

GCSE RE

Buddhist beliefs

Key words (Create your own glossary here)

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Revision guide – GCSE RE – Topic two – Buddhist beliefs

The birth of the Buddha

The stories attached to the conception and birth of the Buddha are rather remarkable.....

The Buddha's mother was called Queen Maya and his father was called King Suddhodana – he was the leader of the Shakya tribe

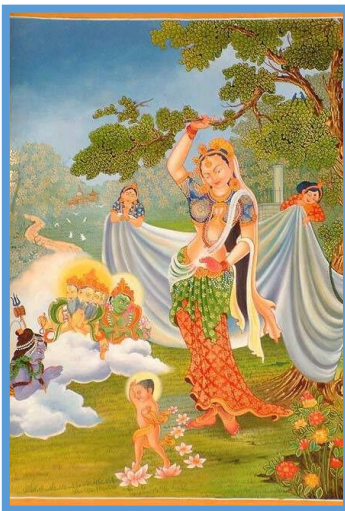
When Maya was pregnant with the Buddha, she dreamt that a pure white elephant entered her womb – there are variations of this but it always includes a pure white elephant

Believing in the importance of dreams, she and Suddhodana went to the advisors to ask what it meant

When it was getting closer to the birth, it was traditional for mums to return to their parents to give birth

So on the way home – at a place called **Lumbini** (*we looked at this as a place of pilgrimage in Year 8*) – Maya gives birth to **Siddhartha Gautama** in the garden in Lumbini

This garden was near the kingdom of Nepal, at the foot of the Himalayan mountains



Tradition says that when Siddhartha was born, Maya's birth pains were practically non-existent

Also, when Siddhartha was born, he took seven steps – where his foot touched the ground a lotus flower sprang up

Then, at the seventh stride, he stopped and with a noble voice, he spoke:

“This is my last birth, there is no more coming to be”

That the man known as the **Buddha** was a **real historical person** is not seriously disputed nowadays

However, it is **very difficult** to establish the **exact details** of his life history **2,500 years** after it happened

The stories and teachings of the Buddha were **passed down orally** until they were written down several hundred years later

Discussion point – what can happen to a story that is only passed down orally for a length of time?



The naming ceremony

King Suddhodana had an old teacher who was known to be very wise. He was called Asita the Sage. Asita visited the newly born Siddhartha

The king was very happy to see his wise old teacher again. In the palace, after the sage was seated, the king brought the prince before him and said, "Teacher, my son was born only yesterday. Here he is. Please see if his future will be good."

Asita predicted that the new born baby would either be a great leader – like his father – or a wise religious leader.

King Suddhodana decided that he wanted his son to become a great leader – like himself – so he devised a plan that would imprison his son in luxury

The Buddha's life of luxury

On the seventh day after his birth, **Prince Siddhartha's mother died**. The king had another queen, who was called Prajapati Gotami. She was the younger sister of Queen Maha Maya, and she had given birth to a son on the same day that Queen Maha Maya died. **Prince Siddhartha could not remember his own mother.**

To stop Siddhartha from thinking about **issues that may have influenced him to become a religious person**, his father provided an environment that **didn't include any kind of suffering – it was all removed.**

Siddhartha Gautama was **imprisoned in paradise** – he wasn't allowed to leave the grounds of his 'palace'

Prince Siddhartha's kindness as a child:

There are stories attached to the Buddha's childhood and youth that demonstrate the kindness and compassion of the young 'prince'. Here are two:

One day he was walking in the woods with his **cousin Devadatta**, who had brought his bow and arrows with him. Suddenly, **Devadatta saw a swan flying and shot at it**. His arrow brought the swan down. Both the boys ran to get the bird. As Siddhartha could run faster than Devadatta, he reached the swan's injured body first and found, to his surprise, that it was still alive. **He gently pulled out the arrow from the wing**. He then got a little juice from cool leaves, put it on the wound to stop the bleeding and with his soft hand stroked the swan, which was very frightened. When Devadatta came to claim the swan, **Prince Siddhartha refused to give it to him**. Devadatta was very angry to see his cousin keeping the swan away from him. "Give me my bird! I shot it down," said Devadatta.

"No, I am not going to give it to you," said the Prince. "If you had killed it, it would have been yours. But now, since it is only wounded but still alive, it belongs to me."

Devadatta still did not agree. Then Siddhartha suggested, "Let us go to the court of the Sage and ask him who really owns the swan." Devadatta agreed, so off they went to the court of the Sage to tell him about their quarrel.

The Sage, hearing both boys' version of the story, said, "A life certainly must belong to he who tries to save it, a life cannot belong to one who is only trying to destroy it. **The wounded swan by right belongs to Siddhartha.**"



what does it teach Buddhists about the Buddha and how does it influence them to live their lives today?

When it was time for the King's Ploughing Festival, the city was decked out like a city in Heaven, and the delighted people in their finery assembled at King Suddhodana's supreme residence.

As a very young boy, Siddhartha also went to the Ploughing Festival.

Having laid the young boy at the root of a certain Rose Apple tree, the nurses went outside to watch the Festival.

While sitting there at the root of that glorious, canopied Rose Apple tree, taking the opportunity, Siddhartha attained a meditative state.

what does it teach Buddhists about the potential greatness of the young prince?



The Four Sights

We have seen that Siddhartha grew up in a palace in a life of luxury, shielded from the rest of the world

However, Siddhartha grew curious and wanted to explore outside the palace walls

Traditional Buddhist stories say that one day **at the age of 29**, despite his father's orders, Siddhartha decided **to leave the palace grounds with Channa** – his chariot driver – to the nearest city

Siddhartha then encountered **four sights that a profound effect on his life**. The story of the four sights is recorded in **Jataka 075** – the Jatakas are texts that record many Buddhist stories:

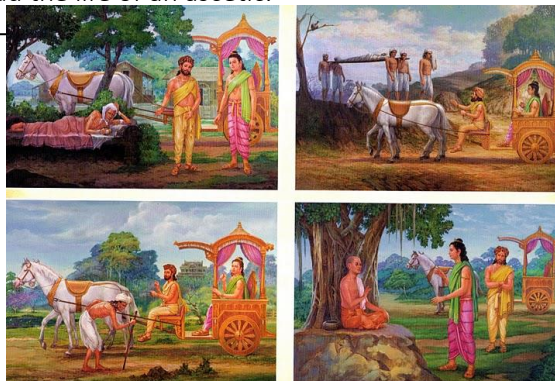
75 - The Four Sights

King Suddhodhana took every precaution to prevent Siddhattha from any sight, which could inspire him to become an ascetic (a holy person who lives a strict lifestyle) ever since he was born.

When prince Siddhattha was twenty-nine, the *devas* (god-like beings) felt that it was time for him to attain Enlightenment. So, they instilled a desire in his heart to visit the park. On the way, he encountered an old man, who was walking with the help of a stick. Shocked with the stark reality - that everybody becomes old and no mortal can escape it - he returned home in serious mood.

When the king learnt of his mental shock he made every object of mundane pleasure available to his son. Nonetheless, the prince was not interested in the worldly pleasure. Next day, he again went to the park. There he saw a sick person; and felt that disease too, is a reality of life, which no one can escape. On the third day, he saw a corpse; and realised that death is another reality, which no one can escape. Thus, he realised the triviality of the mundane life, which is bound to crumble; because if one is born one would undergo the process of ageing, sickness, death and all kinds of suffering. Even the mightiest of all monarchs are not capable of overpowering those realities of life.

Next, on the full-moon day he saw an ascetic. Curious, he asked his charioteer Channa about the identity of the person. Channa then informed him that the person was an ascetic, who had renounced the world in pursuit of eternal bliss. He also praised the ideals of an ascetic. The ascetic's resolution to renounce the worldly life in quest of the truth infused greater happiness in his heart and inspired him to lead the life of an ascetic.



“Siddhartha was wrestling with the fundamental questions of life and death....when he took in the last of the Four Sights. Riding out again in his chariot, he saw a man not dressed in the usual white garb, but in a yellow robe and shaven headed....there was something in his mindful gait that Siddhartha found quietly compelling, and he asked the charioteer ‘what manner of man is this that looks so at peace with himself and the world?’ The charioteer replied: ‘this is one that has gone forth’; ‘gone forth from what?’ said Siddhartha; ‘from the world’ the charioteer explained. ‘He has gone forth from his home, from his family. He has simply left it all behind to devote himself to the search for Truth’”

Urgyn Sangharakshita (a founder of Western Buddhism)

Leaving the palace

Finding the answer to the problem of suffering became the most important thing in Siddhartha’s life

But he knew that if he stayed in the palace, he would find no answers

It is said that on the night his own son Rahula was born, he left the palace for good in search of an answer

He got up quietly, kissed his wife and new-born son, woke Channa, and they crept past the sleeping guards and silently rode away from the palace

When they reached the edge of a river, they dismounted from their horses. Taking his sword, Siddhartha cut off his hair and swapped his rich clothes for the clothes of a beggar

He gave all his rings and bracelets to Channa to take back to his father

Channa watched as Siddhartha crossed the river and disappeared into the forest on the other side

By giving up his possessions and the symbol of his previous life, Siddhartha was letting go of the things that he thought were keeping him ignorant and which were resulting in suffering

Later he was to teach that renunciation – a ‘letting go’ – was important in reaching enlightenment

Learning check:

1. Do you think it is possible to live until you are 29 not to see or experience old age, sickness and death? Explain why
2. Do you think that Siddhartha was right to leave his wife and new baby to ‘seek the Truth’ and overcome suffering? Explain your views
3. Some versions of the Buddha’s story states that Siddhartha never actually saw the four sights. They are just metaphors to show different forms of suffering. Do you think it is right or wrong to define human life by old age, sickness and death? Is this a negative way to look at life? Explain your thoughts

The Buddha's ascetic life

Key term definitions:

Ascetic: living a simple and strict lifestyle with few pleasure of possessions

Meditation: a practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings to completely understand them

After leaving the palace, Siddhartha tried **various methods** to learn how to overcome the problem of suffering

He had been impressed by the **sense of peace** that he felt coming from the **holy man – the ascetic** – that he met before he left the palace, so he decided to **follow ascetic practices for the following six years**

He **rejected anything** that would give him pleasure and **practiced extreme self-discipline**

He began to **practice meditation** with two ascetics – it is said that meditation gave Siddhartha **a feeling of bliss**, but did **not offer him a permanent solution** the suffering that people experienced

Siddhartha then began to **ignore his appetite**. It is said he **held his breath for long periods of time** until sometimes he fell senseless to the ground

He also **fasted for long periods of time**, becoming increasingly hungry and weak. Stories say that his body became so thin that his legs were like bamboo sticks, his backbone was like a rope, his chest was like an incomplete roof of an house, and his eyes sank right into his skull, like stones in a well.

He looked **like a living skeleton** and **suffered from terrible pain and hunger**.

Traditional stories also say that **Siddhartha lived in dangerous and hostile forests**, which were too hot during the day and freezing at night

He **slept on a bed of thorns** as part of his ascetic practices

He was **frightened when the animals came** but never ran away

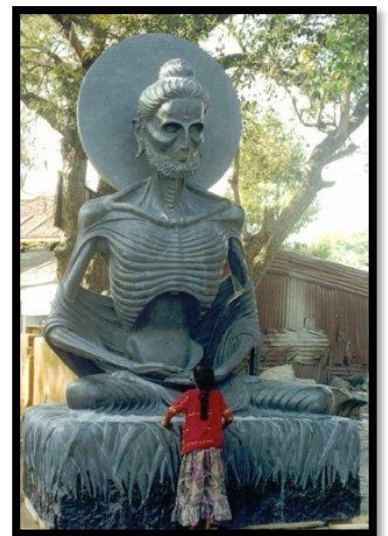
The middle way – turning away from the ascetic life

One day Siddhartha was **bathing in the river Nairanjana**. When he got out of the water he saw **a girl who was looking after a herd of cows** for her father

The girl offered Siddhartha a bowl of milk and rice. He accepted the food as he had by this point become too weak to even meditate

Siddhartha's strength was restored by the food and **he decided to stop his ascetic practices**, as he was **no closer to the truth** of why people suffer and how to get rid of this suffering

His ascetic practices had taught him **discipline and willpower**, but they did not provide a cure for suffering



Neither luxury nor an ascetic lifestyle had given Siddhartha any real answers. This led him to develop a 'middle way' between the two extremes he had experienced

Learning check –

1. In your own words, explain what an ascetic is
2. Give three methods that Siddhartha tried in order to resolve the problem of suffering
3. According to the Jataka tales, what was Siddhartha only eating?
4. Explain how Siddhartha came up with the idea of the 'middle way'.
5. Explain what the middle way means to Buddhists today

The Buddha's enlightenment

Enlightenment: the gaining of true knowledge and wisdom, which allows a Buddhist to break free from the cycle of rebirth

Mara: A demon that represents spiritual obstacles, especially temptation

The three watches of the night: the three realisations that the Buddha made in order to achieve enlightenment

The five ascetics: the Buddha's first five students; five monks who follow ascetic practices

After **rejecting his ascetic lifestyle**, Siddhartha wondered if **meditation** might be the answer to enlightenment

Traditional stories say that he made himself a cushion of grass and found a suitable place **to sit down and meditate**, underneath a Bodhi tree

He sat with his face to the east and thought:

"Though my skin, my nerves and my bones shall waste away and my life blood go dry I will not leave this seat until I have attained the highest wisdom, the supreme enlightenment, that leads to everlasting happiness"

The demon Mara:

Then Siddhartha began to meditate.....

Traditional stories tell how Mara – the evil one – appeared to try to stop him from achieving enlightenment. Mara tried a number of different tactics:

- He sent his daughters to seduce Siddhartha
- He sent his armies to attack Siddhartha
- He offered Siddhartha control of his kingdom
- Mara himself tried to attack Siddhartha



- Throughout it all, Siddhartha **stayed focused on his meditation**. He ignored the **temptations of Mara's daughters**. Arrows directed at him from the armies turned into flowers before they could hit him.
- Towards the end of his meditation, Mara claimed that only he had the right to sit in the place of enlightenment and his soldiers were witness to this. He claimed that without anyone to witness his enlightenment, Siddhartha would not be believed
- Siddhartha then **touched the earth and called upon the earth to witness** his right to sit under the Bodhi tree – the earth shook in acknowledgement to his right

What this supernatural part of the story shows is that Siddhartha had to **overcome fear, lust, pride and other negative emotions to reach enlightenment** – whether there was a demon called Mara may well be symbolic

Becoming enlightened

During the night that Siddhartha became enlightened, he experienced **three different realisations**.

These realisations happened over **three different periods** – or 'watches' – during the night, and so they are known as **'the three watches of the night'**

The three watches of the night:

1. Firstly, Siddhartha gained knowledge of all his past lives
2. Secondly, he came to understand the repeating cycle of birth, death and re-birth. He realised that when someone died, their karmic energy transfers into a new body, and the quality of their rebirth depends on their actions in their previous life
3. Thirdly, he came to understand why suffering happens and how to overcome it



The Buddha:

After his enlightenment, Siddhartha became known as **'the Buddha'** – which means **'enlightened one'** or **'the fully awakened one'**

The Buddha then devoted his life **to teaching others how to overcome suffering and to achieve enlightenment**

His first students were the **five ascetics** he left behind in the forest

Learning check time:

- 1) The image of the Buddha meditating and achieving enlightenment is a focal point for many Buddhists. Why do you think this image is so important?
- 2) What were the three realisations that the Buddha made during the night of his enlightenment and what are they called?

- 3) When asked questions about his enlightenment, the Buddha often spoke in negative terms, describing what it is not rather than what it is (for example, it is *not* heaven, or it is *not* the end). Why do you think the Buddha spoke in this way about enlightenment?

The concept of dharma and the three refuges

Refuge is a **place of safety**. It is why we call people who flee from war zones refugees – as they are **seeking refuge** from terrible things

Having a place of refuge or having something we take refuge in is really important for us all.
It is important to feel safe

A refuge for us can be **buildings, places, objects and even people**

For example, I take refuge in **my family, my house and.....my bed!**

It is with these people and in these places I feel **most safe**

Key terms:

Dhamma (dharma): the Buddha's teachings; truth; universal law or principle

Pali: the main language used for texts Theravada Buddhism

Sanskrit: a language used in many later Buddhist texts, including Mahayana Buddhism

What does dharma mean?

The term dhamma (Pali) or dharma (Sanskrit) has many meanings

It is used to refer to the 'truth about all things', as understood by the Buddha or someone who has become enlightened

Buddhists also think of it as universal 'law' or principals influencing life

The term is often used to describe the teachings of the Buddha after he had become enlightened, particularly his teachings about the three marks of existence and the Four Noble Truths

The word is also used to refer to the Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist teachings in general

For Buddhists, the teachings of the Buddha help to **guide them** to a view of life that will **reduce suffering** and lead them to **being happy**

Even though the Buddha's teachings as seen as the 'truth', the Buddha encouraged his followers to **test out his teachings against their own experiences**, to see if they were **true for themselves**

He discouraged what might be called 'blind faith' in his teachings because he wanted people to **consider and reflect upon his teachings** to see if they would **work in their own lives**

In his book '**Old Path, White Clouds**', the Buddhist monk **Thich Nhat Hanh** recounts stories of the Buddha's life

In one of them, the Buddha explains his teachings like this:

“My teaching is not a philosophy, it is the result of direct experience.

My teaching is a means of practice, not something to hold onto or worship

My teaching is like a raft used to cross the river.

Only a fool would carry the raft around after he had already reached the other shore of liberation”

Thich Nhat Hanh

The **Dhamma** is also one of the **three refuges** (sometimes known as the 3 treasures or the 3 jewels) of Buddhism – the **other two are the Buddha himself and the Sangha (Buddhist community)**

When **people become Buddhists**, they **recite the three refuges at a special ceremony** – and then **recite them frequently throughout the rest of their lives**:

“To the Buddha for refuge I go,

To the dhamma for refuge I go,

To the Sangha for refuge I go”

When a Buddhist says they go for refuge, they are **not trying to escape from someone or something, or hide away from their responsibilities to themselves or others**

Rather, they are **committing themselves to a path of spiritual transformation**, as embodied in the three refuges

Through going for refuge, a **Buddhist expresses the intention to seek and find enlightenment**

The three refuges of Buddhism



A **useful analogy** to help understand the importance of the three refuges is a **medical one**

- The Buddha is like a doctor.
- The Dharma is his medicine.
- The Sangha are the hospital staff. You can put your life in their hands

Learning check:

- 1) Identify the three refuges of Buddhism by writing down the chant that Buddhists frequently make
- 2) When Buddhists recite this chant, what are they committing themselves to?
- 3) Explain how the medical analogy helps us understand the importance of the three refuges in Buddhism

The concept of dependent arising

Key terms:

Dependent arising: the idea that all things arise in dependence on conditions

The Tibetan Wheel of Life: an image that symbolises samsara, often found in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and temples

Nidanas: 12 factors that illustrate the process of birth, death and re-birth

Samsara: the repeating cycle of life, birth, death and re-birth

Kamma (Karma): a person's actions; the idea that skilful action results in happiness and unskilful action in unhappiness

Nirvana: a state of complete enlightenment, happiness and peace

This basically expresses the view that life is an interdependent web of existence

For example, a tree depends on soil, rain and sunshine to survive. Everything else is also dependent on certain conditions to survive

Nothing is independent of supporting conditions, which means nothing lasts forever, including human beings

Everything is a constant process of change

The Dalai Lama – the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism – explained dependent arising like this:

“All events and incidents in life are so intimately linked with the fate of others that a single person on his or her own cannot even begin to act. Many ordinary human activities, both positive and negative, cannot even be conceived of apart from the existence of other people....in reliance of the existence of others it becomes possible for the media to create fame or disrepute for someone. On your own you cannot create fame or disrepute no matter how loud you might shout. The closest you might get is to create an echo of your own voice”

The 14th Dalai Lama



The Tibetan Wheel of life as an example of dependent arising

The Tibetan Wheel of Life illustrates the process of dependent arising in relation to human life, death and re-birth

The outer circle of the wheel is made up of 12 links or stages (*nidanas*) – the 12th link (old age and death) leads directly to the 1st link (ignorance).



This represents the Buddhist belief in rebirth: Buddhist believe that when we die, our karmic energy transfers to a new body

So the wheel shows the continual cycle of birth (and ignorance), death, then rebirth – this cycle is called *samsara*

Kamma as an example of dependent arising:

The type of world a Buddhist is re-born into – for example: human, animal or a heavenly being – is said to depend upon the **quality of their actions** (kamma) in their current life

The principle of kamma says that **intentions lead to actions which in turn lead to consequences**

In the cycle of life, good intentions lead to good actions – **good actions can lead to a more favourable rebirth**

Kamma is a **specific example of dependent arising** that explains how a person's actions create the conditions for their **future happiness or suffering**

The Samsara circle of birth, death and re-birth

For Buddhists, the **ultimate aim is to break free of the cycle of samsara, because this is what causes suffering**

The cycle is broken by following the Buddhist path but, more specifically through breaking the habit of craving things **we think make us happy – but really don't!**

When someone has an **unpleasant feeling, they want to escape it**, and when they have a **pleasant feeling they become attached to it** – Buddhism teaches that **this kind of automatic response is what leads to suffering**

Through **breaking this response** - and **coming to understand the Buddha's teachings** – **Buddhists may achieve nirvana: a state of liberation, peace and happiness**

The Three marks of existence

The Buddha set out **the 'human existence'**

There are **only three things** that we can be **completely sure of**

[We cannot know whether the world was created by God

We cannot know whether there is life after death]

So all we can be sure of is that **existence has three qualities** –

Dukkha – suffering/not being satisfied

Anicca – impermanence

Anatta – no permanent self

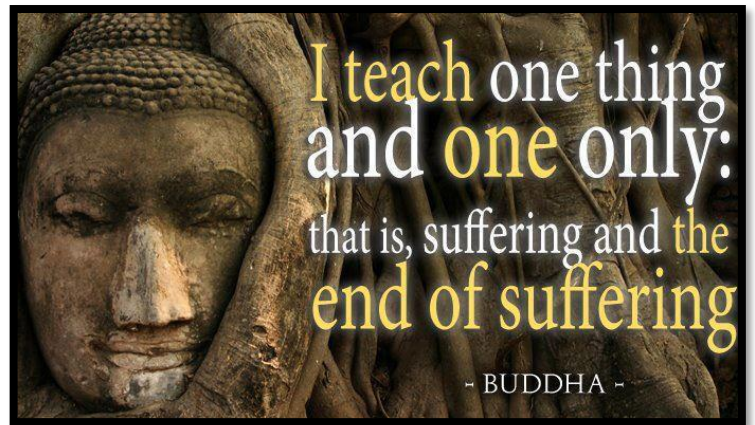


Dukkha:

Buddhists try to reduce suffering for themselves and others **through right action and intentions**, and by **gradually increasing their knowledge of reality**

Eventually they hope to **break the cycle of samsara and achieve nirvana**

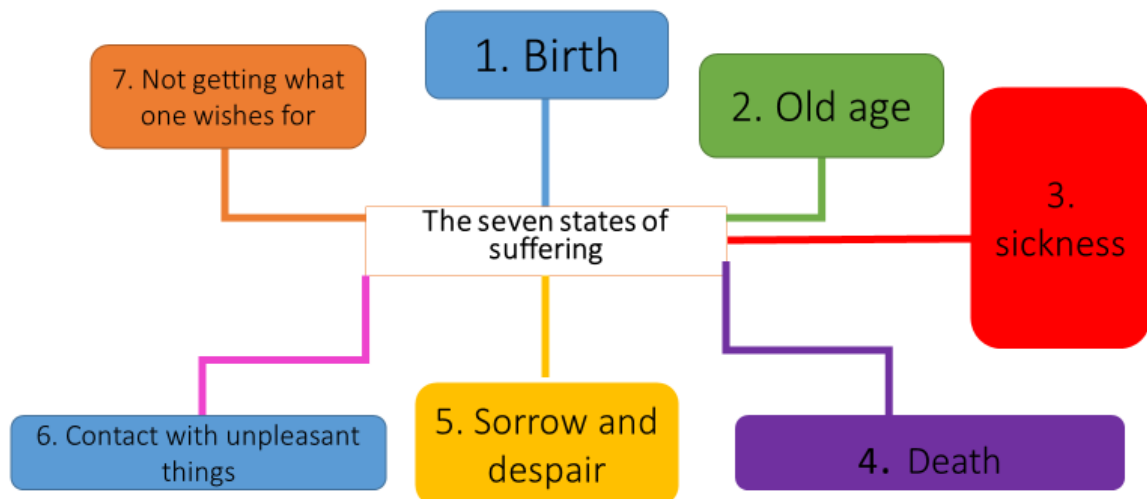
Remember – the main reason the Buddha left the palace is to search for an answer to why we suffer



After the Buddha became enlightened, he gave a sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath – a city in India. He spoke of the **seven states of suffering**:

The seven stages of suffering:

The seven states of suffering



Learning Check:

1. Identify occasion from the Buddha's life story that show when he would suffered or witnessed suffering – this can be a group task
2. Identify occasions in life (your life and the people in your group) that could summaries the last three states of suffering

Three different types of suffering:

1. Ordinary suffering –

Some examples:

Breaking a leg

Getting the flu

Missing someone you love

Friendship breakdown

Being upset at not getting the grade you want in GCSE RE

Waking up early in the morning when you are tired

Death

.....and probably the worst one of all.....

.....watching those that you love suffer

Three different types of suffering:

2. The suffering of change –

One of the Buddha's teachings was that nothing is permanent – things are always changing – this might be small changes or big changes

For example:

The weather turning bad when you were hoping to go out with friends

Getting older – it will happen to you too!!

Moving house or moving school

Moving tutor groups....

Three different types of suffering:

3. The suffering of attachment –

The third type of pain is linked to the idea of attachment. What type of people, objects and activities could we be attached to in our life?

Examples:

Loved ones

Mobile phones

Tablets

Games consoles

Development task:

Why would Buddhists argue that belief in dukkha is realistic, not pessimistic?

List three reasons why some people would see dukkha as realistic and three why some would see dukkha as pessimistic

Buddhists see this as the **hardest of dukkha to understand** – it is best described as a more **subtle dissatisfaction with life** – such as the unhappiness that comes from change and from craving things that are not possible to have

Anicca:

Anicca is usually translated as impermanence – We have already learnt that the Buddha taught that everything is impermanent and constantly changing

So anicca can be thought of as affecting the world in three different ways:

1. It affects living things – think of the acorn as the example (don't forget to explain all examples)
2. It affects non-living things – can you think of any examples? (write them down as explain them)
3. It affects our mind – can you give an example of how our emotions can change during an average day



How anicca and dukkha are related:

According to the Buddha, anicca is one of the main reason why we suffer (dukkha) – does anybody know why (or would like to guess?)

Even though things in the world change all the time, people often expect them to stay the same – the Buddha believed that this is one of the reasons why we suffer (dukkha)

He taught that when people expect things to remain unchanged, they become attached to them

Therefore, when they change (anicca), people experience suffering (dukkha)

Buddhists believe that **accepting that all things change – including themselves – will lead to less suffering**. For Buddhists, **the ultimate goal is to break the cycle of samsara and achieve nirvana, a permanent state where there is no suffering**

How Kisa Gotami came to understand anicca and dukkha

When Kisa Gotami had a child, she had at last found some happiness in her life. However, just when her little boy was old enough to begin to run about and play, he became ill and died. Gotami became almost crazy with sorrow, and refused to believe he was dead. She took the corpse from house to house, asking for medicine to cure her child. 'Why are you asking for medicine?' everyone said. 'Can't you see that the child is dead? You are crazy'.



But one of her neighbours, who was wiser and kinder than the others, realised that Gotami's strange behaviour was due to the depth of her sorrow, and said: 'Why don't you go to the Buddha; perhaps he can give you the medicine you need'. So, she took the dead body of her little boy and showed it to the Buddha, saying 'Please, O Wise One, give me some medicine for my poor sick child'. The Buddha looked at Gotami and the dead child, and he could see deep down that Gotami had enough wisdom and strength to understand her sorrow and gain comfort, even though her terrible loss had made her almost mad with grief. So, he said to her: 'Go back to the town, knock on all the doors and wherever you find a household where no one has died, ask them to give you a little mustard seed. Then in the evening bring me all the mustard seeds you collect and we will make a medicine for the child.

So Gotami went into the town, knocked on the door on the first house and said: 'If no-one has died in your family, please give me a mustard seed: I need it as medicine for my sick child'. The woman of the house looked at her sadly and said, 'certainly I can give you a mustard seed, but I am afraid that we have had many, many deaths in our family'. And Gotami looked sadly at the woman, saying, 'In that case, I'm sorry for you but your mustard seed will be of no use as medicine for my little boy'. She went to the second house, and the same thing happened: yes, she could have some mustard seeds, but in that house also there had been many deaths and much sorrow. And at the third, fourth and fifth house it was the same. At every house where she knocked at the door the family told her that they were also in sorrow for the death of a dearly loved relative – a mother, or a father, or an uncle, or an aunt, or a son or a daughter.

So, by the evening, she still had no mustard seed for medicine for her child. However, something important happened. As a result of sharing her sorrow with so many other people who had also lost a loved one, she found that her own sorrow was now different. She no longer felt agonised and almost mad with grief. Instead, although she still felt sorrow at the loss of her child, she also knew that everyone else in the town had experienced a similar loss and the same terrible sorrow. Suddenly she realised that sorrow and death are part of how life is, and not only for her but for everyone. So, she took her dead child to the cemetery outside of town and sadly, lovely, buried him.

Then she went back to the Buddha, who asked, 'Well Gotami, have you got the mustard seed for the medicine?' Gotami answered: 'Thank you O Wise One, no I have not brought any mustard seeds, but your medicine of the mustard seed has already worked, as you knew it would. Because I now see that my own sorrow is part of the sorrow of all people, and the death of our loved ones is part of the sorrow of all people, and that the death of our loved ones is part of the pattern of life for everyone. That is the medicine I needed, and that is what you have helped me understand'. After this experience, Gotami became a follower of the Buddha and an Arhat.

Key learning check time:

1. Give an example of how anicca affects inanimate objects
2. Give an example of how anicca can lead to dukkha (think about the task you did earlier in this lesson)
3. Read the story of Kisa Gotami. Explain what Gotami learnt about suffering, and how did it help her

Anatta

Anatta is often translated as 'no self'

But it **does not mean** that Buddhist believe that there is no concept of 'I', 'me' or 'self', just that **the self is not fixed or permanent**

The Buddha taught that there is **no fixed part of a person that does not change**

Take the case study of the car:



What is a 'car'?

What makes a car, a 'car'?

Are all the parts that make a car permanent? Think of last lesson?

Therefore, is a car just a name for a collection of parts that are subject to anicca?

Take the case study of a football team:

Many things about a football team can change over the years – new players come and go, as do new supporters, the team's position in the league changes, and so on.

But the team itself still exists and has its own identity, even though it is made up of many changing parts



Take the case study of the sugababes:



The Sugababes are an English girl band who have changed their line up six times which means that the original line up are no longer part of the band – yet are they still the Sugababes?

Nagasena and the chariot:

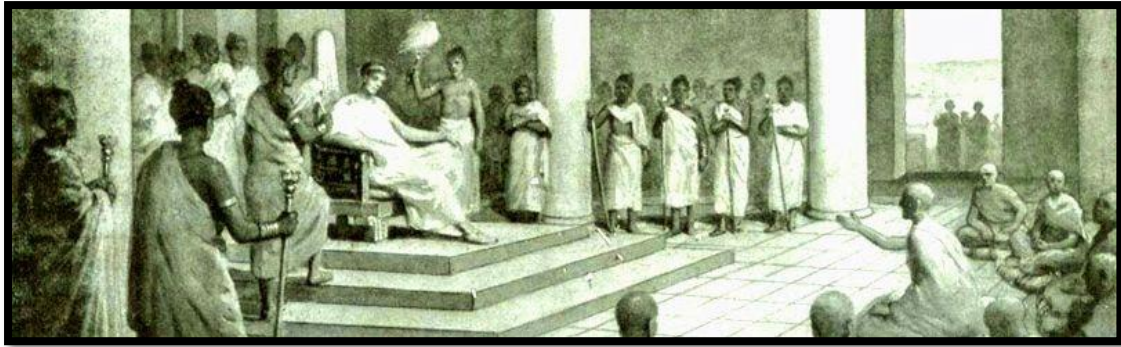
A story that is often used to illustrate the concept of anatta is found in a text called 'The Questions of King Milinda'. King Milinda was a Greek king who lived some 200 years or so after the Buddha. One day a monk named Nagasena arrived at the court of King Milinda. The king asked Nagasena what his name was. The monk replied that he was known as Nagasena, but this was merely his name, but that was merely his name, without any reference to a real self or person. The king was confused by this and how there could be a person before him, who was standing in robes and hungry for food, if Nagasena was just a name.



Nagasena replied in what might be seen as a strange way. He asked the king how he arrived today. The king said he arrived by chariot. Nagasena asked him to point out what a chariot was, which the king did.

Nagasena then said that a chariot is not just the wheels or the axle or the yoke, but it is actually something separate to these things. So, the term 'chariot', like the term 'Nagasena', is merely a name used to refer to a collection of parts.

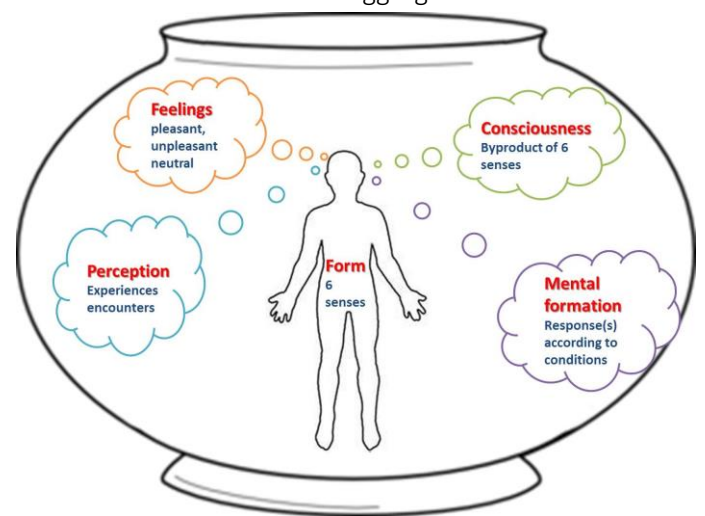
Nagasena said that people are made up of various body parts like liver, kidney, lungs and so on, but only when these are put together in a particular order and given a name do we recognise the 'owner' of these parts. A chariot exists but only in relation to the parts they are made up of. There is not a separate 'self' that is independent of these parts.



The Five aggregates –

The Buddha taught that people are made up of five parts. These are called the five aggregates (Khandas in Pali and Skandhas in Sanskrit). They are:

1. Form (our bodies)
2. Sensations (our feelings)
3. Perceptions (how we recognise things)
4. Mental formations (our thoughts)
5. Consciousness (our awareness of things)



The Four Noble Truths

An introduction:

The Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths to Buddhists. We will get to them in a bit.... However, because of these teachings, many see the Buddha fulfilling the same role that a doctor does:

- I. The doctor tells us what is wrong with us – the diagnosis
- II. The doctor then tells us the reasons why we got poorly
- III. The doctor then reassures us and tells us that there is a cure for our illness
- IV. The doctor then gives us the medicine for us to get better – the prescription

The first Noble Truth – The Buddha tells us what is wrong with us – his diagnosis

The second Noble Truth – The Buddha tells us why we are poorly

The third Noble Truth – The Buddha reassures us and tells us that there is a cure

The fourth Noble Truth – The Buddha gives us the medicine for is to get better – the prescription

The **Four Noble Truths** are said to be at the **heart of the Buddha's teachings**

They were **discovered by the Buddha** while he **searched for enlightenment** under the Bodhi tree

They were also the **first teachings** that he gave the five ascetics during his first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath

1. The truth of suffering – dukkha
2. The truth of the cause of suffering – Samudaya
3. The truth of the end of suffering – Nirodha
4. The truth of the path of the end of suffering – Magga

Another way of thinking about these four truths is to say that:

1. Suffering exists
2. Suffering is caused by something
3. Suffering can end
4. There is a way to bring about the end of suffering



What is the first noble truth?

The first noble truth draws attention to the fact that suffering is a part of life and something that everyone experiences

The Buddha taught there are four unavoidable types of physical suffering: birth, old age, sickness and death

The Buddha also taught that there are three main forms of mental suffering: separation from someone or something you love; contact with someone or something you dislike; and not being able to achieve or fulfil your desires

“Now this, [monks], is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering”

The Buddha in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, vol.5 P. 421

Even though the Buddha taught that it is important to recognise that suffering is a part of life, **he did not deny that happiness exists.**

However, the Buddha taught that **even though happiness is real, it is impermanent** – it will not last and will therefore eventually give way to unhappiness

Many people try to **combat suffering with temporary pleasures** – for example, you fall out with a friend so you eat a chocolate bar to cheer yourself up, but the happiness that the chocolate creates only lasts until you get to the end of the bar

It does not solve the root cause of your unhappiness

What is the second noble truth?

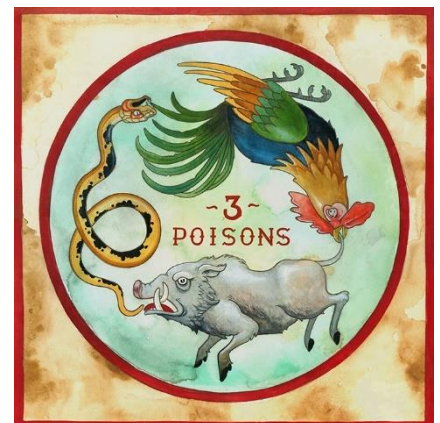
The **second noble truth (samudaya)** explores the **origins of suffering**. Buddhists believe that **understanding why people suffer is important if suffering is to be reduced**

The Buddha taught that one of the **main causes of suffering is tanha** which means ‘thirst’ or ‘craving’. This refers to wanting or desiring things. **The Buddha said that there are three main types of craving:**

1. **Craving things that please the senses, such as beautiful sights or pleasant smells. One example is drinking a hot chocolate not because you are thirsty, but because you like the taste of it**
2. **Craving to become something that you are not, such as craving to become rich or famous**
3. **Craving not to be, or craving non-existence. This refers to when you want to get rid of something or stop it from happening any more, such as not wanting to feel embarrassed after making a mistake, or not wanting to feel pain after twisting an ankle**

At the centre of the Tibetan Wheel of Life there are usually three animals that represent three different tendencies:

- A pig – represents ignorance
- A cockerel – represents greed and desire
- A snake – represents anger and hatred



The three poisons:

These are called the **three poisons in Buddhism** because they are considered to be the **forces that keep the wheel spinning, and the cycle of samsara turning**

The Buddha taught that **craving is rooted in ignorance** – this is not the sort of ignorance related to not knowing the location of a country or not knowing how to speak a language, but **a deeper ignorance about people, the world and the nature of reality**

Buddhists believe they will **only achieve enlightenment by overcoming ignorance and finding wisdom**

The Buddha also taught that **craving leads to greed and hatred**

It is these **three poisons** that **trap humans in the cycle of samsara and prevent them from reaching nibbana**

What is the third noble truth?

The third noble truth (nirodha) is that there is an end to suffering

This means that Buddhism teaches that it is possible to end a person's suffering through their own action and efforts – which eventually will lead to enlightenment

The third noble truth is important because it teaches that it is possible to achieve happiness and it is possible to overcome suffering

The Buddha taught that when people desire things but don't get them, they become frustrated and unhappy with life

So they have to let go of this craving in order to stop feeling dissatisfied with life

The Buddha taught that people should enjoy and take pleasure in things but recognise that they can't last – people should enjoy things but recognise that they can't last

The Buddha also taught that the way to stop craving is to have an inner satisfaction with life and a total appreciation of what one has already got

The third noble truth, therefore, teaches that it is possible to end suffering, and that thus can be achieved by overcoming ignorance and craving

What is the fourth noble truth?

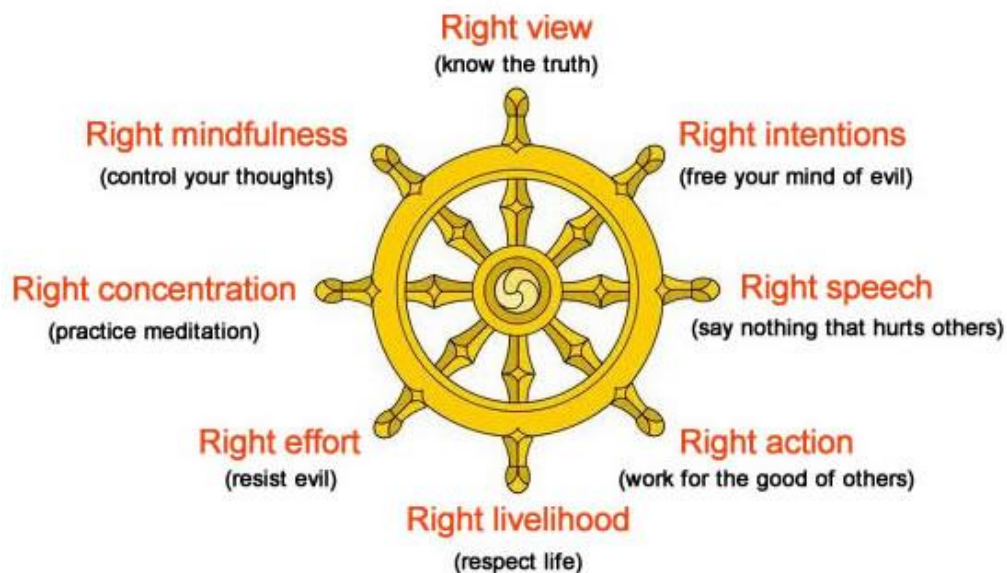
The **fourth noble truth (magga)** is the **'cure' to end suffering**: a series of practices that Buddhists can **follow to overcome suffering and achieve enlightenment**

It is known as the **middle path or middle way** – the Buddha had lived two different extremes of life and neither had helped

The **fourth noble truth** is the **Eightfold Path** – eight guidelines that Buddhists can **practice and follow in order to achieve enlightenment**

Despite being called 'a path', the **Eightfold Path** is often represented as a wheel with **eight spokes as they can all be practiced at the same time**

The **Eightfold Path** consists of the following eight practices, which are **grouped into three sections** that make up the threefold way:



Ethics (sila):

6. **Right speech:** speaking **truthfully** in a **helpful, positive way**; **avoiding lying or gossiping about others**
7. **Right action:** behaving in a **peaceful, ethical way**; **avoiding acts such as stealing, harming others, or overindulging in sensual pleasures**
8. **Right livelihood:** earning a living in a way that **does not harm others**, for example not doing work that exploits people or harms animals

Meditation (Samadhi):

3. **Right effort:** putting effort into **meditation**, in particular, **thinking positively** and **freeing yourself from negative emotions and thoughts**
4. **Right mindfulness:** becoming **fully aware of yourself** and the **world around you**; having a clear sense of **your own feelings and thoughts**
5. **Right concentration:** developing the **mental concentration** and focus that is required to meditate

Wisdom (panna)

1. **Right understanding:** understanding the Buddha's teachings, particularly about the Four Noble Truths
2. **Right intention:** having the right approach and outlook to following the Eightfold Path; being determined to follow the Buddhist path with a genuine, honest attitude

Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism is strongest in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma (Myanmar). It is sometimes called 'Southern Buddhism'.

Theravada Buddhism is **one of the oldest schools of Buddhism**, and is known as **'the school of the elders'**

Today Theravada Buddhism is practiced mostly in **Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar**

The school stresses the **importance of ordination in the monastic community** – you need to become a monk



While **some women have been ordained** within Theravada Buddhism, **full-ordination is reserved for men**

The Buddha is seen as the **main focus of commitment** and is one of the **three refuges** (what are the other two?)

He is a **guide, an example for others to follow and a teacher**, but he is **not considered to be a god**

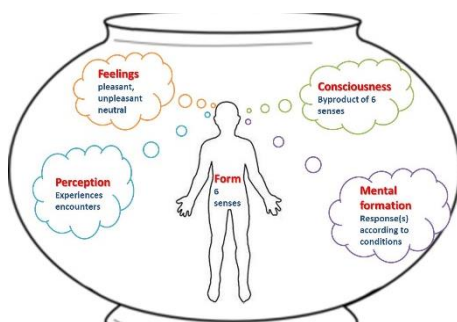
Theravada monks (and nuns) **devote their whole lives to following the path of enlightenment**, and promise to follow a **number of rules**, including **not to own anything, not to have sexual relationships, and never to be offensive to anyone**

Monks (and nuns) focus in particular **focus on meditation**. They believe that **commitment to the Buddha and the Eightfold Path will bring good kamma** – their **goal is to achieve enlightenment and reach nibbana**

Some Theravada Buddhists believe it is possible to **share their own good fortune** with other people, **by transferring the kamma** they have gained to someone else

This transfer of kamma becomes **particularly important when someone has died**. When this has happened, the family and friends may gather round whoever has died and transfer their kamma to him or her, **in the hope that this will help the dead person to have a favourable rebirth**

The human personality in Theravada Buddhism



Theravada Buddhists believe that the **five aggregates interact with each other to make up a person's identity and personality** –

1. **Form**: this refers to **material or physical objects** (such as a house, an apple, or the organs that make up a person's body)

2. **Sensation:** this refers to the **feelings or sensations** that occur when someone comes into contact with things. They can be **physical** (such as a sensation of pain after stubbing a toe), or **emotional** (such as a feeling of joy at the end of term!)
3. **Perception:** this refers to how people **recognise** (or perceive) **what things are, based on their previous experiences**. For example, you might recognise what the feeling of happiness means because you have felt it before – you recognise a car because you have seen one before
4. **Mental formations:** this refers to a **person's thoughts and opinions** – how they respond mentally to the things they experience, including their likes and dislikes, and their attitudes toward different things
5. **Consciousness:** this refers to a person's **general awareness** of the world around them

Here is a **simple example to show how the five aggregates interact** (all of these things happen more or less at the same time):

1. **Form:** you enter a room and see a **slice of cake** (a physical object)
2. **Sensation:** seeing the slice of cake gives you a **feeling or sense of anticipation**
3. **Perception:** you **recognise that it's a slice of cake**, from having seen other slices of cake in the past
4. **Mental formations:** you **form an opinion of the cake and decide whether you want to eat it or not**
5. **Consciousness:** all of these things are connected by your **general awareness** of the world

What is Mahayana Buddhism?



Mahayana Buddhism is a **term used to describe a number of different traditions that share some overlapping characteristics**

A few of the main traditions that come under the Mahayana umbrella are: Pure Land Buddhism (which we will look at in two lessons time); **Zen Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism and Nichiren Buddhism**

Today, Mahayana Buddhism is mainly practiced in **China (including Tibet), Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia and Bhutan**

Whereas Theravada Buddhists believe the Buddha was an historical person and has now ceased to exist, Mahayana Buddhists believe that **the Buddha remains active and can influence the world**

Mahayana Buddhist believe that the **Buddha can be encountered through visions and meditation**

The importance of sunyata in Mahayana Buddhism

An important belief in Mahayana Buddhism is sunyata, which is often translated as 'emptiness'

For Mahayana Buddhists, understanding sunyata is essential for achieving enlightenment

Sunyata is linked with the same ideas as anatta – nothing exists independently but only in relation to, and because of, other things – a wave, for example, cannot be separated from the sea

For Buddhists, realising that everything depends on, and interlinks with, everything else can lead to trust, compassion and selflessness

Realising that everything is impermanent is important for reducing the suffering that results in becoming too attached to things

These realisations are important for achieving enlightenment

Buddha-nature and attaining Buddhahood in Mahayana Buddhism:

Buddha-hood is an important belief in some Mahayana traditions

At a basic level, it refers to the idea that everyone has the seed or nature of a Buddha already inside them – sometimes it is believed that deep down, every person is *already* enlightened

However, because a person's Buddha-nature is hidden by desires, attachments, ignorance and negative thoughts, it is not realised

Only when people understand the Buddha's teachings and reality around then do they experience the Buddha-nature that was always there

One example given in traditional Buddhist scripture to help explain Buddha-nature is that of honey surrounded by many bees. The honey is sweet and tasty but as long as it is surrounded by bees, it isn't possible to get to the honey – the only way to experience the honey is to get rid of the bees

The parable of the Burning House from the Lotus Sutra:

One day, a fire broke out in the house of a wealthy man who had many children. The wealthy man shouted at his children inside the burning house to flee. But, the children were absorbed in their games and did not heed his warning, though the house was being consumed by flames.

Then, the wealthy man devised a practical way to lure the children from the burning house. Knowing that the children were fond of interesting playthings, he called out to them, "Listen! Outside the gate are the carts that you have always wanted: carts pulled by goats, carts pulled by deer, and carts pulled by oxen. Why don't you come out and play with them?" The wealthy man knew that these things would be irresistible to his children.

The children, eager to play with these new toys rushed out of the house but, instead of the carts that he had promised, the father gave them a cart much better than any he has described - a cart draped with precious stones and pulled by white bullocks. The important thing being that the children were saved from the dangers of the house on fire.

In this parable the **father, of course, is the Buddha** and **sentient beings are the children trapped in the burning house**. The Burning House represents the world burning with the fires of old age, sickness and death. The teachings of the Buddha are like the father getting the boys to leave their pleasures for a greater pleasure, Nirvana.

A further interpretation is to see the goat, deer, and ox carts as representing the early teachings of Buddhism, as the teachings of Hinayana Buddhism (the Mahayana term for the Buddhism that preceded it), and the cart pulled by white bullocks to 'The Lotus Sutra' which, when followed, leads to Buddhahood.

Becoming an Arhat

For Theravada Buddhists, an Arhat is a 'perfected person' who has overcome the main causes of suffering – the three poisons (what are the three poisons again?) – to achieve enlightenment

When someone becomes an Arhat, they are **no longer reborn when they die**

This means that they are **finally freed from the suffering of existence in the cycle of birth and death (samsara), and they can attain nibbana**

The goal is achieved by following the Eightfold Path and concentrating on wisdom, morality and meditation

During the Buddha's lifetime, **many of his disciples became Arhats**. Among them were the **first five monks the Buddha was with** and the **Buddha's own father, Siddhodana**

Mahayana Buddhists sometimes use the term Arhat to refer to someone who is far along the path of enlightenment but has not yet become enlightened

"I have no teacher, and one like me
Exists nowhere in the world...
I am the Teacher Supreme.
I alone am a Fully Enlightened One
Whose fires are quenched and extinguished"
The Buddha in the *Majjhima Nikaya*, vol. 1, P.171

Becoming a Bodhisattva

A Bodhisattva is someone who sees their own enlightenment as being **bound up with the enlightenment of all beings**

Out of compassion, they remain in the cycle of samsara in order to **help others achieve enlightenment as well**

The **ultimate goal for Mahayana Buddhists** is to become Bodhisattvas

Bodhisattvas combine **being compassionate with being wise** – Mahayana Buddhists believe that the **original message of the Buddha’s teachings to his followers was to ‘go forth for the welfare of the many’**

“However innumerable sentient beings are; I vow to save them”

A Bodhisattva vow

A person becomes a **Bodhisattva** by **perfecting certain attributes** in their lives. There are six of these that Mahayana Buddhists focus on and are called the **six perfections**:

1. **Generosity** – to be charitable and generous in all that is done
2. **Morality** – to live with good morals and ethical behaviour
3. **Patience** – to practice being patient in all things
4. **Energy** – to cultivate the energy and perseverance needed to keep going even when things get difficult (resilience)
5. **Meditation** – to develop concentration and awareness
6. **Wisdom** – to obtain wisdom and understanding

Mahayana Buddhists believe there are **earthly and transcendent Bodhisattvas** – the ‘**earthly**’ ones **continue to be reborn and live on Earth**, while the ‘**transcendent**’ ones **remain as spiritual or mythical beings**. Mahayana Buddhists pray to these **Bodhisattvas** in times of need

Arhat and Bodhisattvas – similarities and differences

Arhat

Theravada tradition
 A perfected being
 Free from greed, hatred and ignorance (the three poisons)
 A wise and compassionate being
 Need to be a monk or nun
 Has made a solitary journey to enlightenment
 Will not be reborn into samsara
 Enters parinibbana after death and cannot be contacted to help others

Bodhisattvas

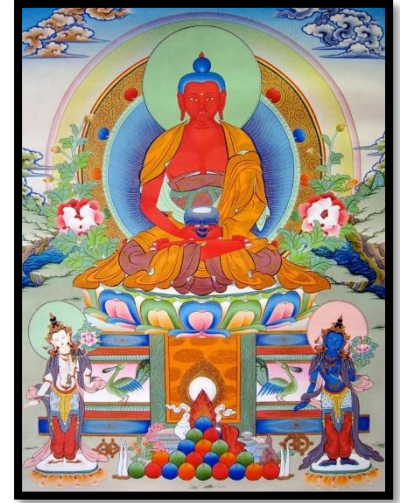
Mahayana Tradition
 An enlightened being
 Free from greed, hatred and ignorance (the three poisons)
 A wise and compassionate being
 Can be a lay person or a monk/nun
 Takes a vow to continue to be re-born into samsara until all sentient beings find enlightenment
 Can be called on to help others on the path to enlightenment

Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land Buddhism is part of the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism. It began in China as early as the second century CE, then developed and spread throughout China and into Japan. Today, **Pure Land Buddhism** is the main type of Buddhism in Japan

Pure Land Buddhism is based on faith in **Amitabha Buddha**, in the hope of being reborn in the paradise where **Amitabha** lives.

Amitabha was a king who renounced his throne to become a monk. Mahayana scriptures tell how when he achieved enlightenment and became a Buddha, he created a pure land called **Sukhavati**, which is a land that can be found far to the west, beyond the boundaries of our world



Amitabha created this perfect paradise out of his compassion and love for all beings. **Pure Land Buddhists** believe that if they are reborn into this land, they will be taught by **Amitabha** himself and will therefore have a much better chance of attaining **Buddhahood** (becoming a Buddha). In the **Pure Land**, there is no suffering, and none of the problems that stop people in our own world from attaining enlightenment

“**Sukhavati** (the Pure Land) is rich in a great variety of flowers and fruits, adorned with jewel trees, which are frequented by flocks of birds with sweet voices.....And all the beings who are born...in this Buddha-field, they are all fixed on the right method of salvation, until they have won **nibbana**. For this reason, that world system is called the ‘Happy Land’”

The Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra, sections 16-24

How to reach the Pure Land

T’an-luan is considered to be the person who founded **Pure Land Buddhism** in China. He encouraged believers to follow five types of religious practice:

1. Reciting scriptures
2. Meditating on Amitabha and his paradise
3. Worshipping Amitabha
4. Chanting his name
5. Making praises and offerings to him

Of these five he taught that the most important is to recite **Amitabha’s** name. if a person follows these practices, they will be reborn in the paradise of **Sukhavati** (the **Pure Land**)

Pure Land Buddhism focuses on having faith in **Amitabha**, and believing that he will help Buddhists to be reborn in **Sukhavati** (the **Pure Land**). Faith in **Amitabha** is more important than a person’s own actions and behaviour. This is quite different to other schools of Buddhism. For example, **Theravada Buddhism** teaches that enlightenment can only be achieved through a person’s own thoughts and actions, and they cannot rely on any outside help to achieve enlightenment. The fact that it is seen to be easier to reach enlightenment in **Pure Land Buddhism**, with **Amitabha’s** help, has allowed this school of Buddhism to gain popular appeal

“Even a bad man will be received in Buddha’s land, how much more a good man?”

Honen (Twelfth century Japanese Pure Land teacher)

“Even a good man will be received in Buddha’s land, how much more a bad man?”

Shinran (a student of Honen)

