**Buddhist Practices**

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| Explain the nature, use and importance of Buddhist places of worship e.g. monasteries, shrines, temples, gompas and their key features including the Buddha rupa, artefacts and offerings. |
| Explain how Buddhists perform puja in the home and in the temple, including chanting, mantra recitation and use of malas.  |
| Explain the aims, methods and significance of different types of meditation.  |
| Explain the practice and significance of different ceremonies and rituals associated with death and mourning.  |
| Explain how Buddhists celebrate festivals of Wesak and Parinirvana Day.  |
| Explain Buddhist teachings about kamma, rebirth, compassion and loving –kindness. |
| Explain Buddhist teachings about the 5 moral precepts.  |
| Explain the Buddhist teachings about the 6 perfections.  |

**Key terms**

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| **TEMPLE**  | A place where Buddhists come together to practise. |
| **GOMPA** | A hall or building where Tibetan Buddhists meditate. |
| **STUPA**  | A small building in a monastery that sometimes contains holy relics. |
| **SHRINE**  | An area with a statue of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, which provides Buddhists with a focal point for meditation and devotion. |
| **BUDDHA RUPA** | A statue of the Buddha, often sitting cross legged in a meditation pose. |
| **MONASTERY (Vihara)** | A place where Buddhist monks and nuns live.  |
| **PUJA** | An act of worship |
| **CHANTING**  | In Buddhism reciting from the Buddhist scriptures.  |
| **MANTRA** | A short sequence of sacred syllables. |
|  **MALA** | Prayer beads that are used to count the number of recitations in a mantra. |
| **MEDITATION:** | A practice of calming and focusing the mind, and reflecting deeply on specific teachings topenetrate their true meaning. |
| **SAMATHA MEDITATION** | ‘calming meditation’; a type of meditation that involves calming the mind anddeveloping deeper concentration. |
| **MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING** | A meditation practice focusing on the experience of breathing. |
| **VIPASSANA MEDITATION:**  | ‘insight meditation’; a type of meditation that involves developing understanding ofthe nature of reality. |
|  **ZAZEN MEDITATION** | A type of meditation in Zen Buddhism that requires awareness of the present moment. |
| **THANGKA** | A detailed painting of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. |
| **MANDALA** | An intricate, circle-shaped pattern that is used for meditation |
| **FESTIVAL**  | A day or period or celebration for religious reasons. |
| **RETREAT** | A period of time spent away from everyday life in order to focus on meditation practice. |
| **WESAK:**  | A Theravada festival that celebrates the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and passing away. |
| **PARINIRVANA DAY:** | A Mahayana festival that commemorates the Buddha passing away. |
| **SKILFUL** | Good, ethical actions or behaviour. |
| **UNSKILFUL** | Bad, unethical actions or behaviour. |
| **KARUNA** | Compassion, feelings concerned for the suffering of other people and wanting to relieve their suffering. |
| **THE FOUR SUBLIME STATES** | The four qualities of love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity which theBuddha taught the Buddhists should develop. |
| **METTA** | loving-kindness, showing a benevolent, kind friendly attitudes towards people. |
| **FIVE MORAL PRECEPTS** | Five principles that Buddhists try to follow to live ethically and morally. |
| **THE SIX PERFECTIONS** | the six qualities or virtues that Mahayana Buddhists try to develop in order to live asBodhisattvas. |

**PLACES OF WORSHIP**

**TEMPLE:** A temple is often at the heart of a Buddhist community, found in many different shapes and sizes. Some consist of just one building, while the larger ones consist of a number of different buildings grouped together on one side. Depending on its size and function, a Buddhist temple (or temple complex) may include the following:

● A main hall or building, where Buddhists practise together; this will contain a statue of the Buddha (Mahayana temple may also include statues of various Bodhisattvas).

● A meditation hall or building, which is a quiet space together where Buddhists can meditate; in Tibetan Buddhism this is known as a **gompa.**

● A study hall or building, for meetings and lectures.

● A shrine or number of shrines dedicated to the Buddha (or, in Mahayana temple, to a Bodhisattva).

● A pagoda stupa, which is a tiered tower or mound-like structure that it sometimes used to contain holy relics (items associated with the Buddha that are considered to be holy). Pagodas and stupas are generally designed to symbolise the five Buddhist elements of earth, water, fire, air and wisdom. The base of the building symbolises the earth, water, fire, air and wisdom. The base of the building symbolises the earth, then the building extends upwards with different segments stacked on top of each other to represent the other elements. These reach upwards to a point or spire that symbolises wisdom.

***Temples are important centres of religious life where Buddhists can study, meditate and practise together. Buddhists may listen to talks given by members of the monastic community, a lay people may take offerings, including food, to support them.***

**SHRINE:** A Buddhist **shrine** is area where the focus is a statue of the Buddha (a Buddha rupa), usually sitting cross-legged in a meditation pose. (In Mahayana Buddhism, there are also shrines where the focus is a statue of a Bodhisattva rather than the Buddha). Shrines can be found in a temple or in a home; they provide a focal point for Buddhists to meditate or practise. Buddhists will also make offerings at a shrine, as a way of paying respect to the Buddha and expressing gratitude and thanks for his teachings. The

offerings also remind Buddhists of the Buddha’s teachings, because they symbolise different aspects of them. For example:

● An offering of light (such as candle) symbolises wisdom, because the light of the candle drives away the darkness of ignorance.

● An offering of flowers (which will wilt and decay) reminds Buddhists that all things are impermanent.

● An offering of incense symbolises purity, reminding Buddhists of the importance of practising pure thoughts, speech and conduct.

***“The time and effort required to keep the shrine clean and replenished with flowers and other offerings is considered a skilful activity to focus one’s mind in the spiritual practice.”* Lama Choedak Rinpoche**

**MONASTERIES:** A monastery (vihara) is a building (or group of buildings) where a community of Buddhist monks or nuns live. These are Buddhists who have chosen to dedicate their lives full time to their spiritual practice; they spend their days studying, practising and meditating on the Buddha’s teachings. Buddhist monks and nuns generally live a simple lifestyle, but the monastery still has to provide for all their needs because it is where they live, eat study and sleep. Some Buddhists monasteries are like small villages in themselves, while the smaller ones consist of one building only.

**A stupa** is a particularly important part of a monastery. When the Buddha died, his body was cremated and parts of his ashes are said to have been sent to different places. Stupas were then built to hold his ashes. Today, a stupa is a small, dome-shaped building that usually contains holy relics, such as the remains of monks and nuns or items associated with important Buddhists.

**BUDDHIST WORSHIP**

**THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP**: Worship (puja) allows Buddhists to express their gratitude and respect for the Buddha and his teachings. It gives them an opportunity to acknowledge how important the Buddha is in their lives. It also allows them to focus on their faith and to deepen their understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. Through performing puja and reciting verses of scripture, Buddhists acknowledge the Buddha’s qualities and their commitment to following his example. They remind themselves of his teachings on the nature of existence and the way of life, leading to the wisdom and compassion of enlightenment. Through dwelling on these teachings, they may absorb them more deeply and find their lives changing for the better, as they become wiser and more compassionate towards themselves and others.

**HOW BUDDHISTS WORSHIP**: Puja may include rituals and ceremonies carried out in groups, or private worship in the home. It often involves the following activates: meditation, making offerings, chanting, reciting mantras, and bowing.

**CHANTING:** In the early times of Buddhism, the only way to share Buddhist texts and teachings was to memorise them and pass them on orally. Monks would chant the texts in order to learn and remember them. Today, Buddhists still chant from sacred texts: written records of what the Buddha taught. Examples might include chanting the three refuges, the five moral precepts or the Bodhisattva vows. Chanting is a devotional practice: it may increase a Buddhists receptivity towards the Buddha and his teachings. It can

also be used to help calm and concentrate the mind.

**MANTRA RECITATION**: A mantra is a sequence of sacred syllables that is usually chanted over and over, sometimes spoken, or experienced silently in the mind. Some Buddhists believe that mantras have transformative powers. They can be used in meditation to focus the mind. Mantras often call on the spiritual qualities of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. The most common mantra, used by Tibetan Buddhists, is *om mani padme hum.* This represents the sound of compassion, and is associated with the Bodhisattva of

compassion, Avalokiteshvara. By chanting this mantra, Buddhists may hope to invoke the presence of Avalokiteshvara. They may feel that the mantra helps them to become more receptive to compassion, helping them to better express this quality in their lives. Buddhists may recite a mantra hundreds or even thousands of times, often using a mala (a string of prayer breads) in order to count the number of recitations. A mala usually has 108 beads.

**MEDITATION**

**MEDITATION:** Meditation is mental concentration in order to achieve a state of mind from which one can eventually attain enlightenment. It is a physical and mental discipline. It is one of the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, so most Buddhists meditate in some form. Imagine the mind as a pool of water. Thoughts disturb the surface, so one cannot see clearly into it. Meditation aims to still the surface to allow clear sight and understanding.

**HOW DO WE KNOW MEDITATION IS IMPORTANT/SIGNIFICANT IN BUDDHISM:** Right Concentration is one elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Fourth Noble Truth. It is considered crucial for attaining enlightenment. Meditation leads to mindfulness, which leads to detachment, which leads to nibbana. The Buddha is most commonly seen seated in meditation pose in rupas/images, hence implying its importance. He trained himself in meditation practices and then meditated until enlightened, so this is his example. **All Buddhists Meditate. ‘Through *one may live a hundred years with no true insight and self-control, yet better, indeed, is a life of one day for a man who meditates in wisdom’* Dhammapada 11.**

**SAMATHA (CALM**/CONCENTRATION AND TRANQUILITY) - This aims to develop calmness and ‘one-pointedness’ of mind (mindfulness). Samatha trains the mind to not be distracted by thoughts. Eight ‘trance’ levels (jhanas) are recognisable in samatha meditation, beginning with ‘mindfulness of breathing’. This is about being ‘in the present moment’, still and calm. Each subsequent one is more complicated/refined. Successful Samatha leads to **Right Mindfulness.** Samatha changes a person’s outlook and attitudes in daily life as well as while meditating.

**VIPASSANA** (insight)- This is specific to Buddhism, developed by the Buddha. Focus is on analysing the mind and body and interactions with the material world in order to break attachment. This allows insight to be gained into the true nature of reality, particularly the Three Marks of Existence. From that nibbana can be attained. It is a permanent solution to the problem of suffering, given the realisation of the Three Marks. Vipassana seems to be more connected to wisdom (panna) than concentration (samatha).

**ZAZEN** (meditation in sitting) - This comes from Soto zen, Japanese Buddhism. The meditator sits in a meditative position in a quiet room and tries to attain a state of relaxed attention (no thoughts, no reasoning, no reflection). It is common for the meditator to have been posed a paradox - **koan -** the answer to which may come in these sessions. These are supposed to train monks to give up on logical reasoning and force sudden intuitive enlightenment. Dogen, the founder of Soton Zen, said that zazen in itself could

constitute enlightenment.

**VISUALISATION** (of Buddha or bodhisattva) - This involves calming the mind and visualising Buddhas or bodhisattvas to develop compassion. It is common to Chinese (Chan) and Tibetan Buddhism. It may include trying to recreate an image in one’s mind - of a mandala, an tangkha (image of a Buddha in their heaven, e.g. Amitabha), a Buddha, e.g. Guan Yin (Bodhisattva of compassion), a Buddha heaven, or a mantra. The meditator is trying to see what it would be like to be the subject or in the place being visualised.

**CEREMONIES AND RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH DEATH AND MOURNING**

Buddhists contemplate death throughout their lives, not only before they are about to die. It was one of the Four Sights. It is a stage in the cycle of samsara, and an example of anicca (impermanence) so a learning tool. Many Buddhists meditate on death and dying.

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| Theravada funerals  | * Little money spent
* Family and friends may donate to a worthy cause and transfer the merit to the deceased.
* Rituals that transfer merit to the deceased may be performed by family members to other mourners. E.g. They may offer cloth to make new robes to a monastery on behalf of the dead person.

At the funeral itself the following may happen* A shrine may display the deceased’s portrait, along with an image of the Buddha and offerings to the Buddha.
* Monks often attend the funerals of lay people and perform rituals or give a sermon.
* The deceased may be cremated or buried, although cremation is traditional.
* All mourners send good thoughts to the family and contemplate impermanent.
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| Funerals in Tibet  | * Sky burial is a traditional practice. The body is left in a high place as a gift to the vultures.
* However, it is now more common to burn the body. (Revered teachers have always been cremated)
* Ceremonies involving prayers and offerings of yak-butter lamps may be made every 7 days for 49 days after death.
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| Funerals in Japan | * Funeral rites last several days.
* Procession to the temple. Coffin placed in front of items to invoke paradise. Mourners give money.
* Priest kneels before the coffin and recite sutras and Family offer respect to the dead.
* Body is burned, while a family meal takes place. Ashes/bones are placed into a box using special chopsticks. This is put out on the family shrine
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**FESTIVALS AND RETREATS**

Festivals specifically commemorate an event/person which is historically important. They could be seen as the religions outward, public face. Retreats are a total focus on the religion, as if going inward away from the public gaze its aim to deepen understanding of Buddhist practice.

**WESAK:** Wesak recalls the birth, enlightenment and the death of the Buddha, each of which happened in May on the night of the full moon. The Buddha’s teachings help everyone and the Buddhist path is seen as one of peace - hence the importance of this festival.

During the festival the laity follows Eight Precepts (the Five Precepts plus refraining from singing/dancing/ wearing garlands and perfume, eating after midday and sleeping in luxurious beds). They attend temple and make offerings to the temple, but also to the vulnerable of society (giving), and restate their commitment to the precepts (virtue). They participate in chanting scriptures, listening to sermons, and in meditation (Cultivation), as well as doing good deeds (Merit-making). Some Buddhists wear white (novice) robes and spend the whole day/evening at the temple. Many pour water over statues of the Buddha, as if

washing them, and put garlands of flowers over them.

**PARINIRVANA DAY:** For Mahayana Buddhists, **Parinirvana Day** recalls the day that the Buddha died, so he reached nibbana. For most Buddhists this day is 15th February. It is important because it reminds of final death, ceasing to be reborn - the goal of all Buddhists. Buddhists should reflect on their future death and on any recent death. The day involves attending temple and/or meditation. Some spend the day reading/reciting sutras (especially Parinirvana sutra). Prayers will be said for the recently deceased to try to send them merit for their journey. Many Buddhists give money and items to support monks at monasteries. It is also a traditional day for pilgrimage in Asia.

**COMPASSION (KARUNA):** This is mercy or compassion – feeling concerned for the suffering of others and wanting to relieve it. It is one of the four sublime states which Buddhists are constantly urged to develop in themselves (loving-kindness, compassion, being happy for others and stable/calm in the face of happiness or suffering). It is a virtue or state of mind which leads to a sense of selflessness. It is important to Mahayana Buddhists who view it as an essential quality for becoming a Bodhisattva. The Buddha is the model of compassion and wisdom - compassion without wisdom can lead to harmful actions. The whole point of the Noble Eightfold Path is to develop wisdom and compassion.

**KARMA AND REBIRTH**

Karma/Kamma means ‘action’. Buddhists believe that all intentional actions/thoughts/words have consequences. Actions can be skilful or unskilful - skilful actions bringing positive futures consequences, unskilful actions bringing negative ones. Since the key is ‘intention’, having generally good morality can outweigh unskilful action to some extent (i.e. one unskilful action does not necessarily define a future lifetime, and may even have no consequences). Many Buddhists believe in merit-making building good karma by good deeds - which offsets previous bad karma. Essentially, our rebirth (**samsara)** - positive or negative - is defined by our karma.

**METTA**

Metta is loving kindness and a desire for others to be happy. It is selfless - kindness for no personal gain. The act of kindness can be small or large, done for those near or for those far away. The Metta Suttra says, ***‘Whatever beings there may be...may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded.’***

The Dalai Lama once said, ‘My ***religion is simple, my religion is kindness’.***

**KEY TEACHINGS**

**THE SIX PERFECTIONS:** In Mahayana Buddhism these are the virtues perfected by a bodhisattva in the course of their spiritual development and journey towards enlightenment. However, any person can try to be better at any of them - they don’t have to be Buddhist or Bodhisattva.

**Giving/generosity –** Buddhists should give without expecting anything in return.

**Morality –** Buddhist try to follow the 5 moral precepts.

**Patience** – Which is expressed through tolerance and endurance.

**Effort/energy** - This means never getting bored/tired of their practice of the Dhamma.

**Meditation** - This is about becoming able to always see things as they are so as to help others more effectively.

**Wisdom** – Aim to understand the nature of reality.

**THE FIVE PRECEPTS**

The **Five Precepts** are five guidelines for living which all Buddhists laity (ordinary people) must keep to. They are not laws. They are followed in skilful or unskilful ways. To follow them in skilful ways results in good karma, while following the in unskilful ways results in bad karma being generated. Keeping them in a skilful way is a good counter to the Three poisons (greed, hatred, ignorance). Unskilful means ignoring precepts, as well as deliberately breaking them. Buddhism emphasises intention, so thoughts and words matter just as actions do. A Precept can be kept or broken in mind as well as in practice.

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| Skilful | Precept  | Unskilful |
| Helping a homeless person by feedingthem | **First Precept****Abstain from harming sentient beings(any form of feeling life)** | Murdering another person. |
| Being kind with one’s possession so asto share them with others. | **Second Precept****Abstaining from taking that which is not freely given (including not forcing****others to give)** | Persuading someone to give yousomething when you know they don’twant to really. |
| Being faithful in marriage | **Third Precept****Abstain from sexual misconduct****(physical or emotional)** | Making unwanted sexual comments tosomeone. |
| Being honest and kind in speech | **Fourth Precept****Abstain from using false speech****(including being untruthful or unkind with language).** | Telling lies about someone. |
| Not drinking alcohol so as not to beunaware of actions. | **Fifth Precept****Abstain from using intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness (not being concerned about consequences.** | Taking drugs not prescribed asmedicine. |