



## Buddhism key facts

You are expected to know all of the information in this booklet.  
You will be assessed on this knowledge.

### Buddhism

- The founder of Buddhism was a prince called **Siddhartha Gautama**.
- Prince Siddhartha practised meditation in an effort to understand the truth about life. Through this, he eventually achieved **enlightenment**.
- After he achieved enlightenment, he travelled around India, sharing what he had learnt. People who followed him called him the **Buddha** because they believed that he was awakened to the true nature of reality.
- The Buddha never claimed to be a god and the Buddhist scriptures do not mention a creator god.
- Some Buddhists say that they pray, but this does not mean that they pray to a god. Buddhist prayer may involve personal reflection, often through chanting and making offerings.
- One of the most important sacred texts in Buddhism is the **Dhammapada**, which most Buddhists believe is an accurate collection of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha did not write down any of these teachings himself: they were passed on by word of mouth and collected and recorded by his followers in the centuries after his death.
- Buddhist temples always contain a statue of the Buddha.
- Buddhists sometimes bow to the statue of the Buddha as a sign of respect, admiration and appreciation for his teachings, but they do not worship him as a god.

### The cycle of birth, death and rebirth

- Buddhists believe that we are travelling through a continual cycle of birth, death and rebirth. They call this cycle **samsara**.
- Buddhists aim to escape samsara by achieving enlightenment through meditation, wisdom and living a good life.
- Buddhists believe that when someone dies, he or she is reborn. The persons' next life may be better or worse, depending on the **karma** he or she has stored up.
- Good actions in life store up good karma; bad actions store up bad karma.
- Buddhists believe that people who escape samsara enter into a state of complete bliss called **parinirvana**.



## The four sights

- At the age of 29, Siddhartha decided that he wanted to leave the royal grounds for the first time to see the world outside. The king arranged for him to visit one of the royal parks near the palace, but he gave instructions that anyone who was poor, elderly or ill should be kept away.
- Siddhartha saw four things on four different visits (the **four sights**): old age, sickness, death and a holy man.
- On his final journey, the prince rode his horse into the forest, hoping to find peace. As he approached the woodland, he saw an **ascetic** man walking towards him from the trees. The man wore simple robes and explained that he had given up his home, his possessions and his family to search for an answer to all the suffering and unhappiness in the world. Then he disappeared.
- Siddhartha decided to leave his life as a prince – this is known as '**The Great Departure**'. He left his wife and child at the palace and went into the forest where he cut his hair and removed his robes and jewels and replaced them with simple clothes.

## Finding the Middle Way

- While travelling, Siddhartha met five ascetics. Ascetics are people who live a life of simplicity and self-denial. They saw that he was very good at meditation and decided to become his followers. He spent the next 6 years living as an ascetic.
- Ascetics punish their bodies to try and gain peace and wisdom. This can involve fasting, standing on one foot for a long time and sleeping on nails. Siddhartha tried to learn to control his breathing and to starve himself, but this made him ill and he realised he would die if he continued, so he decided to give up his ascetic life. His five ascetic followers found him eating and so they abandoned him.
- Siddhartha's asceticism led him to an important truth - he realised that denying his body what it needed was as bad as being surrounded by luxury. He saw that the only way to reach peace was to follow the **Middle Way**.
- The **Middle Way** is a life of moderation, with neither too much nor too little of anything. This is the way Buddhists live today.

## Achieving enlightenment and becoming the Buddha

- Siddhartha visited the north Indian city of **Bodh Gaya**. He sat down, cross-legged, in the shade of a **Bodhi tree** and began to meditate, saying 'I will not move from this spot until I have found supreme and final wisdom.'
- While he was meditating, the demon **Lord Mara** began to attack him. Eventually, Mara said 'Arise from that seat. It belongs to me!'. Siddhartha said nothing but lowered one of his hands to the ground. The sky filled with thunder and the earth shook. Mara was defeated.
- Siddhartha was finally free to achieve his goal of enlightenment. Siddhartha's enlightenment happened in three steps:
  1. He saw all of the many animal and human lives he had lived before.
  2. He saw the complete cycle of samsara, which was like a wheel, constantly spinning. He realised that the cycle of death and rebirth is determined by karma.
  3. He achieved enlightenment. He had found nirvana and become the **Buddha**.

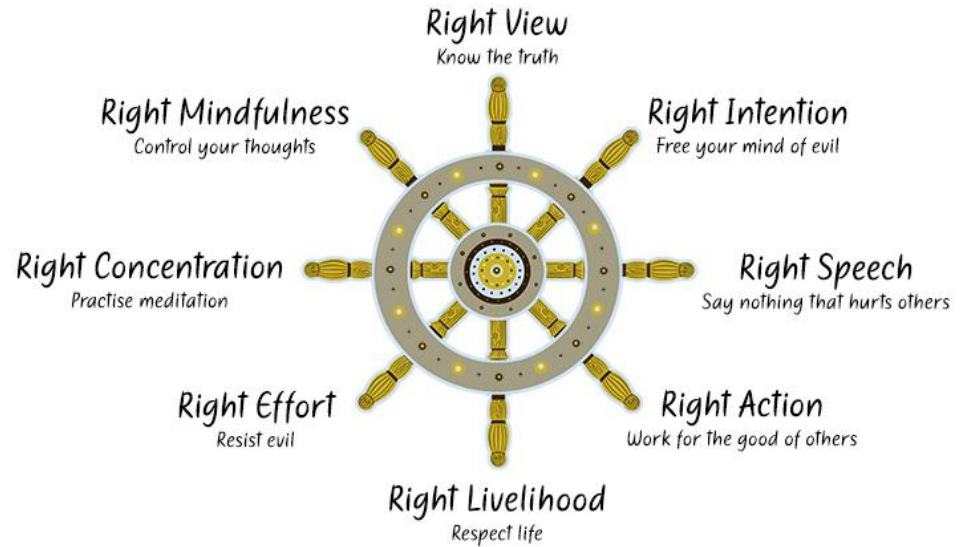
## The teachings of the Buddha

- After his enlightenment, Siddhartha realised he needed to share the truths that he had discovered. He said that he did not create any new ideas – he just tried to explain how the world was. The name that Buddhists give to the laws that Buddha discovered is the **dharm**.
- The Buddha went to a city called **Sarnath** and came to a deer park where he found the five followers who had abandoned him. He preached his first sermon to them, explaining what he had learned under the Bodhi tree. This sermon is called '**Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma**' and its teachings are known as the four noble truths. The ascetics became his followers again after the sermon.

## The four noble truths

- **All creatures suffer** – the Sanskrit word for this is **dukkha**.
- **Suffering is caused by selfish desires** – this could be for material things, for people, or even for immortality.
- **Suffering can be ended** – the way to overcome suffering and achieve nirvana is to eliminate the three poisons of greed, hatred and delusion.
- **The way to end suffering is to follow the eightfold path**

## The Noble Eightfold Path



## The eightfold path

- The eightfold path provides a guide to how Buddhists should live their lives. The eightfold path helps Buddhists to overcome the selfish desires that cause all suffering.
- The eightfold path is not a set of rules that people must follow to please god because Buddhists do not believe that their actions are judged by a god.
- The eight parts all fit together and should not be taken individually. No step is more important than another. By following the path correctly, Buddhists believe that they can escape the suffering of **samsara** and achieve **nirvana**.
- Buddhists believe that people must follow the path in their own way and that they will almost certainly stumble or fall as they journey through life.