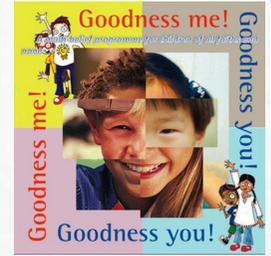


BUDDHISM

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People adhere to religious traditions in different ways. Not all Buddhists will adhere to all of the practices mentioned in this material. If there is a child in your class that follows this religious tradition it is important that the child's parents or guardians are the primary source of information about that child's beliefs and practices.

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature of life. Buddhists seek to reach a state of nirvana, following the path of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who went on a quest for Enlightenment around the sixth century BC.

The history of Buddhism is the story of one man's spiritual journey to enlightenment, and of the teachings and ways of living that developed from it.

The Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was born into a royal family in present-day Nepal over 2500 years ago. He lived a life of privilege and luxury until one day he left the royal enclosure and encountered for the first time, an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. Disturbed by this he abandoned his



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life of privilege in the palace and embraced an ascetic lifestyle of poverty and fasting. He wished to understand the purpose of existence and why human beings suffer. Close to death from severe fasting, meditation and self-denial he felt no closer to the truth. He gave up the ascetic lifestyle also and decided to pursue the 'Middle Way' – a life without luxury but also without poverty. He continued on the path of meditation and awareness in pursuit of the truth about the reality of existence.

Buddhists believe that one day, seated beneath a Bodhi tree in Northern India, Siddhartha became deeply absorbed in meditation and reflected on his experience of life until he became awakened or enlightened. By finding the path to enlightenment, Siddhartha was led from the pain of suffering and rebirth towards the path of enlightenment and became known as the Buddha or 'awakened one'. Buddhists believe that we all have the potential to awaken.

BUDDHIST BELIEFS

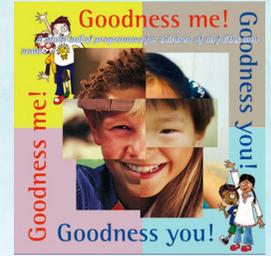
There is no belief in a personal god. Buddhists focus on consciousness rather than a deity. They believe that nothing is fixed or permanent and that change is inevitable. The key to Buddhism is to accept and embrace that we are mortal—everything changes, everything is impermanent. This is reflected in the cycle of nature and in human life. Nothing stays the same—people, our emotions, the seasons, the present moment. We cannot truly possess anything.

Buddhism teaches that the way to alleviate suffering is to embrace



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and live with impermanence. Our attachments only lead to suffering. Buddhism therefore teaches that happiness can be attained by letting go of attachments and our tendency to cling to possessions, people, status etc. It is not to try to grasp and cling, but rather to foster an attitude of acceptance and awareness, of letting go. It is only through really striving to become aware of the present moment, to live in the present moment and accept that nothing stays the same that we can begin to experience happiness.

This can be done, with practice, through mindful awareness or meditation.

Meditation

Meditation is the primary prayer practice of Buddhists. It seeks to focus on the inner chatter of our minds and still our thoughts, freeing us from anxiety, worry and needless attachments. It is a discipline that Buddhists practise for hours each day; heightening their powers of concentration, inner calm and insight.

Training our minds with meditations on loving kindness and compassion also helps us to change emotional habits which are harmful to ourselves and others, bringing instead a sense of joy, big heartedness and wellbeing.

Mindfulness

To be mindful is to be in touch with how we are in the present moment. It involves becoming aware of our thoughts as well as our surroundings. It is seeking to be attentive to each moment in life. Mindfulness involves consciously deciding to open ourselves to the present moment. To stop. To

tune in. To breathe. To notice and be aware of the now. Buddhism believes this is the only way to find peace - by living in the present.

Compassion

The Buddha taught that to realise enlightenment, a person must develop two qualities: wisdom and compassion. Wisdom and compassion are sometimes compared to two wings that work together to enable flying, or two eyes that work together to see deeply.

In the West, we're taught to think of 'wisdom' as something that is primarily intellectual and 'compassion' as something that is primarily emotional, and that these two things are separate and even incompatible. But this is not a Buddhist understanding.

The word compassion is understood to mean active sympathy or a willingness to bear the pain of others and it is an essential means to realising enlightenment.

Reincarnation

Buddhists believe that human beings are part of a wheel of life that involves a succession of rebirths from one lifetime to the next, known as Samsara or endless wandering. All living creatures are part of this cycle and we continue to be reborn until we reach enlightenment or Nirvana. This is similar to the Hindu faith; however, Hindus believe that our soul is reborn into each lifetime and Buddhists believe that it is our consciousness

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that lives through each lifetime. Everything depends on Karma. How we live our lives in this lifetime will depend how enlightened and consciously evolved we are in our next lifetime.

Buddhist teachers or leaders are known as Lamas. Many Lamas are believed to be enlightened beings, who have awakened to their Buddha-nature. However, instead of experiencing Nirvana, they choose to continue to be reincarnated, to help others and show compassion in a suffering world.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

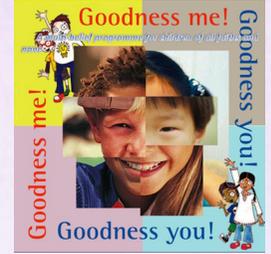
The Four Noble Truths contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings. It was these four principles that the Buddha came to understand during his meditation under the bodhi tree.

1. The truth of suffering (Dukkha)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha)
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Magga)



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THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Eightfold Path is comprised of eight primary teachings which Buddhists follow and use in their everyday lives.

1. Right View or Right Understanding: insight into the true nature of reality.
2. Right Intention: the unselfish desire to realise enlightenment.
3. Right Speech: using speech compassionately.
4. Right Action: using ethical conduct to manifest compassion.
5. Right Livelihood: making a living through ethical and non-harmful means.
6. Right Effort: cultivating wholesome qualities and releasing unwholesome qualities.
7. Right Mindfulness: whole body-and-mind awareness.
8. Right Concentration: meditation or some other dedicated, concentrated practice.

BUDDHIST WORSHIP

Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple. At home, Buddhists will often set aside a room or a part of a room as a shrine. There will be a statue of Buddha, candles, and an incense burner. Buddhist temples come in many shapes and sizes. Perhaps the best known are the pagodas of China and Japan.

Another typical Buddhist building is the Stupa, which is a stone structure built over what are thought to be relics of the Buddha, or over copies of the Buddha's teachings.

THE DALAI LAMA

The most senior teacher or Spiritual Leader of Tibetan Buddhism is called the Dalai Lama. He is considered by the Tibetan people as the 'Buddha of Compassion'.

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CELEBRATIONS

The most important Buddhist festival is known as either Vesak, Wesak or Buddha Day, and is celebrated annually on the full moon of the ancient lunar month of Vesakha, which usually falls in May, or in early June. At Vesak Buddhists commemorate the birth of the Buddha-to-be, Siddhartha Gautama, his Enlightenment at the age of 35 when he became the Buddha and his final 'passing' into Nirvana at the age of 80, no longer to be reborn. Buddhist scriptures relate that each of these three significant events occurred on a full moon of the Indian lunar month of Vesakha.

There are some cultural and local differences in how the various Buddhist groups and nations celebrate Vesak, but broadly speaking, devout Buddhists will try to attend their local temple for at least part of the day, while some remain there throughout the day and night of the full moon. The celebration will include the practices of Giving, Virtue and Cultivation and the doing of good and meritorious deeds.

Giving usually involves bringing food to offer and share, as well as supplies for the temple and symbolic offerings for the shrine. Virtue is observed by reaffirming commitment to the moral precepts. Cultivation can include chanting, meditation and listening to sermons.

AT A GLANCE...

Sacred text: Tripitaka

Special place: Bodh Gaya/Lumbini

Special person: Siddhartha Gautama

Clergy/religious leader: Dali Lama

Symbol: Eightfold Path

Practices: The Eightfold Path/meditation/mindfulness

Beliefs: Reincarnation/Karma/meditation/mindfulness/compassion

