# **Buddhism**

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| **General** | **Core Belief**  Self-discipline (**sila**), meditation (**samadhi**), and wisdom (**pannya**) are the foundation of the teachings of the Buddha. They are necessary to achieve escape from the cycle of re-birth (samsara). The cycle of rebirth will end when one achieves enlightenment or awakening, but everyone must work hard for it by **sila**, **samadhi** and **pannya**. All Buddhists believe in self-effort for their enlightenment or awakening because no one can enlighten or awken each other.  All Buddhist take refuge in three jewels: the qualities of the **Buddha**, **Dhamma** (Buddha’s teaching), and **Sangha** (Buddha’s disciples and the practitioners of the Dhamma).  **Buddhists see the Four Noble Truths as reality of human life**:  1. Suffering is inevitable in life and continues endlessly by rebirth.  2. Suffering is caused by selfishness, ego, desire, craving, greed, and ignorance. Life will continue after death due to these causes.  3. Suffering ceases when one deals with their causes. Cessation of suffering is **Nibbana**, the ending of the causes. Enlightenment or awakening is experienced in this state.  4. Suffering can be ended by the practice of Noble Eightfold Path.  **Noble Eightfold Path**   1. Right understanding: to understand each of the Four Noble Truth appropriately, to accept the reality of impermanence, suffering and soulless/selfless nature of life, and to see the world through causes and effects. 2. Right thought: not to develop an intent that hurts others, not to nurture the thoughts of craving and covetousness. 3. Right speech: not to tell a lie, not to use, abusive, divisive and gossiping words. 4. Right action: not to hurt, not to steal, not to practice wrong or harmful sexual actions and not to take ecstatic substances. 5. Right livelihood: not to trade with harmful objects- such as weapons, animal life, human trafficking and poisonous substances. 6. Right effort: not to make an effort to harm oneself and others; instead, one should make an effort to develop right understanding, right thinking, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right mindfulness, and sustain each with appropriate energy. 7. Right mindfulness: paying an appropriate attention to internal and external physical objects, thoughts, feelings, and objects of mind. 8. Right concentration: to practice meditation with breathing processes, bare attention to one’s emotion, mental contents, and objects of mind. One should reach a state of absorption with one of these meditation objects.   **Karma**  Karma is defined by the intention of an individual’s physical, verbal and mental action. All karmas have a specific reaction, but the degree of consequences depend on the intention of the actor.  **Scripture**  The **Tipitaka** (three baskets) written in **Pali**, the earliest Buddhist scriptures: 1) **Vinaya**, the disciplinary rules for monks and nuns. 2) **Sutta** (**sutra**), the teachings of the Buddha recorded with reference to the places, types of audience, and conditions of the teaching. 3) **Abhidhamma**, the composition of the key philosophical teaching of the Buddha and practices.  **Dhammapada -** This is one section of the sutta (sutra in Sanskrit) in the three baskets, and a collection of the best-known saying of the Buddha.  **Jataka Tales -** These arestories of the Buddha’s previous lives before he was born as **Siddhartha Gautama**. Jataka Tales informs us numerous accounts of his past lives, all of which are associated with moral narratives. These moral tales are suitable for young and adults.  **Daily Acts of Faith**  Buddhists are expected to follow the **Five Precepts**, support the **sangha** (monks and nuns) with gifts of food and robes, medicines. The **Sangha** gives it to the poor if they have received more than they need. Buddhists also practice meditation in order to develop tranquillity and insight.  Each morning or evening a Buddhist should repeat the Five Precepts along with the qualities of three jewels (**Tiratana**:- Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) as this practice reminds their faith and commitments.  **Five Precepts:**   1. do not harm any living thing 2. do not take what is not given 3. do not practice wrong or harmful sexual activity 4. do not lie or say unkind things 5. do not use drugs or alcohol which will cloud the mind   **Schools of the Buddhism**  There are three main schools: 1) **Theravada** school, also known as southern school. This school is actively visible in Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Nepal. 2) **Mahayana** school, also known as northern school. Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhists are affiliated to Mahayana school. 3) **Vajaranya** school, also known as Tibetan school. This school is mostly practiced by the people of Himalayan regions including Bhutan. Current Dalai Lama is the head of this school. Many people believe Tibetan school is a part of Mahaya school.  **Major Annual Events**  Different schools of Buddhism observe different festivals, but the most common festival is known as **Vesak/Wesak** Day, also called Buddha Day. Vesak falls on the Full Moon Day of May/June every year. Triple life -event of the Buddha took place on this Full Moon Day: the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha.  Theravada Buddhists observe three more events: 1) **Assala Day** (beginning of three months rain retreat), which falls on the Full Moon Day of July/August, 2) **Pavarana Day** (the end of the three months rain retreat) falls in October/November and 3) **Kathina Day** (robe offering festival) starting from the next day the Pavarana to the Full Moon of November/December.  **Births rites**  There are no special Buddhist ceremonies to mark the birth of a baby. It is, however, usual for monks or nuns to chant blessing after a birth, and a family may bring the new baby to the temple, into the presence of the Buddha image.  **Buddhist Names**  Lay people, with some exception, do not use Buddhist names but monks and nuns are required to give a new name at their ordination. They normally use Pali name while some may also choose Sanskrit name.  **Diet**  Eating meat is not prohibited as killing depends on the choice of an individual’s livelihood. Killing animals is an act of wrong karma, and the killer will the pay price for their action. Some Buddhists eat meat. Many Buddhists believe that eating meat is acceptable if they buy it from a shop, or eating in a restaurant because those meats are not prepared on their request. Generally, a Buddhist would not kill the animal their self. Buddhist monks normally take anything devotees offer during their alms-round.  **Language**  All scriptures in the Theravada school is written in Pali, the language of the Buddha. They are translated into national languages for learning only but not for recitation. Some Mahayana scriptures are written in Sanskirt but most Mahayana Buddhist scriptures are translated into different national languages. Buddhists use this translated language for their rituals.  **Dress**  There are no specific regulations for the dress of lay Buddhists, traditionally women will not wear short skirts when attending a ceremony at the monastery. Monks and nuns wear robes of Saffron, brown (or sometimes grey) and shave their heads. Mahayanist monks wear ready-made saffron or grey uniform.  **Places of Worship**  There are usually monks or nuns living in a **Vihara** (Buddhist temple). Every temple has a shrine room. The shrine room is seen as a sacred space. When in the shrine room, it is considered respectful not to point your feet at the shrine. Buddhists pay respect the shrine three times when they visit the temple. They do the same to the monks, especially during a ceremony. Monks will have daily practices according to their own timetable. Normal recitation takes place in early morning and evening. Shoes are always removed on entering the shrine room.  **Traditional Buddhists may practice the following:**  • visiting a shrine or temple (**vihara**) on a special event such as birthday or Memorial Day of departed one  • bowing down in front of the Buddha image (**rupa**)  • offering fruit and flowers at the shrine  • chanting  • meditating  • burning incense sticks  • using a prayer wheel or prayer beads.  **The Home**  Buddhist homes may contain a shrine as a focal point for Buddhist observances. At the centre of the shrine there is usually a stupa (image) of the Buddha. There may also be a volume of Buddhist scriptures and other images, pictures or photographs eg of Buddhist monks. The objects are regarded as auspicious and as blessing the home. This is also to remind people of the qualities found in the Buddha and to gain inspiration to work towards cultivating these qualities in themselves.  Prayer beads called **malas** (comprising 108 beads) and prayer wheels may be used. | |
| **Classroom Practice** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| Do avoid suggesting that all Buddhists are celibate and that all monks or nuns shave their heads.  Do be cautious about the use of the word ‘suffering’ as it is used in accounts of the ‘Four Noble Truths’. Suffering (dukkha) refers to the unsatisfactory nature of life. Buddhism doesn’t claim that everything is painful, but it claims everything is impermanent. So, suffering is also impermanent.  Do select Jataka stories carefully. These are accounts of the previous loves of the Buddha. Some are excellent but some are quite difficult to grasp and can appear to be merely grim tales of sacrifice.  Do be cautious about asking the pupils to “try a bit of meditation”. Stilling activities in order to encourage the class to be more reflective are in order but simply announcing that everyone in the class is going to have a go at Buddhist meditation comes so close to a faith activity that unless one has the consent of everyone it could create difficulties.  Do remember that not all Buddhist monks and nuns wear saffron robes, eg **Zen** wear black/brown; **Niehiren** wear white and yellow; **Cha’an** wear black; and **Tibetan** wear wine/gold.  Do avoid suggesting the Noble Eight Fold Path as a ‘path’ that is staring at step one and then taking the next step and so on. It is really one path with eight aspects. The path is actually followed when observing all eight aspects together. | Don’t use the term ‘Begging Bowl’ instead it is better to use the term ‘Alms Bowl’. Begging bowl suggest that members of the **Sangha** are parasitic on the laity when in fact both are spiritually supportive of each other. Members of the Sangha are not allowed to ask for food, so the term ‘begging’ is inappropriate.  Don’t suggest that all Buddhist are Atheists. For many Buddhists the existence of God is not an issue as it is not relevant to the goal of enlightenment or awakening. However, Buddhists believe that God is impermanent because God is not free from the law of Karma and God cannot support a Buddhist in their quest for enlightenment/awakening.  Don’t refer to **Siddhatha Gautama** as being the Buddha until after his enlightenment/awakening. Strictly speaking the status ‘the Buddha’ can only be given to Siddhatha after his ‘awakening/enlightenment’ under the Bodhi tree.  Don’t equate Buddhist meditation with achieving ‘Mindfulness’ or being fully aware. Meditation leads to calm, concentration and insight. Other forms of meditation are often associated with drawing upon transcendent forces outside of the self or transcendent states of consciousness.  Don’t use the term ‘merit’ unless also explaining it is not a ‘points system’ to gain as much merit as you can for yourself. Merit is only kept when given away totally and freely.  Don’t use the term ‘reincarnation’ as it suggests a soul or something that can be reincarnated. Buddhists prefer the term ‘**Rebirth**’.  Don’t confuse showing respects for the Buddha with worship of the Buddha. Prostrations in front of statues and shrines is a form of showing respect and gratitude. In other word, bowing and prostration is merely an act of faith on the Buddha’s qualities and his teaching.  Don’t equate the 5 Precepts (for laity) and 10 Precepts (for novice before fully ordained monk) with commandments. They are not commandments but commitments: “I endeavour to train myself to abstain from….” |
| **Visits** | **Good Practice** | **Things to avoid** |
| There are usually no restrictions on dress. You will be asked to remove your shoes before you enter the shrine room and remember not to point your feet at the shrine when sitting down. |  |