

# Buddhism Guidelines for RE

## What are the 'big ideas' in Buddhism?

Buddhism is not strictly a religion, but a philosophy, a way of living centred on achieving **enlightenment** and **nirvana**, a state in which desires (which lead to suffering) are overcome. **Buddha** was a Prince who lived in Nepal and began to seek the path to enlightenment after seeing the **Four Sights** (an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a poor, but radiant holy man). Buddha is not worshipped as a god, as there is **no supreme deity** in Buddhism, but is honoured as a **great teacher**. His teachings (**dhamma**) and wisdom are key parts of Buddhist meditation, which concentrate on individuals developing characteristics of the Buddha, such as wisdom, kindness & courage. Practices vary according to different Buddhist traditions and cultural expressions. The **Buddhist way of living** focuses on the Buddha's teaching about suffering, the **Four Noble Truths**. The way to overcome this is by following the Middle Way, the **Eightfold Path** (*right view; right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right contemplation*) and living by **Five Precepts**, which lead to enlightenment. Buddhists have **three treasures**, in which they seek refuge: the **Buddha**, the **dhamma** (his teachings) and the **sangha** (the Buddhist community).



An interpretation of the Wheel of Life © 2012 Jim Robinson.  
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# What do I need to know about Buddhism?

Buddhism started in India about 2500 years ago. For the first 200 years, it spread throughout India, then moving to Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Laos & Thailand (Theravada Buddhism). After about 500 years, it spread to China, Korea & Japan (Mahayana Buddhism), then from 7<sup>th</sup> C CE to Tibet, Mongolia & Nepal, and from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> C CE to the West. While these groups share certain core beliefs, there are some differences in interpretation, and cultural differences in expression.

- In **Mahayana Buddhism** the key difference is the belief that nirvana is not the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Instead everyone should aim to become a Bodhisattva (one who has delayed enlightenment in order to teach others) and eventually a **Buddha** (enlightened being) and help with the salvation of all beings.
- **Theravadins**, on the other hand, believe that, while the Bodhisattva path is the best possible goal, it is not for everyone, only the noble few. The majority of people should aim for nirvana.
- **Tibetan Buddhism** combines Mahayana Buddhism with beliefs from earlier Tibetan faiths & places more importance than the other groups on rituals and initiations, and the relationship between life and death. It is also rich with visual symbolism e.g. prayer flags & wheels. Tibetan Buddhists place more emphasis on mantras and meditation practice.

## Buddhism in a nutshell

Buddhism is a path to liberation from the bondage of greed, anger and delusion, the cessation of which is known as Nirvana. The path consists of morality in the form of the precepts that guide the Buddhist towards compassion for all living things, and meditation that leads one to recognise the causes of suffering and to abandon them. This in turn leads to wisdom, which is the knowledge of things as they truly are.

The founder of Buddhism was Siddattha Gotama, an Indian prince of the 6th century BCE, who left his life of luxury when faced with the suffering that affects us all. He set out to find its cause and its cure. In stark contrast to his earlier luxurious life, he adopted severe ascetic practices that, in the end, showed him that the true way lies in being compassionate to oneself without being indulgent - the Middle Way. He finally realised Enlightenment, or Nirvana, and spent the remaining 40 years of his life teaching others. Siddattha Gotama is the supreme example for Buddhists, but he is not regarded as a god. They believe that all beings have the potential to realise Enlightenment as he did. He emphasised that his teaching, summarised as The Four Noble Truths, should not be accepted blindly and that everyone must tread the path for themselves.

All Buddhists take refuge in the Three Treasures: the Buddha as teacher and embodiment of the potential found within us all, the Dhamma (the Buddha's teaching), and the Sangha (the Buddhist community).

As Buddhism spread throughout the Far East and the teachings developed, many different traditions and schools evolved. Buddhism became a major influence in India, Sri Lanka, China, Japan Thailand, Tibet, Burma and many other countries, and is now growing rapidly in western countries. There are many Buddhist organisations (including monasteries and temples) operating in the United Kingdom, embracing all of the major traditions of Buddhism.

*Basic Beliefs: Surrey Agreed Syllabus online resources*

## What do Buddhists believe?

The Buddhist faith begins with the belief in reincarnation – that beings are reborn as animals, humans and even gods. What we are reborn as is defined by our karma, our good and bad deeds and, more importantly, our good and bad intentions.

**Buddham** saranam gacchāmi  
I go for refuge in the Buddha.  
**Dhammam** saranam gacchāmi  
I go for refuge in the Dharma.  
**Sangham** saranam gacchāmi  
I go for refuge in the Sangha

A Buddhist is best described as someone who takes refuge in the Three Jewels (also known as Three Refuges, Three Treasures or the Triple Gem – see Basic beliefs above). The Dharma holds the key beliefs for Buddhists.

Buddhists also follow the 'Five Moral Precepts': avoid killing; avoid stealing; avoid misusing sex; avoid lying & avoid using intoxicants. More detail can be found at:

[www.clear-vision.org/Schools/Students/Ages-12-14/Five-Precepts.aspx](http://www.clear-vision.org/Schools/Students/Ages-12-14/Five-Precepts.aspx)



## Key beliefs: The Four Noble Truths

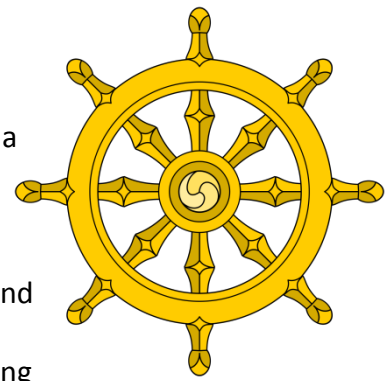
1. The belief that suffering (dukkha / duhkha) exists – in negative events such as sickness and death, and also in things that are pleasing, because the pleasure will end.
2. The acceptance that the origin of suffering is craving. This keeps beings in samsara, the eternal cycle of rebirth and hence suffering.
3. The statement that the cessation of suffering does exist. This is normally defined as nirvana.
4. A description of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. This is the **Noble Eightfold Path**.



## Key beliefs: The Noble Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is not linear, but more like a wheel (hence the symbolism of a wheel for Buddhism) It is a path of self-transformation which Buddhists of all traditions and all walks of life try to follow:

1. **Right View:** seeing things as they really are, not how you think they are
2. **Right Intention / Thought:** kind thoughts, not cruel ones, giving things up and not being greedy
3. **Right Speech:** not lying, being rude or abusive and not gossiping or chattering
4. **Right Action:** saving life, not destroying it, not stealing, being respectful in relationships
5. **Right Livelihood:** earning a living without hurting others - people or animals
6. **Right Effort:** working hard to understand truth and stay with what is right
7. **Right Mindfulness:** being aware of actions, words and thoughts at all times
8. **Right Meditation / Contemplation:** learning to meditate without losing concentration



## An image that 'explains' Buddhism: Bhavachakra (Wheel of Life)

This representation is used mainly in Tibetan Buddhism, as a meditation aid. It could be used with pupils to explore Buddhist beliefs. In the worlds, suffering is everywhere, but if you look closely, Buddha is there to help! The beings in each world could be linked to different 'bad attitudes' that get in the way of the path to enlightenment e.g. pride, jealousy, ignorance, greed, evil-doing, selfishness. The realms of gods and titans are sometimes combined. You can find a full explanation at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/galleries/bhavachakra/> or an interactive version at: [www.buddhanet.net/wheel2.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel2.htm)

**Yama, Lord of Death**  
Symbolises the impermanence of everything & that suffering and death comes to all living beings

*Buddha is outside the wheel, showing the way*



### The middle ring: the six realms

(clockwise, from top)

'World' represented	Buddha holds....	Meaning
Realm of the gods (PRIDE)	a lute	Music brings pleasure, but does not last forever. As the music fades, so even the gods will age and die. They should not be so confident that they can avoid suffering.
Realm of the titans (half-gods) (JEALOUSY)	a flaming sword	There is war and there are weapons, but the Buddha seems to have most power.
Realm of hungry ghosts (GREED)	a jar of nectar	Some beings are so greedy they are never satisfied. The Buddha's teaching is so sweet it can help these beings to forget their craving.
Realm of hell (DOING EVIL)	a flaming torch	Beings who live in darkness need light to bring them hope.
Realm of animals (IGNORANCE)	a book	Books contain knowledge and learning – a being cannot escape suffering through ignorance.
Realm of human beings (SELFISHNESS)	an alms bowl like a wandering monk	People are stuck in the chain of cause and effect – they will not escape suffering until they follow the Buddha's teaching about the simple life and leave all their selfish desires behind.

**At the very centre: the three fires, or three poisons**

*The causes of all suffering: greed, ignorance & hatred (cockrel, pig & snake)*

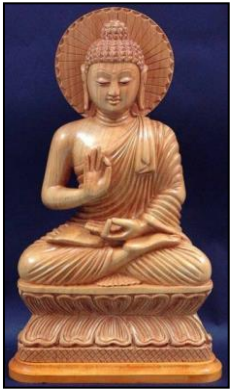
## The outer ring: Nidanas – the twelve causes & their consequences ('dependent origination')

Buddhism has no creator god to explain the origin of the universe. Instead, it teaches that everything depends on everything else: present events are caused by past events and become the cause of future events.

Look out for... **Ignorance** – represented by a blind man; **Willed action** – represented by a potter; **Conditioned consciousness** – represented by a restless monkey (development of habits); **Form & existence** – represented by a boat; **Six senses** – represented by windows of a house (the mind is the sixth sense); **Sense-impressions** – represented by two lovers; **Sensations / emotions** – represented by an arrow in the eye, can be blinding; **Craving** – represented by a man drinking (unhealthy desires); **Attachment** – represented by clinging to a fruit tree; **Becoming** – represented by a pregnant woman, being trapped in the cycle of life; **Birth; Old age & death**

## Buddha statues: look carefully at the hand positions....

A statue of the Buddha is called a **rupa**, a term which literally means 'form or figure'. They are not accurate representations of Gautama, the historic Buddha, but express a range of spiritual qualities and attributes. They act as aids to meditation and are revered as a focus of the qualities which they symbolise. Here are some to get you started....



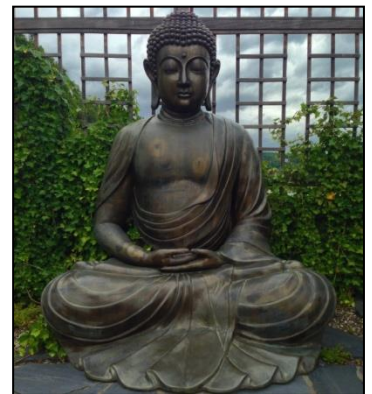
### Buddha in the Abhaya Mudra

This position symbolises protection, peace, and the dispelling of fear.

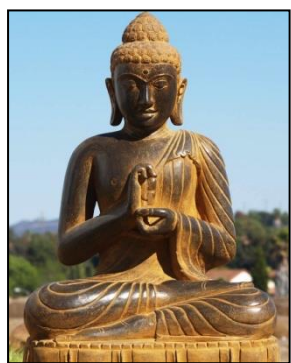


### Buddha in the Bhūmisparśa Mudra

Bhūmisparśa means 'touching the earth'. This position recalls Buddha's enlightenment under the bodhi tree & symbolises unshakeability.



The **Dhyana mudra** is the mudra of meditation, of concentration on the Good law, and of the attainment of spiritual perfection.

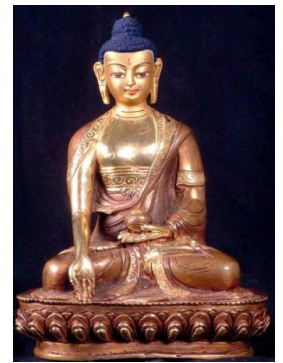


### Buddha in the Dharmachakra Mudra

In Sanskrit 'dhamachakra' means 'Wheel of Dharma'. Position symbolises one of the most important moments in the life of Buddha, when he preached the first sermon after his Enlightenment, often referred to as the setting into motion of the Wheel of the teaching of the Dharma.

### Buddha in the Varada Mudra

This position, symbolising the giving of charity & compassion, is often used in combination with one of the other mudras



## Useful web-based resources for teachers and classrooms:

- [www.reonline.org.uk](http://www.reonline.org.uk) Great for background knowledge, with lots of links to classroom resources via a search tool. Use the 'Knowing' tab to find out what you want to know, or try here: [www.reonline.org.uk/knowning/what-re/buddhism/](http://www.reonline.org.uk/knowning/what-re/buddhism/) REOnline also have some lesson ideas (search for '**RE Banquet**'), but ensure you match to the Diocesan Core Knowledge objectives.
- BBC Religion also has great background information for adults: [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/)
- Images of the Buddha: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1VfqJOPqvSS8cwFqFwbrGY2/images-of-the-buddha](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1VfqJOPqvSS8cwFqFwbrGY2/images-of-the-buddha)
- [www.clear-vision.org](http://www.clear-vision.org) A Buddhist organisation that provides resources for schools and Buddhist families. Especially worth a look are the online galleries of Buddha images [www.clear-vision.org/Schools/Images.aspx](http://www.clear-vision.org/Schools/Images.aspx)
- [www.buddhanet.net/](http://www.buddhanet.net/) There is a section for children on a tab, but also useful is their interactive Wheel of Life: [www.buddhanet.net/wheel2.htm](http://www.buddhanet.net/wheel2.htm)
- Also useful is the explanation of Buddha mudras at: <http://www.lotussculpture.com/mudras.html>
- BBC Beliefs clips are aimed at KS3, but may also be appropriate for UKS2 [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zw5kp/clips](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00zw5kp/clips)
- Buddha hand gestures: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/335P6YcZyJcX1SVc08SNjCJ/what-meaning-do-the-features-and-gestures-of-the-buddha-convey](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/335P6YcZyJcX1SVc08SNjCJ/what-meaning-do-the-features-and-gestures-of-the-buddha-convey)
- Clips of Buddhists talking about their faith: [www.cleo.net.uk/resources/displayframe.php?src=480/consultants\\_resources/religiouseduc/bqb/bqb.html](http://www.cleo.net.uk/resources/displayframe.php?src=480/consultants_resources/religiouseduc/bqb/bqb.html)
- A selection of animated stories from world religions can be found on the BBC Schools Radio website: [www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/collectiveworship/collectiveworship\\_stories](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/schoolradio/subjects/collectiveworship/collectiveworship_stories) One of them is the story of The Monkey King's Sacrifice.
- Woodlands Junior School site <http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/religion/buddhism.htm> is a great place to see a summary of Buddhism: children could use it too. There are links to other useful sites.

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