

1. Meditation

Meditation is a rigorous spiritual discipline which involves calming the mind in order to reflect upon key Buddhist teachings. Crucially mediation was the method by which the Buddha became enlightened and it is a necessary part of both lay and monastic Buddhist practise.

Before Buddhists start meditating they may recite verses praising the **three refugees; the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha**. For Theravada Buddhist, they may recite the five moral precepts. Meditating itself usually involves the practice of mindfulness of the body and breath.

Samatha meditation

This type of meditation us used in Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana. Samatha is to concentrate the mind, disciplining it to focus rather than be distracted. Samatha meditation cultivates mindfulness and awareness of the **5 khandas (aggregates; form, sensation, perception, mental formations & consciousness)** leading to attainment of higher states of consciousness.

These states of consciousness are called Jhanas, and at each stage the mind becomes increasingly detached from world of sense desire. This meditation might focus on breathing for example.

For samatha, the meditator will focus on one neutral object or process, such as the 5 khandas.

These are earth, water, fire, wind, blue.

What is the purpose?

Learning to focus on one object/breathing helps you to develop a calm and concentrated mind.

This is preparation for wisdom and understanding the nature of reality (can be achieved in Vipassana meditation).

SOW: 'breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness and unites your body through thoughts' Thich Nhat Hanh.

Vipassana Meditation

Vipassana meditation is often called insight meditation. This is because the purpose is to gain insight into the true nature of reality and to see things as they really are. It may consist of reflecting upon the **three marks of existence(anicca, dukkha, antta)**. This type of meditation will often help Buddhists develop greater wisdom and awareness of the world. This mediation gets you to reach enlightenment!

Also, mediation is part of the Eightfold Path and the purpose is to develop complete understanding and achieve enlightenment. Vipassana meditation allows for this to happen; it is a more skilful type of meditation.

Metta bhavana meditation

Loving-kindness meditation is a common form of meditation in Buddhism. Its aim is to help the meditator develop an attitude of metta, firstly towards themselves and then towards everyone else in the world. The meditator usually visualises or imagines someone looking happy. They may reflect on the positive qualities of that person and any kind acts they have done. *SOW: 'Radiate kindness all over the world'*

Visulisation

This is a Mahayana tradition. It requires the meditator to visualise an object in their minds – this is usually the Buddha or a Boddhisattva. They will visualise this in as much detail as possible. They believe by doing this it allows for deeper concentration but mainly allows them to awaken their buddha-nature. They also think it may reduce suffering, encourage compassion which is important for enlightenment

2. Chanting

Chanting exists in all types of Buddhism and is used either to prepare for mediation by focusing the mind or as a form of devotional practice towards the Buddha and also Bodhisattvas. For example, Theravada Buddhists might chant the names of the three jewels (Buddha, Sangha, Dhamma).

Theravadin practice will often involve the recitation of refuge in the Buddha, sangha and the dhamma. At home this might be in front of a small shrine of the Buddha, or lay people might visit a vihara.

Nam Myoho Renge Kho is a chant from the Mahayana tradition and more specifically from Nicheren Buddhism.

So, chanting in Buddhism is reciting from the Buddhist scriptures.

Living the Buddhist Life

4.Places of Worship

Buddhists can practise at home or in a temple. There are many different types of place of worship in Buddhism which reflect the different denominational strands within it. Another name for worship is puja.

Monasteries/vihara

In Theravada Buddhism, the central place of worship is a **vihara (monastery)**. This typically also houses the monastery and traditionally would have been resting places for monks during the rainy season. This is a place where Buddhist monks who have dedicated their life to full time spiritual practise will live.

Temples

Temples are typically found within Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. They are designed around the five elements and are supposed to represent the pure land environment that the Buddha resides in. Temple also covers buildings known also as stupas (mounds in which relics of the Buddha are contained) and pagodas which are a development of stupas. Depending on the size and function of the Buddhist temple may include:

A main hall or building- where Buddhist practise together; this will contain a statue of the Buddha (Mahayana temples will contain statues of various Bodhisattvas)

A meditation hall or building- this is a quiet space where Buddhist can meditate; in Tibetan Buddhism this is known as a **gompa**

A study hall- this is for meeting or lectures

A library- this is where they can learn more about the Buddha and his teachings.

A shrine or number of shrines dedicated to the Buddha (or in Mahayana temples to a Bodhisattva)

A pagoda or stupa- which is a tiered tower or mound-like structure that is sometimes used to contain holy relics

3. Mantra

A mantra is a collection of words or syllables that are repeated as a form of Buddhist practice. Repeating a mantra helps to still and focus the mind, but also can be a sign of devotion to a doctrine, scripture or bodhisattva.

The most common mantra, used in Tibetan Buddhists, is *om mani padme hum*. This represents the sound of compassion, and is associated with the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avolokiteshvara. By chanting this mantra, they often feel that it helps them to better express this quality of their lives

Buddhists might use **prayer beads (mala)** in order to count the number of mantras that they recite. In viharas and temples you may see Buddhists making offerings to the Buddha of food or clothes.

These are often then used by the monks. These offerings are somewhat confusing as the Buddha is not a god, but an extraordinary human being. Likewise, Buddhists understand that he is dead but that somehow there is a connection with the Buddha. In Tibetan Buddhism, these offerings are given to encourage the bodhisattvas to answer adherent's prayers.



5. Puja

Puja translates as **devotion or worship**. This might be shown through bowing, chanting or meditation. It expresses **gratitude to the Buddha** for the teachings and also reverence or respect.

Puja can be offered informally at home or in the temple. Often lay people will visit the temple on poya/holy days and these pujas will be more detailed and ritualistic.

6. Death and Mourning

In **Theravada Buddhism** the only life cycle events which are celebrated are ordination (becoming monk) and funerals. Other events such as marriage are seen as too worldly. Funerals often involve the monks and are seen as a good opportunity to reflect upon key Buddhist principles such as **anicca or impermanence**.

Actions are performed which are seen to help the dead person; the **kamma** generated from the ceremony is transferred to them. For example, they might offer cloth to make new robes to a senior monk of a nearby monastery on behalf of the deceased person.

A **shrine** may be set up to display the deceased portrait, along with offerings of flowers, incense and candles to the Buddha.

After the funeral, at fixed intervals the grieving family offer meals to the monks to transfer the kamma to the dead person.

The will then be cremated or buried but cremation is more common as there is no attachment to the body (no self). All mourners will remember anicca.

In **Tibetan Buddhism** the funeral rituals are very different. One of the best know is a 'Tibetan Sky Burial' in which the body is left in a high place as a gift for the vultures to eat. This is generosity (one of the six perfections). **The Tibetan book of the dead** is read to the dead person in-between dying and reincarnation. It is thought to describe bardo, or the intermediate state between death in this life and rebirth in the next.



Clarify

Key words: YOU NEED TO KNOW THE DEFINITION OF ALL THESE!

Anicca, anatta, dukkha, metta, karuna, skilful, nirvana, reincarnation, energy, devotion, puja, mindfulness, eightfold path, 5 precepts, 3 jewels, sangha, wisdom, sila, panna, samadhi, temple, monastery, gompa, prayer beads

7. Festivals and Retreats

There are a large number of festivals within Buddhism, partly due to the different denominations within the tradition. There is some cross over between them all.

- **Wesak** – this is celebrated on the full moon of the Indian calendar; this usually falls in May/June. The day celebrates the **birth, life and enlightenment of the Buddha**. Wesak is a joyous festival where Buddhists will chant, meditate, focus on the three jewels, Buddhists will also make offerings symbolising impermanence such as flowers and incense sticks. They will also decorate their homes with candles and lanterns. They will really focus on the Buddha's life and his enlightenment.
- **Parinivarna Day** – this is a Mahayana festival that is celebrated in February to celebrate the Buddha's passing to Nirvana. It is a more solemn occasion than Wesak. For Buddhists, it is a chance to reflect on their future death, remember friends/relatives. The focus of anicca is the centre of the day.
- In Theravada Buddhism the **Vassa/rain retreat** is a three-month celebration in which the monks retreat to the monasteries to meditate and chant. This is determined by the lunar calendar and usually begins around July. It traditionally occurred during the rainy or monsoon season. The lay people show their devotion by supporting the monks with food and drink. They may also increase the focus on their practice by giving up smoking or drinking - for this reason sometimes vassa is referred to as Buddhist lent. This is a good retreat/festival as it allows them to avoid distraction from the outer world and focus on meditating, which will help them reach enlightenment.
- **Kathina** occurs at the end of Vassa and is a time of alms giving. Lay people will offer cloth to the monks to make their robes, following the tradition set by the Buddha.
- **Upostha** is a day of observance used to help cleanse the mind. On this day lay people will make a special effort to keep the 5 precepts. The monks will make confessions of mistakes they have made in order to cleanse themselves of the infraction. This could occur roughly once a week in Theravadin traditions, and at slightly different intervals in Mahayana.
- **Hanamatsuri** is a Japanese Buddhist celebration of the Buddha's birth on April the 8th. It is also known as the floral festival as buildings are covered in flowers.
- **Obon** is a three-day festival in Japan in which the spirits of the ancestors are honoured. Followers will return to graves and clean them as well as offer prayers and chants. This is a blend of Buddhist and Confucius traditions.
- **Lama Tsong Khapa Day** is a Tibetan festival which celebrates the enlightenment of Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). On this day all merit from karma is increased. Buddhists would therefore be increasingly focussed on ethical practice like keeping the 5 precepts or studying his teachings.

- a) Outline three Buddhist festivals (3 marks)
- b) Explain two reasons why Gompas are important (4 marks)
- c) Explain two reasons why metta bhavana is important to Buddhists. Refer to a sow (5 marks)
- d) 'Greater understanding is gained by chanting' (12 marks)

- a) Outline three things in a Meditation hall (3 marks)
- b) Explain two things on a shrine (4 marks)
- c) Explain two Buddhist mourning traditions. Refer to a sow (5 marks)
- d) 'Wesak is the most important festival'

Aim to complete questions a-d in 25 mins.



Question