YEAR 8 · SUMMER 2 · BRANCH 6: ENCOUNTER · KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Buddhism and Suffering

KEY QUESTION

How do Buddhists respond to the issue of suffering?

Key vocabulary

Buddha: 'Awakened one'. The title given to Siddhartha Gautama after his enlightenment.

Dharma: The teaching of the Buddha; the truth about how things are (Pali: *Dhamma*).

Dukkha: Suffering or unsatisfactoriness – the first Noble Truth.

Tanha: Craving or selfish desire – the cause of suffering.

Anicca: Impermanence: everything changes and nothing lasts.

Anatta: No fixed, unchanging self or soul.

Karma: Intentional action and its consequences; the intention behind an action matters most.

Samsara: The cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Nirvana: 'Blowing out' the flames of greed, hatred and ignorance; freedom from samsara.

Enlightenment: Seeing the truth about reality and being freed from suffering.

Bodhisattva: In Mahayana, one who delays final nirvana to help all beings reach enlightenment.

Arhat: In Theravada, a 'worthy one' who has reached nirvana.

Three Jewels: The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha – Buddhists 'take refuge' in them.

Sangha: The Buddhist community, especially monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkhunis).

Meditation: Training the mind: *samatha* (calm) and *vipassana* (insight).

Dalai Lama: Spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, believed to be reborn in each generation.

Two main schools

Theravada ('way of the elders'): Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar. The Buddha as a human teacher; goal to become an **arhat**; strong focus on monastic life.

Mahayana ('great vehicle'): China, Japan, Korea, Tibet. Goal to become a **bodhisattva** who helps all beings; all have Buddha-nature.

The life of Siddhartha

Born a prince in Lumbini (Nepal) and protected from suffering by his father.

The Four Sights: an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a holy man. Aged 29 he left the palace.

The ascetic: six years of starving his body did not bring the truth, so he chose the **Middle Way** between luxury and hardship.

Enlightenment: meditating under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya aged 35.

Gave his first sermon at Sarnath and taught for 45 years.

Four Noble Truths & Eightfold Path

1. **Dukkha** – suffering is everywhere.
2. **Samudaya** – it is caused by craving (tanha).
3. **Nirodha** – suffering can end.
4. **Magga** – the way to end it is the Eightfold Path.

Wisdom: right view, right intention.

Ethics: right speech, right action, right livelihood.

Meditation: right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

Shown as a wheel with eight spokes – the Dharma wheel.

Karma, rebirth and nirvana

Skilful actions from good intentions lead to good results; unskilful ones lead to suffering. For Buddhists the **intention** behind an action is what matters.

Karma shapes rebirth within **samsara**. Because of anatta there is no soul that passes on – like a flame lighting one candle from another.

Death is not the end; the aim is to escape samsara through enlightenment and reach **nirvana**.

Impermanence and the three poisons

Because everything is impermanent (anicca), clinging to things brings suffering. At the centre of the Wheel of Life are the **three poisons**: greed (rooster), hatred (snake) and ignorance (pig).

Key teachings and stories

Four Noble Truths – *Suffering is everywhere; it is caused by selfish desire; we can be rid of it by following the Eightfold Path.*

Impermanence – *"Even happy moments are tainted with dukkha."*

Parable of the arrow – *A man shot by an arrow who demands to know who fired it before it is removed will die. Deal with suffering first rather than asking endless questions.*

'This too shall pass' – *From Jewish folklore about King Solomon: good and bad times are both impermanent.*

Mark 10:17–31 – *The rich young man: Jesus asks him to give up his wealth and follow him.*

Ethical living and money

The Five Precepts: refrain from harming living beings, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants.

Taking refuge in the **Three Jewels** is at the heart of being a Buddhist.

Money is not evil, but **attachment** to it causes suffering. **Right livelihood** means earning a living without harming others; **generosity** (dana) weakens greed. Theravada monks own almost nothing and rely on alms.

Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness: paying full attention to the present moment.

Samatha calms the mind; **vipassana** brings insight into anicca and anatta; **metta** meditation develops loving-kindness.

Mindfulness-based therapy is now used in the NHS to support mental health.

Temples and monastic life

Features: a shrine with a **Buddha rupa** (image), offerings of flowers, candles and incense, a meditation hall and often a **stupa**.

Theravada temples are often simple; Mahayana and Tibetan temples are colourful, with prayer wheels and images of bodhisattvas.

Monks and nuns shave their heads, wear robes and follow the rules of the **Vinaya**. They meditate, study and teach.

In Theravada, monks collect alms and lay people gain merit by giving. In Mahayana, monks often serve the wider community.

The Dalai Lama

When a Dalai Lama dies, monks search for the child he has been reborn as, using signs and tests. The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (born 1935), fled Tibet in 1959 and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. In 2011 he gave up his political role to an elected leader. He is a leading voice for interfaith dialogue.

Check your knowledge

1. What were the Four Sights?
2. Name the Four Noble Truths.
3. Why does intention matter in karma?
4. How is a bodhisattva different from an arhat?
5. How might a Catholic and a Buddhist each respond to suffering?