

GCE
RELIGIOUS STUDIES
NEXT STEPS
CPD SEPT 2016



Teaching & Assessing
Buddhism

AS Religious Studies

Component 1: Option D - An Introduction to Buddhism

Exemplar Responses – SAMS Question 1

Example 1

1. (a) Examine Buddhist teachings about anicca and dukkha. [25]

The three marks of existence form the basis of Buddhist teaching. They are dukkha, anicca and anatta. They are also known as the three universal truths and the three signata.

The first of the three is dukkha, literally translated, it means 'suffering'. However, Buddhists would argue that this is not a correct translation as dukkha is not necessarily physical pain, but more of a dissatisfaction with life, feeling discontent. Buddhists believe that there are three kinds of 'dukkha', the first being 'unsatisfactoriness', the second being physical pain and death, with the third being the suffering of others. Buddhists say that the more compassionate you are as a person, the more you are subjected to dukkha. Buddha taught that dukkha was the result of your own greed, hatred and ignorance. The teaching of dukkha is however not negative in the Buddhist view, as many believe it is better to be aware of reality, than remain ignorant and in turn create more dukkha for oneself. Buddhism teaches that the realisation of dukkha and its causes is what will lead a Buddhist to the Dharma and in turn the Four Noble Truths. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, "People suffer because they are caught in their views. As soon as we release those views, we are free and we don't suffer anymore." (Taken from "The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation").

The second of the Universal Truths is the teaching of anicca, which states that everything is impermanent. Buddhists believe that nothing in life is permanent, everything is in flux, the world is constantly changing. This includes people, objects, states of mind, relationships, etc. as being dependent on causes and conditions, and are therefore constantly changing. Nothing remains forever. A flower is a good example of the transience of all things, because a flower perceptibly changes and decays. Buddhism says that this transience is a feature of all things. Even a plastic flower might seem to have the ability to last forever, but actually it is decaying, just much more slowly than the real flower. Even the things that seem permanent, like land or mountains, are in fact in flux (or constant change). The concept of annica teaches Buddhists not to become attached to any worldly desires as everything is anicca and in turn, will only result in your own suffering. The three Universal Truths help Buddhists to come to terms with the realities of life – they guide them on their quest to enlightenment.

Example 2

1. (a) Examine Buddhist teachings about anicca and dukkha. [25]

Buddhism started in Northern India over 2,500 years ago. As Cush quoted "It was a great time of excitement and change." One important part of Buddhism is the three marks of existence. The three marks of existence play an important role in Buddhism as they are one of the things that the Buddha realised as he was living his life as an ascetic. One of the three marks of existence is dukkha, dukkha is the teachings of the Buddha and is also hard word to explain. It could be explained as being 'suffering, but not all suffering is bad, one example would be that you are excited to go to a concert, you go and watch it but then it must come to an end. This is an example of dukkha. Many Buddhists monks even find it difficult to explain. The second of the three marks of existence is anicca, this is the cause of dukkha, this word again is difficult to explain. One way of explaining it would be if you have two candles and one is lit, if you then light the one that isn't lit from the lit one, it has been lit from the other one but is a different light. This means that it causes the suffering but it isn't suffering.

Example 1

**1. (b) 'The three lakshanas are negative.'
Evaluate this view. [25]**

Dukkha could be described as a pragmatic concept rather than a negative one, because it recognises that suffering exists. We all experience suffering or unsatisfactoriness, even when we are feeling happy, we know that as anicca suggests, this feeling is impermanent. Others however may argue that dukkha is not everywhere, and that the concept of dukkha does appear to give a negative view of life. Not everyone has had great experience of suffering, whereas dukkha implies that suffering is the norm for everyone.

Likewise it could be argued that anicca is also a pragmatic view of life. It is not negative, it simply states that nothing appears to be permanent. Moments of happiness or even days full of happiness always come to an end. The flowers offered during puja are a good example of this – they remind Buddhists of the impermanence of all things.

However, it could be said that some things do last – for example you inherit genes from your family. A Buddhist would argue however that even these change over time as genes from different families mix. They would also argue that impermanence can be viewed as a positive thing rather than a negative one, because accepting that there is impermanence yourself helps them to focus on the goals on enlightenment and helping others. It also helps Buddhists deal with the fact that they are not constantly the same during their life and they will change.

Anatta is not negative as it allows a Buddhist to understand themselves. Once they understand that dukkha is unavoidable, everywhere and must be overcome this helps them to understand anicca – that everything is impermanent - including the self being impermanent (no permanent fixed self - anatta). Anatta is also a positive concept as it allows Buddhists to understand the concept of rebirth – that there is no permanent self or essence as they pass from one life to another. It also helps them to understand the concepts of karma and merit and how this can impact upon the next life.

Others would argue that during a person's life there is a permanent 'self'- your DNA which remains the same throughout your life.

In conclusion many would argue that the three marks of existence are not negative, but rather offer a pragmatic and holistic explanation of life.

Example 2

1. (b) 'The three lakshanas are negative.'
Evaluate this view.

[25]

Dukkha is not negative as it recognises that in order to minimise suffering we have to accept that it exists. For example, if craving money is causing me to suffer, by ceasing to this I will help to ensure my own happiness. However, others would say that dukkha is negative because it focusses on suffering rather than the positive aspects of existence such as love, friendship, etc.

Anicca is negative because it focuses entirely on the fact that nothing lasts forever. This might cause people to question the purpose of existing at all.

Anatta is also negative because it states that whilst a person's essence may exist in some form in another existence it will not be the same self. Some may claim what is the point of this continued existence if there is no 'self', it seems pointless.

A LEVEL

Component 1: Option A – A Study of Buddhism

Exemplar Responses – SAMS Question 1

Example 1

1. (a) Explain the reasons for the development of Socially Engaged Buddhism. [20]

Socially engaged Buddhism is a modern movement within Buddhism although it could be said to trace back to the teachings of the Buddha himself. It has developed out of particular historical situations of great suffering, such as the Vietnam War and the persecution of Buddhism in Chinese controlled Tibet. Buddhism is known for its compassionate response to suffering. The Buddha is said to have state that he ‘comes to teach but two things – suffering and release from suffering.’ The whole basis of Buddhism is about dukkha, which means suffering among other things. It is the beginning of the Four Noble Truths and the Three Universal Truths. Buddhism comes in many forms and some, like Theravada, are focused on your own personal suffering and how to overcome it through the practice of nonattachment. Others like Mahayana talk about the development of wisdom and compassion, like in the bodhisattva idea, which is much more about helping others. Socially Engaged Buddhism might be more like Mahayana Buddhism, but at the same time there is a famous Theravada engaged Buddhist called Silak Sivaraksa who tries to take on the big logging companies in Thailand to stop them destroying the villages and rural way of life.

Socially engaged Buddhists engage in protests, like political protest and non-violent protests that are meant to change things and have some positive effect for people who struggle in society, like the poor or illiterate. It is not just helping them by donating food, but trying to change the system that creates such a big difference between rich and poor. Some socially engaged Buddhists are angry protestors, which does not seem very Buddhist, but on the other hand their focus is caring about the less well off.

Thich Nhat Hanh said that anyone who practices Buddhism practices engaged Buddhism. I think he means that you can’t be a Buddhist and NOT care about suffering in the world. It would mean you hadn’t understood it. The reasons that Socially engaged Buddhism developed were that there was and is a lot of suffering in the world, and some Buddhists wanted to address that. It became famous because of well-known teachers like the Dalai lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, but perhaps Buddhism has always been socially engaged before they came along. For example the Jakarta tales talk about a king sacrificing himself to feed a starving tiger. This is a story about trying to alleviate suffering even at great personal cost. Buddhist socially engagement has been influence by Christian liberation theology and Marxism. They all share the idea that it is wrong to turn a blind eye to any suffering in the world, including animal suffering, and something must be done.

Example 2

1. (a) Explain the reasons for the development of Socially Engaged Buddhism.
[20]

Socially engaged Buddhism is when buddhists try to help people in the real world – like the poor and marginalised. It means engaged with society. Like the opposite of being in a monastery which isn't engaged with society its escaping society.

Famous Social Engaged Buddhist are the Dali Llama and tich Nat Han. They invented it. They both suffered wars and persicution in their countries and they try to teach peace and say that if bad happens to you, you should turn the other cheek but also try to stop it and prevent the suffering. Buddhists are against suffering.

Example 1

1. (b) 'Buddhists should try to change themselves, not the world.'
Evaluate this view.

[30]

The account of the Buddha's teaching in the Pali Canon shows clearly that Buddhism is about changing yourself. In the Buddha's first sermon (The DhammacakapavattanaSutta) he explains about the problem of the human condition, and what should be done to solve it. He recommends the following of the Noble Eightfold path, which is a structure that leads to personal change. Observing the precepts too is a way that individual Buddhists try to change themselves and become better Buddhists and better people. Buddhists strive for enlightenment, to become awakened, like the Buddha himself. This takes a lot of effort because of fetters and hindrances. The path of self-development is highly worthwhile but very difficult. Buddhism is different from other religions which say you need forgiveness for wrong-doing. It explains that you need to take responsibility for yourself and your actions and do the best that you can. This way you purify your karma.

As well changing yourself, changing the world is also important in all types of Buddhism. Even the Theravada Eightfold path is about your relationships with others in the world. The Buddha said 'avoid evil. Do Good.' If everyone actually did this, the world would change. Changing the world is associated with the aims of engaged Buddhism. As well as improve themselves, engaged Buddhists want to change and improve the world for others. They want to minimize the amount of suffering that there is for people (and animals and nature – the environment). They argue that is not achieved just by being a nice person. You have to challenge the systems in the world that cause suffering – like wars. For example wars are currently causing a massive refugee crisis. A Buddhist might offer hospitality to a refugee, but an engaged Buddhist might do this AND protest strongly about the war and injustice that causes the refugee crisis. They might non-violently attack the government, or even go on hunger strike. In Tibet and Vietnam some engaged Buddhists have set themselves on fire in order to do the most that they possibly can to protest and change the system for the benefit of others. The same goes for Buddhists who are working against gender inequality, like Rita Gross. She says that Buddhism itself has caused problems for women, so she is engaged in the sense that she is trying to change Buddhism for the better, as well as trying to change the rest of the world. Engaged Buddhists do their best to change the world because they

feel that they have to because they are Buddhists. Buddhists are unselfish and compassionate, so they feel like they have to act.

Example 2

- 1. (b) 'Buddhists should try to change themselves, not the world.'**
Evaluate this view.

[30]

On the one hand Buddhists should change themselves. Buddhism is about overcoming greed hatred and delusions which are the fires or poisonings. This requires a lot of effort and meditation to ask the question am I being greedy or hating and how can I change it in order to get to nirvana. This is the question Buddhist ask themselves. People go into monasteries to escape society so that they don't have to be greedy or hating any longer. A scholar said only you can change you. No-one else can. We are all responsible for ourselves. The Buddha said be a lamp up to yourselfs. Buddhist use the Noble eightfold path to try to change themselves for the better, and get improvements on the way to nirvana.

On the other hand – you have to be kind to others. Its not all about you and you achieving your goals even if those goals are good like nirvana. Actually its selfish to just care about your own goals, so not Buddhist at all. You have to care about others and the world.

COMPONENT 1: AS BUDDHISM THEME 2B

TEACHER'S NOTES

The iconography of the Wheel of Life (sometimes known as the Wheel of Rebirth, or Wheel of Becoming):

This ancient art-work, in Sanskrit the *bhavachakra* is found all over the Buddhist world, although most commonly used within Tibetan traditions. It is not technically a *mandala*, but is often described as such. It is dense with imagery illustrating basic Buddhist ideas about the nature of *samsara*, the six realms of rebirth, positive and negative *karma* and, in the twelve links, the way in which ignorance gives rise to birth, death and rebirth. It positions greed, hatred and delusion as the axle of the wheel, and the thus their role as driving forces of birth death and rebirth. Yama, the god of death and delusion, holds the wheel. Some interpretations have it that at death Yama hold up a mirror to the life of the deceased, so that they see the karmic ripple-effects of their own actions and intentions in their lifetime for others. In this picture, Yama holds up a mirror to all conditioned existence. Outside of the wheel is the Buddha, who points at the moon, symbolising Awakening.

The Victoria and Albert museum website hosts a zoomable Tibetan Thangka of the Wheel of Life. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/wheel-of-rebirth/>

Students may also find it helpful to look at other, more stylised pictures, such as this one: <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/triratna-thames-valley-and-reading/triratna-thames-valley-and-reading-2016>

Activity:

As a research task students should explore the wheel in pairs and find the 'information' set out below in the picture.

Whilst exploring the iconography students should discuss:

- 1) Why might Buddhist concepts be best communicated through symbols and artistic representations?
- 2) Why might this particular picture appear on the walls of temples and monasteries and in the homes of Buddhists?
- 3) Western converts often think of the six realms of rebirth as psychological states. What examples can you give of this sort of interpretation?
- 4) Why are the *klesas* called 'fires' or 'poisons'?

What to look for:

The Twelve Links (*Nidanas*)

These illustrate *Pratitya Samutpada*. The twelve links and how they relate, one to the other, would be reflected upon in depth by serious practitioners. It is important to grasp that this ancient system of knowledge elaborates on the basic idea of connectedness outlined by the Buddha, reflected in the statement ...

'When there is this, that comes to be;
with the arising of this, that arises.
When there is not this, that does not come to be;
with the cessation of this, that ceases.' *Majjhima Nikaya* 79

1. A blind man –ignorance.
2. A potter – ignorance giving rise to elemental impulses.
3. A monkey playing with a peach – Tasting good and evil: impulses, giving rise to consciousness.
4. Two men in a boat – Personality: consciousness giving rise to name and form.
5. Six empty houses – 6 senses (including mind): personality giving rise to sense perception.
6. Love-making – The senses giving rise to desire for contact with their objects.
7. Blinded by arrows in both eyes – Feelings of pleasure and pain: contact giving rise to feeling.
8. Drinking – Thirst: feeling giving rise to thirst for more.
9. A monkey snatching fruit – Appropriation: thirst giving rise to grasping.
10. A pregnant woman – Becoming: grasping giving rise to continuity of existence.
11. Childbirth – Birth: birth giving rise to rebirth.
12. A corpse – Decay: rebirth giving rise to renewed death and further rounds of birth and death for ever and ever.

The Six Realms of Rebirth

None of these realms represent permanent states. Once the *karma* which has caused the birth in that realm has been exhausted, death and rebirth elsewhere will occur, unless Awakening is achieved. Thus there is no permanent hell or eternal punishment in Buddhism. Similarly, though existence in a heavenly state might be pleasurable and last for eons, it too is ultimately impermanent. The most blessed of births is the 'precious human birth' in which Awakening is possible.

Heaven, the home of the gods (*devas*): this is a realm of enjoyment inhabited by blissful, long-lived beings. (upper realm)

Human realm: although humans suffer, this is considered the most fortunate state because humans have the greatest chance of enlightenment. (upper realm)

The realm of the angry/jealous demi-gods (*asuras*): these are beings who are at the mercy of negative impulses. (upper realm)

The realm of the hungry ghosts (*pretas*): these unhappy beings are unable to satisfy their craving, symbolised by their depiction with huge bellies and tiny necks and mouths. (lower realm)

The animal realm: animals are not usually considered able to attain Awakening, a human birth is preferable. (lower realm)

Hell realms: where beings are tortured in many different way. (lower realm)

Inner circle of karma

Showing the descent into the lower realms and the ascent into the upper realms – depicted as a circle.

The Buddha

Outside the circle and pointing to the moon (symbolising Awakening/*Nirvana*)

The three *klesas*

the axel of the wheel of *samsara*

The three 'fires' or 'poisons', represented by

The pig—ignorance/delusion

The cockerel/bird – greed

The snake – hatred

These *klesas* give rise to *karma* and to suffering.

As a second task, students should write a few sentences on how they might use the iconography of the *bhavachakra* to illustrate each of the following concepts in an essay:

Karma

Rebirth

Pratitya Samutpada

Key Quotes:

'The great advantage of a human existence is that it reminds us constantly of the realities of suffering and impermanence.' (Prebish & Keown, 2010, 18)

There is a 'close association between psychology and cosmology in Buddhist teachings.' (Prebish & Keown, 2010, 19)

Hungry ghosts are 'unhappy spirits that hover around the fringes of the human world.' (Keown, 1996, 32)

Resources:

- Harvey, P. (2012). *An Introduction to Buddhism*, ISBN-10:0521676746 [Although he does not refer to the iconography of the *bhavachakra* he explains realms of rebirth, the twelve *nidanas* and *paticca samuppada* (*pratitya samutpada*)
- Keown, D. (2013). *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, ISBN:0199663831
- Prebish, C. S., & Keown, D. (2010). *Introducing Buddhism*. London: Routledge. pp14-19, ISBN:0415550017

COMPONENT 1: BUDDHISM THEME 4C

TEACHER'S NOTES

Dana and Punya (Giving):

The primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop is giving, *dana*, which forms a basis for further moral and spiritual development. In Southern Buddhism it is the first of the ten 'auspicious actions' which produce 'merit': giving, keeping the precepts, meditation, sharing 'merit', rejoicing at the 'merit' of others, giving service, showing respect, teaching *dharma*, listening to *dharma* and acting with the right view. The key focus of giving is the monastic sangha, which depends on the laity for such items as alms-food, robes, medicine, accommodation. The monks and nuns, by teaching and example return a greater gift, for 'the gift of *dharma* excels all gifts.' (DHP 354.) Such acts of mutual giving thus form a key feature of the lay-monastic relationship: 'Thus, monks, this holy life is lived in mutual dependence, for ferrying across the flood [of *samsara*], for the utter ending of *dukkha*.' (IT iii). The sangha, moreover, is a potent 'field of merit', so gifts 'planted' in it are seen as providing a good harvest 'merit' for the donors. As alms bestow long-life, good appearance, happiness and strength on the recipient, then these in a human or heavenly rebirth are said to be the karmic results of alms-giving. (A.iv.57). On the other hand, being stingy is said to lead to being poor (M.iii.205). Generosity is not only practiced towards the sangha, but is the pervading value of Buddhist societies. (Fielding Hall, a British officer in 19th century Burma once asked for a bill at what he had taken to be a village restaurant and found that he had been fed as a guest in a private house!)

One fairly common practice is to contribute to the costs of printing Buddhist books for free distribution. Buddhists are also keen to give their assistance, goods and money at an ordination, funeral, festival or illness, so as to make 'merit' and share it with others. Communities are bound together in acts of communal 'merit'-making, and obligations are fulfilled by contributing to a ceremony sponsored by someone who has previously helped one in this way. Some ceremonies can be expensive, and so a rich person may also help sponsor the ordination of a poorer person's son.

While any act of giving is seen as generating 'merit' this becomes more abundant as the motive becomes purer. Giving may initially be performed for the sake of material karmic results, but the joy and contentment that giving brings is then likely to provide the motive. The constant practice of giving also aids spiritual development, by reducing possessiveness, cultivating an open-hearted and sensitive attitude towards others, and expressing non-attachment and renunciation, reflected in the practice of 'giving up' home and family life to become a monk or nun. Giving is also the first of the bodhisattva 'perfections', according to all traditions.

Activity:

Read the passage above and answer the following questions:

- 1) What might the laity 'give' to the monastic sangha?
- 2) What might the monastic sangha 'give' to the laity?
- 3) How does giving (dana) enhance moral and spiritual development? *As well as the information contained throughout this passage, use knowledge you have about the Four Noble Truths and the practice of lovingkindness to answer this question.*
- 4) Why is the sangha described as a 'field of merit'?
- 5) Explain the link between 'giving' and 'giving up', and why it is important in Buddhism.

Activity 2:

If you have access to a copy of Harvey, P. (1990, 2012). ASIN:B00NBLQ35Q - look at the dedication. Peter Harvey is a practising Theravada Buddhist.

'May any auspicious purifying power (puñña) [Skt punya] generated by writing this work be for the benefit of my parents, wife, daughter, all who read this book, and indeed all beings.'

Harvey dedicates the merit generated by writing the book for the benefit of his parents. It is common in Buddhism for parents and other forebears (whether they are alive or deceased) to be the object of merit transference. Merit can be ritually 'transferred' to the deceased with the intention of helping to improve the prospects for an auspicious rebirth, or progress on the path to liberation from samsara. Harvey also chooses to transfer the merit generated by his efforts to be transferred to his readers. They comprise a 'community' of people linked by a shared experience. In a vihara, it would be common for merit to be dedicated to the sangha, first the monastic sangha and then the greater sangha. Then Harvey dedicates the merit to 'all beings.' Think about what 'all beings' means. You might use the six realms of rebirth in the Bhavachakra to help you think this through. See how Harvey widens the focus. Can you trace a similar widening of focus in the practice of *Metta Bhavana* (Lovingkindness Meditation)? This dedication helps us to understand *dana*, as well as *punya*. What is Harvey 'giving'?

Writing task:

Explain how Peter Harvey's dedication in *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices* illustrates merit, transfer of merit and giving in Buddhism.

Resources:

Harvey, P. *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices* Cambridge;
ASIN:B00NBLQ35Q

A LEVEL COMPONENT 1: BUDDHISM

GROWTH OF BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

THEME 3B

TEACHER'S NOTES

ACTIVITY:

Two flip charts – two groups.

One group discusses and writes up responses to:

- i. **What is it about Buddhism that makes it attractive to people in Britain?**

The other discusses and writes up responses to:

- ii. **What features of British society contribute to Buddhism's popularity?**

Suggested answers (NB – all of these points need further critical analysis, they are not all accurate, many are tendentious, but they are likely to be mentioned).

- i. No God--No strict rules--meditation --peaceful--anti-stress—mindfulness—anti-greed—individualistic--can engage on own terms--not patriarchal--not bigoted about sexuality--pleasing aesthetic (shrines, rupas, incense, zen art, sacred space)--going on retreat--‘spiritual but not religious’ --open to psychological explanation of key ideas (like realms of rebirth)--lots of rationalist approaches to Buddhism available (e.g. Steven Batchelor, Jon Kabat Zinn)--kind and compassionate--socially engaged Buddhism—belief in karma--accessible famous teachers e.g. Dalai Lama --celebrity converts e.g. Richard Gere, Orlando Bloom, Tina Turner, Benedict Cumberbatch
- ii. Secularisation—decrease in church going—Christianity no longer key provider of rites of passage in society—spiritual seeking—dissatisfaction with the capitalist rat-race—stress --seeking alternative to consumerism—interest in all things ‘eastern’ (e.g. yoga, fengshui. Martial arts)—Buddhist chic—disbelief in god/supernatural beliefs—desire for scientific/rationalist way of life—desire for individual choice about life-style—preference for practising alone rather than in groups—interest in vegetarianism/healthy life-style—celebrity fandom—desire for order/meaning/justice.

Put the two flip charts together and discuss the links between the two lists.

Read the following passage from and answer the questions

Wynne, A. (2015). *Buddhism: An Introduction*, ISBN:1848853971

The Buddhists of ancient India thrived in a culture of religious freedom unparalleled in the classical world. The emergence of settled monasticism did not change this, for the Buddhist Sangha in pre-modern Asia retained its peripatetic habits, and was supported by the ordinances of the Vinaya, which institutionalized the Buddha's spiritual individualism. The Sangha was a society of the free, and with a collective aim of complete freedom: within its own apolitical sphere, Indian Buddhists and their Asian successors were expected to think for themselves, take responsibility for their own deeds, and pursue their own salvific purpose.

An important factor in the spread of Buddhism to the West has been the appeal of this individualistic ethos. While the socio-political freedoms of the modern west lie in the secular rather than religious domain, it encourages a similar way of thinking: just as the ancient Indian Buddhist was theoretically free to follow the Dhamma according to his or her own conscience, the modern individual is theoretically free to make his or her own socio-political choices. In both cases individual choice is not diminished by a figure of absolute authority, but is rather tempered by the rule of the law. Indeed, just as there is no Buddhist creator deity to supplicate, and generally no external agency to intervene and do one's spiritual work, in the liberal democracies of the West the individual is free from the authority imposed by the monarch or dictator.

The meeting of Buddhist and Western individualism is an underlying reason for the rapid rise of Buddhism beyond Asia in recent times. This is why a most famous statement of the Buddha is frequently cited in modernist works: the admonition given to his followers, just before he died, to be 'a light unto yourselves, taking refuge in only yourselves'. This dictum on personal responsibility encapsulates the individualistic and non-authoritarian approach of the Buddha, and is in general agreement with the reality of life in the liberal democracies of the West. For a modern individual enjoying the socio-political freedoms of a democratic state, the appeal of Buddhism lies not only in its ideas and practices, but also in the strangely modern place it imagines for a person in the world.

For converts to the Dhamma, Buddhist individualism is a sort of antidote to the metaphysical confusions of modern life – urbanization, industrialization and the materialistic discourses of science. Western individualism is therefore tied to a demythologized and disenchanting world-view, according to which a person is alone in a godless universe, consciousness nothing more than an emergent property of the brain, and individual existence ultimately reducible to a collection of biological processes. The void created by the loss of Christian faith has been occupied by science, which offers no higher value to guide society: in the emerging post-religious societies of the West, there is barely any sense of individual religious purpose and no such thing as shared ethos.

In contrast to this dearth of meaning, the doctrine of karma grounds Buddhist discourse in a spiritualized sort of individualism which runs counter to the materialistic narratives of science.

- 1) Explain why Buddhism might be associated with religious freedom according to Alex Wynne.
- 2) What does Alex Wynne say about western ideas about freedom?
- 3) How does Wynne link Buddhist ideas with ideas about western democracy?
- 4) How does Wynne describe the 'confusions of modern life'?
- 5) Drawing on your reading of this passage, and your other reading and thinking – write a paragraph about why Buddhism is so appealing in the West.

A LEVEL COMPONENT 1: BUDDHISM

THEME 3C

WOMEN AND AWAKENING

TEACHER'S NOTES

Activity:

Answer the following questions

- 1) Does Buddhism teach the equality of men and women?
- 2) Is there any fundamental Buddhist teaching which indicates women's ability to attain enlightenment is less strong than men's? Explain your answer.
- 3) What 'core teachings' of Buddhism does Rita Gross have in mind in the third passage?
- 4) Why might many Buddhists be feminists?

Key Quotes:

Read the following passages:

Five years after the Buddha's enlightenment experience... women loyal to the new religion first gained formal permission to adopt the world-renouncer's lifestyle favoured by the Buddha. His aunt and foster-mother [Mahapajapati] who had raised him from early infancy, came with five hundred women followers to ask the Buddha for admission into the monastic order, already well established for men. They were refused the first time they asked¹, but they persisted and asked again at a later date. At that time, the Buddha's personal attendant, Ananda, took up their cause. He asked the Buddha if women could achieve the same spiritual states as could men. The Buddha replied that they could, whereupon Ananda suggested that, since women could benefit spiritually from living the homeless life, they should be allowed to renounce the world. The Buddha agreed, contingent on the condition that the women world renouncers accept eight special rules, the effect of which was to make the nuns' order dependent upon and subservient to the monks' order. The eight special rules were accepted and the nuns' order began

¹ In fact it claimed that if women joined the monastic sangha, it would be destroyed, like 'mildew in a rice field.'

Gross, R (1994) Buddhism. In Holm J & Bowker, J (eds) *Women in Religion*. London. Continuum. (pp3-4)

Eight Garudhammas: (extra rules for nuns)

1. A nun who has been ordained even for a hundred years must stand and salute and respect a monk ordained only that day.
2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks.
3. The nuns must ask the monks for the dates of Observance days
4. The monks must advise the nuns after the rains retreat.
5. A nun, who breaks a rule, must undergo penance for half a month before both Orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has trained for two years, she should seek higher ordination from both Orders.
7. A monk must not be criticised in any way by a nun.
8. Admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden.



The Lotus Sutra is a rich and mythic sutra, populated by enlightened beings who can appear at will in different realms

In the Devadatta Chapter (chapter 12) of the Lotus Sutra there is an account of a discussion between enlightened beings and bodhisattvas about whether a girl can become enlightened. Shariputra and other bodhisattvas said she cannot, because women's bodies are 'defiled' by negative karma. At this moment the eight year old daughter of the Dragon King 'appeared' in front of the Buddha and presented him with a priceless jewel. Bodhisattva Manjusri explained that contrary to the views of the other enlightened ones, the girl could attain enlightenment, because her practice and intentions were pure. In that moment, the girl changed miraculously into a man and instantly attained Buddhahood.

Many Buddhists read this parable as liberating for women. It resonates with the Mahayana idea of enlightenment for all – including girls, and animals (remember the girl is a dragon-girl, not just a human girl). Some Buddhists argue however, that the story re-affirms a patriarchal view because the dragon-girl had to change into a man before she could attain enlightenment.



None of the major teachings of Buddhism supports gender inequity or gender hierarchy. Instead, if one tries to link these core teachings with questions about how best to think about and deal with human sexual differentiation, one must conclude that the Buddhist worldview and ethic are more consistent with gender equality than gender inequity, more consistent with flexibility and non-fixation regarding gender roles and stereotypes than with rigid, unalterable gender-specific norms and behaviors.

Rita M Gross: (1992). *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, ISBN: 0791414043