

Buddha's birthday

In May each year, Buddha's birthday is celebrated all over the world. It is a day when Buddhists take time to think of and pray for the less fortunate in the world.

1. What do you know about Buddhism? Can you answer the questions?

- How old is Buddhism?
- In which countries is Buddhism practised?
- How many Buddhists are there in the world today?
- Do you know any celebrities who are Buddhists?
- Why is Buddhism not considered a religion?
- How did Buddhism originate?
- What is the *Middle Way*?
- What does the word 'Buddha' mean?
- What is *karma* and *nirvana*?

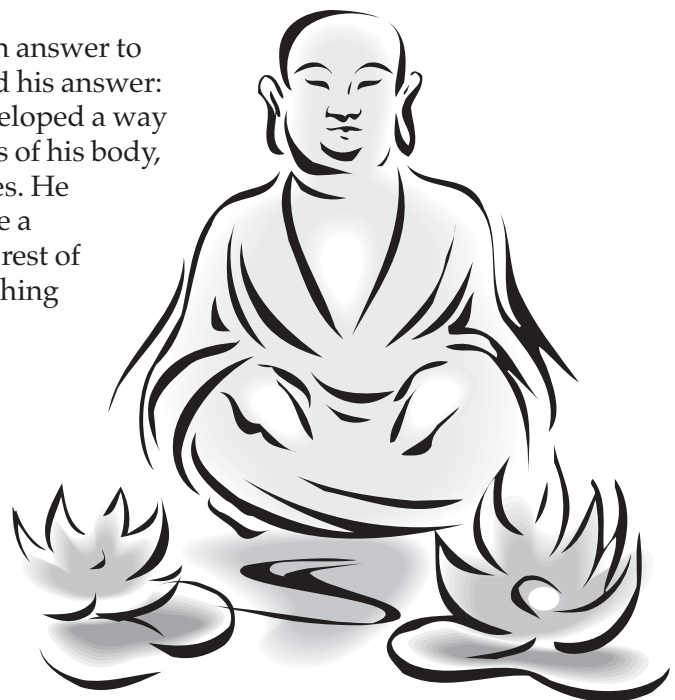
2. Read the information below and on worksheet B to find the answers to the questions in 1.

How it began

Buddhism was originated by Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince, born around 560 BC. When Siddhartha was a young man, he left the palace for the first time and was shocked by four things he saw: an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a holy man. He decided to leave the palace to find an answer to why people suffer. After a few years, he found his answer: suffering came from people's desires. He developed a way of life in which he looked after the basic needs of his body, but did not seek any extra comforts or luxuries. He called this the *Middle Way*. Siddhartha became a Buddha, meaning 'Enlightened One'. For the rest of his life he travelled around India on foot, teaching his philosophy and helping others.

Buddhism

- Buddhism originated in India around 500BC.
- There are about 500 million Buddhists in the world today.
- Buddhism is practised mostly in eastern Asian countries such as Thailand, Tibet, India, Japan and Korea.
- Buddhism is not technically a religion as it is not centred on a god – it is a system of philosophy.
- Some celebrity Buddhists are the singer Tina Turner, the actor Richard Gere and the golfer Tiger Woods.



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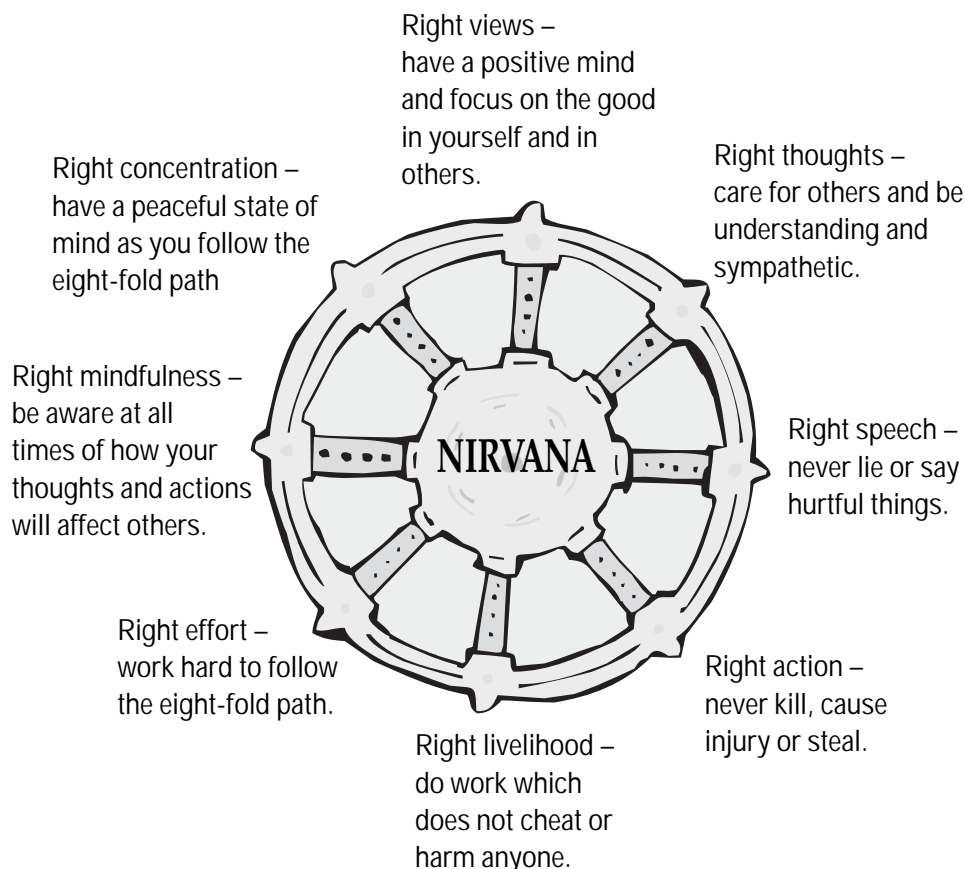
Karma and nirvana

There are three fundamental beliefs at the heart of Buddhism:

- When people die, they are reborn into another life time after time.
- People suffer because of their desires. Desires cause greed, anger, hatred and other negative feelings. These feelings create a force called *karma*.
- If individuals can remove these feelings, the force of *karma* disappears. When this happens, the individual is freed from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. This freedom is called *nirvana*. It is every Buddhist's aim to reach *nirvana*, even if it takes a thousand lifetimes.

The eight-fold path

Buddha taught that there was a path, or way of life, that anybody could follow which would help them overcome suffering. This forms the basis of Buddhism today.



3. In pairs or small groups, discuss the following questions.

- Which of the ideas of Buddhism are similar to those of your religion, or the religions of your country? If you are Buddhist, can you explain more about it?
- Which ideas of the eight-fold path do you feel are the most important?
- How did your religion, or the religions of your country, originate?

Teacher's notes

Task

To find out about Buddhism by reading a text.

To discuss issues of Buddhism and relate this to the students' own religion or religions in his/her country.

Preparation

Make one copy of worksheets A and B for each student.

Procedure

- 1 Tell the students that Buddha's birthday is celebrated around the world on different dates in May, and in April in Japan and Korea. Elicit a few facts about Buddhism.
- 2 Give the students a copy of the worksheets A and B and ask them to discuss the questions in (1) in pairs or small groups. Ask the students to report to the class their suggestions for answers to the questions.
- 3 Ask the students to read the text to find the answers to the questions, making notes of the answers. This can be done as a collective effort with the students working in pairs or small groups.
- 4 Check the answers with the whole class and ask further questions to check comprehension and to encourage more detailed reading. For example,
Where was Buddhism founded? By whom was it founded? What is every Buddhist's aim? What is meant by 'Right speech'?
Alternatively, you could ask the students to ask each other questions, possibly dividing them into teams.
- 5 Then ask the students to discuss the questions in (3). The students report to the class anything interesting from their discussions.

Answers

a. two-and-a-half thousand years old b. most eastern Asian countries c. about 500 million d. Tina Turner, Richard Gere, Tiger Woods e. It is not centred on a god. f. It was founded by Siddhartha Gautama as a consequence of his search for an answer to why people suffer. g. a way of living where the individual looks after their basic needs and does not seek luxuries h. Enlightened One i. *karma* = a force determined by how much negative feeling and suffering an individual has; *nirvana* = freedom from the cycle of reincarnation

Follow up

The students could prepare a poster or a presentation about their religion or about religions in their country.

Websites

For more information about Buddhism, visit the following websites:

home.earthlink.net/~srama/

www.religioustolerance.org/buddhism.htm

www.buddhanet.net/budnetp.htm