



# Pointing the Moon

Questions and Answers on the Buddhism



Atlantic Theravada Buddhist Cultural and Meditation Society

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## Forward

A Chinese Buddhist saying depicts that the Dhamma is like a finger pointing to the moon. This analogy has many implications. One implication is that any finger can be pointed towards the moon. In that situation, what matters is not the particularity of the finger, but whether or not it is properly pointed towards the direction of the moon so that the moon can be seen. Another implication is that if we only look at the finger that is being pointed we will not see the moon. Without looking at the direction of the finger pointing no moon can be seen, Buddhism can only be seen through the direction of which Dhamma is pointing at.

As the Buddha has uttered, there are three things that illuminate the entire world, (vivato virocati) those are SUN, MOON and DHARMA. In this small book, my intention is to illuminate Buddhist public with Dhamma teaching. As a piece of sandalwood, Buddhism will radiate pure smell only when you go deeper into it.

There are three types of generosity in Buddhism; Giving material possessions to those in need (Amisa Dāna), Giving protection to those in danger (Abhaya Dāna) and Giving wise advice leading to right path (Dharma Dāna). On one occasion upon inquiry Buddha stated that the most meritorious among those givings is giving dharma since Dhamma eradicates delusion. Delusion leads to wrong view (Miccaditti) which is the worst of all sins. Learning Buddhism will lead the path of right view.

I was invited by Mr. Sauders Jayathilake to write this Buddhist Question and Answer book aiming at those people who are curious about Buddhism. Now there is an emerging trend in the world where people are moving towards Buddhism to find answers to many unanswered questions in their lives. In the year 2003 an American

researcher said that every one out of eight American claims himself as a Buddhist. In the middle of this year, I started a Buddhist meditation class in the university and very first day 18 people appeared with small notice and in the 4th week the numbers grew to 25. This book will broaden new comers understanding of Buddhism.

I extracted sections from two books in this edited collection of 'Pointing the Moon'; 'Good Question - Good Answer' By Ven. S. Dhammika and 'Without and within' by Ajahn Jayasaro. Hereby I would like to thank them for sharing their wisdom with transferring merits.

Mr.Morris Saunders Jayathilake and Mrs. Chamila Jayathilake provided marvelous support for printing and they encouraged me to write this book. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. and Mrs Jayathilake for their generosity towards new temple project in Halifax, Nova Scotia Canada. Without their benevolence this would not have happened, I would like to transfer merits to them.

Bhanthe SIRInanda  
Atlantic Theravāda Buddhist Society  
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## The Buddha



The Buddha is the Pure One, the Perfectly Enlightened One; He is impeccable in conduct and understanding,

The Knower of the Worlds;

He trains perfectly those who wish to be trained; He is Teacher of Gods and humans;

He is Awake and Holy.

## Who was the Buddha?

Some 2,600 years ago a child was born into the royal family of the Sakyan clan, a people living in a part of northeast India that now lies within the borders of Nepal. He was given the name of Siddhattha. At the age of 29, Prince Siddhattha renounced a life of ease and privilege to search for spiritual liberation. Six years later, after a momentous night of meditation sitting cross-legged under a bodhi tree, he realized 'the unexcelled complete awakening'. By doing so he became "the Buddha", "the Awakened One".

Following his enlightenment, the Buddha devoted the remaining forty-five years of his life to revealing the Dhamma: the truth of 'the way things are', and the path leading to the realization of that truth. During this time the Buddha established a monastic order (Sangha) for those of his disciples, men and women, who wished to put aside all worldly tasks and devote themselves wholeheartedly to the study and practice of his teachings.

## What does "Buddha" mean?

The word Buddha means "the awakened one." The Buddha taught that the unenlightened human being lives in a state that may be compared to sleep or to a dream. Through the clear light of wisdom, and completely unaided, the Buddha is the one who has awakened from that dream to the true nature of existence. Guided by compassion, the Buddha is the one who has sought to share his understanding of the path to awakening with all beings who wish to follow in his footsteps.

## Was the Buddha a human being?

Prince Siddhattha was a human being. On the night that he realized supreme enlightenment he became a Buddha, and from that moment onwards was a human being in the normal meaning of that term no longer. To uninitiated eyes, the Buddha would have appeared as an immensely charismatic and commanding religious leader, one who died a normal human death at the age of eighty. Those with more developed faculties, however, were aware that no external appearance, no words, concepts or categories could come anywhere near to expressing the marvelous and undying nature of his Buddhahood.

## What proof is there that the Buddha existed?

- ▶ Archeologists provide strong empirical proof of the Buddha as a historical figure.
- ▶ Many of the monasteries mentioned in the Buddha's discourses have been located.
- ▶ Buddha relics have been recovered.
- ▶ There is much circumstantial evidence.
- ▶ In year 2014, archeologists discovered the birth place of prince Siddhartha in Lumbini, Nepal.

The cohesion and lack of inner contradiction in the Buddha's discourses, together with the finely detailed prescriptions for the ordering of the monastic body found in the 'Books of Discipline', point strongly to a single author.

On one occasion, the Buddha said: "Whoever sees the Dhamma sees me". In other words, verifying the truth of the teachings in one's own life is, in the Buddhist view, the most reliable confirmation of the Buddha's existence.



## How many Buddhas are there?

According to the Theravāda tradition, there can only be one Buddha at any one time. However, there have been other Buddhas in the distant past and in the future there will be more. The interval between the arising of Buddhas is measured in kalpas. A kalpa is an extremely long-time. The Buddha gave the following definition:

*'Suppose, bhikkhu, there was a great stone mountain ten miles (a yojana) long, ten miles wide and ten miles high, without holes or crevices, one solid mass of rock. At the end of every hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of fine cloth. That great stone mountain might by this effort be worn away and eliminated but the kalpa would still not have come to an end*

## Is Lord Buddha a god?

Lord Buddha is not a god, nor is He a normal human being. He was born among human beings and achieved enlightenment, becoming the greatest of all beings.

## If He is not a god why is He venerated by human beings?

Lord Buddha, a great character, has many great qualities, not found in other human beings. The qualities of Lord Buddha can only be found in the lineage of Supreme Buddhas. One day, a Brahmin named Weranja asked Lord Buddha “Why does The Blessed One not respect and venerate other elderly people when He sees them?” Then Lord Buddha explained “Brahman, a hen may lay eight, ten or twelve eggs and incubate them. After some time the chicks may break the egg-shell and come out. In this case, the first chick that comes out of the egg by breaking its shell would be the elder to all other chicks that come out after it. Likewise, Brahman, I also was encapsulated in the shell of ignorance and came out breaking that shell of ignorance. By attaining enlightenment, I have become the greatest of all.” Accordingly, the Blessed One is the eldest of all, the most senior and the greatest of all as He demolished ignorance and attained enlightenment. Lord Buddha, therefore, deserves veneration above all others; no one else equals Him.

## Why are Buddha Images worshipped?

We Buddhists have a place of worship; it is called a vihāra or Wat (in Thailand) The Blessed One is offered the first place in a vihāra. Out of respect and veneration Lord Buddha's image is worshiped in a vihāra. But, an image can never do justice to the great physique of Lord Buddha, depicting his thirty great physical features. We worship the image by visualizing the great qualities of Lord Buddha.

# Dhamma



The Dhamma is well-expounded by the  
Blessed One, Apparent here and now,  
  
Timeless,  
  
Encouraging investigation, Leading onwards,  
  
To be experienced by the wise.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dhamma (Sanskrit: Dharma) refers to

- i) the truth of things, “the way things are”.
- ii) the Buddha's teachings that illuminate that truth, and which detail the path leading to the direct experience of it

## What are the Four Noble Truths?

All of the Buddha's teachings are encompassed within what are called the Four Noble Truths, in the same way, he explained, as the footprints of all the animals in the jungle fit into the footprint of the elephant. These Truths reveal the fundamental problem of our existence and its resolution.

### 1. There is dukkha

Dukkha is generally translated as “suffering”, but in fact has a far more profound meaning than is implied by that word. Dukkha refers to the chronic unsatisfactoriness of unenlightened existence. It covers the whole spectrum of experience, from severe physical and emotional pain to the subtlest sense of unease and lack.

### 2. There is a cause of dukkha

Dukkha is not our unalterable human predicament. It is dependent upon certain causes and conditions, in particular upon the cravings that arise through a fundamental misperception of our human nature.

### 3. There is a cessation of dukkha

There is a complete ending of dukkha, a state of liberation and true happiness.

### 4. There is a path leading to the cessation of dukkha

Dukkha is comprehended, its causes abandoned and its cessation realized through cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path. This path involves an education or training of every aspect of our lives, inner and outer. The eight factors are as follows

1. Right View
2. Right Intention
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

## Why are the Buddhist teachings often referred to as the Middle Way?

The “Middle Way” is a term used by the Buddha in two distinct contexts. Firstly, it characterizes his core teaching that all things arise and pass away due to causes and conditions as a middle way between the extremes of annihilationism (the belief that everything ends at death) and eternalism (the belief that death is followed by eternal bliss or eternal damnation).

Secondly, the Buddha presented the Eightfold Path as a middle way between the extremes of sensual indulgence and empty, “no pain no gain”, asceticism. It would be mistaken, however, to see this as simply a teaching of moderation. Rather, the Middle Way must be understood within the framework of the overall effort to abandon unskillful mental states, to cultivate skillful mental states and to find liberation from ignorance and delusion. The Middle Way is not to be found by seeking a midpoint between two extremes. Rather, at any moment, the middle way lies in whatever spiritual practice will provide optimum progress towards the goal of awakening.



## **If the Dhamma of Lord Buddha is so good, why are some Buddhist countries poor?**

We should think twice about the idea that Buddhist countries are poor. Let us go back to our past. During the time of Lord Buddha and the period of great Arahants (after the Blessed One's attainment of Parinibbāna) the most developed countries were India, Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries. This can be validated through the study of the history of these countries. During the above mentioned period there were multi-storied buildings and palaces, large ponds, beautiful, natural gardens, developed roads and a self-sufficient economy. During that period the advanced countries of today, were in fact backward and under developed. That was 2550 years ago. Those Buddhist countries were truly disciplined in the doctrine of Lord Buddha. If the multitude continued to lead their life according to the Dhamma, those countries would have remained powerful countries in the world today. If the Buddhist economic system is followed, not only Buddhist countries but the whole world can be developed.

## **What does Buddhism teach about the nature of happiness?**

Human beings can experience two kinds of happiness: that which is dependent upon an external stimulus and that which is not. The first kind of happiness is experienced at its most basic level in sensual pleasure: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching agreeable things. It also includes the positive emotions we experience through personal relation-ships, worldly accomplishment and social status.

The second kind of happiness is known through spiritual development. It is first enjoyed through the cultivation of generosity and moral discipline, but reaches its most profound levels through meditation. Seasoned meditators recognize the zest and bliss that arise in a focused mind as unquestionably superior to pleasures dependent upon the grosser senses. But refined meditative states do not constitute the highest happiness. It is in the gradual abandonment of toxic mental states the root cause of suffering that the practitioner discovers a stable and sublime sense of well-being. This is considered as a higher kind of happiness which is experienced as a natural expression of the cultivated mind, rather than as a transient experience subject to gain and loss.

Lay Buddhists are encouraged to pursue, in moderation, worldly happiness compatible with access to inner happiness; and to relinquish indulgence in worldly pleasures that turn the mind away from spiritual cultivation

## Buddhists talk a lot about being in the present moment

Doesn't that conflict with learning from past experiences and planning for the future?

Past and future meet in the present moment: the past as memory, the future as thought and imagination. Any assessment of past experience, any decision regarding the future, is a mental activity that must inevitably occur in the present moment—there is no choice, it is all we have. The problem is that being unaware of memory as memory and thought as thought, we easily become lost in them. When we lose our presence of mind in this way our life becomes a dreary shadow of itself.

The more we are grounded in the present moment, the more uncluttered our mind becomes, and the easier it is to learn from past experiences and plan wisely for the future.

It is sometimes said that Buddhism is a science. What does that mean? There are parallels between Buddhist contemplative practices and the scientific method, with the rejection of blind faith and the emphasis on unbiased investigation of phenomena essential to both modes of inquiry. However, there are also differences. In its investigations science is limited to the study of that which is publicly verifiable, can be measured, and can be repeated at will. Introspective inquiries carried on by Buddhist meditators are not. Most scientists today take as basic premises for their work a number of unproven assertions that Buddhists cannot agree with. Most notable among these is the belief that the mind is merely a phenomenon created by the workings of the brain.

Hypotheses and theories arise in the human mind. They are not embedded in the external world. Subjective experience is the central feature of our life. The Buddhist contention is that any search for abiding truths which depends on ignoring that fact can only ever be partially successful.

## Buddhism and the scientific method

More consistent with the scientific method than traditional, faith-based religion, the Kalama Sutta insists on a proper assessment of evidence, rather than a reliance on faith, hearsay or speculation:

"Yes, Kalamas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you Kalamas, do not be led by reports, or tradition, or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, not by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: 'this is our teacher'. But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (akusala), and wrong, and bad, then give them up...And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (kusala) and good, then accept them and follow them."

## Buddhism and psychology

During the 1970s, several experimental studies suggested that Buddhist meditation could produce insights into a wide range of psychological states. Interest in the use of meditation as a means of providing insight into mind-states has recently been revived, following the increased availability of such brain-scanning technologies as fMRI and SPECT.

In 1974 the Kagyu Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa predicted that "Buddhism will come to the West as psychology". This view was apparently regarded with considerable skepticism at the time, but Buddhist concepts have indeed made most in-roads in the psychological sciences. Some modern scientific theories, such as Rogerian psychology, show strong parallels with Buddhist thought. Some of the most interesting work on the relationship between Buddhism and science is being done in the area of comparison between Yogacara theories regarding the store consciousness and modern evolutionary biology, especially DNA. This is because the Yogacara theory of karmic seeds works well in explaining the nature/nurture problem.

William James often drew on Buddhist cosmology when framing perceptual concepts, such as his term "stream of consciousness," which is the literal English translation of the Pali vinnana-sota. The "stream of consciousness" is given various names throughout the many languages of Buddha dharma discourse but in English is generally known as "Mindstream". In *Varieties of Religious Experience* James also promoted the functional value of meditation for modern psychology. He is said to have proclaimed in a course lecture at Harvard, "This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now."

## Buddhism as science

Buddhist teacher S.N. Goenka describes Buddhadharma as a 'pure science of mind and matter'. He claims Buddhism uses precise, analytical philosophical and psychological terminology and reasoning. Goenka's presentation describes Buddhism not so much as belief in a body of unverifiable dogmas, but an active, impartial, objective investigation of things as they are

What is generally accepted in Buddhism is that effects arise from causation. From his very first discourse onwards, the Buddha explains the reality of things in terms of cause and effect. The existence of misery and suffering in any given individual is due to the presence of causes. One way to describe the Buddhist eightfold path is a turning towards the reality of things as they are right now and understanding reality directly, although it is debated the degree to which these investigations are metaphysical or epistemological.

In Buddhism there are two kinds of truth: conventional truth (Sanskrit: samvrti-satya, C: 俗諦, P: Sammuti sacca) and ultimate truth (Sanskrit: paramārtha-satya, C: 真諦, P: paramatta sacca). In the framework of the conventional truth, Buddhists speak of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going, inside and outside, one and many, etc... and the Buddhist teaching and practice based on this framework helps reduce suffering, and bring more harmony and happiness. In the framework of the ultimate truth, the teaching transcends notions of being and non-being, birth and death, coming and going, inside and outside, one and many, etc... and the teaching and practice based on this insight help practitioners liberate themselves from discrimination, fear, and touch nirvana, the ultimate reality. Buddhists see no conflict between the two kinds of truth and are free to make good use of both frameworks.

Classical science, as seen in Newton's theories, is built upon a framework reflecting everyday experience, in which material objects have an individual existence, and can be located in time and space. Quantum physics provides a framework for understanding how nature operates on subatomic scales, but differs completely from classical science, because in this framework, there is no such thing as empty space, and the position of an object and its momentum cannot simultaneously be precisely determined. Elementary particles fluctuate in and out of existence, and do not really exist but have only a "tendency to exist".

Classical science seems to reflect the conventional truth and quantum physics seems to be on its way to discover the absolute truth, trying very hard to discard notions such as being and non-being, inside and outside, sameness and otherness, etc.... At the same time, scientists are trying to find out the relationship between the two kinds of truth represented by the two kinds of science, because both can be tested and applied in life.

The practice of mindfulness and concentration always brings insight. It can help both Buddhists and scientists. Insights transmitted by realized practitioners like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can be a source of inspiration and support for both Buddhist practitioners and scientists, and scientific tests can help Buddhist practitioners understand better and have more confidence in the insight they receive from their ancestral teachers. It is our belief that in this 21st Century, Buddhism and science can go hand in hand to promote more insight for us all and bring more liberation, reducing discrimination, separation, fear, anger, and despair in the world.

## Buddhism and relativity

Buddhism shares with science the understanding of relativity. The relativity of phenomena is often used in Buddhist teaching to counter dogmatic or rigid views, like the relativity of size to break the belief in "small" or "tall". In Nāgārjuna's *Treaty on the Middle Way*, in the chapter 3 "Analysis of motion", it is even shown that motion has no independent existence and does not exist intrinsically, more than one millennium before Galileo who wrote: "Let us therefore set as a principle that, whatever be the motion that one attributes to the Earth, it is necessary that, for us who partake of it, it remains perfectly imperceptible and as not being".

In the Heart Sutra, which presents the view of emptiness, it is said that phenomena have no "defining characteristics", which is a claim of relativity since, in the absence of a reference system, nothing can be said about anything and therefore objects have indeed no intrinsic characteristics. In this Sutra, it is also said that phenomena are "not decreasing nor increasing", which is in agreement with Noether's theorem showing that, because of relativity, there are conserved quantities in physics, like energy. Buddhism mainly focused on the emptiness aspect of objects whereas science developed more the relative aspect.

## Notable scientists on Buddhism

Niels Bohr, who developed the Bohr Model of the atom, said, For a parallel to the lesson of atomic theory...[we must turn] to those kinds of epistemological problems with which already thinkers like the Buddha have been confronted, when trying to harmonize our position as spectators and actors in the great drama of existence.

Nobel Prizewinning philosopher Bertrand Russell described Buddhism as a speculative and scientific philosophy:

Buddhism is a combination of both speculative and scientific philosophy. It advocates the scientific method and pursues that to a finality that may be called Rationalistic. In it are to be found answers to such questions of interest as: 'What is mind and matter? Of them, which is of greater importance? Is the universe moving towards a goal? What is man's position? Is there living that is noble?' It takes up where science cannot lead because of the limitations of the latter's instruments. Its conquests are those of the mind.

The American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer made an analogy to Buddhism when describing the Heisenberg uncertainty principle:

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say 'no;' if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say 'no;' if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say 'no;' if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say 'no.' The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the conditions of man's self after his death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century science.

Nobel Prizewinning physicist Albert Einstein, who developed the general theory of relativity and the special theory of relativity, also known for his mass-energy equivalence, described Buddhism as containing a strong cosmic element:

...there is found a third level of religious experience, even if it is seldom found in a pure form. I will call it the cosmic religious sense. This is hard to make clear to those who do not experience it, since it does not involve an anthropomorphic idea of God; the individual feels the vanity of human desires and aims, and the nobility and marvelous order which are revealed in nature and in the world of thought. He feels the individual destiny as an imprisonment and seeks to experience the totality of existence as a unity full of significance. Indications of this cosmic religious sense can be found even on earlier levels of development for example, in the Psalms of David and in the Prophets. The cosmic element is much stronger in Buddhism, as, in particular, Schopenhauer's magnificent essays have shown us. The religious geniuses of all times have been distinguished by this cosmic religious sense, which recognizes neither dogmas nor God made in man's image. Consequently there cannot be a church whose chief doctrines are based on the cosmic religious experience. It comes about, therefore, that we find precisely among the heretics of all ages men who were inspired by this highest religious experience; often they appeared to their contemporaries as atheists, but sometimes also as saints.



## Is Buddhism a pessimistic religion?

Pessimism, in its most common usage, means “a tendency to see the worst aspect of things or believe that the worst will happen; a lack of hope or confidence in the future” and as a philosophical position “a belief that this world is as bad as it could be or that evil will ultimately prevail over good”.

Neither of these meanings applies to Buddhist teachings. The Buddha taught that all things arise and pass away in accordance with causes and conditions. If the causes and conditions for the worst to happen prevail in a particular situation, then the worst will happen; if the causes and conditions for the best possible outcome prevail, then the best outcome will emerge. He emphasized learning to see things clearly rather than adopting one-sided attitudes towards them.

The Buddha, understanding the causal nature of phenomena, did not posit absolute values of good and evil pitched against each other in an endless war. Thus the idea that he taught the ultimate triumph of one side of a struggle which he did not acknowledge to exist in the first place can be dismissed. Buddhists hold that if a cup of tea has a salty flavor, unpleasant as that might be, it is not evidence of an essentially malevolent universe. It is simply the result of someone mistaking the container holding the salt for the one with the sugar.

## What is the "Anatma" not-self

Anatma means that everything in the world is impermanent and therefore we are unable to control it. Think for a moment as to whether there is anything in this world that is permanent. All matter in this world is impermanent. Any comfortable feeling we have is impermanent. The sufferings we endure are impermanent. Moderate feeling also is impermanent.

Further, all recognition of forms seen by the eye, the recognition of sounds heard by the ear, the recognition of aromas smelled by the nose, the recognition of flavours tasted by the tongue, the recognition of tactile objects touched by the body and the recognition of mental objects cognized by the mind are impermanent. The volition (cetanā) and consciousness are also impermanent. As all these factors are impermanent there is nothing that is permanent. If there is an Atma within us, we should be able to control all these things and they would not be subject to change. But this is not the case. We cannot control everything as we wish. Whether we like it or not, we have to face aging. We will face illness, suffering and death. That is why we say all things are Anatma.

## **All religions have holy writings or scriptures. What is the holy scripture of Buddhism?**

The scripture of Buddhism is the Tipiṭaka where what Lord Buddha preached for forty-five years is captured as pure and pristine Dhamma. The Dhamma contained in the Tipiṭaka was communicated over generations through the oral tradition by great Arahants. About 1000 years ago this true Dhamma was transcribed into writing. It is that Dhamma written in the original language of the Buddha (Pāli), we are now learning. We have translated these noble teachings into simple English, and have made them available on the Buddha Vision website, so that you and others may have the opportunity to learn the Noble Truths.

## **Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy?**

Buddhism can be puzzling for someone brought up within one of the great monotheistic traditions such as Christianity or Islam. Although Buddhist traditions give a place to devotion and ceremony, Buddhism has no dogmas, no single great book. It involves no worship of a god. What Buddhism does have is a mass of teachings that in other traditions would be considered to lie within the realm of philosophy or psychology. For this reason there has been much doubts as to whether Buddhism is a religion at all.

Buddhism certainly does not fit into the template for religion created in the Western world. Whether that signifies that Buddhism is not a religion at all, or that it is simply a different kind of religion, is a moot point. To put the argument for the second possibility, it might be said that whereas the religions that grew up in the Middle East are essentially belief systems, Buddhism is a system of education.

## **What is the ultimate goal of Dhamma practice?**

The results of Dhamma practice can be expressed both in the negative and the positive sense. In the negative sense, the result is freedom from all suffering and from all the causes of suffering, namely the toxic mental states rooted in greed, hatred and delusion. In the positive sense, it is the perfection of wisdom, compassion and inner freedom

## **How long does it take to get enlightened?**

This question may be answered with an old story:

A monk is walking through the countryside. He asks an old lady sitting by the side of the road how long it will take him to get to the mountain. She ignores him. He asks her again and she ignores him again. And so for a third time. The monk assumes that the woman must be deaf. As he walks on he hears her shout out: "Seven days!" The monk returns to the woman: "Grandmother, I asked you this question three times and you ignored me each time. Why did you wait until I had walked on by before shouting out the answer?" The old lady said, "Before I could answer I had to look at how fast you were walking and how determined you looked."

Buddhists who are convinced that there is such a thing as enlightenment and that they have the potential to realize it, and who are following the path to that realization, give little time to speculating on how long it will take. Seven days, seven months, seven years, seven lifetimes however long it takes, there is no alternative route.

## Do Buddhists believe in God?

As the definition of the word “god ” varies throughout the various religious traditions of the world, there is no straightforward answer to this question. Whereas the notion of a personal creator god is clearly incompatible with Buddhist teachings, some of the more abstract concepts of “god” may be reconciled with them to a certain degree

## Please illustrate the workings of the law of kamma

Every day we perform so many volitional acts, our life is such a complex flow of volition, that the effect of any one particular act is rarely obvious. To use an analogy, if a bucket of acid were to be thrown into a river, we could be sure that it would reduce the pH level of the water to some degree. But the extent to which that change is observable would depend on what other substances had been introduced into the water. If the water was already very acidic or very alkaline, the effect might not be at all obvious.

Although the external effects of individual kammic actions may not be easily verified, internally it is a different story. We can easily observe that every time we indulge in anger, we increase the likelihood that we will indulge in the same way in the future. We create and feed habits and personality traits through a constant drip of volitional actions. Every time we act with a coarse intention, we immediately become a slightly coarser human being. Every time we act with kindness we immediately become a slightly kinder person.

## What does Buddhism say about rebirth?

In the early hours of the night on which Siddhattha Gotama became enlightened, he found himself capable of recollecting an immense number of past lives. In the middle part of the night he found himself able to follow the wanderings of beings through different realms over many lifetimes, and thus to verify the law of kamma. These unimaginably intense experiences so undermined the deep-seated foundations of toxicity in his mind, and so enhanced the power of his contemplations, that by dawn he had become a fully enlightened Buddha.

Throughout his teaching career the Buddha revealed information about other realms. He spoke on various occasions about the different realms of existence and the conduct that led to rebirth in them. It seems clear that he felt knowledge of these realms gave a fuller context for spiritual endeavor. Even if this knowledge was as yet unverifiable by direct experience, he considered it a valuable support for all those following the Eightfold Path.

The Buddha made it clear that no realm is eternal, and that rebirth in heaven realms, no matter how sublime, is ultimately unsatisfactory and comes to an end. He taught that for the fully enlightened being, there can be no more rebirth. The cause for the beginningless wandering in temporal realms is a fundamental ignorance of the true nature of things. Once that ignorance has been destroyed, all that is founded upon it disappears

## If there is no self, then what is reborn?

The teaching of not-self points to the fact that things exist as processes rather than as discrete objects. A candle flame provides the traditional analogy for illustrating the relationship between not-self and rebirth. What we call a candle flame is not a thing in itself, but the expression of a time-bound relationship between candle-wick and oxygen. If a new candle is lit from an old one it is only conventionally true to say that a thing called a flame has migrated from one candle to another; in fact a process has been maintained with the supply of a new material base. Similarly, there is not a thing called a self that is reborn at the death of the body, but a process that manifests in a new and fitting form.

## Sangha

They are the Blessed One's disciples who have practiced well, Who have practiced directly,

Who have practiced insightfully, Those who practice with integrity--

That is the four pairs, the eight kinds of noble beings-- These are the blessed one's disciples.

## What does “Sangha” mean?

The word “Sangha” is used in two ways. Firstly, it is the name given to the monastic order, hence the phrase, “the Thai Sangha”. Secondly, it refers to the community of all those who have realized one of the four stages of enlightenment. The two categories overlap to a high degree: over the past 2,600 years the vast majority of those who have realized stages of enlightenment have been members of the monastic order. Nevertheless, monastic life is not a necessary condition for enlightenment. There have been many members of the enlightened Sangha who have lived (and live) as householders.

## Why do Buddhist monastics shave their heads?

Hair is a major focus of the human desire to beautify the body and project a particular image in the world. Monastics shave their heads as an expression of their aspiration to renounce personal vanity. Doing so serves as a reminder to themselves and others that now they have left the world. The sight of a Buddhist monastic in brown robes and shaven head is a memorable one. People seeing them may become curious or intrigued, feel uplifted, be reminded of the need to be alert and awake. Thus Buddhist monastics propagate the Dhamma in a very gentle way, simply by being seen.

Monastics shave their heads either once a month (the day preceding the full moon) or twice (adding the day before the dark moon). In Thailand, monastics also shave their eyebrows.

## Do monastics take lifetime vows?

Entering the monastic order entails making a commitment to monastic training that is left open-ended. Privately, a monk might make a vow to remain in robes for the rest of his life, but it is not expected of him.

Temporary ordination has long been a key feature of some Asian countries. Traditionally, young men have become monks for the three-month rainy season retreat (vassa), which is held between the full moons of July and October. The value of this custom lies firstly in the young man receiving an immersion in moral and spiritual values before taking on the challenges of marriage and career. Secondly, it provides them with a means to formally express gratitude to their parents for their upbringing (it is believed that by their ordaining their parents gain great merit). Thirdly, the custom creates bonds between lay Buddhists and monasteries (where either they or family members have been monks) that may last for generations.



## What is the Vinaya?

The Vinaya is the name given to the compendium of training rules, protocols, procedures and duties laid down by the Buddha for the monastic order. The Vinaya is intended to maintain harmony within and amongst monastic communities, and to create the optimum conditions for the practice of Dhamma by each individual monk. The heart of the Vinaya is the Pātimokkha, the 227 rules which constitute the basic code of discipline.

The Pātimokkha is divided into a number of sections. The first consists of four expulsion offenses: sexual intercourse, stealing, killing a human being, making bogus claims of spiritual attainments. The second section consists of thirteen extremely grave offenses which constitute serious blots on the honor of a monk and, if committed, require a period of penance for purification. These include cases of gross sexual misconduct such as masturbation, touching a woman's body with lust, and sexually explicit flirting. All other offenses are confessed and purified in a short procedure preceding the twice-monthly meeting of the monastic community, the Uposatha, during which the entire Pātimokkha discipline is chanted by one of the monks

## Can women become monastics?

Yes, women can lead a monastic life, dedicating their lives to the study and practice of the Buddhist teachings, but not in quite the same way as the nuns of earlier generations. Unfortunately, the original nuns' order, the Bhikkhunī Sangha, became extinct more than a thousand years ago. The prevailing (although not unanimous) view in Theravāda Buddhist countries is that reviving the Bhikkhunī order is not possible, as the requirements for bhikkhunī ordination laid down by the Buddha can no longer be fulfilled. Theravāda being a tradition that defines itself by its conservative attitude to the texts, it is unsurprising that overriding the instructions given by the Buddha himself is considered by most monks to be unthinkable. As an alternative to bhikkhunī ordination, Theravāda countries have established their own quasi-monastic institutions for women with faith. In Sri Lanka 'dasa sil maatha' order and Thailand this institution is the white-robed mae chee order.

The orthodox view on the revival of the bhikkhunī order is not universally accepted. Over the past few years a movement to re-establish the bhikkhunī order, mainly instigated by Buddhist women from Western countries, has gathered pace. A growing number of women are now living as bhikkhunīs.

## What kind of a person is suitable to become a monk or a nun?

Any person can become a monk or nun. But, to enter into the order genuinely, one has to be ordained not only physically but mentally also. Those who can give up all the lay men's burdens, who are honest, determined, not double-dealing are suitable to enter into the Buddhist Order.

## **Why do Buddhist monks wear robes of maroon, brownish colour?**

Lord Buddha recommended that his followers wear maroon and brownish coloured robes. The reason is when they are in the jungle they would not be seen from a distance. Further, the colouring ingredients of robes were made from barks of trees in the jungle which repel mosquitoes and flies.

## **What is the greatest service that Buddhist monks do for society?**

The greatest service a member of Lord Buddha's Order can provide to society is to discipline oneself according to the Dhamma and only teach the pristine Dhamma as purely as Lord Buddha preached, without expressing personal views. In this way, the Dhamma will last in the world for a long time to come.

## **Buddhist Attitude**

Our actions are all led by the mind; mind is their master, mind is their maker. If one acts or speaks with a defiled state of mind, then suffering follows like the cart-wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

Our actions are all led by the mind; mind is their master, mind is their maker. If one acts or speaks with a pure state of mind, then happiness follows like a shadow that remains behind without departing.

Dhammapada v.1-2

## **Why has so much blood been shed in the name of religion?**

### **Has Buddhism contributed to the carnage?**

Human beings need their lives to make sense, to have meaning and purpose. Religions appear to meet this need. As a consequence, most people adopt a set of religious beliefs or dogmas as a framework within which to understand their lives. But as there are a number of belief systems, and each one tends to assert that it alone is the possessor of truth, the age-old conflict between belief systems and the passions they engender is inevitable. Despite all of the “religious” violence the world has seen, the nature of human needs makes it hard to imagine a world without people taking refuge in dogmatic beliefs.

Even determinedly secular or materialistic people have the same psycho-logical needs for stability and meaning. Indeed, they may identify with their own views and beliefs as tenaciously as the more conventionally religious. It is not difficult to find present-day examples of political beliefs and even scientific theories taking on the trappings of dogma.

Buddhists are proud that in their texts not one phrase can be found that would justify shedding a single drop of blood. In some places, however, the texts remain unread and their lessons untaught. In the world today, a small minority of men wearing the robes of Buddhist monks use their authority to aggravate rather than placate ethnic and territorial disputes, while the rest of the Theravāda world looks on in dismay.

Nevertheless, the teachings of Buddhism do offer a way out of religious violence. They assert that the path to true security and meaning lies in our actions of body, speech and mind, rather than belief. Faith is placed in our capacity to change, which we can put to the test, rather than in dogma which we cannot. In the effort to educate their behavior, emotions and understanding, human beings can find a purpose that does not create a sense of alienation from all those who do not share their commitment.

## **What is the Buddhist attitude to women?**

First and foremost, women are viewed as human beings subject to birth, old age, sickness and death: beings prone to suffering and with the ability and opportunity to transcend it. The Buddha made it very clear that the capacity for enlightenment is not gender-based. It is present by virtue of a human birth and women are viewed as having the same spiritual potential as men.

In light of this view of their spiritual capacity, the Buddha gave women who wished to devote themselves wholeheartedly to his training the opportunity to become monastics. He spent a great deal of time teaching women, both monastic and lay, and did not keep back any teachings from them on the grounds of their sex.

But the Buddha's assertion of women's spiritual equality did not lead him to advocate radical changes in the male-dominated social order. He reserved his social criticism for what seemed to him its most pernicious feature: the caste system. Interestingly, in the Sangha, the area in which the Buddha did have the power to establish conventions governing relationships between men and women, he did not opt for equality. The Buddha established relations between the two monastic orders such that the nuns' order, established after that of the monks, was considered its younger sibling. The Buddha judged that this kind of mild hierarchy, guarded against abuse by the built-in checks and balances of the Vinaya discipline, was the best way to govern renunciant communities, and the one most acceptable to society at large.

## How does Buddhism view love?

In Buddhist teachings love is looked at in terms of the toxic or nourishing mental states present in the minds of lovers and loved. A range of emotions may be distinguished. At its coarsest level love may be narcissistic and demanding; at its most sublime love is selfless and unconditioned. Personal love tends to oscillate from one end of this scale to the other. Buddhists are taught that the more their love inclines towards the selfish forms, the more they will suffer and the more suffering they will cause for their loved one; the more unconditional their love, the more it is based upon wisdom and understanding, the more happiness they will enjoy and the more they will be able to give to others. Buddhists are taught to cultivate their actions, speech, thoughts and emotions in such a way as to educate and purify the positive emotions

## What is the Buddhist attitude to other religions?

The Buddha spoke in praise of those elements of other religions that were in harmony with his path to awakening; he was critical of beliefs and practices that increased the amount of superstition, cruelty and prejudice in the world. He advocated goodwill and respect for all fellow beings, irrespective of their beliefs.

Religious intolerance is alien to Buddhism. As Buddhism does not consider that there is a salvation dependent on belief in a particular set of dogmas, it does not find a diversity of beliefs offensive, and does not proselytize. Indeed, the monastic discipline forbids monks to teach any one at all, even lay Buddhists, without prior invitation.

## Do Buddhists believe in god?

This is a question common to all. Those who have not seen god think are not sure whether there is god or no god. In order to make this clear, let us turn to discusses of Lord Buddha whose knowledge of the world is the greatest.

One day, a brahmin called, "Sangarawa", belonging to the clan of "Bharadwaj; asked a question from the Enlightened One. The blessed One; are there any gods? "Bharadwaj; if there is any reason to say that there are gods, it is known to me. What; the Blesses One? When I asked you whether there are gods, My Lord's answer was "if there is any reason to say there are gods, it is known to me. Venerable Sir, if it is so, the fact there are gods become a utter lie. The Blessed One; is it not so? "Bharadwaj; if someone says that there are gods, if someone says that this reason is known to me, a person of wisdom should come to a logical conclusion about this matter. So we can say there are gods. The Blessed One; why didn't you tell it to me earlier? "Bharadwaj"; if there is any statement to say that there are gods; it is seconded and highly accepted by the world. It is clear to you from the above statement made by The Blessed One, that the fact that there are gods in the world is accepted by anyone in the world. Even Lord Buddha did not reject that idea.

## **What is the Buddhist attitude to entertainments like cinema and sport?**

The Buddha taught his disciples to consider in what ways their activities support the path of awakening, and in what ways they pull them away from it. He laid down a general principle that whatever activity increases the strength of toxic qualities in the heart and diminishes the strength of nourishing qualities is to be avoided. Any activity that increases the strength of nourishing qualities in the heart and diminishes the strength of the toxic qualities may be mindfully pursued. This is the principle applied to determine the correct relationship to all forms of entertainment, from the coarsest to the most refined.

The Buddha recognized the need that people leading stressful lives in the world feel for relaxation and enjoyment. For this reason he did not encourage lay Buddhists to abstain from such pleasures completely. He did, however, recommend a twice-monthly day of abstinence, (on the full and dark moon days). Apart from releasing more time for spiritual practices, this day allows householders to step back from their daily pursuits and re-assess to what extent their lives are in harmony with their goals and aspirations.

## **Is there a Buddhist approach to conflict resolution?**

Every society experiences conflicts of interest and view, both from within and from without. Buddhist teachings emphasize ways of preventing conflicts from arising in the first place, and of preventing those that have already begun from escalating. They seek to achieve this by instructing the people involved how best to educate their conduct, emotions and understanding of life.

In Buddhism, violence is considered the least intelligent reaction to conflict. Violence, whether physical or verbal, does not create lasting solutions to problems. The perpetrators of violence create heavy kamma through their actions, for which they eventually have to pay. The victims of violence or their families crave revenge. Cycles of violence are set in motion. The root causes of conflict remain unhealed.

The Buddha said that minds free from toxic mental states make the most intelligent long-term decisions. Greed, self-importance and prejudice arise within individual minds and, if unattended to, can have enormous consequences for communities and nations. The Buddha taught his disciples to constantly look within in order to establish the ways in which they contribute to external conflicts through their actions and speech, their desires and emotions, their beliefs, values and theories. He taught ways to let go of the destructive aspects of the human mind and ways to cultivate the constructive ones. Learning how to distinguish the causes and conditions of conflict, Buddhists are taught to apply effort in dealing with them in the best possible way.



## **What is the best way to deal with stress?**

Given our responsibilities and the pressures upon us, feeling a certain amount of stress is probably inevitable. It is not always a bad thing, and hard to imagine how making positive changes in our life, abandoning old unwise habits, could be possible without any stress at all. If we are unable to deal with stress or feel we should not have to deal with it, we may fail to realize important goals in our life.

Nevertheless, it is possible to radically reduce the amount of stress we experience. It helps to simplify our lives as much as we can and learn to slow down a little; trying to fit too much into a day is needlessly wearing. Bringing attention to the quality of our actions and speech reduces stressful interactions with others. A more judicious use of resources reduces stress over personal finances. Regular exercise, especially yoga and tai chi (because designed to affect the nervous system), alleviates much physical tension, and teaches us to breathe more naturally.

Regular meditation practice gives us the skill to recognize and let go of the toxic moods and thoughts that underlie chronic tension. Unrealistic expectations of ourselves and those around us, for instance, can be crippling. In daily life, taking regular short breaks to calm and center the mind prevents stress from gradually accumulating throughout the day. These breaks might take the form of a sixty-second breath meditation in front of a computer or simply taking a few deep grounding breaths before picking up a ringing phone. Developing the ability to come back to the present moment and re-establish a state of calm alertness on a regular basis throughout the day can make significant changes to the quality of our life.

## **What is the Buddhist attitude to vegetarianism?**

The first precept undertaken by lay Buddhists requires them to abstain from killing living beings or having someone else kill living beings on their behalf. All forms of intentional killing create bad kamma, with serious consequences for the one who kills. However, in the case where people buy and consume meat from a supermarket, for example, no kamma is incurred, as they have no direct involvement in the death of the particular animal that provides that meat. Nevertheless, many Buddhists adopt a vegetarian diet from a wish to avoid even an indirect connection to the killing of animals.

The Buddha also taught people to reflect wisely on their relationship to the environment in which they live. For this reason, reducing meat consumption or adopting a vegetarian diet might be considered an intelligent and Buddhist response to the grave threats posed to the environment by the huge and growing human demand for meat.

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## In Buddhism, how important is it to help others?

Altruism lies at the very heart of the Buddhism tradition. The blossoming of compassion is seen as the measure of an awakening mind. The two pre-eminent virtues possessed by the Buddha were wisdom and compassion. The Buddha was enlightened through wisdom and shared his path of awakening with others through compassion. In Buddhism, wisdom and compassion are considered to be inseparable, like the two wings of an eagle.

The wish to make others happy or to relieve them of their suffering is a wonderful jewel of the human mind. But for noble feelings to lead to effective action, wisdom is needed. People with good intentions but lacking sensitivity or respect for those they are determined to help can do more harm than good. Conceit, impatience, hesitation, saying the wrong thing, or saying the right thing at the wrong time there are so many lapses of judgment, so many character flaws, that can undermine the best efforts of the kindest person. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, people sometimes don't want to be helped or are not ready for it.

The Buddha taught that ripeness is all. The wise person understands that all beings are the “owners of their kamma”. In expressing the compassion that flows from wisdom and is informed by it, the wise try to help others when they can, never forgetting that there is no guarantee their efforts will be successful. As a result, they do not indulge in disappointment or despair when things do not work out. If they are frustrated in their efforts to help others they dwell in equanimity, ready to try again whenever the prevailing conditions allow

# Path



## Dāna (Giving)

Bhikkhus, if beings knew, as I know, the result of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of meanness to obsess them and take root in their minds. Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with

Itivuttaka 18

## Where does the Buddhist path begin?

The Buddhist path seeks to eliminate suffering and the mental toxicity that is its cause. The coarsest of the mind's toxic agents is selfish attachment to material possessions. For this reason the Buddhist path begins with the cultivation of generosity. Cultivating a habit of giving and sharing cleanses the mind of its narrow and jealous grasping onto things. Giving requires the giver to take the needs of others into account and so promotes empathy. The practice of giving creates joy in the giver and increases the feeling of warmth and mutual support in families and communities.

## What determines the spiritual quality of giving?

Intention is key to all Buddhist practices. An act of generosity motivated by the desire for a reward, whether it be for some material advantage, or for more intangible gains—status, reputation, respect or love—has little power to purify the mind. Such giving is, in fact, little more than a form of exchange. Giving without expectations is empowering, reduces attachments and gives rise to self-respect and joy.

### **Sīla (Morality)**

Furthermore, you should recollect your own virtuous behavior as unbroken, flawless, unblemished, unblotched, liberating, praised by the wise, ungrasped, conducive to concentration. At any time when a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting virtue, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind is simply straight,

based on virtue. And when the mind is simply straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed experiences ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

## **Is there a key feature of the Buddhist attitude to morality?**

Yes, the emphasis on volition. The Buddha said that morality is volition. An act is determined to be moral or immoral according to the mental factors present when the act is performed. An act prompted by a toxic mental state is automatically bad kamma; the particular nature of the act affects only the severity of the kamma created. The practice of present-moment awareness of one's intentions, and the cultivation of the mental states that enable one to refrain from harmful intentions, are vital features of Buddhist morality.

## **What are the five precepts?**

The five precepts constitute the most basic moral code in Buddhism. They consist of the determination to refrain from:

- 1 Taking life
- 2 Stealing and cheating
- 3 Sexual misconduct
- 4 Lying
- 5 Alcohol and all substances drugs.

Almost every ceremony presided over by members of the Sangha includes a passage in which the lay Buddhists present formally request the five precepts from the senior monk. The monk recites the precepts one at a time and the lay Buddhists repeat them after him. The wording of the precept is instructive: 'I undertake to refrain from taking life (stealing and cheating, etc.) as a means of educating my conduct.

## **Are violence or killing ever justified?**

The short answer to this question is no. The Buddhist teaching on this point is unwaveringly clear. Whatever justification may be made for killing, if the volition to kill was present in the killer's mind, then bad kamma has been created which will lead to unfortunate consequences. The reasons for killing determine only the severity of the kamma created. For instance, the premeditated killing of a benefactor out of desire or hatred would create much heavier kamma than killing an enemy to protect one's family, country or religion. There are no cases in which the Buddha advocated violence even as a last resort. In a famous verse the Buddha stated:

Hatred never ceases through hatred in this world; but through non-hatred it ceases.

This is an eternal law





## **Bhāvanā**

(Mental cultivation, Meditation)

There are these roots of trees, these are empty huts. Meditate, monks, do not delay or you will regret it later. This is our instruction to you.

## Why meditate?

Human beings want to be happy and do not want to suffer. Meditation is the most effective means of cultivating the inner causes of happiness and of eradicating the inner causes of suffering.

Meditation has numerous physical benefits. New technologies such as fMRI, for example, have revealed that regular meditation over many years has positive effects on both brain structure and function. Meditation reduces stress and by so doing strengthens the immune system, leading to a decrease in the frequency and severity of illnesses. The training of the mind develops the ability to let go of toxic mental states, thus reducing the psychosomatic factors involved in physical illness. Having cultivated the ability to calm the mind, meditators are better able to deal skillfully with the feelings of depression, anxiety and fear which often accompany illness. Such skill reduces the mental suffering attendant upon physical illness and accelerates the healing process. At the end of life, experienced meditators are able to leave the world in peace.

The first task for meditators is to learn how to sustain attention on an object. By doing so they expose the normal untrained behavior of the mind, and can learn how to identify and deal with distracting and confusing mental states, and how to cultivate nourishing ones. A valuable ability learned at this stage of meditation is impulse control, one of the most significant predictors of success in all walks of life. The calmness and sense of well-being that arise through meditation leads to an inner self-sufficiency. As a result, the urge to seek pleasure through the senses is much diminished, and harmful behaviors such as drug use are abandoned without regret. Noble thoughts of generosity and kindness arise in the mind naturally and with increasing frequency.

The mind that has been well trained in meditation possesses sufficient clarity and strength to perceive the true nature of things as a direct experience. Seeing things in this light allows one let go of the mistaken assumptions and attachments which are the root cause of human suffering. Ultimately meditation leads to awakening and complete liberation from suffering and its causes, and to a mind pure and unimpeded in its functions, replete with wisdom and compassion.

## When is the best time to meditate?

A great Thai master has said, "If you've got time to breathe, then you've got time to meditate." That said, many people find the early morning to be the most productive period for a session of formal meditation. The body has been rested and the mind is reasonably free of its usual busyness. A meditation session is a wonderful way to start a new day. By observing the positive effects on their mental state during the day, particularly in the hours directly following the meditation session, meditators develop great confidence in the value of meditation to their life

## What is the basic method of meditation?

Although certain fundamental principles inspire all forms of Buddhist meditation, there is great variety in the specific techniques employed to embody them. There is not one basic method of meditation but many. One particular approach is as follows.

Firstly, the meditator gives attention to the external conditions. It is helpful to have a particular space put aside specifically for practicing meditation. The meditator wears loose clothing and ensures reasonable ventilation: stuffy rooms induce dullness.

Sitting cross-legged is the best posture, as it produces feelings of stability and self-reliance which support the meditation practice. Most people find it helpful to use a small cushion as support for the lower back. The posture should be straight, but not rigid; the meditator looks for a balance between effort and relaxation (the free flow of the breath is a sign that this has been achieved). The meditator places the hands in the lap or on the knees and gently closes the eyes (they may be kept slightly open and unfocused if sleepiness threatens). If sitting cross-legged is not possible, the meditator sits on a seat, but if possible, without leaning against the backrest.

Meditators begin by spending a few moments of reflection recalling their motivation, the technique to be employed and the pitfalls to avoid. They then systematically pass their attention from the head down to the feet, identifying and relaxing any tension in the body. On discovering a knot of tension, in the shoulders for example, the meditator consciously increases the tension for a second or two and then relaxes it. Physically prepared, meditators now focus on the particular meditation object which they have chosen. Here we will discuss breath meditation, the most popular form in the Buddhist

tradition: the meditator trains to be present to the sensation of the breath at the point in the body in which it is felt most clearly. For most people this point will lie in the area around the tip of the nose. It is unwise to force the breath in any way. The meditator is merely aware of the present sensation as it appears.

To help sustain attention on the breath, a two-syllable mantra may be recited mentally, first syllable on the in-breath, second on the out-breath. The most common word used by Thai Buddhists is Bud-dho, but reciting 'in' on the inbreath, and 'out' on the outbreath would also work. Counting the breaths may also be used to sustain the connection between the mind and the breath. The simplest form of counting the breath is to count in cycles of ten, taking one inbreath and outbreath as 1, and then continuing up to 10 and then back to 1.

Whatever technique is adopted, the mind will wander. Just as in learning to play a musical instrument or learning a language, the meditator must be patient and committed, and have faith that in the long run meditation is worth the time and effort. Gradually the mind will settle down.

## **What is the purpose of walking meditation and how is it practiced?**

Walking meditation provides both a supplement and an alternative to sitting meditation. Some meditators prefer it to sitting and may make it their main practice. Walking meditation is a particularly useful option when illness, tiredness or a full stomach make sitting meditation too difficult. Whereas in sitting meditation mindfulness is developed in stillness, in walking meditation it is developed in movement. Practicing walking meditation in combination with sitting thus helps the meditator to develop a flexible all-round awareness that can be more easily integrated into daily life than that which is developed by sitting meditation alone. As an added bonus, walking meditation is good exercise.

To practice walking meditation, a path of some 20-30 paces long is determined, with a mark placed at the mid-point. Meditators begin by standing at one end of the path with hands clasped in front of them. Then they begin walking along the path to its other end, where they stop briefly, before turning around and walking back to where they started. After another brief halt, they repeat this, walking back and forth along the path in this way for the duration of the walking meditation session. Meditators use the beginning, the end and the mid-point of the path as check-points to ensure that they have not become distracted. The speed at which meditators walk varies according to the style of meditation being practiced and to individual preference.

In the initial effort to transcend the five hindrances to meditation a variety of methods may be employed. One popular method, similar to that mentioned in the discussion of sitting meditation, is to use a two-syllable meditation word (mantra): right foot touching the

## **How long should a session of meditation last?**

At the beginning meditators should not push themselves to sit for longer periods than they are ready for. Such initial over-exertion can often lead to a reaction some way down the line that results in them giving up altogether. It is better to begin with five minutes, and then gradually increase the time to around half an hour, and then little by little to forty-five minutes or an hour. Experienced meditators may sit for two or even three hours at a stretch, but it is the quality of the time rather than its quantity that counts.

## What is mindfulness?

Most simply, mindfulness is not-forgetting. Mindfulness (sati) is the mental faculty that brings to mind and bears in mind. If you bring to mind all you need to remember in a given situation and don't become distracted from it, then you have sati. Crucially, this includes bearing in mind the moral dimension of one's actions: a safe-cracker might know how to focus on his task in the present moment but he would not possess sati. In meditation, sati manifests as awareness of the object.

Sati must be accompanied by alertness and appropriate effort. Those adept at the practice of sati are aware of their body, feelings, thoughts, emotions and senses in the present moment as simply that: body, feelings, thoughts, emotions and senses, without identifying with them. They know how to protect their mind from toxic states, and how to deal with toxic states that have already arisen. They know how to create nourishing mental states and how to nurture those that have already arisen.

## What is the meaning of samatha and vipassanā?

**Samatha (literally 'even-ness') refers to:**

- i. meditation practices aimed at temporarily overcoming toxic mental states by systematically cultivating nourishing mental states, in particular the qualities of mindfulness, alertness and effort.
- ii. the bright and stable calmness of mind that results from such practices (here it is a synonym for samādhi).

**Vipassanā (literally 'clear-seeing') refers to:**

- i. meditation practices aimed at permanently removing toxic mental states by uprooting the attachments that underlie them. In vipassanā: meditators investigate the three characteristics of conditioned existence: impermanence, dukkha and not-self.
- ii. the insight into the three characteristics of existence which produces liberation from attachment.

The relationship and relative importance of these two kinds of meditation has been a source of much debate amongst Buddhist meditators. Here, suffice it to say that a successful meditation practice requires a balance between the two approaches. Samatha without vipassanā can lead to indulgence in blissful mental states; vipassanā without samatha can become dry and superficial. One great teacher has compared samatha to the weight of a knife and vipassanā to its cutting edge.



## **I have heard that meditation is dangerous; is it true?**

Meditating for a few minutes a day is not at all dangerous. However, for people suffering from serious psychological problems, especially any requiring medication, longer periods of unguided meditation are usually unadvisable. When people are suffering from intense mental obsessions, Buddhist teachers may caution against sitting meditation altogether and instead encourage them to focus on the practices of giving and helping others. At this point in their lives, the joy to be found in service and kind actions, together with the self-respect gained by keeping precepts, may have a much more healing effect than the application of meditation techniques.

## **Buddhist lay life**

### **Buddhist should refrain from**

- 1      Taking life and harming others
- 2      Stealing and cheating
- 3      Sexual misconduct
- 4      Lying
- 5      Alcohol and all substances drugs.

## How can I become a Buddhist?

Do you like to be a Buddhist? So, the first thing you have to do is to take refuge in the Triple Gem (Lord Buddha, The Doctrine of Lord Buddha and the monastic noble disciples of Lord Buddha). Then you need to observe sil; five precepts or "Pancha Sila" (discipline in five precepts). To take refuge in the Triple Gem the following stanzas should be recited by memory:

**Buddham saranam gaccâmi**

I take refuge in Lord Buddha

**Dhammam saranam gaccâmi**

I take refuge in Supreme Dhamma

**Sanghamiaranam gaccami**

I take refuge in Noble Followers of Dhamma

**Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gaccdmi**

Secondly also I take refuge in Lord Buddha

**Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gaccdmi**

Secondly also I take refuge in Supreme Dhamma

**DutiyampiSangham saranam gaccâmi**

Secondly also I take refuge in Noble Followers of Dhamma

**TatiyampiBuddham saranam gaccâmi**

Thirdly also! take refuge in Lord Buddha

**Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gaccâmi**

Thirdly also I take refuge in Supreme Dhamma

**Tallyampi San gham saranam gaccâmi**

Thirdly also I fake refuge in Noble Followers of Dhamma

## Then observe Pancha Sila"(Five precepts)

**Panatipatā Veramanl Sikkhapaciam Samadiyami**

I observe the precept called-abstinence from killing

**Adinnddâna Veramani S!kkhâpadam Samadiyâmi**

I observe the precept called-abstinence from stealing

**Kamesu Miccacara Veramani Slkkhapadam Samadlyami**

I observe the precept called-abstinence from sexual misconduct

**Musawada Veramani Slkkhâpadam Samadiyâmi**

I observe the precept called-abstinence from lying

**Surameraya MajJapamadatthâna Veramani Sikkhâpadam Samadiyami**

I observe the precept called-abstinence from taking intoxicants

When you have finished observing the precepts by reciting the above, you have made yourself a virtuous Buddhist who has taken refuge in the Triple Gem.

## What should I do after becoming a Buddhist?

After becoming a Buddhist, try to learn the discourses of Lord Buddha. For that library of Buddha Vision will be very helpful to you.

## **What is Triple Gem?**

Triple Gem means: Taking refuge in Lord Buddha, The Dhamma (doctrine of Lord Buddha) and Supreme Sangha (The Noble Followers of Lord Buddha).

## **What are the changes that take place in our life after taking refuge in the Triple Gem?**

After to king refuge in the Triple Gem, we have chosen Lord Buddha with full comprehension, as the Supreme Leader of our life. We have chosen the "Supreme Dhamma" as the only way to free ourselves from the sansaric suffering. At the same time, we have chosen the "Maha San gha" (Noble Followers of the Dhamma) for veneration and attendance. As such you will see a big change take place in your life. So you will improve in "Saddha", "Sila", knowledge of Dhamma, almsgiving and wisdom. Within a short time you can become a strong character.

## **If my friends and relatives oppose to my becoming a Buddhist, what can I do?**

First, extend loving kindness towards them. While doing so, suppress the hatred you have towards them. Then without telling anyone take refuge in the Triple Gem and start to discipline in the five precepts. Whenever possible learn Buddha Dhamma through Buddha Vision. Buddha Vision wishes you that you will become a good Buddhist coming over the obstacles on your way.

## **Why should Buddhists often try to spread the "Dhamma" to others?**

Can you remember the day you received this precious Dhamma? How happy you were thinking that you could see the truth after a long time! How good it is if that happiness and benefit can be given to others also. Therefore, spread this supreme message of Lord Buddha among your friends, relatives and neighbors. At least e-mail the address of [www.atlanticbuddhist.com](http://www.atlanticbuddhist.com) Website to your friends. That will surely be a great meritorious act since the relief and the relaxation you received from the Dhamma is extended to others also.

## **How can I find a Buddhist temple?**

Do you like to find a Buddhist temple? There are many Buddhist Centers all over the world. If not, always be with Buddha Vision. Then it will of course be a Buddhist temple that will visit your home.

## **If there is no Buddhist temple located close to my home, what can I do?**

If there is no Buddhist temple located close to your home, arrange a place for worship keeping an image of Lord Buddha in a suitable place at home. Then keep company with [www.atlanticbuddhist.com](http://www.atlanticbuddhist.com) (or any other Buddhist teaching society) which is like a meditation master who visits you. So, you are not alone; we are with you forever.