



Buddhist Worship and Beliefs



Learning Objective:

To find out where and when Buddhists worship

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Do Buddhists worship
Buddha as a god?

Explain your reasoning
to a partner.

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Buddhists do not believe in a god. They see Buddha as a man who once lived and became enlightened. They worship him as a sign of respect and devotion to his teachings.

Buddhists believe that worship is important. It helps them to transform their minds through positive action, so that they can break free of **samsara**.

Samsara is the continuous cycle of life, death and rebirth.



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A Buddhist temple is a place of worship for Buddhists. The style of the temples varies depending on what area of the world they are in, and what branch of Buddhism they belong to. However, two of the most common kinds of temples are **pagodas** and **stupas**.

Pagodas can be found in China and Japan, where Buddhism is the main, or one of the main, religions.



Pagoda



Stupa

Stupas are shrines that contain Buddhist objects, or even the remains of Buddhist monks or nuns.

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Buddhists typically visit temples on full moon days (known as **poyas**) and festivals, or to give thanks for an important event in their lives, such as the birth of a baby in the family.



Wat Chiang Man Temple in Thailand

Buddhists may also visit a **vihara** (a Buddhist monastery). These are open to people for study, meditation and worship.



Would you like to visit a Buddhist place of worship?

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All Buddhist temples have a statue of Buddha. There are many different depictions of Buddha since no one is sure what he looked like. The first statue of Buddha was not created until 400-500 years after his death.



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The most important part of the temple is the shrine room, which contains one or more images of Buddha. These are called **Buddharupas**. They can be statues, models or pictures of Buddha. They are always placed higher than the worshippers, to show respect for Buddha and his teachings.



On entering the shrine room, Buddhists take off their shoes, and sit with their feet tucked under their body (it is considered rude to point the soles of the feet towards someone else).

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Worship can include:

Chanting

Phrases from Buddha's teachings are repeated, often in a sing-song tone.

Listening to sermons

Bhikkus (Buddhist monks) may read and discuss some of Buddha's teachings, and their relevance to daily life.

Candles & incense

Lit candles represent the light of Buddha's teachings. Incense is burned to help create a peaceful, calm atmosphere for meditation.

Offerings

Flowers, water and food are placed in front of an image of Buddha.



Meditation

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It is not an essential part of a Buddhist's worship to go to a temple on a regular basis. Most Buddhists have a shrine at home, which will include Buddharupas, candles, flowers, an incense burner and food offerings.

When Buddhists worship, they thank Buddha for showing them the path to enlightenment, and meditate to try and achieve this state.

What items can you see on these shrines?



Shrines at home

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Buddhism observes many different holidays and festivals, most of which celebrate an important event in the life of Buddha. The most important of these is **Vesak**.

Vesak is held on the first full moon in May, and commemorates Buddha's birth, **enlightenment and death**. It is a joyous occasion, with many Buddhists visiting temples to worship together.

Flowers, candles and incense sticks are used as a reminder that, like these objects, nothing ever stays the same - life can wither and decay.



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Offerings are laid in front of Buddharupas to show respect and thankfulness to Buddha for his life and teachings. Only vegetarian food is consumed on this day, as Buddhists must refrain from killing any living being.



The tradition of 'bathing the Buddha' is carried out - scented water is poured over the shoulders of the statue, and the following sentences are chanted:

May I eliminate all evil thoughts
May I cultivate good deeds
May I help save all living beings



Can you describe in your own words what what Buddhists are praying for here?

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Celebrations of Vesak vary from one country to another. In some countries, there is a ceremonial release of caged birds. In others, lanterns made from paper and wood are lit and released into the night sky. Both of these acts are symbolic of letting go of troubles and wishing all living beings health and happiness.

Buddhists try to carry out acts of kindness for those less fortunate than them too, such as making donations to charities.



Would you like to
experience the
Vesak
celebrations?



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Now it's time for you to
show what you have learnt
about where and when
Buddhists worship.

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Plenary:

Did you know?

There are many different styles of Buddhist temples, but they are all designed to represent the five elements of earth, water, fire, air and wisdom.

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