britain today, including the celebrations, origins and significance of:
 - Wesak
 - Parinirvana Day

Buddhist ethics

- Ethical teaching:
 - kamma (karma) and rebirth
 - compassion (karuna)
 - loving kindness (metta)
- The five moral precepts
 - do not take life
 - do not take what is not given
 - do not misuse the senses
 - do not speak falsehoods
 - do not take intoxicants that cloud the mind
- The six perfections in the Mahayanan tradition
 - generosity
 - morality
 - patience
 - energy
 - meditation
 - wisdom, including how the individual develops these perfections within themselves

Places of worship and devotional practice (puja)

Temple

- diversity depending on location and tradition, but usually contain:
 - Buddha rupa in a shrine room as focus for worship and offerings
 - meditation hall/room, called a gumpa in Tibetan Buddhism
 - teaching rooms for study and discussion
 - stupa containing artefacts linked to important Buddhas/Bodhisattvas

Shrine

- can be in temple or home
- used as focus for devotion/worship and meditation
- has a Buddha rupa (could be statue or picture) of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva
- place for making offerings to show devotion

Vihara (monastery)

- home to Buddhist monks and nuns, so reminder of importance of the sangha
- lay Buddhists attend to worship or meditate in the meditation hall
- contains a shrine room for devotion and worship
- offerings are made to show devotion to Buddha and to support sangha
- often has a stupa containing artefacts related to the Buddha or a Bodhisattva

Devotional ritual and worship (puja)

- **Chanting:** repeating key Buddhist teachings (such as the three refuges) to aid concentration and memory and to show gratitude to the Buddha and his teaching
- **Reciting mantras:** repeating holy syllables such as 'om mani padme hum' which represents compassion. This is done to help clear the mind and cultivate attributes such as compassion.
- **Use of malas:** prayer beads are used to count mantras or help chanting. These aid focus and ensure that the worshipper concentrates on the devotional act
- **Offerings:** food, flowers, candles and incense are brought as offerings to show gratitude to the Buddha and remind the worshipper of annica (impermanence) and the light of the dhamma
- **Bowing:** bowing three times in front of the Buddha rupa as a sign of respect

Why worship is important to Buddhists

- to give a chance to meet with other Buddhists, strengthening the sangha
- to allow Buddhists to show gratitude to the Buddha and Bodhisattvas
- to contain reminders of important Buddhist teachings such as anicca and dukkha

Meditation

Why meditation is important to Buddhists

- to help Buddhists to clear their minds of the worries and distractions of life
- to show devotion to the Buddha
- to help cultivate important qualities such as compassion and loving kindness
- to learn, retain and understand the dhamma
- to increase chances of enlightenment and the attainment of nibbana

Samatha meditation

- 'calming meditation', with the aim of quietening the mind to aid concentration
- involves 'mindfulness of breathing' which is where you focus on how you are breathing and pay attention to how this feels to clear the mind of other distractions
- Buddhists may focus on objects to help clear their mind, for example earth, water or a colour
- Buddhist practise Samatha meditation to help achieve Right Mindfulness so that they become fully aware of themselves

Vipassana meditation

- 'insight meditation', which has the aim of gaining understanding of the dhamma and the true nature of reality, including the truths about suffering
- Buddhists focus on something to clear the mind and gain insight into reality, for example a sound or a teaching
- some Buddhists may repeat the Four Noble Truths or three refuges in their minds to help develop Right View
- Buddhists might also reflect on a personal problem or current situation to help them understand how best to move forward
- Zazen meditation is a Japanese form of meditation involving sitting and relaxing whilst being aware of the present moment. Zen Buddhists allow thoughts to pass through them without dwelling on them to gain insight without thinking

Visualisation meditation

- Buddhist may visualise a Buddha or Bodhisattva by imaging them in their mind's eye, or by using an image or statue at a shrine. They do this to help them understand that Buddha's teachings or character, in the hope that they will become more like them.
- Buddhists may also visualise specific objects or mandalas (circular patterns) to help clear their minds and understand the dhamma better

Festivals and retreats

Wesak

- celebrated in the month of Vesakha (in Spring) around the world by most Buddhists
- it is a commemoration of the Buddha's birth and enlightenment
- Buddhists decorate their homes and streets with lanterns and candles to represent the light of the dhamma, as received by the Buddha at his enlightenment
- Buddhists often meditate on the Buddha's first sermon and other teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, to help them understand the dhamma better
- this is an important festival as it gives chance for Buddhist to show devotion to the Buddha, follow his example and celebrate his life and teachings

Parinirvana

- celebrated by Mahayana Buddhists in February
- it is a solemn commemoration of the Buddha's death and entry into nibbana
- Buddhists meditate on the Buddha's teachings and the story of his death
- Buddhists will also spend time reflecting on their own mortality and the death of loved ones by visiting graves and meditating to achieve enlightenment
- this is an important reminder of key teachings about death, impermanence and nibbana and gives Buddhists the chance to spend time in devotional practice to help themselves achieve nibbana

Retreats

- a retreat is a period of time spent away from normal life which allows Buddhists to focus on their faith in a new environment
- Buddhists may go to a monastery or Buddhist centre close to home, or travel to historical sites associated with the Buddha or Bodhisattvas
- retreats usually involve meditation, workshops, discussions and teaching
- the aim is for Buddhists to gain a deeper understanding of the dhamma
- Buddhists can spend more time meditating and so hope to understand the dhamma better

Death rituals

Theravada Buddhists set up a shrine for the dead person and offer candles and flowers to show anicca. Monks chant over the dead person to give them a good rebirth. Bodies are cremated to show anicca.

In Tibet the body is left on a mountain to be eaten by vulture to show anicca. The Book of the Dead is read to prepare the person for the mid-state of 'bardo' before rebirth. Yak lamps are lit for enlightenment.

In Japan, the Buddha's name is chanted over the dead person and the Lotus Sutra is read as a reminder of anicca. The body is cremated and the ashes are put in the family shrine to remember rebirth.

Key ethical teaching

Kamma

- kamma literally means 'action' and is the principle that every action has a natural consequence
- Buddhists try to perform 'skilful' actions as these create good 'merit'; they try to avoid 'unskilful' actions as this created bad 'merit'
- 'skilful' actions are those that agree with the Noble Eightfold Path and demonstrate metta and karuna, 'unskilful' actions break the five moral precepts

Karuna (compassion)

- compassion is actively feeling concern for those around you and acting to help reduce their suffering and increase their happiness
- compassion is shown by giving to those in need, helping those who need assistance and teaching the dhamma to all humans to help them achieve enlightenment
- karuna encourages Buddhists to act skilfully in every situation

Metta (loving kindness)

- loving kindness is having a general loving attitude towards all living being
- because of metta, Buddhists want all people to be happy and desire the ending of suffering for all people
- metta encourages Buddhists to make the world a better and more positive place

Five moral precepts

These are five guidelines for Buddhists to follow to perform skilful actions:

- **do not take life** – not harming any living thing in any way physically or emotionally; helping others instead
- **do not take what is not given** – do not steal anything; give to others instead
- **do not misuse the senses** – do not engage in harmful sex or indulge the senses; respect yourself and others
- **do not speak falsehood** – do not lie or speak badly; use positive words instead
- **do not take intoxicants** – no drugs or alcohol; keep your mind clear

Six perfections

These are six personal qualities that Mahayana Buddhists seek to develop:

- **Generosity** – give to others
- **Morality** – follow the five moral precepts, practice metta and karuna
- **Patience** – do not give up with Buddhist practice, bear with others
- **Energy** – put effort into being a good Buddhist
- **Meditation** – clear the mind and seek insight about the dhamma
- **Wisdom** – learn and practice the dhamma

Buddhists should practise all of these to develop them effectively