

Mock Revision notes – B601 – Buddhism

<u>Religious and Spiritual Experience</u>	
Public and private worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of worship• Worship in a vihara and at home• The use and significance of symbolism in worship
Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of meditation• Its purpose and use to deepen faith
Food and fasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of fasting• Use of food and fasting as a spiritual discipline• Food for festivals

Example Question

(a) What is fasting? [1]

(b) List two symbols used in worship by Buddhists. [2]

(c) State three ways Buddhists might worship in the home. [3]

(d) Explain how meditation deepens the faith of a believer. [6]

(e) 'Using symbols helps people to worship.'

Discuss this statement. You should include different, supported points of view and a personal viewpoint. You must refer to Buddhism in your answer. [12]

Total: [24]

Public and Private Worship

Puja is the word that Buddhists use for worship. Worship is the expression of devotion, respect, admiration and the love for something. It is a means of gaining access to your emotions, your deepest thought and feelings, your true nature. For most religions the object of worship is God. For Buddhists, puja means investigating the true nature of life in order to reveal enlightenment. So Buddhists do not worship the Buddha as a God and when it seems like they are it could be argued that they are showing respect and admiration for the Buddha and his ideals and characteristics.

There are three aspects of Buddhist puja:

1. Looking inwards: The first step is to look in oneself for those qualities that are worthy of respect, love and admiration. These will be positive characteristics (meditation).
2. Development: Next, the worshipper will want to develop those qualities to make them stronger and bring them to the surface (meditation).
3. Extension: Here the idea is to spread these positive feelings so that they reach all beings. Buddhists try to develop and spread emotions through various activities and rituals that involve movement, sound, colour and artefacts. (prayer wheels, prayer flags).

Worship in a Vihara (a Buddhist monastery) and at home

There are no set rules to Buddhist worship. Buddhists do not have to worship for a set amount of time. Some will only worship at home at a shrine. Others go to a temple for worship – some daily, some only at special festivals.

Worship at home

Many lay Buddhists use a shrine to worship at home and each feature of the shrine will have a symbolic meaning for example;

Statue / image of the Buddha – to symbolise the qualities and characteristics of Buddhahood.

Flowers / leaves – to symbolise anicca.

Water – to symbolise pure respect for life.

A candle – to symbolise enlightenment.

Incense – to symbolise Dhamma, the law of life, operating in the universe.

Fruit – to symbolise anatta.

Puja can be described as a celebration of life, and so the objects that are found at a shrine can represent the things that are essential for sustaining life: water, food, shelter, light and warmth. They can also be seen as objects to stimulate the five senses: taste, sight, smell, hearing and touch.

The shrine will be kept clean and tidy as Buddhist would consider the shrine as reflecting their state of mind and even influencing it if the shrine was dirty or untidy it might hinder the Buddhist's spiritual progress.

Buddhists will usually bow to shrines and some will even prostrate (lying face down) themselves in front of shrines. They do this as a sign of respect and this reflects the culture of many Buddhist countries. They also bow to indicate the denial of the ego (anatta).

Buddhists may also chant as part of their worship. The teachings that are chanted are usually in a foreign or ancient language and it is not essential to understand their meaning although many Buddhists will find it helpful to translate the meanings. Chanting for Buddhists is a way of showing their commitment to the Dhamma (the law of life and the teachings of Buddha – the truth) and of sharing their commitment with others. It is an inclusive practice: anyone can do it as it requires no special skills. It has a very calming effect on the mind because of the regular rhythm and so it can be used in preparation for meditation. It is also a way for Buddhists to feel connected to those members of the Sangha (Buddhist community) who they are with but also those followers of the Dhamma from former ages who chanted the same teachings.

Example chant translations – 'I dedicate my life to the Buddha of Infinite Light'; 'I dedicate my life to the Dharma and the law of cause and effect (Karma) in eternity.'

Worship in a Vihara

The Buddhist place of worship is called a Vihara, also referred to as Temple or Centre. Buddhists worship there whenever they can. The Vihara (monastery) is traditionally the focal point for corporate worship and communal life. They are not closed communities just for the monks and nuns, and ordinary lay Buddhists visit the monasteries for worship or study.

Viharas and temples are centres of Buddhist social life, not just places of worship. Many shrines and temples contain fine examples of religious architecture, paintings and sculptures which remind Buddhists of key beliefs and events in the life of the Buddha.

The most important, and often most beautiful, part of the Vihara/centre is the shrine hall. Within the shrine there is always a Buddhharupa (Buddha figure), and sometimes a relic of the Buddha himself. Buddhist shrines and temples are often built to symbolise the Five Elements of the universe, i.e. earth, water, fire, air, and consciousness. They may also have a smaller representation of these symbols called a stupa actually on the shrine. Buddhists light candles and incense in front of the Buddhharupa.

For Buddhists, the use of incense is symbolic of both devotion and the Buddha's teaching spreading throughout the world. The Candles are representative of the Buddha's wisdom. Buddhists also offer flowers which represent both beauty and impermanence. Eight bowls of water are often put on shrines to represent the eight traditional offerings given to an honoured guest in ancient India. Offerings are often made while chanting special verses or mantras.

Buddhists take off their shoes before going into the Virhara, Centre or Temple. They go up to the Buddhharupa and bow to it, seeking comfort and inspiration from thoughts of the Buddha. When they bow they are mindful of the purity, radiance and peace of the Buddha - it is an act of humility, putting the ego-self low and the ideal of Buddhahood high. It is also an act of acknowledgement and gratitude to the Buddha and all those who have tread the same path before them.

Vihara Activities –collective meditation and chanting, prayer flags, prayer wheels and teaching and learning of Buddhist teaching and beliefs.

Use and significance of symbolism in worship

As well as the symbolism of objects laid out at a shrine there are other symbols used by Buddhist in their worship. For example mala (prayer beads) and the vajra (handle / weapon).

Statues and images of the Buddha are sometimes known as rupas and these are usually a wealth of symbolic meanings and messages included in these. For example, a rupa with one palm held up and facing outwards symbolises determination and courage as the Buddha once raised his hand in this way to halt a stampeding elephant that was heading in his direction. Rupas often have large stomachs and this symbolises contentment and happiness. Symbols are also used in images of Bodhisattvas.

Symbols are used to assist a Buddhist in deepening and developing their religion and therefore symbols help a Buddhist to reach enlightenment. Symbols remind Buddhists of important truths and teachings relating to Buddhism and also provide a focus in meditation.

Meditation

The purpose of Buddhists is to reach enlightenment. Enlightenment occurs when a person has developed the wisdom to see life as it really is. Samatha meditation allows Buddhists to concentrate their mind and vipassana meditation allows Buddhists to gain an insight into the true nature of life. Therefore, meditation brings Buddhists closer to enlightenment and thus deepens their faith.

Samatha meditation enables Buddhists to concentrate their minds. This meditation usually involves focusing on an object or their breathing. The human mind is often full of useless thoughts and worries and samatha clears the mind of these pollutants. The Buddha said, 'a discipline mind leads to happiness', and this is exactly what samatha meditation does, it trains and disciplines the mind so

it is ready to learn the true nature of life. Therefore, samatha meditation puts Buddhists on the starting block to learn the true nature of life and allows them to begin to deepen their faith.

Vipassana meditation is meditation that results in a person receiving wisdom about the true nature of life. It is one thing to understand the meaning of the three universal truths of anicca, anatta and dukkha but it is a step further to really feel these truths. Vipassana meditation is a skill and it must be taught by a master. Vipassana deepens the faith of Buddhists as it helps them to gain full knowledge and appreciate the nature of life which is essential on the path to enlightenment.

Food and Fasting

‘He who lives only for pleasures, and whose soul is not in harmony, who considers not the food he eats, is idle, and has not the power of virtue – such a man is moved by mara (evil one), is moved by selfish temptations, even as a weak tree is shaken by the wind.’

Dhammapada

Fasting is the practice of restricting or temporary halting food intake. Religious fasting occurs to assist the religious person in developing their spirituality and deepening their faith.

The Buddha himself discovered that fasting did not help him to reach enlightenment and he only reached enlightenment when he practised moderation in his approach to food. Therefore, many Buddhist simply follow the Buddha’s stance. There are certainly no set rules in relation to fasting although some Buddhists do find it beneficial.

When and why do Buddhists fast?

Some Buddhist monks fast completely on the days of the full moon and new moon of each lunar month and many Buddhists never eat solid after noon. They do this to control their desires, discipline the mind and purify the body and therefore, the mind. Other Buddhists make a permanent decision to eat low on the food chain which they believe creates merit, serves the planet and all living things and shows compassion to the starving.

Buddhists also use food as symbols on their shrines and there is a long standing tradition of offering food to monks in many Buddhist countries and this is seen as maintaining and developing a spiritual connection between the monks and the rest of the community.

Food is an integral part of Wesak, the most important Buddhist festival and on this day food is offered to monks but also to poor people.

Although Buddhists do not thank God for their food like other religions they do still use meal times as an opportunity to develop their faith and focus their mind.

A Buddhist Meal Chant

First, let us reflect on our own work and the effort of those who brought us this food. Second, let us be aware of the quality of our deeds as we receive this meal. Third, what is most essential is the practice of mindfulness, which helps us to transcend greed, anger and delusion. Fourth, we appreciate this food which sustains the good health of our body and mind. Fifth, in order to continue our practice for all beings we accept this offering.