

Buddhism

A Guide

You need to know

Beliefs

- 3 Marks of Existence
 - Anicca, Anatta, Dukkha
- Nature of Human Beings
 - Tahna
 - 3 Root Poisons
 - Kamma
- Beliefs about the Buddha
- Samsara and Nibbana

Practices

- Living According to the Eightfold Path
- Five Precepts
- Sangha
- Meditation and Devotion

With each of these headings you will need to know

- Knowledge
- Sources
- Relationships between Beliefs and Practices
- Importance of these beliefs and practices.
- The Purpose of the practices
- Benefits and Challenges
- How they impact on Buddhist Life

These notes are here to summarise the main ideas. They are split into the 3 Jewels – The Buddha, The Dhamma and The Sangha.

On the last page you will see these all laid out. It may be worth while trying to make connections between the beliefs and practices.

There are past paper questions. Use these to help with your revision.

READ THE QUESTION – sounds simple but so many people pick out key words and answer a question they've memorized as opposed to the question it is asking.

Use the question to help you format your answer.

Skills

Knowledge and understanding

Knowledge and understanding involves presenting relevant and accurate content. A relevant and accurate point which may include

- ? accurate factual information
- ? relevant factual information
- ? reference to sources
- ? case studies
- ? examples
- ? viewpoints
- ? description of arguments.

Analysis

Analysis involves doing something with factual information, for example identifying parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole; drawing out and relating implications.

A relevant, accurate and developed point which may include

- ? links between different components
- ? links between component(s) and the whole
- ? links between component(s) and related concepts
- ? similarities and contradictions ? consistency and inconsistency
- ? different views/interpretations
- ? possible consequences/implications
- ? the relative importance of components
- ? understanding of underlying order or structure.

Evaluation

Evaluation involves making a judgement or measurement based on an issue. A relevant, accurate and developed point which may include

- ? the relevance and/or importance and/or usefulness of a viewpoint or source
- ? positive and negative aspects
- ? strengths and weaknesses
- ? any other relevant evaluative comment

The Buddha- The Teacher

What do We know?

We don’t know a lot about the life of Siddhartha Gautama. However, what is widely believed is that he was a prince living a life of satisfactoriness. He left the palace and encountered the 4 sights. This inspired him to leave and adopt the lifestyle of an ascetic. From here he was not content and mediated to find the middle way and reach enlightenment. He then spent the rest of his life teaching others about this.

“The founder of Buddhism was not a god, a prophet, or a messiah. He was a normal human being who, by his own efforts, became completely awake, both to his own potential and to the nature of the world around him.” **Chris Pauling**

Cycle of Samsara

Buddha taught that all living things are stuck in a Cycle of Rebirth – called **Samsara**. This is something Buddhists aim to escape from by achieving **enlightenment**. When you escape from this cycle you reach a state of being called **Nibbana**. It is a state which is said to be indescribable in our human words, which is why even the Buddha found it difficult to express.

Sources

- “The king asked: ‘When someone is reborn, Venerable Nagasena, is he the same as the one who has just died, or is he another?’ – The Elder replied: ‘He is neither the same nor another’.” **The Questions of King Milinda**
- “What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind. If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of a cart follows the beast that draws the cart.” **Dhammapada 1**
- “O bhikkus, this cycle of continuity (samsara) is without visible end, and the first beginnings of beings wandering and running around, enveloped in ignorance and bound by the fetters of thirst (desire) is not to be perceived.” **Walpola Rahula, “What the Buddha Taught”, p 27**

Enlightenment

Enlightenment is a state of being combining knowledge in a total understanding of life. On reaching enlightenment you are set free from all ignorance and suffering in the world. The Buddha on reaching enlightenment had broken the chain of rebirth, he had reached perfect peace and would therefore have to suffer no longer.

“The stopping of becoming is Nirvana” **Samyutta-nikaya 1, 39**

“ Enlightenment is direct insight into the nature of reality.”
Chris Pauling, “Introducing Buddhism”

Eightfold Path

Buddha taught that the way to escape the **cycle of Samsara** is to follow what he termed **The Middle Way** or the **Eightfold Path**.

This is a series of eight rules or guides that Buddhists must follow in order to rid themselves of suffering and reach **enlightenment**.

The Eightfold Path is the **Fourth Noble Truth**

Sources

📖 Known as the ‘Middle Path’, because it avoids two extremes: one extreme being the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses; the other being the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism.

Walpola Rahula

📖 “This is the Path, there is no other that leads to the purifying of the mind.”

Dhammapada 20

Importance

The Buddha is important as without him and his teachings there would be no Buddhism. However, it is important for Buddhists not to get too caught up in his life and his history. Instead focusing on his teachings.

The Cycle of Samsara is important as escaping it and suffering is the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

The Eightfold Path is important as it is the way to escape the cycle of Samsara.

Benefits and Challenges

The benefits of following the Eightfold Path are:

- Helps overcome suffering.
- Gives guidelines on how to live free from craving
- Helps to overcome attachment and gain good Karma
- Helps to free ones self from samsara
- It brings calm and peace to a person and helps gain wisdom
- Creates a freer and more tolerant society

Some difficulties of trying to follow the Eightfold path are

- It is hard to keep to the path. Responsibilities of work and family take up time
- Pressure of work and the time work takes, can keep people from following the path.
- Other attachments and cravings which we are exposed to in the modern world hinder our progress.
- Sometimes the path might not seem realistic in the busy modern life.
- Some Buddhists believe that you have to withdraw to a monastery to progress along the path quicker.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The heart of the Buddha’s teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths which he expounded in his very first sermon to the five ascetics, at Isipatana near Benares.

Dukkha - Fact of suffering - suffering is a necessary attribute of sentient existence

Samudaya - Cause of suffering is caused by passions (Cause of Suffering)

Nirodha- Cessation of suffering or extinction of passion (Effect of Happiness)

Magga The Path leading to the extinction of passion (Cause of Happiness); i.e. Eightfold Path

The Sangha – The Community

What is the Sangha?

The community of people who practice Buddhism can be divided into two main groups: the ‘monastic community’ or ‘sangha’, monks and nuns who live in monasteries and nunneries, and the ‘lay community’, Buddhists who live the ordinary family life of a householder. There has always been a strong relationship between these two communities - the monks rely on the lay community for their material needs and the lay people rely on the monks for their spiritual needs.

5 Precepts

Followed by ALL Buddhists, lay and monastic

- 1. To abstain from harming living beings
- 2. To abstain from taking things not freely given
- 3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
- 4. To abstain from false speech
- 5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which cloud the mind

Followed only by monastic Buddhists: monks and nuns

- 6. To abstain from taking food other than at prescribed times (ie.not after noon)
- 7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music and other unseenly activities
- 8. To abstain from the use of garlands and perfumes
- 9. To abstain from the use of high and luxurious beds
- 10.To abstain from accepting gold, silver or money.

Importance

The Sangha is important as it allows Buddhists the opportunity to come together – to support each other and reach the goal of enlightenment.

Following the 5 Precepts is important as a way to keep yourself from suffering or inflicting suffering on others.

Meditation and Worship

Buddhists can worship both at home or at a temple. It is not considered essential to go to a temple to worship with others.

Worship 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.

Worship at temple - Buddhist temples come in many shapes. 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.

Meditation is a way of exerting a more direct influence on our mental states. Meditation gives us a way of working the mind *with the mind*, allowing us first of all to increase the overall awareness and positivity, and then to use this strengthened and purified awareness to see into the nature of all things as they really are.

Puja is the name for ceremonies that involve offerings, or gifts. During these ceremonies, there will also be **meditation** and prayer. This is known as devotional practice and its purpose is to enable Buddhists to express how grateful they are to the Buddha for what he taught. This allows them to show respect for his teachings.

Mantras - Buddhists may chant repetitively, as this is a form of mediation.

Chanting - Buddhists may sing the scriptures.

Mala - Buddhists may use a string of beads to help them focus during worship.

Meditation - Buddhists may use meditation to open themselves to a higher state of awareness.

Meditation is central to Buddhism.

Offerings - Buddhists may leave gifts as a mark of respect and reverence to the Buddha. These gifts may include flowers, which are beautiful but fade and serve as a reminder of the impermanence of things. They may also include candles, which are a mark of light and wisdom.

The aim of these individual practices is to enable Buddhists to become more deeply devoted to Buddhism and to open themselves to understand the Buddha Dhamma (Dharma). By doing these things at home or in a place of worship, a Buddhist makes them part of their daily life and practice.

Benefits and Challenges

Benefits

The benefits of joining a monastic community are that you are fully focused on achieving enlightenment.

The 5 Precepts are beneficial as they help you complete the right action.

Meditation is beneficial at increasing our awareness and focusing on the goals of Buddhism.

Drawbacks

To join the monastic community takes initial sacrifices that may for some be hard.

There is a reliance between the lay community and monastic community.

Meditation takes practice – it is not always straight forward to achieve right mindfulness.

The 5 Precepts can be interpreted in different ways.

The Dhamma – The Teachings

What are the Teachings?

Dhamma can mean many things. It can mean the ultimate truth or reality of life. It can also mean the teachings of the Buddha. Some Buddhists talk of practising the dhamma. Some have said it is the Buddhist word for Buddhism.

3 Marks of Existence

The Three Marks of Existence is important in Buddhism, because it means we start to see things, situations as they really are.

Anicca - Everything is impermanent

Dukkha - suffering is a part of existence (for living things anyway)

Anatta - nothing exists in and of itself, without dependencies.

The three marks of existence is not an idea or theory you have to believe in. Rather it is a way to explore yourself and everything around you.

Dukkha

☞ “If a man watches not for Nirvana, his cravings grow like a creeper and he jumps from death to death like a monkey in the forest from one tree without fruit to another.” **Dhammapada 334**

Anicca

•☞ “Consider this body! A painted puppet with jointed limbs, sometimes suffering and covered with ulcers, full of imaginings, never permanent, for ever changing.” **Dhammapada 147**

•☞ “When a man considers this world as a bubble of froth, and as the illusion of an appearance, then the king of death has no power over him”

Anatta

☞ “We only rent this house, not own it. If we think it belongs to us, we will suffer when we have to leave it. But in reality, there is no such thing as a permanent self, nothing solid or unchanging that we can hold on to.” **Achaan Chah, “A Still Forest Pool”**

Importance – The teachings of the Dhamma are really important as they help Buddhists understand more about the nature of their existence and how to reach enlightenment. By understanding more about life and accepting the three marks of existence Buddhists can work towards the goals.

Three Root Poisons

The cause of human suffering, in Buddhist terms, is **greed, hatred and ignorance**. These negative traits and fundamental evils are called the Three Root Poisons, because they are dangerous toxins in our lives. Not only are they the source of our unquenchable thirst for possessions, and the root cause of all of our harmful illusions, but they are painful pollutants, which bring sickness, both physical and mental.

Tanha: Literally translates as thirst. It means that 'Craving' is the chief root of suffering, and of the ever continuing cycle of rebirths.

This is a teaching that is central in Buddhism. It is the Second Noble Truth.

Kamma and Skilful Action

The movement of beings between **rebirths** is not a haphazard process but is ordered and governed by the LAW OF KARMA, the principle that beings are reborn according to the nature and quality of their past actions.

It is said that acts of hatred and violence lead to rebirth in a hell, acts bound up with delusion and confusion lead to a rebirth as an animal, and acts of greed lead to rebirth as a ghost.

1 What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind. If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart.

Visuddhimagga, p. 513

Benefits and Challenges

- Benefits of accepting the 3 marks of existence are by accepting them we can see the world for what it really is.
- By understanding the three root poisons Buddhists can be more aware and therefore avoid these poisons and rid themselves of suffering.
- By focusing on Kamma and skilful actions Buddhists are being compassionate to others and are making the world a better place.

Challenges

- The 3 Root Poisons can appear quite negative and it may be hard to really get to the root of suffering. Or how to stop this behavior.
- It can be a difficult concept to grasp that nothing is permanent or there is no self. Therefore, hard to rid yourself of the craving that this brings.
- It can be challenging to know what a skilful action might be in each situation.

Glossary

- **Ahimsa:** Non-harming or not hurting; gentleness to all forms of life.
- **Anatta:** No-soul non-self teaching of Buddhism.
- **Arhat:** The perfected disciple; one who has completed the discipline required to attain liberation.
- **Anicca:** 'Impermanence', one of the three essential characteristics of existence, along with Anicca and Dukkha.
- **Bodhisattva:** One moved by compassionate zeal to aid fellow beings, hence willing to postpone his or her own entrance into Nirvana to this end.
- **Buddha:** The Illumined One. The main title of the founder of Buddhism after his Enlightenment.
- **Compassion:** To vibrate in sympathy with others
- **Dhamma** The Universal Truth; The Teachings and the inner practice of the Teachings of Buddha; Essential quality and factual reality.
- **Dukkha:** Suffering, stress, pain, misery, sorrow, unhappiness, dissatisfaction with the way things are, a central factor in the human condition, one of the "three marks" of existence.
- **Eightfold Path:** The path that leads to liberation, consisting of right understanding, right aim, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- **Enlightenment:** Complete elimination of all negative aspects of the mind and perfection of all positive qualities.
- **Five Precepts:** or Five Training Rules that Buddhists should aim to follow. Monastic Buddhists have 5 extra precepts to follow.
- **Four Noble Truths:**
Fact of suffering - suffering is a necessary attribute of sentient existence
Cause of suffering is caused by passions (Cause of Suffering)
Cessation of suffering or extinction of passion (Effect of Happiness)
The Path leading to the extinction of passion (Cause of Happiness); i.e. Eightfold Path
- **Karma:** (Sanskrit), Kamma: (Pali): "action or volitional activities" the cosmic law of cause and effect: every physical or spiritual deed has its long-range consequences as determined by the agent's intention. Sanskrit form: karma..
- **Mantra:** (Skt) Sacred word or formula repeated often of only one or two syllables, used in certain Buddhist rituals.
- **Meditation:** The process of becoming deeply acquainted with one's own mind.
- **Moksha:** Ultimate release or liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
- **Nibbana (Pali) Nirvana (Sanskrit):** Literally, the "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the entire round of death and rebirth. This term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace
- **Puja:** (Sanskrit) A gesture of worship or respect, usually that of raising the hands, palms together, the height of the hands indicating the degree of reverence
- **Rebirth:** The corollary of karma. The doctrine that each individual is born into the world again and again to inherit the effects of his deeds, or rather, that by action in this life the individual creates a fresh personality for himself in order that the results of his actions may be fulfilled in a future life
- **Samsara:** (Sanskrit and Pali) The world of appearances and endless flux, including all aspects of becoming and death; cycles of birth and rebirth.
- **Sangha:** (Pali) On the conventional (sammati) level, this term denotes the communities of Buddhist monks and nuns; on the ideal (ariya) level, it denotes those followers of the Buddha, lay or ordained, who have attained at least stream-entry
- **Tanha:** (Pali) Lit. 'thirst': 'Craving' is the chief root of suffering, and of the ever continuing cycle of rebirths.
- **The Three Jewels:** Or the Triple Gem, i.e. the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, which are the three essential components of Buddhism. They are the objects of veneration. Buddhists take refuge in them by pronouncing the threefold refuge formula, thus acknowledging themselves to be Buddhists
- **Vesak:** In Buddhist tradition it is the date not only of the Buddha's birth, but also of his Enlightenment and death. The full moon day of the month corresponding to May in our calendar.

3 Marks of Existence
Annica
Anatta
Dukkha

Nature of Human Beings
Tahna
3 Root Poisons
Kamma

Beliefs About Buddha
4 Sights
Middle Way

Samsara and Nibbana
Rebirth
Enlightenment

**Living According to the
Eightfold Path**
Four Noble Truths
Enlightenment
Middle Way

5 Precepts
Rules to Live By
**5 More for Monastic
Community**

Sangha
Monastic Community
Lay Community
Worship

Meditation and Devotion
Right Concentration
Worship
Monastic Community

Past Paper Questions

Buddhism	
Analysis	Evaluation
Analyse the purpose of following the Five Precepts.	‘The Three Marks of Existence are the most significant of all Buddhist beliefs.’ How far do you agree?
Explain the purpose of living according to the Eightfold Path.	‘Beliefs about Samsara present challenges for Buddhists.’ How far do you agree?
Explain the relationship between two Buddhist beliefs you have studied.	To what extent does worship benefit Buddhists?
Analyse the relationship between beliefs about tanha and the Three Root Poisons.	‘Living according to the Eightfold Path presents too many challenges for Buddhists.’ To what extent do you agree?