

BUDDHIST Religion Information Sheet for Education Providers

Background of Religion:

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BuddhaNet Basic Buddhism Guide A Five Minute Introduction

• What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is a religion to about 350 million people around the world. The word comes from 'budhi', 'to awaken'. It has its origins about 2,550 years ago when Siddhartha Gotama, known as the Buddha, was himself awakened (enlightened) at the age of 35.

• Is Buddhism a Religion?

To many, Buddhism goes beyond religion and is more of a philosophy or 'way of life'. It is a philosophy because philosophy 'means love of wisdom' and the Buddhist path can be summed up as:

- (1) to lead a moral life,
- (2) to be mindful and aware of thoughts and actions, and
- (3) to develop wisdom and understanding.

• How Can Buddhism Help Me?

Buddhism explains a purpose to life, it explains apparent injustice and inequality around the world, and it provides a code of practice or way of life that leads to true happiness.

• Why is Buddhism Becoming Popular?

Buddhism is becoming popular in western countries for a number of reasons, The first good reason is Buddhism has answers to many of the problems in modern materialistic societies. It also includes (for those who are interested) a deep understanding of the human mind (and natural therapies) which prominent psychologists around the world are now discovering to be both very advanced and effective.

In the 2006 Australian Census, Buddhism ranked second after Christianity in the number of followers and demonstrated a substantial rate of growth, contrasting with the other faiths that actually showed decline.

Buddhism in Australia was established originally by the immigrants from Asian countries as early as the mid-1800's, however today the upsurge is from within the broader community. There are now more than ninety Buddhist centres and groups within Queensland, each supporting teaching programs in both English and other languages that include Thai, Sri Lankan, Lao, Burmese, Vietnamese and Cambodian, Japanese, Korean and Tibetan.

• Who Was the Buddha?

Siddhartha Gotama was born into a royal family in Lumbini, now located in Nepal, in 563 BC. At 29, he realised that wealth and luxury did not guarantee happiness, so he explored the different teachings religions and philosophies of the day, to find the key to human happiness. After six years of study and meditation he finally found 'the middle path' and was enlightened. After enlightenment, the Buddha spent the next 45 years of his life teaching the principles of Buddhism — called the

Dhamma, or Truth — until his death at the age of 80.

- **Was the Buddha a God?**

He was not, nor did he claim to be. He was a man who taught a path to enlightenment from his own experience.

- **Do Buddhists Worship Idols?**

Buddhists sometimes pay respect to images of the Buddha, not in worship, nor to ask for favours. A statue of the Buddha with hands rested gently in its lap and a compassionate smile reminds us to strive to develop peace and love within ourselves. Bowing to the statue is an expression of gratitude for the teaching.

- **Why are so Many Buddhist Countries Poor?**

One of the Buddhist teachings is that wealth does not guarantee happiness and also wealth is impermanent. The people of every country suffer whether rich or poor, but those who understand Buddhist teachings can find true happiness.

- **Are There Different Types of Buddhism?**

There are many different types of Buddhism, because the emphasis changes from country to country due to customs and culture. The significant traditions available in Queensland today are Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, Pure Land and Zen.

What does not vary is the essence of the teaching — the Dharma or truth, and calm meditation.

The teachings were first preserved in text form around 83 BCE in Pali and Sanskrit, and became known as the Pali Canon, or Tipitaka, consisting of many volumes and over 12,800 pages.

- **Are Other Religions Wrong?**

Buddhism is also a belief system which is tolerant of all other beliefs or religions. Buddhism agrees with the moral teachings of other religions but Buddhism goes further by providing a long term purpose within our existence, through wisdom and true understanding. Real Buddhism is very tolerant and not concerned with labels like 'Christian', 'Moslem', 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist'; that is why there have never been any wars fought in the name of Buddhism. That is why Buddhists do not preach and try to convert, only explain if an explanation is sought.

- **Is Buddhism Scientific?**

Science is knowledge which can be made into a system, which depends upon seeing and testing facts and stating general natural laws. The core of Buddhism fit into this definition, because the Four Noble truths (see below) can be tested and proven by anyone, in fact the Buddha himself asked his followers to test the teaching rather than accept his word as true. Buddhism depends more on understanding than faith. Buddhists often use the term 'experiential' to describe their acknowledgement and understanding of the truths as they examine and test their validity.

- **How do I Become a Buddhist?**

Buddhist teachings can be understood and tested by anyone. Buddhism teaches that the solutions to our problems are within ourselves not outside. The Buddha asked all his followers not to take his word as true, but rather to test the teachings for themselves. In this way, each person decides for themselves and takes responsibility for their own actions and understanding. This makes Buddhism less of a fixed package of beliefs which is to be accepted in its entirety, and more of a teaching which each person learns and uses in their own way.

Beliefs:

• What did the Buddha Teach?

The Buddha taught many things, but the basic concepts in Buddhism can be summed up by the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

• What is the First Noble Truth?

The first truth is that life is suffering i.e., life includes pain, getting old, disease, and ultimately death. We also endure psychological suffering like loneliness frustration, fear, embarrassment, disappointment and anger. This is an irrefutable fact that cannot be denied. It is realistic rather than pessimistic because pessimism is expecting things to be bad. Instead, Buddhism explains how suffering can be avoided and how we can be truly happy.

• What is the Second Noble Truth?

The second truth is that suffering is caused by craving and aversion. We will suffer if we expect other people to conform to our expectation, if we want others to like us, if we do not get something we want, etc. In other words, getting what you want does not guarantee happiness. Rather than constantly struggling to get what you want, try to modify your wanting. Wanting deprives us of contentment and happiness. A lifetime of wanting and craving and especially the craving to continue to exist, creates a powerful energy which causes the individual to be born. So craving leads to physical suffering because it causes us to be reborn.

• What is the Third Noble Truth?

The third truth is that suffering can be overcome and happiness can be attained; that true happiness and contentment are possible. If we give up useless craving and learn to live each day at a time (not dwelling in the past or the imagined future) then we can become happy and free. We then have more time and energy to help others. This is Nirvana.

• What is the Fourth Noble Truth?

The fourth truth is that the Noble 8-fold Path is the path which leads to the end of suffering.

• What is the Noble 8-Fold Path?

In summary, the Noble 8-fold Path is being moral (through what we say, do and our livelihood), focussing the mind on being fully aware of our thoughts and actions, and developing wisdom by understanding the Four Noble Truths and by developing compassion for others. These eight paths are Right- View, Intention, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Ethics, Mindfulness and Concentration.

• What are the 5 Precepts?

The moral code within Buddhism is the precepts, of which the main five are: not to take the life of anything living, not to take anything not freely given, to abstain from sexual misconduct and sensual overindulgence, to refrain from untrue speech, and to avoid intoxication, that is, losing mindfulness.

• What is Karma?

Karma is the law that every cause has an effect, i.e., our actions have results. This simple law explains a number of things: inequality in the world, why some are born handicapped and some gifted, why some live only a short life. Karma underlines the importance of all individuals being responsible for their past and present actions. How can we test the karmic effect of our actions? The answer is summed up by looking at (1) the intention behind the action, (2) effects of the action on

oneself, and (3) the effects on others.

Karma is what feeds the continuous cycle of birth, old-age, sickness and death we call samsara, which is the source of each re-birth that continues until we become enlightened, which then extinguishes that cycle instantly. Karma generated in this life may not necessarily be the sole causes of one's conditions in their next life - it may take many re-births before a certain action's karma may ripen.

• **What is Wisdom?**

Buddhism teaches that wisdom should be developed with compassion. At one extreme, you could be a goodhearted fool and at the other extreme, you could attain knowledge without any emotion. Buddhism uses the middle path to develop both. The highest wisdom is seeing that in reality, all phenomena are incomplete, impermanent and do not constitute a fixed entity. True wisdom is not simply believing what we are told, but instead, experiencing and understanding truth and reality. Wisdom requires an open, objective, un-biased mind. The Buddhist path requires courage, patience, flexibility and intelligence.

• **What is Compassion?**

Compassion includes qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, sympathy, concern, caring. In Buddhism, we can really understand others, when we can really understand ourselves, through wisdom.

Issues that education providers will be most interested in:

Issue	Explanation or Actions to take
Dress	<p>There are no prescribed dress codes other than to dress modestly and avoid garishness (attachment to any-thing including fashion, hairstyles, clothes etc, defeats effective Buddhist practice) but this remains in the hands of the individual person.</p> <p>The only item that might be thought of as jewellery a Buddhist might wear, that may be part of their Buddhist practice is a set of prayer beads, called "mala" – either a 21-27 bead wrist band worn on the left-wrist, or a longer 108-bead thread that can be wrapped around the left-wrist or neck, but neither are compulsory and can be removed or concealed as required, but should not then be allowed to touch the ground (if they have been blessed).</p> <p>Some may also wear a single thin coloured piece of string around their neck or wrist – this is a "blessing string" and should not be removed.</p> <p>Other Buddha or other pendants etc, although they should not be used as a fashion accessory per se, are often used to help reinforce one's mindfulness, but can also be removed or covered if necessary, and stored appropriately with respect.</p>
Diet	<p>Since the first precept all Buddhist's accept is the principle of "no-harm", meaning that killing an animal for one's own benefit is not good karma. However this is also governed by the choices of food available in the region a person lives and one must eat to survive to complete one's own life journey.</p> <p>For those Buddhists not ordained monks or nuns, the choice is flexible as to what extent, if at all, they practice vegetarianism or variants.</p>

	<p>In social gatherings however, it is always considered appropriate to offer vegetarian food options so as to not cause distress to those who elect for this option. Some Buddhist followers also do not eat garlic or onion.</p>
<p>Camps</p>	<p>Buddhism is a holistic philosophy that encourages an experiential approach to life, believing that any moment in one's life may become the catalyst for enlightenment (the goal of all Buddhists), and engaging in such activities poses no issue to the philosophy.</p> <p>The only issues that may arise is that of the meals provided (see above) or certain sports (see below) and other possible activities such as fishing (killing other sentient life), etc.</p>
<p>Sports</p>	<p>Buddhism is a holistic philosophy that encourages an experiential approach to life, believing that any moment in one's life may become the catalyst for enlightenment (the goal of all Buddhists), and engaging in such activities poses no issue to the philosophy.</p> <p>However, where sports are of the "combatant" or "full contact" form, it would be appropriate to seek the consent of both the person and their parents as to their willingness to participate in that particular form of sport, since they may not wish to inflict harm on the other person (or themselves).</p> <p>Motivating slogans along the lines of "Kill the opposition", "murder your opponent", "Give 'em hell" etc, are not deemed appropriate messages for any person or group, instead focussing on messages such as "let's try our hardest", "let's show them what we can do" etc are far more positive stimulators.</p>
<p>Prayers</p>	<p>Depending on the particular tradition and the level of commitment to Buddhist practice a person has, there may be subtle displays of a short prayer before a meal or of a quiet meditative sitting period, however these should never be performed in a manner that attracts undue attention to the person or is disruptive to others – in such cases, requesting they refrain from doing so or do so elsewhere is appropriate.</p> <p>Respect for other people is an overriding principle in Buddhism, as is respect for other person's beliefs and practices.</p>
<p>Religious Education Curriculum</p>	<p>Buddhists would generally opt for a Buddhist-focus RI but are able to participate in any general RI curriculum that expresses mutual respect for all faiths and belief-systems without proselytising or expecting full acceptance for, or understanding of, any other faith's views or practices, while sharing and recognising the mutualism of all faith's core values which are, more or less, the same.</p> <p>The two issues that separate Buddhism from the many diverse Abrahamic-based faiths is</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) the concept of a mono-theistic, omnipotent God that is worshiped. Buddhism does not explicitly deny the potential for such an entity but does not hold to the belief that such a God can exert influence on the course of one's life or the existence that sustains it, or expects to be worshiped, and (2) Buddhists hold to the concept of an endless cycle of birth, old-age, sickness and death for all life until they attain

	<p>enlightenment, at which point that cycle ends and they too become a fully realised Buddha in their own right.</p> <p>From the Buddhist perspective then, heaven and hell are merely realms of existence that one may experience in their cycle of rebirths, but none are permanent.</p>
<p>Possible Challenges</p>	<p>The possible issues that might occur include those based on a lack of appreciation about Buddhism, including –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) <u>Buddhists are atheists</u> >> untrue, but the God-concept plays no part in Buddhist philosophy; (2) <u>Buddhists are vulnerable</u> >> true, since most are pacifists, they can become the target for bullying and harassment, and are less likely to engage in violent confrontations or be the protagonists; (3) <u>Buddhists and biology</u> >> killing and dissection of specimens may be rejected by Buddhist students on faith grounds and should be accepted (Asian medicine was developed largely without anatomical dissection or examination, and yet delivers profound results).
<p>Contact Details</p> <p>To obtain more information on -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o locating the nearest Buddhist centres and groups within Queensland, or o learning more about Buddhism, and/or meditation, or o details about <u>Buddhist Religious Instruction</u> or <u>School Chaplaincy</u> in your school, <p>you can contact the Buddhist Council of Queensland by email at buddhist_council@hotmail.com, by phoning the Council's mobile on 0422 819 379, or by visiting our website at www.buddhistcouncilofqueensland.org</p> <p>The Buddhist Council of Queensland Inc. [BCQ] is constituted as the representative body for Buddhist-based centres, groups and individuals in Queensland, and is the state's voice in the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils [FABC]. The FABC also partners with the Australian Sangha Association [ASA], representing the community of Buddhist monks and nuns to work in supporting Buddhism with all Australian communities, governments and enterprises.</p>	