

MYTHOLOGY

1. What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is a way of life which is based on the profound and wholesome teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha's teaching, called the Dharma, reveals the true nature of life and the universe. "Life" refers to ourselves and "the universe" refers to our living environment. Buddhism is a religion of wisdom where examining one's own mind is the principal practice.

2. How old is Buddhism?

Buddhism has been established for over 2,500 years.

3. Where and when did Buddhism originate?

Buddhism originated in India in the sixth century BCE.

4. Who was the founder of Buddhism? Can you tell a brief story of him?

Buddhism was founded by Sakyamuni Buddha. He was born in Northern India (currently Nepal) as a wealthy prince of the Sakya clan with the given name Siddhartha Gautama. At the age of 29, he encountered four sights which marked the turning point of his life. The first three sights of suffering from aging, disease and death showed him the inexorable nature of life and the universal ailments of humanity. The fourth sight of a hermit with a serene countenance showed the means to attain peace and that peace was indeed possible. Realizing the temporary nature and worthlessness of sensual pleasures, he left his family and all his wealth in search of the truth of life and eternal peace. After six years of ascetic practices, he realized that one must practice the Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of self-mortification that only weakens one's intellect and the other extreme of self-indulgence that retards one's moral progress. At the age of 35 (about 525 BCE), while sitting under a Bodhi tree in the full moon, he suddenly had a dramatic break-through in wisdom, realizing the ultimate truth of the universe and gaining deep insight into the ways of life. Buddhists call this understanding "enlightenment". Upon enlightenment, he was given the title of Sakyamuni Buddha. Sakyamuni means the age of the Sakya clan'. *Buddha is translated as "one who is fully awake and enlightened".*

To share the benefit of his enlightenment, the Buddha travelled all over India with his disciples, teaching and spreading his principles to people for 45 years until he passed away at the age of eighty.

5. *Is the Buddha a God?*

The Buddha is *not* a God. He was a human being who attained enlightenment through his own practice.

6. *What does "Buddha" mean?*

The title Buddha is derived from a root word "budh" in Sanskrit. "Budh" means "to know or to be aware". Buddha means "one who is fully awake or enlightened."

7. *Is there a God in Buddhism as in Christianity?*

In Christianity, people believe in an Almighty God who is the Creator of the earth and who has absolute power over nature and human destinies. In this sense, Buddhism has no God.

8. *Do Buddhists believe in God or divine being?*

Buddhists believe in gods who are defined as heavenly beings or Devas. Devas are believed to inhabit the heavens above the human realm, but are still unenlightened, bound to Samsara, or subject to birth and death. Many such beings have been converted to Buddhism and become its protectors (Dharma Protectors). Any living beings can be reborn as one of the gods if that living being has substantial merit and virtue.

9. *If Buddhists don't believe in a God, how do they know right from wrong?*

The ability to distinguish right from wrong is based on one's wisdom, intelligence, knowledge and experience. It has nothing to do with whether one believes in a God or not. Are all atheists unable to tell the right from the wrong? No, certainly not. Knowing good from bad, right from wrong is not reliant upon believing in a God.

10. *If the Buddha is not a God, why do people worship him?*

Buddha is not a God but serves as our exemplary teacher who taught us the truth of life and the universe, thus we address Sakyamuni Buddha as our "Original Teacher". Buddha statues or images in temples do not represent idol worship but should be viewed as symbolic reminders of the qualities inherent not only in Buddha, but in all being. Thus, when a Buddhist kneels down before the image of the Buddha, he or she does not worship the holy image but brings to mind the teaching of the enlightened one who has taught the way to liberation. The kneeling and bowing are forms of deep respect to the Buddha as a teacher, and the more one respects a teacher, the more one will learn from him.

11. *What is a Bodhisattva?*

A Bodhisattva is one who aspires to the attainment of Buddhahood and devotes oneself to altruistic deeds, especially deeds that help others to attain enlightenment, i.e. one who aspires to Supreme Enlightenment and Buddhahood for oneself and all beings. The word Bodhisattva can therefore stand for fully realized beings such as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva but also for anyone who has developed the Bodhi Mind -- the aspiration to save oneself and others.

12. What was the Buddha's main contribution?

Sakyamuni Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. After his full enlightenment, he spent his remaining forty-five years teaching the Dharma i.e. revealing the truth of life and the universe to all beings.

13. What did the Buddha say about the origin of the universe?

Though the Buddha was fully enlightened with ultimate wisdom, the Buddha did not attempt to address all problems that perplexed mankind, especially those that tend neither to edification nor to enlightenment. The Buddha was chiefly concerned with one practical and specific problem, that of suffering and its elimination; all peripheral issues were completely ignored. Once, a Bhikkhu demanded an immediate solution to this type of question, threatening to discard his robes if no satisfactory answer was given. The Buddha responded, "I have not revealed whether the world is eternal or not eternal, whether the world is finite or infinite because these are not profitable, and are not conducive to tranquillity, to intuitive wisdom, to eradication of suffering or to enlightenment. Therefore, I have not revealed these." He admonished the Bhikkhu not to waste time and energy over idle speculations detrimental to his moral progress, and that he would die before these questions had ever been elucidated to him. The Buddha gave a parable about a person who was pierced by a poisoned arrow, and would not permit to procure a surgeon until several questions were answered. The dying person said, "I will not have this arrow taken out until I know the details of the person by whom I was wounded, the nature of the arrow with which I was pierced, etc." This person died before these questions were ever answered to him.

Buddhists do not believe that the world will suddenly end in complete and utter destruction. When a certain section of the universe disappears, another section reappears or evolves out of the dispersed matter of the previous universe. This is formed by the

accumulation of molecules, basic elements, gas and numerous energies, a combination supported by cosmic implosion and gravity. That is why the Buddha says that the beginning and the end of the universe are inconceivable. The life stream flows ad infinitum as long as it is fed with the muddy waters of ignorance and desire. When these two are completely removed, only then does the life-stream cease to flow and the cycle of rebirth end as in the case of Buddhas and Arahats. An ultimate beginning of this life-stream cannot be determined, as a stage cannot be perceived when this life-force was not fraught with ignorance and desire.

Buddhists do not believe in a God who created the world, but according to the Law of Cause and effect, all phenomena arise from causes and conditions.

14. Is Buddhism just a philosophy?

Buddhist teachings are profound and have given us much insight into various phenomena of life and the universe. It also differs from other religions in that it allows one to have questions regarding the teachings. In this respect, Buddhism is very much like a philosophy. Although Buddhism is very logical, it does not stop with theoretical pursuits alone. The content of the Buddha's education is more like a complete university of both theory and practice, and philosophy is only one of its courses. Philosophy deals mainly with knowledge and is not concerned with practice; whereas Buddhism lays special emphasis on practice and realization.

15. Is Buddhism scientific?

The Buddha was an enlightened person with ultimate wisdom. His teachings survive even in the modern scientific age. Modern science has already contributed a great deal of information to support the Buddha's realizations, such as on the nature of existence and the universe. Scientific knowledge and technological development help us to understand more about the universe, therefore, it is easier to explain the Buddha's discoveries today.

Also the teachings of the Buddha were always open to scientific examination and an explorative spirit. The Buddha never encouraged rigid, dogmatic belief or divine revelation. He allowed flexibility and freedom of thought. The Buddha encouraged his disciples not to accept any teaching until they had critically investigated, it and personally verified its plausibility. In his approach to truth, the Buddha was as analytical as the present

day scientist. He established a practical, scientifically worked-out method for perceiving the Ultimate Truth and reaching Enlightenment.

16. What symbols or signs are representative of Buddhism? Explain their meaning or historical significance.

The common symbols or signs that are representative of Buddhism are Buddha or Bodhisattva statues or images, the Dharma Wheel, and Sauvastika.

Buddha and Bodhisattva statues or images are viewed as symbolism. No religion in the world can forgo symbolism, whether the symbols are human or otherwise, for without symbolism, identification would be quite impossible. All images serve only as reminders of their respective qualities, e.g. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva symbolises great compassion. The images used in Buddhism are therefore useful aids in generating faith and devotion in the minds of believers and are objects worthy of reverence.

The Dharma Wheel symbolizes the preaching of a Buddha. The Dharma Wheel is likened to a wheel because it crushes all delusions.

Sauvastika was an auspicious sign in ancient India, found also in Persia and Greece, which symbolizes the sun, lightening, fire, and water flow. This symbol has been used by Buddhists for over two thousand years to represent collections of all virtues and goodness and the purity of insight the Buddha attained upon reaching enlightenment.

(In this century, Hitler chose this symbol for his Third Reich but reversed its direction, named it Swastika, and used it to symbolize the purity and superiority of the Aryan race.)

17. How did the Buddha's teaching spread and come to be known?

Although the Buddha has long passed away, the teachings which he expounded during his long and successful ministry still exists. The Buddha left no written records of his teachings, but his disciples preserved them by committing them to memory.

Three months after the death of the Buddha, the First Buddhist Council consisting of 500 members was assembled to collect, study, and rehearse the teachings of the Buddha (known as Dharma). Ananda, the Buddha's attendant who had the special privilege and honour of hearing the discourses from the Buddha, and Upali were chosen to answer questions about the Dharma and the Vinaya (Discipline) respectively.

Two other Councils were held 100 and 236 years later, again to rehearse the words of the Buddha to ensure that the teachings were not polluted. About 83 BCE, a Council was

held in Ceylon to commit the Tripitaka to writing. Tripitaka literally means 'three baskets'. The Tripitaka includes the discourses (Sutra), discipline (Vinaya) and ultimate doctrine (Abhidharma).

The teachings of the Buddha were first transmitted outside India to Sri-Lanka during the reign of King Asoka (272-232 BCE). In China, history recorded that two Buddhist missionaries from India arrived at the court of Emperor Ming of Han Dynasty in 68 C.E. and remained there to translate Buddhist texts. In the Tang Dynasty (602-664 CE), a Chinese monk named Hsuan Tsang crossed the Gobi Desert into India, gathering and researching Buddhist Sutras. He returned to China seventeen years later with vast volumes of Buddhist texts, and thereafter spent many years translating them into Chinese. The Buddhist faith eventually spread throughout Asia.

18. What is the Buddhist holy book or scripture?

The Buddhist scripture is the Buddhist Canon or the Tripitaka. They are the Sutras (Dharma), Vinaya (discipline) and Abhidharma (ultimate doctrine or commentary). The voluminous Tripitaka, which contains the essence of the Buddha's teaching, is estimated to be about eleven times the size of the Bible.

19. How important are the scriptures to Buddhists?

Before the Buddha passed away, the Buddha told his disciples, "Whatever doctrine and discipline have been taught and promulgated by me, they will be your teacher when I am gone." Thus the Tripitaka, which contains the essence of the Buddha's teaching, becomes the primary written guide and source of inspiration to all Buddhists.

20. Is there a main source of scripture which is given priority in the religious practice of Buddhists?

The Sutras used in Buddhist services vary with different schools of practice or nature of a particular Dharma function. It was said that the Buddha elucidated eighty four thousand ways of cultivation catering to people of diverse capacities and abilities, but all leading to the same goal. In Chinese Buddhism, there are ten schools of practice, such as Ch'an and Pure Land. Different schools of practice may emphasize different Sutras.

DOCTRINAL

1. What are the basic teachings of Buddha?

The Buddha's teaching contains three major aspects: discipline (morality), concentration, and wisdom. Wisdom is the goal and concentration is the crucial process towards achieving this goal. Discipline through observing precepts is one method that helps one to achieve deep concentration; then wisdom will be realized naturally.

All sentient beings possess this innate wisdom and Buddha nature, but are unable to realize it because they have been deluded and confused. The Buddha's teaching helps us to realize that innate ultimate wisdom. With wisdom, we can then solve our problems and turn suffering into happiness. Suffering is caused by delusion and ignorance.

2. What are the Four Noble Truths?

To cleanse ignorance which is the source of all suffering, one must understand the Four Noble Truths:

1. The Truth of Suffering -- Life is subject to all kinds of suffering, the most basic being birth, aging, disease, and death. No one is exempt from these stages of existence.
2. The Cause of Suffering -- Suffering is caused by ignorance that results in desire and craving. It is craving which produces rebirth, accompanied by passionate clinging in life. It is the craving for pleasure, fame, or materialistic possessions that causes great dissatisfaction with life.
3. The Cessation of Suffering -- Cessation of suffering comes from total elimination of ignorance and detachment from desires and craving, reaching a state of supreme bliss or nirvana, wherein all suffering is extinguished.
4. The Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering -- The way leading to the cessation of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path.

3. What is the Noble Eightfold Path?

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of:

1. Right understanding -- Have the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths so that one can understand things as they really are.
2. Right thought -- Develop a noble character of life and do not cause harm to others.
3. Right speech -- Abstain from lying, idle-talk, slander, and harsh words.
4. Right action -- Abstain from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.
5. Right livelihood -- Avoid any occupation that causes harm to others such as butchering or selling intoxicants like alcohol or drugs.

6. Right effort -- Have self-discipline to attain full control of the mind in order to develop a clear mental state, thus avoiding an evil mental state.
7. Right mindfulness -- Develop awareness of all actions of the body, speech and mind so as to avoid wrongdoing.
8. Right concentration -- Attain mental peace and the wisdom to realise the full significance of the Four Noble Truths.

4. What or where is Nirvana? Is there any proof that such a dimension exists?

Nirvana is a supramundane state realised by Buddhas and Arahats, a state of liberation through full enlightenment. It is not something to be described in mundane terms or understood by mundane knowledge, but is realized only by intuitive wisdom. Nirvana also means the destruction of lust, hatred, and ignorance, erasing egoism and discovering deliverance from suffering. The Buddha described the state in terms such as infinite, supreme bliss, and peace.

Nirvana is not a kind of heaven where the ego resides; it is a spiritual place that is spaceless and timeless. This is the "abode of immortality" which is not spatially located. However much we may speculate, we shall never be in a position to comprehend its real nature. The best way to understand Nirvana is by self-realisation.

5. Buddhists seek Nirvana through following the Noble Eightfold Path, is this the only guideline accounted for in Buddhism?

The way to Nirvana is the Middle Path which avoids the extreme of self-mortification that weakens the intellect, and the extreme self-indulgence that delays moral progress. The Middle Path consists of the Noble Eightfold Path in which right understanding and right thought are classified as Wisdom; right speech, right action, and right livelihood as Morality; and right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration as Concentration. According to the order of development, Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom (insight) are the three stages that lead to Nirvana. This is the main guideline on which the Buddha's teachings are based upon.

6. How is one's lifestyle affected by living the Noble Eightfold Path? Is it difficult to follow in Australia?

The Noble Eightfold Path embraces the three major teachings of the Buddha: discipline (morality), deep concentration, and wisdom. Discipline through observing

precepts is the method that helps to achieve deep concentration; wisdom will then be realized naturally. Discipline refers to following not only the Buddha's teaching, but also customs, rules, and laws wherever we are. Law-abiding people have a clear conscience, so their minds are peaceful and calm, and they can concentrate easily. An increase in true wisdom helps us to solve our problems and differentiate right from wrong and beneficial from harmful. On a broader scale, the Noble Eightfold Path can help us to solve society's or the world's problems and is essential in leading a happy, harmonious, and fulfilling life. This is the ideal lifestyle which should be practiced by people all over the world.

Australia is a peaceful country with friendly people who are quite likely to accept the idea of enhancing their lives. Furthermore, Australia is a democratic and multicultural society that promotes respect for different cultures and religions. Everyone desires to live peacefully and happily, and this is what Buddhism aims at.

7. Explain the concepts of karma and rebirth.

Karma is a Sanskrit term meaning thoughts, feelings, and actions. Any verbal or mental action performed with intention can be called karma. It is through our own will, be it moral or immoral, that we create our own karma. The karma performed by the body, speech and mind determines the happiness and sorrow of one's present and future lives. The deeds of positive (good or wholesome) or negative (bad or unwholesome) karma are stored like "Seeds" in our eighth consciousness -- the alaya-vijnana or the "storehouse consciousness". These seeds will manifest when the right conditions arise, and the manifestation is the fruit of karma, or the karmic force.

Our present life is not marked by a definite beginning and a definite end, instead we are constantly going through the cycles of rebirth. Individual karma determines how a specific beings is reborn. Alaya-vijnana is the core of rebirth. The result of good karma is rebirth in the three good realms of celestial, human, or asura existence. Evil karma causes rebirth in the three realms of suffering, i.e. animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings.

8. If our lives are determined by our karma, can we change it?

Yes, we can change our karma. Karma results from the seeds of good and evil deeds stored in the alaya-vijnana and will be manifested when the right conditions arise. Some seeds ripen in this life, some in the next life and some in future lives. Evil seeds that have already been planted will inevitably give rise to evil fruits, or results. They will not be

cancelled out by doing good deeds. The only thing we can do to change our destiny or to prevent the reaping of evil fruit is to practice kind deeds, correct our faults and to create more good conditions. In doing so, the seeds of evil deeds will not have the proper conditions to grow and the evil fruits will be less severe. If many good deeds are performed, the good fruits will ripen quickly, so that the evil conditions will be weakened. This is just like a glass of salt water, which is similar to evil deeds. If a lot of fresh water, which symbolizes good deeds, is added to the salt water, the fresh water will dilute the salt water, making it less salty. Thus by doing good deeds and creating good conditions, one's life can be changed for the better.

9. Is one always reborn as a human being? What decides where beings will be reborn?

No, one is not always reborn as a human being. Everyday, we create endless karma of action, speech and thought. Some of this karma is wholesome, while some is unwholesome. They form two dominating and competing forces. If the force of the wholesome karma is stronger, we will be reborn into one of the three good realms: celestial, human, or asura. If the force of the unwholesome karma predominates, we will be reborn in one of the three suffering realms: animal, hungry ghost, or hell. Thus, it is the goodness or badness of karma that decides the future of our rebirths.

10. What do you think happens to good and evil people after death?

After death, good people will be reborn into one of the good realms because of their wholesome karma. Evil people will be reborn in one of the three lower or evil realms because of their unwholesome karma.

11. Is there any proof that we will be reborn when we die? Isn't talk about rebirth superstitious?

Rebirth is not a superstition. It is the truth of life as expounded by the Buddha with his ultimate wisdom. Anything that is the truth will always remain the truth regardless of whether you believe it or not. The earth will still be round even if you don't believe it. There are already many well-documented cases of rebirth that will dispel any remaining doubts regarding the truth of rebirth.

12. What is the Buddhist belief regarding death and after life?

According to Buddhism, the death of any living being is inherent in its nature. Death is a natural function of the ongoing process of life. Just as a birth leads inevitably to death,

so a death leads inevitably to a birth. Death is metaphorically understood as abandoning an old house (the body) and moving to a new house. After-life refers to the state of being reborn.

13. How does the mind go from one body to another?

Death is the process of having all types of consciousness leave the body in sequence, with alaya-vijnana (storehouse consciousness) being the last to vacate. Alaya-vijnana, with its karmic force, is the core of rebirth. When the body dies, its karmic force is reborn in another form without anything transmigrating from this new life to the previous one. The last thought-moment (mind) of this life conditions the initial thought-moment in a subsequent life. The new being is neither absolutely the same (since it has changed) nor totally different (being the same stream of karmic energy). This is merely a continuity of a particular life-streams.

14. Do Buddhists believe in a resurrection of the body after death?

Buddhists do not believe in a resurrection of the body after death. In Buddhism, death does not mean the mere cessation of breathing or the stopping of the heart beat, for the dying person consciousness is still "being". When all types of consciousness leave the body, this is the actual time of death.

15. Where do beings come from and where are they going?

The Buddha stated, “--- a first beginning of beings who, if obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving, is not to be perceived.” According to Buddhism, people are born from the matrix of action. Parents merely provide new existence with a material layer. At the moment of conception, it is karma that conditions the initial consciousness that vitalises the fetus. It is this invisible karmic energy generated from the past life that produces the mental phenomena of the present life. Thus, the birth of a being corresponds to the death of a being in a past life; just as, in conventional terms, the rising of the sun in one place means the setting of the sun in another place.

A being is merely the outward manifestation of its invisible karmic energy. When the being dies, the karmic force remains undisturbed by the disintegration of the physical body, and the passing away of the present consciousness leads to the arising of a fresh one in another birth. It is thus an endless and beginningless flow of life in which different variations of life forms are manifested.

16. *In Buddhism, do people communicate with the dead?*

In some religions, people have various means to communicate with the dead for different purposes. However, communicating with the dead is not a Buddhist practice.

17. *What are the beliefs on the causes of evil, suffering and sin?*

The fundamental causes inherent in life which give rise to evil and suffering are the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. The three poisons are regarded as the source of all delusions and worldly desires. They are so called because they pollute people's lives. Greed is an improper desire for something and the longing for more and more of it. It can also mean avarice or any kind of attachment. Anger, or hatred, is an aversion to or rejection of what displeases one or infringes upon one's ego. Ignorance, or delusion, is due to wrong views and lack of wisdom.

18. *What is the concept of forgiveness of sin?*

In Buddhism, there is no such concept of forgiveness of sin. Everything good or evil is *created* by ourselves, not arranged or bestowed by God. When Buddhists break their precepts or commit faults, they are not to seek forgiveness of sin from a higher authority such as a God or a priest. Rather, they repent and review why they broke the precepts or committed the wrongdoing. Relying on their wisdom and determination, they modify their behavior to prevent the recurrence of the same mistake. In doing so, Buddhists rely on the individual effort of self-examination and self-perfection. Through the act of disciplining thoughts, action and behavior, one can restore inner peace and purity of mind.

19. *What do the terms compassion and wisdom mean in Buddhism?*

Compassion and wisdom are greatly emphasized in Buddhism. These two form the outstanding Mahayana virtues. Compassion is unconditional love, kindness, and active sympathy. It extends itself without distinction to all sentient beings since it is based on the enlightened experience of the *oneness* of all beings. It is sympathy for people who suffer, and the will to end their suffering. Compassion must be accompanied by wisdom in order to have the right effect.

Wisdom is referred to as Prajna in Sanskrit. It is the fundamental wisdom which is inherent in all people and which can manifest itself only in deep concentration or after the attainment of a pure mind. In Buddhism, the main objective of our practice is to achieve this ultimate wisdom.

20. *What is the Buddhist view on the nature of being human?*

The Buddha said that all people have a Buddha nature sometimes referred to as our true self or original nature. However, prior to attaining enlightenment, this true nature is covered by deluded thoughts, attachment and thoughts of discrimination. Since all Buddhas attain Buddhahood through the human realm, there are some favourable conditions of a human that are unsurpassed by beings of other realms. Human beings are able to recall past events and experiences. We are able to tame our own passion and desires. We are able to practise with diligence and perseverance. It is by means of these favourable conditions that we can follow Buddha teaching. It helps us to uncover our true nature.

21. *What is the purpose of human life?*

Buddhism points out that the duration of our life span is very short and we should work vigilantly for our salvation. In fact, it is extremely difficult to be born in the human realm (as opposed to the lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts and animals). Sakyamuni Buddha compared it to the likelihood that a blind turtle, surfacing from the depths of the ocean only once every century, would encounter a tree trunk with a hole suitable for nesting.

Thus, within our precious life span, we should make life worthwhile and pleasant to live by helping to establish a pureland on earth. If we can act wisely by observing universally accepted moral and ethical principles, exercise patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility and kindness, we create understanding and render selfless service. We need to train the mind to gain wisdom, enabling us to achieve something noble and beneficial to all. In doing so, we would experience peace, happiness, satisfaction and tranquillity. By practising such virtues to accumulate merits, we are also preparing for a better rebirth in future lives or even liberating ourselves from the suffering of samsara (cycles of death and rebirth) by being reborn to the Amitabha Buddha Western Pureland.

22. *How would you describe eternal destiny?*

In Mahayana Buddhism, the eternal destiny is to attain Buddhahood or to attain the Buddhist wisdom. In Sanskrit, the Buddhist wisdom is called 'anuttara-samyak-sambhodi' which means ultimate wisdom. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice was to achieve this ultimate wisdom and that everyone has the potential to realise

this state of ultimate wisdom as it is an intrinsic part of our nature, not something one obtains externally.

23. *How do people attain salvation or eternal happiness?*

In Buddhism, the eternal happiness is the state of Nirvana. The way to Nirvana is the Middle Path which avoids the two extremes of self-mortification that weakens the intellect and self-indulgence that retards moral progress. This Middle Path consists of Noble Eightfold Path of right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The first two are classified as Wisdom, the second three as Morality, and the last three as Concentration. The development of Morality, Concentration and finally Wisdom are the three stages on the way that leads to Nirvana.

24. *How does one live in the state of the One True Dharma Realm?*

All dharma arises in the midst of deep concentration or Samadhi. Samadhi is infinitely profound and vast, a revelation of our self-nature. In the state of Samadhi, we dwell in the state of the One True dharma Realm, in which no wandering, discriminatory thoughts and attachments exist. Thus, in this state, there is no differentiation between first and last or big and small. All the relative ideas and phenomena aspects do not exist, and are called the One True Dharma Realm. However, this realm that the Buddha had attained in the state of Samadhi, is not conceivable to us as we are still ordinary beings, thinking in terms of relativity.

25. *What are the beliefs that distinguish the tradition?*

Buddhism is mainly the teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha on the truth of life and our living environment. It is a way of life to be followed, practised and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, word and mind, and self-purification. It also has nothing to do with beliefs as truth always remains to be true irrespective of whether one believes it or not.

26. *Why are there many different types of Buddhism?*

Buddhism originated in India more than 2,500 years ago. In the process of its vast expansion, Buddhism itself underwent profound changes; the further it journeyed, both in space and time, the deeper the remoulding it experienced in ideas and in emphasis. Some

of these changes were due to variations in the national temperament of the people among whom it spread, for Buddhism, specially in its more popular aspects, absorbed local beliefs and ceremonies and adapted them for its own purposes.

As a result of these changes, there ultimately arose two great traditions of Buddhism - Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana. The two great traditions share the same basic teachings of the Buddha but each has somewhat different approaches to attaining enlightenment.

27. *What are the main differences between Theravada (Hinayana), Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism?*

Theravada and Mahayana are two great traditions of Buddhism. They are but two different aspects of the same doctrine and contain no mutual contradictions.

Theravada or Hinayana (Small Vehicle) emphasises the attainment of enlightenment for personal benefit and is common in Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Arhatship is the level of enlightenment in this tradition.

Mahayana or 'Great Vehicle' strives not only for self enlightenment but also to serve all sentient beings actively through the attainment of Bodhisattvahood. A Bodhisattva seeks to attain enlightenment not for himself alone but for all living beings and strives to save himself only by saving others with him because of the realisation that one's spiritual peace cannot be perfect as long as salvation has not been universally won. Mahayana is common in China, Mongolia, Korea, Tibet and Japan.

Vajrayana or Tantric School of Tibet (Tibetan Buddhism) exists in the Mahayana tradition of most Asian countries. It is Esoteric, using mantras and mudras as a principal method of practice. The esoteric (secret) teachings refer to those doctrines and rituals deeply influenced by Hinduism that developed in India during the seventh and eighth centuries A.D.. These teachings, having magical properties, can only be revealed to those who have been properly initiated.

28. *How are the beliefs and teachings communicated?*

Buddha's teachings are communicated mainly by the rich and voluminous collection of the Canon. The Theravadins follow the Pali Canon while the Mahayanists use the scriptures that were written in Sanskrit. Most of these were translated into Chinese and Tibetan by the past great Masters. In recent times, with the rapid development of Buddhism

in Western countries, many of these scriptures have been translated into English. Not only scriptures, but practices such as meditation or Buddhist rituals have also been widely spread and accepted.

RITUAL

1. What is the meaning of religious ceremonies and rituals?

Religious ceremonies and rituals were gradually developed absorbing local culture and traditions, affected by the national temperament of the people among whom Buddhism spread. Thus they vary due to different cultures, schools or methods of practice. Religious ceremonies and rituals are meant for purposes such as joint practice or celebration of special Buddhist festivals, memorial service to ancestors or deceased, blessings, offerings or repentance service.

2. How important is communal worship in Buddhism?

In Buddhism, communal worship normally refers to a joint practice Dharma function when Buddhists come and practise together. Such joint practice provides guidance and a favourable environment for the people. Also people have the chance of listening to Dharma discourses given by Masters or reverends.

3. What regular worship service occurs as a community and as individual? When?

The regular communal worship service is usually a joint practice Dharma function when Buddhists can come and practise together. Regularity of it depends on different temples or way-places. Normally it is held once per week.

For individuals, many Buddhists set up an altar in a quiet place at home for daily chanting and /or meditation practice. There isn't a fixed schedule for it as it depends on individual. Normally, it takes place in the morning and evening.

4. What is the structure or format of a regular worship service?

A joint practice Dharma function is usually led by a Master or reverends. Dharma instruments will be used to provide the rhythm for chanting and singing. Usually there is the reading of a Sutra and the chanting of Buddha's names. Reading of different Sutras reminds us of the teachings of the Buddha, and chanting of Buddha's or Bodhisattva name helps to purify our mind and reminds us of their special virtues, e.g. the infinite mercy and compassion of Kuan Yin Bodhisattva. Many a troubled mind has found solace and

comfort upon chanting her name. Chanting and reading Sutras can generate merits which can promote good karma to grow, and prevent our misdeeds to germinate.

5. Why do Buddhists chant?

Chanting is a common way of Buddhist practice both in Dharma functions or for self cultivation. Chanting simply means to sing or to recite in a sing-song intonation. It can be the chanting of Buddha name, mantra or even sutra. Chanting can be used as a practice; it is an effective means to stabilise the mind so as to attain purity. The mind is compared to an ocean, whereas thoughts and feelings such as anger, happiness, irritation, fantasy and boredom can be compared to waves that rise and fall on the surface. Just as waves can subside to reveal the stillness of the ocean depth, so too is it possible to calm the turbulence of our minds to reveal natural purity and clarity. Chanting in great concentration for example the names of Buddha can have the effect of calming down the mind to find internal wisdom. Thus some people use chanting beads or rosaries to help in their mind concentration. Through concentration, we learn to control our thoughts rather than letting our untrained mind control our behaviour.

6. Do Buddhists pray?

Yes, Buddhists also pray but the prayer is usually the making of vows or dedication of merits. This merit transference is the sharing of one own merits and virtues with others, and is particularly important in Mahayana Buddhism. Chanting of Buddha name or reading sutras with concentration, sincerity and deep reverence enable us to acquire merit. The amount of merit thus acquired will depend upon the mental state. Pious people often transfer the merit they have acquired through vows and penances to their family or even to people of the world.

Today, we often see people simply make offerings to Buddha statues and pray for promotion, fortune or health without acquiring or accumulating merits. This is entirely superstitious as they tend to treat Buddha and Bodhisattva as a god who would satisfy their greed and desire, without understanding the truth of Cause and Effect, i.e. happiness and unhappiness are alike the results of our own actions. For example, those who ask for health must practise compassion or refrain from killing. Compassion is the cause and good health is the effect.

7. Do you have any readings from a special book at the service?

In a Buddhists service or a Dharma function, there is usually a book of liturgy for people to follow. This book differs in the type of Dharma function, the Sutra used or the school of practice. Normally the book consists of Anthem, Sutra, Mantra and Parinamana or the prayer for the transference of merits.

8. *What part do scriptures play in these services?*

Usually in a Buddhist service, scriptures or Sutras are read. The reading of Sutras is to remind us the teaching of Buddha on which our practice is based, and reading with concentration helps us to purify our mind and to cultivate wisdom.

9. *What role do people play in these services?*

A Buddhist service is a kind of joint practice. There is no special role for the people there except the need to have a mind of sincerity and reverence to participate in the service. The service is usually led by reverends and a Master-in-charge.

10. *What role (if any) do children play in these services?*

People of all ages are the same when they participate in a Buddhist service, and children have no special role to play in it.

11. *What gestures are used in these services?*

In Buddhist services, the main gestures are bowing and prostration or half prostration. A Buddhist bows and prostrates before Buddha or Bodhisattva images and makes offerings as an act of deep respect and veneration to them. It should not be viewed as idol worship as all images in temples or shrines only serve as reminders of their respective qualities. Thus, when a Buddhist kneels down before the image of the Buddha, he does not worship the holy image but brings to mind the great compassion of the Enlightened One who has taught him the way to liberation.

12. *Describe the use of symbols or images in these services*

The symbols used in Buddhist services are the images or statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The use of images should be viewed as symbolic. No religion in the world can do away with symbolism, whether they be human or otherwise, for without symbolism, identification would be quite impossible. The images used in temples are useful aids to generating faith and devotion in the minds of believers and they serve as reminders of their respective virtues and qualities.

13. *Do you wear any special clothes or garments in these services?*

In Buddhist services, normally lay Buddhists wear a black robe called the Dharma robe (or 'i-chin' in Chinese) which has the effect of solemnity and uniformity. It was said that the black robe was the costume originated from Tang Dynasty when Buddhism was first established as a state religion in China. The black monotonous colour reduces distraction of the mind, thus helping people to concentrate more during the service. However, wearing the black robe is not compulsory as it depends on the practice of different temples or way-places.

Buddhists who uphold the Five Precepts or Bodhisattva Precepts may wear the brown precept robe (or 'an-yi' in Chinese) on top of the black robe.

14. Are there any major significant worship services throughout the year?

Besides the regular Dharma functions for joint practice throughout the year, there are also other major services for the celebration of Buddhist and Chinese festivals, memorial of the deceased and ancestors, Repentance Dharma function, Retreats etc..

15. What Buddhist festivals are celebrated? When and how?

There are a number of Buddhist festivals celebrated throughout the year, of which the most important is the commemoration of Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. There are three days to be honoured and the dates are based on the Chinese Lunar system:
Sakyamuni Buddha Birthday -- 8 April

Sakyamuni Buddha Renouncement Day -- 8 February

Sakyamuni Buddha Enlightenment Day -- 8 December

Sakyamuni Buddha Birthday is also called the Bathing Buddha Festival. According to the legend, after the baby prince was born, he walked seven steps forward and at each step, a lotus flower sprang up from the ground. Two dragons appeared in the sky spurting two streams of purified water gently down, one warm and one cool, to bathe the baby. Thereafter, when people celebrate Buddha birthday, they use fragrant water to bathe the Buddha statue. This ritual symbolises the purification of our mind, signifying that it is easy to wash away our physical dirt, but is difficult to remove inner or mental dirt of greed, hatred and ignorance.

Sakyamuni Buddha Enlightenment Day is commemorated in a Dharma function and is usually celebrated by eating the 'December 8th congee' which is prepared with eight

vegetarian ingredients. Before his enlightenment, he practised a wide variety of asceticism and reduced his diet until he was eating nothing at all, but still he could not succeed. He realised that neither self-mortification nor self-indulgence was the way; the only way to enlightenment should be the 'middle path' between the two extremes. He finally accepted the milk offered to him by a shepherdess to regain his energy. At the age of 35, while sitting under a Bodhi tree in deep contemplation, he became enlightened. In celebrating this day, the eating of the congee is to symbolise the nourishing of the physical body which is important for our cultivation and enlightenment.

16. *What is the ceremony when a new person is initiated into Buddhism? At what age?*

All Buddhists following the proper practice, should take refuge in the Triple Gem as their first step. There is no age limit to participate in the ceremony. By taking refuge, one declares that he or she is a disciple of the Triple Gem -- the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha taught people the way to end suffering and to gain enlightenment. Dharma refers to Buddha's teachings to overcome desire, ill-will and ignorance in order to liberate from the cycle of death and rebirth. Sangha refers to monks and nuns in the community. The monastic community forms an important base for the teaching of Dharma to the wider community.

Actually, we are also taking refuge in the Triple Gem within our nature. Our nature already possesses the limitless merits of the Triple Gem. All of us possess the Buddha nature (such is called the Buddha); all of us possess equal and identical Dharma nature (such is called the Dharma); and all of us possess a pure, tranquil mind that is free from defilement (such is called the Sangha).

17. *How does it alter a person after taking the ceremony?*

After taking refuge in the Triple Gem, the person will become a Buddhist. Taking refuge means to return and rely. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an Awakened, Enlightened mind. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon purity of mind. Taking refuge is a permanent event which is the taking of an eternal faith.

18. *Is there a ritual to mark adulthood in Buddhism? If so, at what age?*

In Buddhism, there is no special ritual to mark adulthood. However, the Buddha Light International Association World Headquarters, in the past years held the 'Guang Ceremony of Adulthood' at Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles. The ceremony aimed at reminding young people to recognise and rejoice at being grown up, to live moral lives, practise family ethics, to show gratitude to their parents for their guidance, and to learn to shoulder responsibility to serve the community. Such ceremony was also once held in Chung Tian Temple.

19. *Do different rituals mark stages in a person's life?*

There are rituals to mark stages in transcending a person's practice. The first step to become a Buddhist is to take refuge in the Triple Gem. After the Three Refuges, there is the transmission of Five Precepts and Bodhisattva Precepts for lay Buddhists who vow to undertake them. The five precepts are no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no dishonesty and no intoxicants. These are only basic moral principles of conduct which set guidelines for our daily life, and are beneficial for everyone and society.

An extension of the Five Precepts is the Bodhisattva Precepts of which six precepts are to be upheld, i.e. the original Five Precepts and the precept of not speaking ill of the members of the Sangha. There are also twenty eight minor precepts.

20. *How are weddings and births celebrated?*

There are no special Buddhist rituals for the celebration of weddings and births.

21. *What is Buddhist marriage ceremony like?*

The form of a Buddhist marriage ceremony is similar to that held in a church. It is usually conducted in a temple and the Marriage Celebrant is a Buddhist Master. Advice and blessings will be given to the new couple by the Master in the presence of the couple relatives and friends.

22. *What does a Buddhist have to do to get married?*

The Buddhist views on marriage are very liberal; in Buddhism, marriage is regarded entirely as a personal and individual concern, and not as a religious duty. Buddhism allows each individual the freedom to decide for himself all the issues pertaining to marriage.

23. *What is a Buddhist funeral like?*

Buddhist doctrine views death as inevitable and an opportunity for improvement through rebirth and so does not encourage grief. There are no special funeral rituals set down and so the rituals observed tend to be cultural observances as much as religious practice. The service may be held in the home, temple or funeral parlour. Usually it is led by a Reverend with the chanting of Amita Sutra and Amita Buddha name, wishing that the deceased can be reborn to Amita Buddha Western Pureland. Besides which custom also includes a memorial eulogy, offerings of fruit or flowers and the burning of incense. Many Buddhists may prefer cremation. To ensure that the consciousness of the dead has completely left the body, it is advised that cremation should take place seven days after breathing or heart beat stops.

24. *What is the purpose of monks and nuns, and what are they supposed to do?*

Monks and nuns usually form the nucleus of the Buddhist community. Their main activities are practising and presenting the Dharma, helping to propagate it for the salvation of all beings. They are not allowed to work. When one becomes a monk or a nun, one will receive full ordination and dedicate one life for self-cultivation and for the work of salvation. Their lifestyle is governed by the rules or precepts laid down in the Vinaya (discipline) pitaka.

25. *Does one have to be a monk to become enlightened?*

According to the early Buddhist view, only a person who had renounced the world could reach the supreme goal of enlightenment. However, one does not have to be a monk to become enlightened; a lay Buddhist can also become enlightened. Since a monk is one who has renounced the world and easier to set his mind on achieving liberation and not be unduly preoccupied with mundane endeavours which are hindrances in practice, a monk should be in a better position to practice than a lay Buddhist.

26. *Why do monks and nuns wear yellow robes?*

In Buddha time, a monk robe was called kasaya or cassock which was interpreted as decayed, impure in colour, dyed, not of primary colour, so as to distinguish it from the normal white dress of the people. The robe was made from rags. Because of the simplicity and poverty of monastic life, a monk robe was often made by sewing pieces of used cloth together, and to make it look better, the Buddha ordered it to be coloured with bark dye to a brownish colour. The Buddha prescribed their ascetic appearance with simple

robes so that they do not become conceited about their good looks. Today, due to cultural influence, it has gone through a lot of changes; its style and colour vary according to different Buddhist traditions and orders.

27. *Why do monks and nuns have their heads shaven?*

Already in the Buddha time, followers of the monastic life had their heads shaven. The Buddha prescribed their ascetic appearance with simple robes and a shaven head so that they would not become conceited about their appearance and good looks. Most people cherish their hair and try to keep it in an attractive style but a monastic is not allowed to keep it more than two-finger-widths long. In present days, it also symbolises one dedication and the eradication of all defilements.

28. *In Buddha time, why did monks have to go for alms?*

The followers of the monastic life were entirely dependent on the support of lay people because they had no other source of income. This mode of living was prescribed by the Buddha to make the monastics humble and amenable to instruction. No one likes to depend on others because a dependent is in an inferior position. For food, they had to accept whatever was offered and could not, unless invited or ill, asked for what they needed. The Buddha laid down this way of life in order to constantly remind his disciples that their life depended on others, so that they constantly reflected on their morality to see that they were not blameworthy. This encouraged them to get rid of defilements whenever they arose. When they went for alms, they also had the chance to teach the Dharma to the people. Nowadays in places such as Sri Lanka and Thailand, monks also go for alms for food.

ETHICAL

1. *Does Buddhism affect people lifestyles both within and outside the community?*

Buddhism will not affect people lifestyles, but rather it changes people attitude to life and to make life more meaningful. We still carry on with our routine work and enjoy family life based on Buddha teaching. We begin to act wisely and mindfully by observing universally accepted moral and ethical principles, exercise patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility and compassion, create understanding and render selfless service, and train the mind to gain wisdom. By cultivating such virtues in our lives, we should be able

to achieve something noble and beneficial to all and experience peace, happiness, tranquillity and satisfaction in life. We perform our duties well and become role models in what we do for people in our surroundings. If everybody is like this, we can influence our society, country and even the world in a positive way.

2. *Does Buddhism have a code of morality? What key morals does it cover?*

Buddhism contains an excellent moral code including one for the Sangha and another for the laity, and its moral teaching excels all other ethical systems. The base of Buddhism is morality and wisdom is its apex. Of the Four Noble Truths that form the foundation of Buddhism, the fourth (the Noble Eightfold Path) forms the basis of the ethics of Buddhism.

The common basic moral principles of conduct which set guidelines for all Buddhists in daily life are the Five Precepts. They are no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no dishonesty and no intoxicants. Through the Five Precepts, they are more conscious of their behaviour. If all people can live by upholding them, all would live in harmony and enjoy peaceful life.

3. *Is the code adapted over time or is it subject to change?*

Buddhism is known as a timeless doctrine which means that it exists for all time. Even today, Buddhism has an application and a place in modern life. It is because of the timeless relevance, emanating from a set of eternal values that these precepts are adapted over time and are still relevant and applicable to us.

4. *Is it difficult or easy to follow this code in the present day society or culture? Why?*

The Five Precepts are the very basic moral principles of conduct in our daily life. They are not anything abnormal or beyond normal reach. Furthermore, they are exercised with rationality and flexibility. For example, some people hesitate to uphold the precept of no intoxicants which includes alcohol, because some may need to take a small amount daily for medical purpose or some find it difficult to avoid drinking wine in social functions. However, the purpose of this precept is to avoid indulging their pleasure in drinking which results in man's physical and moral degradation. Thus if it is for health reasons or if one is able to exercise good self-control under unavoidable situations, it is not considered to be violating the precept. Therefore, there is no reason why they are difficult to follow in the present day society.

5. *In Buddhism, if the moral values are not being obeyed, is the person asked to leave?*

In Buddhism, if the moral values are not obeyed, the person will bear the consequence since good begets good and evil begets evil as stated by the Law of Cause and Effect. No one will ask the person to leave.

When Buddhists incidentally break their precepts, they are not to seek forgiveness of sin from a higher authority, such as God or a priest. Rather, they repent and review why they broke the precepts. Relying on their wisdom and determination, they modify their behaviour to prevent the recurrence of the same mistake. In doing so, Buddhists rely on the individual effort of self-review and self-perfection. This helps them to restore peace and purity of mind.

6.. Are there any specific dietary habits in Buddhism?

No, some people misunderstand that to take refuge to become a Buddhist, one needs to be a vegetarian. So one need not be a vegetarian to become a Buddhist. Out of compassion, lay Buddhists may choose to be vegetarian as they do not want to eat other sentient beings' flesh just to satisfy their desire of taste.

Also some Buddhists fast after noontime in certain days of each month to symbolise purification of body and mind. Such practice originated at Buddha time when Buddha and his disciples went for alms and ate in the morning but fasted in the latter half of the day.

7. What emphasis is placed on materialism?

In Buddhism, little emphasis is placed on materialism. The Buddha set out a middle way in which neither the extremes of self-indulgence in materialistic pleasure nor self-asceticism is appropriate in life. Many people spend their lives rushing about using all their energy trying to gain wealth and property, and the more they have, the more they want; so they can never be happy or contented. This materialism is the greatest problem faced by society today. They seldom realise that their property will not go with them when they die, but only good or bad actions they have done during their life-time will follow them beyond the grave. All materialistic pleasure is like a mirage in the mind, never fully grasped and accompanied by the fear of loss.

Wealth is for you to make use of for your welfare and others. If you spend your time by only clinging to your property without even fulfilling your obligations towards your people and your country, you may find that when the time comes for you to leave this

world, you will still be plagued with worries. You will not have benefited from that wealth which you have so painstakingly collected.

8. *Are there any cultural habits, values and customs that are essential to Buddhism?*

Many of the cultural habits or customs of Buddhism were not originated or developed in Buddha's time. Within 2,500 years, in the process of its vast expansion in time and space, Buddhism underwent profound changes and remoulding in emphasis and form of practice. Some of these changes were due to variations in the national temperament of the peoples among whom it spread, and the absorption of local beliefs and ceremonies. These cultural habits, values and customs may include religious ceremonies and rituals, temple etiquette, design of a typical Chinese monastery, set up of shrines and holy images etc..

9. *What is the status and role of women in Buddhism?*

The common social attitude towards women has been marked by discrimination backed by prejudices, and this is a common feature in many societies of the world. By contrast, Buddhism can be claimed to be the least discriminatory in attitude towards women. Buddha was considered to be the first emancipator of women who gave women equal and unfettered opportunities in the field of spiritual development. He opened the gates for the full participation of women in the religion by making them eligible for admission into the Bhikkhuni Sangha. Although in tradition, the main duties assigned to women were childbearing and housework, however under the Buddhist point of view, a woman is given equal status with men in their spiritual endeavour to gain wisdom and liberation. However, the Buddha also stated that it was the woman's duty to look after her home and her husband, and that peace and harmony in a home is to a great extent ensured by a woman.

10. *What is the place of women in decision making?*

The Buddha not only gave women equal opportunities in their spiritual growth, he also gave due credit to their abilities and capabilities. The Buddha also stated that it is the husband's duty to hand over authority to his wife. In the early Buddhist period, it was possible for a girl to remain unmarried, and yet unabused. She could even be the owner of great possessions. Thus a woman should be equal in status with man in decision making. However, decision making does not signify authority over others, but works in the capacity of modesty and respect.

11. How important is marriage and family life?

The Buddhist views on marriage are very liberal. In Buddhism, marriage is regarded entirely as a personal and individual concern, and not as a religious duty. Buddhism allows each individual the freedom to decide for himself all the issues pertaining to marriage. However, married life has always been viewed as a hindrance to spiritual pursuits. In spite of this, marriage and family life are still important to most people, and so the Buddha, realistic in his observation, explicitly stated both the duties of the husband towards the wife and vice versa to create happy family life.

12. In Buddhism, is there such a thing as arranged marriages?

No, marriage in Buddhism is not arranged.

13. Does Buddhism permit divorce or separation?

Separation or divorce is not prohibited in Buddhism though the necessity would scarcely arise if the Buddha injunctions were strictly followed. Men and women should have the liberty to separate if they really cannot agree with each other. Separation is preferable to a miserable family life for a long period of time.

In Buddhism, everything including human relations change according to causes and conditions. As nothing is permanent, so is the relation between husband and wife.

14. How do single parent families get treated in the Buddhist community?

In the Buddhist community, mutual respect and understanding are important in human relations. Single parent families will be treated the same as normal families, but more care and concern may be offered to them as they may be in greater need of help.

15. What view is adopted to sexual issues such as pre-marital sex, adultery? Are they a type of sexual misconduct?

Yes. Adultery is mentioned in Buddhist texts as one of a number of forms of sexual misconduct. For laymen, sexual intercourse is forbidden with any woman before marriage who is under any form of protection -- whether that of parents, guardians or husband to be. In Buddhism, to commit sexual misconduct is a violation of the one of the Five Precepts which are the basic moral principles of conduct for our daily life.

16. What is Buddhist attitude regarding abortions?

Act of abortion, i.e. terminating life of a foetus, is explicitly mentioned in Buddhist canonical scriptures, in the Vinaya-Pitaka, as a great offence. This is in accordance with the Buddhist view that destruction of life is a moral transgression.

17. Do Buddhists believe in contraception?

Contraception is accepted by Buddhists. According to Buddhist tenets, the life cycle of a sentient being begins when the consciousness enters the womb, and traditionally this has been considered the moment of conception. Therefore, there is no objection to contraception which interferes with conception without damaging sentient life. However, termination of pregnancy necessarily occurs after conception, so it is not advised.

18. What is Buddhist attitude towards euthanasia?

Buddhism does not condone any act that results in the deprivation of life of any living being. This is more so with regard to cases involving human beings. According to Buddhism, life is suffering of which illness is only one aspect. Death is only a violent break in this continuous process, and brings about only a temporary end to suffering which is bound to recur with the next birth. Also if the sufferer intentionally ends his own life, he is committing suicide and must one day face all that entails in terms of karmic retribution. In the same way, someone who enables the sufferer to die, even by request, is also culpable.

19. What is Buddhist attitude towards drugs and alcohol?

When drugs are abused, the results can be devastating -- for the abuser, for those who care for him or her, and for society at large. Alcoholism is a chronic illness which manifests itself as a disorder of behaviour. In Buddhism, the last of the Five Precepts advocates total abstinence from the consumption of intoxicants including drugs and alcohol. The strict observance by Buddhists of this precept is extremely important for the well-being of one's mental and physical health. However, flexibility is allowed in situations such as when alcohol or drugs have to be used for medical purposes.

20. What is Buddhist attitude to stealing?

Stealing is considered as an invasion to other people's property. Not to steal is also one of the Five Precepts for Buddhists. Stealing is the taking away of other's property without the consent of the owner.

21. What about lying? Is it possible to live a life without telling lies?

Lying is forbidden in Buddhism and is again advocated by one of the Five precepts. Though it is difficult to live a life without telling lies, still we should try our best to abide by it. There may be situations when lies are unavoidable; if the lies are for the benefit of others, they are not considered to be violating the precept.

22. What are the Buddhist views on homosexuality?

Homosexuality applies to people who are sexually and emotionally attracted to others of the same sex, and is a kind of sex deviation. Homosexuals probably can do anything about their condition', and we should not contribute to the prevailing social pressure that forces many of them to hide their true selves. From the Buddhist point of view, this kind of sexual act can be regarded as sexual misconduct to those who try to renounce sensual pleasure in order to lead a holy life. For others, this can be regarded as sex abuse.

23. What is the Buddhist attitude towards suicide?

According to the Buddhist doctrine, a man cannot avoid suffering by taking his own life, nor can he escape from samsara (cycles of death and rebirth) by so doing. The destruction of the physical body merely transfers the entity to another body or sphere of existence, and usually unfavourable rebirth follows. Physical life is considered of great importance, as is only here that the way of liberation can be followed, and enlightenment attained. Taking one's own life is, therefore, not only a waste of opportunity, but also an offence, creating more unwholesome karma. As life is given to us by our parents to whom we should be grateful, the taking of one's life is an extremely unfilial act.

However, voluntary sacrifice of one's life for the welfare of others is considered meritorious, the motive being altruistic.

EXPERIENTIAL

1. What kind of spiritual fulfilment do Buddhists seek?

The spiritual fulfilment a Buddhist seeks is from the inner mind the recovery of the true basic nature or Buddha nature in which the ultimate wisdom can be attained. The Buddha taught us that the main objective of our practice or cultivation was to achieve this ultimate wisdom. Everyone has the potential to realise this state of ultimate wisdom, as it is an intrinsic part of our nature, not something one obtains externally. Thus, Buddhism aims at regaining our own intrinsic nature which is now temporarily lost as a result of our

delusion and confusion. Due to our lack of wisdom, we perceive, view and behave foolishly, and thus suffer the consequences evoked by our incorrect actions. With wisdom, we can then solve our problems and turn suffering into happiness.

2. Is Buddhism difficult to follow as a community?

Buddhism is how we can incorporate the teaching of Buddha to enhance the quality of our lives. Instead of living in delusion and ignorance, we act wisely and mindfully for the benefit of self and others in a community. It is not something absurd or special that is difficult to adopt as a community.

3. What message does Buddhism offer the world today?

In the world today, environmental pollution has become a serious problem and now mankind has finally begun to understand the need for protecting our environment. However, the problem of mental or spiritual pollution is many times more serious than that of the environment. This is the source of worldly ills that not many people realise. Buddhism, the teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha, is considered the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous society by purifying the human mind to establish a pureland on earth. It provides the solution to a myriad of social ills and leads the way to changing one suffering into happiness.

4. What meaning does Buddhism have for the individual?

According to the Buddha, it is due to ignorance that people crave for existence within this Samsara -- cycle of birth and death -- while enduring suffering and running after a mirage in perpetual search for something to please their senses. Buddhism enables a person to understand the truth of suffering in life and to provide the solutions to change one suffering into happiness. Furthermore, Buddhism leads one to the way of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth and the attainment of the state of eternal bliss.

5. How do children learn about Buddhism?

Usually children learn about Buddhism from their parents, family or influenced by school or teachers. The Chung Tian Chinese School in Chung Tian Temple provides opportunities for children to come to the temple which is a good environment to associate them with Buddhism. Also Buddha Light International Association of Queensland (BLIAQ) has a Youth Branch, organising various activities to provide chances for them to learn about Buddhism.

6. How is the religion reflected in the life of a Buddhist?

A real Buddhist is not one who merely participates in spiritual practices which have been reduced to superstitious beliefs and blind faith. Buddhism is a way of life based on the teaching of the Buddha, enhancing the moral and spiritual values of the practitioner. A real Buddhist act wisely and mindfully by observing universally accepted moral and ethical principles, exercise patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility and compassion, create understanding and render selfless service and be beneficial to others. By cultivating such virtues, he is able to bring peace, happiness and harmony to the world.

7. What is meditation?

Meditation is a mind cultivation, commonly practised by Buddhists to attain inner happiness and to create internal wisdom. Meditation can indeed be practised by anyone regardless of his religious label. The happiness we gain from the physical environment does not truly satisfy us or free us from our problems. Therefore, dependence on impermanent things and clinging to the rainbow-like happiness produce delusions, followed by grief and disappointment. According to Buddhism, true and lasting happiness exists and every one has the potential to experience it. True happiness lies deep in our mind, and ways for achieving it can be practised by anyone. Meditation is able to achieve this.

Our delusions, including jealousy, anger, desire, pride and the like stem from our misunderstanding of reality and habitual clinging to the ways we see things. Through meditation, we can recognise our mistakes and adjust our mind to think and react more realistically and honestly. This transformation of mind happens gradually and delivers us from instinctive and habitual fallacies to becoming familiar with the rightful truth. We can then eventually free ourselves of problems like dissatisfaction, anger and anxiety. Finally, by realising the actual way that things exist, we will eliminate completely the very source of all disturbing states of mind.

8. Do Buddhists meditate regularly?

Not all Buddhists would choose to meditate since meditation is only one way of mind cultivation. Meditation is a continuous practice and it is important that a practitioner should make a firm decision to devote a regular time to practise everyday. When you have developed your meditation, anytime is the time to meditate. If you reach this stage, then meditation is part of your day-to-day living. Living meditation is simply developing and

making use of concentrated awareness in the common experiences and events of your daily life.

9. Is meditation important to Buddhists?

Meditation is important to Buddhists since it is a cultivation of awareness and mindfulness that develop deep concentration of the mind, leading to the recovery of our innate wisdom. The goal of Buddhism is in fact the attainment of 'nuttara-samyuk-sambodhi' or ultimate wisdom.

10. How many types of meditation are there?

Meditation is simply concentrated awareness; so in practising, there are two types of meditation that help to develop your concentration -- Samatha Meditation and Vipassana Meditation. If the Samatha (Concentration) Meditation is adopted, then you should learn to apply concentration or a one-pointed mind in your daily life. If Vipassana (Insight) Meditation is used, then learn to apply awareness and mindfulness to your daily life.

11. How do you practise Mindfulness of Breathing?

After adopting a suitable posture, then you are ready to begin. Breathe calmly and naturally and while breathing, be fully aware of your breath. Be aware of the act of breathing without identifying yourself with this breathing. Acknowledge this process thus: 'breathing in', 'breathing out'. If too many ideas or other distractions arise and disturb your concentration, then you might try counting your breath movements: at the moment of either breathing in or breathing out, count 1, 2, 3 ...up to 10 and repeatedly doing the counting. As the concentration increases, drop the counting and acknowledge the breathing. Try to fix your attention on the point of the nose where the breath makes contact with the body.

Breath may become deep or shallow, slow or quick, following natural tendencies. Keep the body erect and motionless while being mentally alert; be keenly observant and as motionless as possible. As you gain mastery over this exercise, the body becomes relaxed and the breathing gentle. You will be very peaceful and undisturbed by events either within the mind or from outside. While doing this exercise, you should forget daily affairs of all kinds and should not even be conscious of yourself. Only be aware of the breathing process, just mentally noting the inflow and outflow of the breath as it occurs. Early morning is a good time for this exercise.

12. What about Loving-Kindness meditation, and how is it practised?

In the Buddha Dharma, there are many meditation methods for helping to cultivate loving-kindness or compassion. One method, taught by the Buddha directly, is that every being -- whether human, animal, spirit, friend or enemy -- has been your own mother at some point in the cycles of rebirth. We understand that without a mother, we wouldn't exist as we do now. Whether she has been angry or loving, hurtful or helpful, she gave us a human body which is an incomparable gift. So there is an appreciation for motherhood and a respect for the dignity of the mother who has given birth to us. When we consider that everybody has been our mother on rebirth, the concept is immense. It is illuminating when we begin seeing people everywhere as our mother. Everyone we see was once the most important person in our existence. Then we realise that all these beings now want to be happy, yet they don't quite know how to do it. This way we develop compassion and a real aspiration to liberate them from pain and suffering in an ultimate way.

13. What is the benefit of doing the Loving-Kindness meditation?

Loving-kindness or compassion is the outstanding quality of all Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. It is the sympathy for people who suffer, and the will to end their sufferings. With compassion, we can refrain from unpleasant thoughts and vindictiveness, from any desire to harm others. Among miserable and wretched people, even though you might not like them, you can still be kind, generous and charitable towards them. Loving-kindness meditation enables you to be mindful of it towards the fear in the mind, or anger, or jealousy. It means not creating problems around existing conditions, allowing them to fade away. Loving-kindness is a very useful and effective instrument for dealing with all the trivia which the mind builds up around unpleasant experience. It is also a useful method for those who have discriminative and critical minds when they can see only the faults in others but they never look at themselves. You are not binding yourself to the faults and flaws in everything, but you are able to co-exist peacefully with loving-kindness.

14. Do I need a teacher to teach me meditation?

Meditation is not simply a matter of sitting in a particular posture or breathing a particular way; these are only to help you to concentrate to acquire a stable state of mind. Thus, for beginners, it is especially important to have someone well experienced in meditation to teach and guide you the correct posture, ways of relaxation, focusing or

concentration, or how to develop different kinds of mindfulness. To have someone to guide you along and to solve the difficulties you encounter on the way, will make your practice more effective and to prevent you from being led astray.

15. Are there any specific roles for the Buddhists in contributing to the temple?

Besides the monastics, lay Buddhists are the temple Dharma supporters and protectors. They participate in Dharma functions and activities held in the temple. They support and assist in various aspects both in terms of money, time, talent and effort. A temple is a non-profit organisation, thus the running and maintenance of it largely depend on the donations of devotees. Besides pecuniary support, lay Buddhists contribute by helping with the cleaning, cooking, paperwork, reception etc., or assist the Reverends in Dharma functions and organising activities in the temple. In Chung Tian Temple, hundreds of lay Buddhists working as volunteers are regularly involved in the operation of the Temple and many others serve during major events.

SOCIAL

1. Who is the Founder of the Foguangshan Buddhist Order? Can you give a brief introduction of him?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun is the Founder of the Foguangshan Buddhist Order. He was born in China in 1926. He became a novice monk at the age of twelve and was fully ordained by 1941, receiving formal education in monastic precepts and Buddhism in China. In 1949, as mainland China was enmeshed in civil war, he left his homeland for Taiwan. For half a century, the strength of his vows has enabled him to revitalise Chinese Buddhism and usher in a new era for Humanistic Buddhism. His transformations have greatly influenced Buddhist study and practice throughout Taiwan and on all five continents.

Recognised for his bold and innovative methods of applying the ancient teachings to meet contemporary needs, Master Hsing Yun founded Foguangshan Monastery in Taiwan with more than 170 branch temples all over the world, 4 public universities, 16 Buddhist colleges, 20 libraries, 2 publishing houses, 9 art galleries, free mobile health clinics and a cable television station. He has made tremendous achievements in restructuring and modernising international Humanistic Buddhism.

2. What is the history of Foguangshan Buddhist Order?

Foguangshan Buddhist Order was founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. The Foguangshan Monastery was established in 1967 under the Master's wise leadership, the selfless devotion of his ordained disciples, and the ardent support of his lay devotees. During that period, they encountered many difficult hurdles, both natural and man-made. Relying on faith and the spiritual strength of Foguang Buddhists, they weathered all storms and overcame all difficulties. Foguangshan has evolved from a mountain-top bamboo forest to the largest Buddhist monastery in Taiwan and an internationally recognised religious site. It has gained world-wide recognition in cultural, educational and philanthropic activities, and in the promotion of international Buddhism.

3. How is the community structured and organised?

Foguangshan Buddhist Order is a progressive Buddhist organisation which has a Religious Affairs Committee as its leading management unit. It oversees, manages, directs, and assists the main monastery, subsidiary and associate monasteries and all organisations and units. The committee members are elected by secret ballots. The Abbot of Foguangshan Buddhist Order is elected by the committee members; he assumes the position of chairperson of the committee and will spend a maximum of two terms in office.

4. How did the community grow and develop?

Since its establishment, the order has quickly spread all over the world. Foguangshan Buddhist Order now has over 170 branch temples in different areas of the world. Besides the Foguangshan Buddhist Order for the monastics, Venerable Master Hsing Yun also founded the Buddha Light International Association (BLIA) for lay Buddhists with the view that lay Buddhists should be united to face the world and to help people. It was inaugurated in 1992, with nearly 100 world-wide chapters. This not only fulfils the Master's dream of disseminating the Buddha's teaching to the five continents, it also signifies that Buddhism is entering a new era.

5. What message does the community offer to the world?

The message that the Foguangshan Buddhist Order and BLIA offer to the world is how we can incorporate Humanistic Buddhism in our everyday life to establish a Pureland on earth. Dedicated since its very inception to the establishment of the Pureland on earth, Foguangshan has focused the religious spirit inherited from ages past on the altruistic activities of the Bodhisattva. By striving to bring to others faith, happiness, hope and

comfort from sorrows, Foguangshan works to actualise a dynamic and humanitarian Buddhism appropriate to the contemporary world.

6. *Do other Buddhist communities combine with your own to celebrate or practise faith? If so, where do they come from?*

In Buddhist conferences or in celebration of Buddhist festivals, other Buddhist communities are invited. For example, Master Hsing Yun chaired organising the World Sutric and Tantric Buddhist conference, the International Buddhist Conference, the International Conference on Ch n Buddhism, the World Fellowship of Buddhists etc. where Buddhists of different traditions and schools from the world came to attend to promote communication and mutual understanding. In celebration of the Buddha Birthday, Buddhists of both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions were invited to participate.

7. *When was the Chung Tian Buddhist Temple completed?*

Chung Tian Buddhist Temple was completed in the year of 1993.

8. *What does 'Chung Tian' mean?*

'Chung Tian' literally means middle heaven as it is situated in Brisbane, midway between the north and south of East Australia. Chung Tian Temple thus means the heaven in the middle of Australia.

9. *How is the temple organised and what kind of authority exists?*

Chung Tian Temple is a non-profit branch organisation of the Foguangshan Buddhist Order. The Religious Affairs Committee of the Buddhist Order will appoint reverends to the temple to be responsible for its management and operation. There is an Abbess or Master who is in charge of the temple, and all other reverends will be delegated with different aspects of work concerning religion, culture and education.

10. *Are all members in the Temple called missionaries or evangelists?*

In the Temple, the Abbess is addressed as Master and all other monastics are called Reverends. Although their mission also involves the propagation of Buddhism, they are not called missionaries or evangelists.

11. *Who is responsible for the administration of the Temple?*

The monastics are responsible for the administration of the Temple with the assistance of lay Buddhist volunteers.

12. Who holds authority to teach and preach?

The monastics and lay Dharma teachers have authority to teach and preach. Lay Dharma teachers are Buddhists knowledgeable in Buddhism and are specially recognised by the Buddhist Order to be qualified to teach.

13. Do certain people hold specific responsibilities in the Temple?

In the Temple, all Reverends hold specific responsibilities in the managing and operation of the Temple.

14. Does your community practise faith outside the Temple e.g. school, hospital?

Buddhism is becoming more popular and acceptable to the community and many people are interested to know about it. At present, due to the request of some schools, Reverends from the Temple go to these schools to conduct Buddhist lessons for students each week. For Buddhists who are sick and hospitalised, Reverends and lay Buddhists may also visit them and give them spiritual support and consolation. Buddhist funeral rituals may be practised in funeral parlour or homes of the deceased.

15. Do you publish or advertise your faith to the public, or is it more of an isolated community?

The Buddhist community is not an isolated community, in contrast, it is our aim to disseminate the teaching of Buddha to all people of the world. It is the ideal of Venerable Master Hsing Yun that 'the light of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will shine everywhere and the water of Dharma will flow forever.' All the Dharma functions and activities held by the Temple are publicised to the public as all people, irrespective of Buddhists or non-Buddhists, are welcome to participate.

16. Is the community growing? How are new members invited to join?

Since the establishment of Chung Tian Temple in 1993, year after year, there is an increasing number of people coming to the Temple Dharma functions, to learn about Buddhism and to participate in its cultural activities. Some people have been converted to become Buddhists by taking refuge and some people become members of BLIAQ (Buddha Light International Association of Queensland). As the Temple and its activities are open to the public, all people are welcome to join. They are usually invited through open letters, posters or notices, newspapers or other media.

17. How do members support the work of the Temple?

People, lay Buddhists or members of BLIAQ can help to support the work of the Temple by serving as volunteers. In actual fact, volunteer involvement is over 90%. The Abbess and Reverends normally lead and conduct volunteers in all functions and activities.

18. What missionary activities are held?

Regular Dharma functions are held on Saturday and on the 1st and 15th of each Lunar month. There are also special Dharma functions held during festivities. In these functions or services, Dharma discourse will be delivered by the Abbess or Reverends so that people will have a better understanding of the teaching and its practice. There are a Buddhist Class, Bodhi Class and Meditation Class for people to learn Buddhism and to practise meditation.

19. What social activities are held?

In the past three years, a great celebration of the Buddha Birthday Festival was held in Flag Court, Southbank. Last year, it attracted over 100,000 people to come and enjoy the day. It was first held in 1997 in response to the Government endeavour to promote multicultural events and festive activities. In view of the continuous success of the event in the following years, the Brisbane City Council highly recommends that this festival celebration should be held annually and the first Sunday of May each year is assigned for the occasion.

Besides, other major activities including Buddhist Cultural Exhibitions, Buddhist Music and Chinese Cultural Arts Performances, and Chinese Arts and Crafts Festivals in response to the Logan Festival. The Temple is also widely recognised by schools and educational institutes as a popular site for educational visits for cultural research and religious study. Each year, the Temple receives thousands of students, and informative guided tours are arranged for them.

One of the objectives of the Temple is to benefit society through charitable programs. The Heart of Loving Care Group, formed by lay Buddhists, always involves charity donations, visiting nursing homes, hospitals and helping people who are in need. The Temple is also a member of the Interfaith Multicultural Forum.

20. Are there any counselling services for members?

There are no fixed counselling services for people in the Temple but people who want counselling or advice are welcome to talk to the Reverends.

21. Does the Temple conduct schools, hospitals, social agencies or relief services?

In Chung Tian Temple, there is the Chung Tian Chinese School which operates mainly on Saturday and Sunday for both children and adults.

22. Who conducts weddings, funerals, initiations etc.?

For Buddhist wedding ceremonies, the Abbess of the Temple, Master Yi Lai is the marriage celebrant. An initiation or taking refuge ceremony has to be conducted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun or the Abbot of Foguangshan Monastery. For funerals, any Reverends can conduct the service.

23. What contribution does the Temple make to the wider community?

The Temple contributions to the community can be grouped under four categories:

1. To express the Dharma through cultural activities

By conducting various cultural activities throughout the year, the Temple helps to enhance people understanding of Buddhism and its culture. Besides making known Buddhism, it is established with the goal of promoting the integration of Eastern culture into Australian traditions in the context of multiculturalism. It is increasingly becoming an active cultural and educational centre in Queensland and has been widely recognised as a successful model for its multicultural approach in Australia. Throughout the year, activities were organised with great effort towards the aim of helping people to develop an appreciation of cultural diversity and mutual understanding, thus promoting a better community in harmony.

2. To foster talent through education

The Temple plays an important role in education. Chung Tian Chinese School operated in the Temple allows children to learn Chinese language, ethics and culture. Adult classes of Mandarin, Buddhism, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese painting, Tai Chi etc. are offered to people who are interested.

3. To benefit society through charitable programs

The temple partakes in charity ventures, including fund-raising campaigns, donations for community groups, and relief programs aiding victims of natural disasters. The Heart of Loving Care Group' comprising of volunteers often go to visit people in nursing homes or people in need to give them support and loving care.

4. To purify human hearts and minds through Buddhist practice

The Temple is a place for people to seek spiritual reliance. Regular Dharma functions or services are held every Saturday. There are also Buddhist classes, Bodhi classes, Meditation class, retreat etc. scheduled throughout the year.

24. List some educational programs provided in the Temple?

In the Temple, Chung Tian Chinese School offers courses for children to learn Chinese language and ethics, and for adults to learn Mandarin. Buddhist classes and Bodhi classes are for people who are interested to learn about Buddhism. There are also Meditation class, Tai Chi class and classes to promote Chinese art of calligraphy and painting.

25. List some items on display in the Museum of the Temple.

The Buddhist Cultural Museum of the Temple houses a substantial collection of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues, Chinese calligraphic works, paintings, micro-engraving, crafts and other Asian artefacts. There are also exhibits of Chinese antiques and the model of the Qin Dynasty terra cotta army found in the tomb of the First Emperor. As an educational resource, the museum engenders cross-cultural learning.

26. What attracts people to come to this Temple?

People coming to the Temple are usually overwhelmed by the beauty of its architecture and surroundings, its tranquillity and peace, and its rich exhibits. For visitors or students, the Temple is able to provide informative guided tours, satisfying people curiosity on Buddhism and its culture. It is an ideal place for a school educational visit. Some people come to the Temple to learn Tai Chi, Mandarin and Chinese arts. During festive seasons, celebrations were organised by the Temple and local people are drawn to it to enjoy the joyful atmosphere enriched with dragon dances, lion dances, fire crackers, Chinese arts and crafts demonstrations etc.. People who seek peace of mind like to participate in the Dharma functions or practise meditation in its meditation hall.

27. What role does Buddhism play in Australian society?

Buddhism is a religion of peace, advocating unconditional love and compassion for all sentient (feeling) beings. It is a way of practice and a way of life in which people abide by moral and ethical principles, exercise patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility, compassion and kindness, create understanding and render selfless service. Australia is a multicultural society and is characterised by its diversity in races, cultures, traditions and

customs. To create a harmonious society, people must be able to establish mutual understanding and have tolerance, respect and compassion for others, and these are all advocated by Buddhism. Furthermore, Buddhism helps people purify their minds from afflictions and suffering, thus leading to a happier and more peaceful society.

28. *Throughout the past decade, the Buddhist faith has been growing rapidly within Australia. Is this reflective in your community, and have the numbers increased?*

Buddhism is becoming more popular and well accepted by people in the community. It is growing rapidly and the number of people becoming Buddhists have increased.

29. *How do Buddhists view other religious groups?*

Buddhism encourages co-operation and understanding amongst the various religious denominations. Buddhists are not forbidden to give due respect to other religious teachers, nor are they restricted from visiting places of worship and attending religious services, other than Buddhism. They can show their full co-operation while maintaining their basic Buddhist principles. Towards other religious groups, Buddhism advocates unconditional mutual respect, compassion and co-operation so as to coexist harmoniously and to honour each other's differences.

MATERIAL

1. *What kind of architecture is the Temple?*

Chung Tian Temple was built according to the Chinese traditional palace architectural style.

2. *Can you explain some of the features of the Temple, are they traditional?*

The golden-yellow roof and red pillars give the Temple a contrasted beauty among the green colour of the bush. Golden-yellow is a noble colour used by emperors in the olden days and red is an auspicious colour for the Chinese symbolising happiness, prosperity, luck and energy. On entering through the large red wooden doors, appearing in front is a large courtyard leading to the Main Hall, with function rooms on two sides -- this is also a traditional set up. On its right side are mainly the Meditation Hall, Sutra Transcription room, Lotus Treasury World and a library. On its left side are a large Conference Room, a Buddhist Cultural Museum and Dining rooms with some classrooms at the rear operated by the Chung Tian Chinese School.

It has a large front terrace with a beautiful landscape making the Temple grand and magnificent.

3. Describe the place of worship in the Temple.

The place of worship in the Temple is the Main Hall or Bodhisattva Hall as it is dedicated to Avalokitesvara (Kuan Yin) Bodhisattva, also called the Great Compassionate One. A Bodhisattva is a person who, through perfect love, is self-committed to liberating all living beings from suffering. Kuan Yin manifestations are numerous, and the one representing in the hall is the Thousand Hands and Thousand Eyes Kuan Yin' symbolising her great ability to see and to help all those in need. All the carvings on the wall are Kuan Yin Bodhisattva.

On the altar, burning of incense produces fragrance to purify the air but reminds us to purify our mind. Also candles burning themselves to shine on us keep reminding us to sacrifice ourselves for the benefit of others. There are light pagodas on either side of the altar as light represents hope and wisdom. In front of the altar are Dharma instruments -- a round wooden fish' on the left, a gong on the immediate right with the drum and bell at the far right. These are played by the monastics during services to lead the rhythm of chanting.

The cushions are for kneeling and prostration which are acts of deep respect to the Buddha and Bodhisattva who are considered as our teachers to guide us the way of enlightenment.

4. What are the main material possessions or artwork in the Temple, and what do they symbolise? How are these visible symbols important in the ritual aspects of Buddhism?

The main artworks in the Temple are the statues or images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The use of images should be viewed as symbolic, and they serve as reminders of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas' virtues and qualities, and act as useful aids to generating faith and devotion in the minds of believers.

5. Consider that the Buddhist religion is classified as being simple, why are there so many Buddha statues within the Temple?

A Buddha refers to a person who has become enlightened. As all sentient beings (beings with feelings) have a Buddha nature, so all sentient beings are considered as Buddha-to-be. Sakyamuni Buddha is the Founder of Buddhism, but besides Sakyamuni Buddha, there are also other Buddhas, each representing special virtues and qualities. In

Chinese Buddhism, the others who are familiar to us are Amitabha Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva. They all act as exemplary teachers for us to follow. It is like a school where students will be taught and guided by teachers specialised in different fields.

6. *What does the lotus flower symbolise?*

In Buddhism, lotus flowers symbolise purity because out of the muddy waters, it grows into an exquisite and fragrant flower. This metaphorically illustrates the spiritual path from ignorance to enlightenment of Buddhist devotees.

7. *What are the sacred places of Buddhism?*

The sacred places of Buddhism are the places in India where Sakyamuni Buddha spent his life. The four main holy sites are:

1. The place where Sakyamuni Buddha was born -- Lumbini Park
2. The place where he attained enlightenment -- Buddhagaya
3. The place where he turned the Wheel of the Dharma for the first time -- Sarnath
(Deer Park)
4. The place where he entered into Nirvana -- Kusinagara

