

The Buddhist Community in Scouting



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The values, ethos, educational focus and international scope of the Scout Movement are particularly compatible with the teachings of Buddhism. Enabling young people to discover their spirituality within a framework of personal development and 'right doing' is one example of shared core values, and this connection has been recognised in many predominantly Buddhist countries. In Thailand, for example, Scouting is closely linked with the education system and as a result most Scout Leaders are teachers.

Of the 35 million Scouts worldwide, at least 2 million are Buddhists. Buddhists in the United Kingdom originate from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore, Burma and India, with smaller communities that originate from Tibet, Vietnam and China. There has also been an increasing interest in all forms of Buddhism amongst westerners throughout this century. Many practising Buddhists in the United Kingdom are westerners and one movement, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, has developed as a western form of Buddhism.

Buddhism is a commitment to 'right thinking' and living in order to reach enlightenment. The teachings of the Buddha do not dictate a rigid set of rules, but are a guide that sets values and standards of behaviour which should be followed by Buddhists throughout their daily lives. The individual expression of these teachings results in a great diversity of Buddhist practice, which reflect the culture and traditions of the community in which the person lives. However, enlightenment remains the central aim for all Buddhists.



BUDDHISM

Buddhism was founded in the 6th Century BCE (Before Common Era – the term used internationally instead of BC) by a north Indian prince, Siddhartha Gautama. When he was born, astrologers told his father that he would be a great political ruler, unless he saw suffering. If he did, they predicted, he would become a great religious leader instead. As his father wanted Siddhartha Gautama to succeed him, he decided to keep him inside the luxury of the palace. However, one day he went outside the palace walls and saw an old man, then a sick man and then a grieving family by the body of a dead man. It was then that Siddhartha Gautama decided to search for a way that people could escape the everlasting cycle of rebirth. He joined a group of ascetics, but after studying and fasting for six years without becoming enlightened he left his companions and travelled on to Bodh Gaya. Here he sat under the shade of a Bodhi (or 'enlightenment') tree and began to meditate until he became enlightened. He then taught the **four noble truths** and the **eight-fold path**. He became known as **The Buddha**, which means The Enlightened One.

Buddhists believe that achieving enlightenment is to be free of greed, hatred and ignorance, and that all sentient beings will reach Nirvana (see overleaf), however many births it takes. The Buddha is not 'God', though he is revered as one of the Three Refuges (see overleaf). A person who follows the three refuges is a Buddhist. Therefore a Buddhist can re-affirm their faith by consciously taking the three refuges as the guidance within their life.

The **Three Refuges** or **Three Jewels** are:

1. **Buddha:** revered for his teaching and for discovering the truth about the way things are. Images and symbols of the Buddha in temples and shrines are honoured by Buddhists. Common symbols are the Bodhi tree, an eight-spoked wheel (representing the eight-

fold path within the cycle of life) and lotus flowers.

2. **Dharma:** Buddha's teachings, which include the four noble truths and the eight-fold path (see below).
3. **Sangha:** the community of those who follow the Buddhist path.

Gautama Buddha taught that by following the teachings a person can be released from the cycle of death and re-birth and reach **Nirvana** - a state of bliss. He explained Dharma (the teachings) using a parable in which a man crosses a wide river on a raft. The raft carries the traveller from fear to safety, and so he wonders whether to keep such a useful object for the rest of his travels. Buddha taught that the raft was for "getting across, not for retaining", in other words that right teaching takes a person on to the next stage in their journey towards Nirvana. Once they have reached this stage they need new teaching to go further.

Dharma includes:

The Four Noble Truths

Dukkha: suffering is part of life.

Samudaya: suffering occurs as a result of selfish desires.

Nirodha: suffering will cease if we let go of these desires.

Marga: the way to let go of desire is to follow the eight-fold path.

The Eight-fold Path

Right Viewpoint. The first step to happiness is to look at life from the right viewpoint, understanding suffering and the end of suffering.

Right Values. The right way to go about obtaining the things people hope for is to give them their true value. Kindness and love are true values, but a person always thinking of I/me/mine has got false values.

Right Speech. Following this path a person will be wise and helpful in what they say and will not boast, gossip or lie.

Right Behaviour. Buddha taught that this comes from doing good for its own sake not for reward, and that people should "overcome evil with good".

Right Living. A person should work to the best of their ability in an occupation which helps rather than harms living beings.

Right Effort. A person should learn to know themselves and follow the eight-fold path at their own pace. They should avoid evil things and

develop things which give merit, such as love, thoughtfulness and concentration.

Right Mindfulness. A person should develop an attentive calm mind free from unnecessary wants in the search for happiness, for example wanting to eat does not make you unhappy, but an unnecessary desire to eat does.

Right Contemplation. To learn how to control the mind so that a person can develop a calm and happy mind.

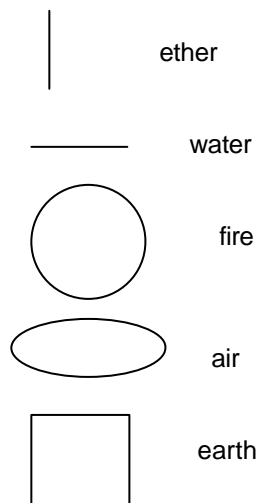
SACRED TEXTS

Buddhism does not have a single authoritative holy book. Instead, Buddhists follow the Buddha's teachings that are written in scriptures which were originally memorised and passed down orally by monks. Buddhists also study texts that record the words of great Buddhist monks and teachers. Theravada Buddhists believe that the scriptures written in Pali (an ancient Indian language) have authority.

WORSHIP AND PRAYER

The central Buddhist belief is **karma** (the law of cause and effect) where good thoughts, word and deeds have good consequences and vice versa. Buddhist rituals are practised individually, and are seen as an important way to achieve good karma. Common rituals include making offerings of flowers, incense, food or (occasionally) money before an image or symbol of Buddha, and walking around an image of Buddha or a temple (always keeping the image to the right as a mark of respect).

A Buddhist holy place can be a **temple**, a **shrine** or a place where relics of Buddha or Buddhist saints are placed. These are called stupas in India, pagodas in Japan, chortens in Tibet and dagobas in Sri Lanka, and are built to symbolise the five elements:



Most Buddhists have a shrine or a statue of Buddha in their own home, and there are temples in most large cities in Britain.

The principal form of spiritual practice is **meditation**. In general there are two stages of meditation. The first is to concentrate on an object (such as a flower, some water or a flame) so that the mind becomes calm and peaceful. The second is to seek insight into the nature of things and to follow the Buddha in seeking enlightenment. This enables the Buddhist to go beyond the calm mind to Nirvana itself.

Other forms of prayer largely reflect the country a Buddhist is from. Some Mahayana Buddhists say **mantras** (sounds or words believed to have a good effect), for example "Om mani padme hum". 'Om' signifies the whole of the universe and 'mani padme hum' (literally 'the jewel in the lotus') signifies that the truth is in the teachings. Other Buddhists use prayer wheels or cylinders, which are turned so that holy words carved on them can send good effects in to the world. Others use prayer flags so that the wind can carry the words printed on them away.

FESTIVALS, HOLY DAYS AND RETREAT

In Buddhism there is an emphasis on daily personal contemplation and devotion. Most Buddhist families do worship together, but this worship usually reflects their own personal circumstances - a family member may be taking an exam or going on a journey - rather than because it is a particular day of the week. Devout lay Buddhists follow all ten precepts (see below) on **Uposatha Days**, which are sacred days which mark the four stages of the moon in each month.

Asala or Dhammacakka Day (Turning of the Wheel of Teaching) usually occurs in July. It celebrates the first proclamation by Gautama Buddha in which he taught the middle way, the noble eight-fold path and the four noble truths. Asala also marks the beginning of Retreat (see below).

Vaisakha Puja or Wesak is celebrated in May or June, and is when Theravada Buddhists celebrate the birth, enlightenment and final passing away of Gautama Buddha. Temples are decorated with lanterns and garlands, and people send Wesak cards. Mahayana Buddhists celebrate these events separately. The festival of Buddha's birth (called **Hana Matsuri** in Japan) is celebrated in April or May. **Bodhi Day** in December commemorates Buddha's attainment of

Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree. **Parinirvana** held in February commemorates the passing from this world of Gautama Buddha at Kushinagara in India at the age of 80.

Poson or Dhamma Vijaya is celebrated in June. It is a Theravada Buddhist festival that celebrates the first preaching of the Buddhist doctrine outside India (particularly marked in Sri Lanka).

Kathina Day is celebrated in October. At the end of three months of Retreat, Theravada Buddhist monks receive new Kathina robes (symbolically made from rags stitched together) which are offered by lay people. The date varies according to the rainy season in different countries.

Lay Krathong (floating candle festival) is celebrated by Theravada Buddhists. It symbolises the Buddha's comparison of the Dharma to a raft that carries a person across the river of ignorance. It is a time for giving thanks to, and asking forgiveness from, the water spirits.

The Buddhist **Retreat** occurs during the rainy season. It is when Buddhist monks, who might be joined by lay people, remain in one place in order to devote their time to study and meditation. Many Buddhist societies in the UK own places for retreat, and some arrange family retreats so that Buddhist parents can fulfil their need to retreat whilst also taking care of their children.

VALUES

The Buddha taught that enlightenment is found by following the **middle way** - by living calmly and without extremes of pleasure or sorrow. **Sangha** (spiritual life) is directed by the Dharma and is shown by the **Ten Precepts** (undertakings).

Buddhists should undertake the rule of training to refrain from:

1. harming life;
2. taking what is not given;
3. being unchaste;
4. false speech;
5. drugs or drink which cloud the mind.

All Buddhists aim to follow the first five precepts throughout their life. Those that dedicate themselves to their sangha (the monastic community and lay people living in monasteries) also follow the latter five precepts daily:

6. to be intemperate in eating and to not eat after noon;

7. to not engage in or witness singing, dancing or the theatre;
8. to not use garlands, perfumes or ornaments;
9. to give up wealth and power ('to not use high or luxurious beds');
10. to give up money ('to not accept gifts of gold or silver').

BEHAVIOUR AND LIFE STYLE

Dharma influences the behaviour and lifestyle of a Buddhist, but it is important to remember that Buddha did not lay down a set of obligatory rules. Instead Dharma is a guide to personal enlightenment, thus though many Buddhists are vegetarian (following the first precept to not harm life) many are not. This is a cultural not a religious difference.

Spiritual enlightenment is available to a Buddhist through a life of contemplation and meditation. A person cannot be born a Buddhist or be converted to Buddhism, but must choose to follow the middle way. Therefore, most Buddhist parents would expect their children to make their own choices about their spirituality, though they will base their children's upbringing on Buddhist principles such as the first five precepts.

SCOUT MEETINGS

Most Buddhist parents would allow their children to attend mixed Scout Groups, provided they had appropriate leadership. However, some Western Buddhists may choose to encourage their children to belong to single sex youth groups as they believe that children have greater opportunities in this environment.

Many aspects of the lifestyle of a Buddhist will reflect their cultural background rather than their 'faith'. A Scout who is a Buddhist whose parents are from Japan, another whose parents are from Thailand, another whose parents are from India, and another whose parents are members of a western Buddhist order, may well have different naming systems, manners of dress, family commitments and food rules, though all follow Buddhist teachings. Like all Scouts within a Group, you will have a better understanding of their needs and beliefs if you get to know the Scout and their family as individuals.

Worship would not normally affect attendance at Scout meetings, though Scouts may not be able to attend activities on festival days. Some temples have lessons and activities for young people at weekends, which may take priority over Scouting

activities. Buddhists would welcome all members of the Scout Group to a temple if they wished to visit.

Buddhist festivals are a time of both contemplation and celebration. Their significance is the same for all Buddhists, but the form of the celebration, and sometimes its date, more often reflects the culture and local traditions of the country the Buddhist or their family are from. It is important that you ask your Scouts and their families how they celebrate festivals. It may be appropriate to include relevant activities for all Scouts in your Group, and Leaders should remember that Scouts who are Buddhist may be absent from meetings and other activities on these days.

The Promise

Buddhist Scouts would not be happy to use the phrase 'duty to God' in the Promise, but can replace it with 'duty to my Dharma'. Buddhists do not believe in a personal creator God: To them ultimate reality is Narvana, a state of beyond greed, hatred and ignorance.

Camp

With a little consideration during the planning stages, a Scout's wish to practise their faith whilst at camp can be facilitated. With some help from the local Buddhist community, a simple service suitable for all Scouts could be put together. When leading worship, a Scout Leader should use non-denominational terms like 'the teacher' which is equally applicable to Jesus Christ or The Buddha. An area, such as a tent with clean ground sheets inside, could be set aside for meditation for all Scouts.

A few traditional Scout activities, particularly outdoor pursuits Scouts often do at camp, may be inappropriate. Any activity that breaks the precept to not take life (such as fishing and some aspects of Backwoods cooking) would not be suitable for the majority of Buddhists. Other activities associated with the taking of life or that imitate fighting may also not be suitable, for example archery, rifle shooting and Laserquest. However, if the activity is undertaken without any intention to take life (such as learning archery as a sport) most Buddhist parents would not object to their children taking part.

When planning a camp menu ask your Scouts what their dietary requirements are. Vegetarian

options (foods that contain no meat products or animal fat) would be suitable for all Scouts.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The SHAP Working Party on World Religions in Education publishes an annual calendar of festivals which will list the appropriate dates for a particular year. The calendar is available from the SHAP Working Party, c/o National Societies RE Centre, 36 Causton Street, London, SW1P 4AU.

For a further list of resources on the Buddhist community, or other faith communities in the United Kingdom, please contact the Programme and Development Department at Gilwell Park.

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