

Voices from Buddhist Worldview Traditions

Over the last few years we have collated responses to questions about religion and worldviews from different perspectives. This resource provides personal answers to questions from lived experience and were written directly by believers.

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1. What is Buddhism? Who was Buddha? Why did Buddha go from being rich to poor?

Buddhism is the English term for those who follow the teachings of the Buddha an Enlightened and therefore 'Awakened One'. All traditions of Buddhism recognise the incredibly rare event of a Buddha arising in the era in which they live (Buddha Shakyamuni is the enlightened being for our era).

If you have looked at the narratives about the early life of the Buddha, you may have worked out that they provide a backdrop to the questions he was seeking answers to, and which form the basis of his teachings or dharma (dhamma). Buddhism offers a particular approach to the nature of reality-why the world is as it is and why we are as we are!

'Buddha' is an Indian word meaning 'awakened one' or 'joyous one'. It is a title Buddhists call an Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama who lived about 2,500 years ago. This prince left his royal life to become a monk and eventually, by practising meditation to the degree he was willing to lay down his life for it, reached spiritual enlightenment. It is because of this enlightenment that he is called 'Buddha'. In the 45 years between his enlightenment and his death, he used the knowledge he gained from his enlightenment to instruct others to become enlightened in his footsteps - and the tradition he founded has come to be known as 'Buddhism' in the present day - a religion that is practiced by 300 million people worldwide. In the world, there are a lot of people who claim to be spiritual leaders or prophets. The Buddha was, however, the only founder of a spiritual tradition which teaches a way people can practise for spiritual salvation without relying on a supernatural power outside themselves. The Buddha claimed neither to be a god nor the earthly ambassador to one. In brief he was the discoverer of the only god-independent pathway of spiritual salvation known to man.

The early life of the Buddha is interesting. And the question you ask is very important - why would a prince who, in a sense, 'had it all', give it up for a very different life?

Two thoughts on the 'why' might interest you. Firstly, Siddhartha seems to have been a very inquisitive and intelligent young man. His father tried all kinds of things in the attempt to keep his son and later his family away from any forms of unhappiness and suffering. Perhaps -the sorts of things any parent might do only on a bigger scale! But Siddhartha was not satisfied with his situation and managed to escape the palace where he experienced what Buddhists call the Four Sights or Signs:

'Siddhattha asked his charioteer to take him on an excursion outside of the place. On the first visit he encountered an old man. On the next excursion he encountered a sick man. On his third excursion, he encountered a corpse being carried to cremation. Such sights brought home to him the prevalence of suffering in the world and that he too was subject to old age, sickness and death - that no-one, not even a king's son, could escape these three. What hope was there, what point in living, if this was the destiny of all? On his fourth excursion, however, he encountered a holy man or sadhu, apparently content and at peace with the world. Perhaps there was a way out of what seemed like the inevitability of suffering after all!

In Buddhism these are referred to as 'the four sights'.

Maybe more interesting is the idea found in the legendary material about Siddhartha, that his father had been given a premonition by a holy man that he would either be a great king or a very important religious teacher. You can imagine which career path his father intended!

Siddhartha's experiences awakened in him a drive to find answers to some of the most important questions human beings face. For example, 'why is there unhappiness and suffering in the world? How can these be avoided and properly dealt with?

His teachings found in the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path are his response to those questions.

Essence of the Buddha's teachings

The term Dharma (in Sanskrit) Dhamma (in Pali) has many meanings. It is used to refer to the 'truth' about all things, as understood by the Buddha or someone who has become enlightened. Some Buddhists also think of it as the 'law' or rules that they should follow. The term is often used to describe the teachings of the Buddha after he became enlightened, particularly his teachings about the Three Universal Truths, Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

All traditions of Buddhism recognise the incredibly rare event of a Buddha (an enlightened being) arising in the era in which they live. For our era that event refers to Buddha Shakyamuni (formerly Prince Siddhartha Gautama). Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings arose out of his own experience(s) which is said to have stretched over many lifetimes and including his final experience of enlightenment. As mentioned at the heart of those teachings lie important questions, which he sought to resolve namely:

Why is the world the way it is?

What is the path to lasting happiness and the ending of suffering?

Ultimately, the answer was to cultivate loving kindness to all beings, get rid of ignorance and delusions about the reality we exist in, leading to wisdom insight.

2. What are some of your main beliefs?

In Buddhism, although we tend to emphasize more on practice than on what we believe – there are some principles we base our ethical reasoning upon – I list them here so that you can compare them with the beliefs you find in other religions:

- that sharing is a good thing
- that welfare work is a good thing
- that respect should be paid to those of high virtue
- that our good and bad actions have karmic consequences
- that the present existence really exists
- that the afterlife really exists
- that we have a debt of gratitude to our mother
- that we have a debt of gratitude to our father

- that spontaneously arising beings (e.g. angels) really exist
- that wise enlightened ones really exist

3. What do Buddhists understand about samsara and Nirvana?

Samsara

When the Buddha taught the First Noble Truth (dukkha), he was trying to make people aware of the real nature of our existence. Dukkha is a Sanskrit word which covers a whole range of experiences- among the many are:

Physical pain

Anxiety

Feeling of loss, for example when someone dies

Feelings of frustration at the universe when we don't get what we want, or when the material things we get do not bring us lasting happiness.

However, one other important experience which he highlighted as a Mark of Existence is change which can bring suffering. Here the fact that everything is in a state of constant change or rebecoming and includes what happens to beings when they die. This event of death we could describe as a more dramatic form of rebecoming before being reborn into another life. For Buddhists, this is a cycle of life, death and then another rebirth-a cycle of samsara or suffering (dukkha).

Dependent arising (paticcasamupada), is the Buddhist teaching that might be helpful here. It explains what causes things to happen. It is the idea that one event causes or leads to another. This simple formula is how it happens:

" 'When this is, that is

" 'From the arising of this, comes the arising of that

" 'When this is not, that is not

" 'When this ends, that ends'

This basically states that one thing happens because something else has happened (for example, you trip over because your shoelaces came undone), or that one thing exists because of the existence of something else (for example, you exist because your parents did). Buddhism teaches that nothing comes into existence through its own power. In other words, all things that are in existence have been created by something else: they are dependent on prior causes.

The Tibetan Wheel of Life is often used as an example of dependent arising. This represents the Buddhist belief in rebirth. Buddhists believe that when they die, their consciousness is reborn into a new body. So, the wheel shows the continual cycle of birth (and ignorance), death, then rebirth. This cycle is called samsara. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/galleries/bhavachakra/>

The type of body that a Buddhist is reborn into (for example, human, animal or a heavenly being) is dependent upon their actions (kamma) in their current life or ones previous to it. Teachings about kamma say that intentions lead to actions which in turn lead to consequences. In the cycle of life, good intentions lead to good actions and eventually to rebirth in a better situation with perhaps a better body. This is an example of dependent arising. Some Buddhists refer to the cycle of life as the 'vicious cycle', as one thing leads to another, so they feel trapped within the cycle of births, deaths and rebirths. The Buddha's teaching is directed to breaking this cycle and believe that this can be done by breaking one of the weaker links in it.

So, Buddhists believe that ignorance and craving cause suffering (we seem to crave or intensely want or become attached to all the wrong things!) However, there is a solution through actions such as meditation, studying the Buddha's teachings and following the Noble Eight-Fold Path. We can break the cycle of samsara. Three antidotes to the 'poisons' symbolised at the centre of the wheel of life can be found in the Noble Eightfold Path. According to the Buddha's teachings we have chances to develop a mind that is wise and fully

understands what we need to do to help ourselves and others achieve enlightenment. In particular, we need to cultivate non-attachment, loving kindness and wisdom - insight (for example the ability to know how to help others without harming them.)

Nirvana

The word Nirvana means 'blowing out' or 'extinguishing' and here it refers to the extinguishing of the fires of craving, hatred (aggression or anger) and delusion that affects us in our samsaric existence. These are the fundamental cause of suffering, which implies that as soon as they have been dealt with and are extinguished, we automatically cease to suffer. If the causes of suffering do not exist, then suffering cannot be produced (according to the principles of dependent origination). Nirvana is taken to mean the end of suffering or the cessation of suffering and includes the cycle of rebirth.

It is important to remember that Nirvana is not a 'thing', is not 'something' that we 'get', nor a place like heaven, where we will go as a reward for practising Buddhist teachings. It is a realisation (deep understanding), a way of seeing things as they really are in such a way that we can aid ourselves and others out of samsara. Nirvana is generally used as another term for enlightenment-a state of complete and lasting happiness and peace. Most Buddhist thinkers have said that it is impossible to explain what the experience of Nirvana is like. This is because it is beyond words.

However, that is not to say that Buddhist thinkers haven't tried to say what it is like:

Positive ideas:

Like medicine that heals an illness

Like an unshakeable peak, nirvana is unshakeable

Like the wind that you cannot actually see, nirvana is there but you cannot point to it.

Negative ideas:

it is not something that is produced

It is not past, or present or future

It cannot be perceived by the senses

It is the end of craving, hatred and ignorance.

Having said all of this, I am tempted to look again at your questions.

4. What do you believe about how the world began?

A fascinating question! It is also a difficult question because Buddhism does not have a lot to say about how the world began.

Before I begin, I would say that when we examine the world's religions, we will find different attitudes to creation and some religions do not deal with the idea of creation much at all. Instead they show different concerns for example with important questions about our complicated existence(s) and how that links into suffering. Let's look at these matters a little further.

1. Generally, Buddhists believe that the world might not have been created at all. The universe in which we live – and all the worlds in it comes into being, exists for a particular time and then decays. This is a naturally occurring cycle (similar to ideas we might find in some modern scientific explanations). It would seem that the Buddha was more concerned to explain how to achieve enlightenment by the removal of suffering (in all realms or worlds of existence). So, it was more important to practise Buddhist virtues (See Noble Eight-Fold Path), than speculate on the creation of the world.

Here is an interesting story to illustrate the point. It is told by **Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera**.

(From a Vietnamese Buddhist website: www.budsas.org/ebud/whatbudbeliev/297.htm)

'One day a man called Malunkyaputta approached the Master and demanded that He explain the origin of the Universe to him. He even threatened to cease to be His follower if the Buddha's answer was not satisfactory. The Buddha calmly retorted that it was of no consequence to Him whether or not Malunkyaputta followed Him, because the Truth did not need anyone's support. Then the Buddha said that He would not go into a discussion of the origin of the Universe. To Him, gaining knowledge about such matters was a waste of time because a man's task was to liberate himself from the present, not the past or the future. To illustrate this, the Enlightened One related the parable of a man who was shot by a poisoned arrow. This foolish man refused to have the arrow removed until he found out all about the person who shot the arrow. By the time his attendants discovered these unnecessary details, the man was dead. Similarly, our immediate task is to attain Nibbana, not to worry about our beginnings.'

2. It is interesting that there are teachings about different realms into which sentient beings (humans, animals etc.) can be reborn. These are illustrated in Mahayana Buddhist teachings illustrated in the Buddhist Wheel of Life. A website you might find useful on this is:

www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/beliefs/universe_1.shtml

Again, the focus is on suffering and a need to achieve enlightenment, and the author states:

'The great tragedy of existence, from a Buddhist point of view, is that it is both endless and subject to impermanence, suffering and uncertainty. These three are called the tilakhana or three signs of existence.'

Existence is endless because individuals are reincarnated over and over again, experiencing suffering throughout many lives.

It is impermanent because no state, good or bad, lasts forever. Our mistaken belief that things can last is a chief cause of suffering.'

3. One further 'turn' in this story is that in recent times Buddhists (like believers in many other traditions) have turned their attention to looking after the planet and there are many websites which give you information about it. One interesting website you might look at (your teacher will help you if there are tricky ideas to deal with), is Buddhist Action Month 2015 (BAM!). it shows Buddhists being involved in social action on environmental issues and other things: <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/BAM>.

5. To what extent is the importance of community central in Buddhism?

The Sangha is one of the Three Precious Jewels in Buddhism and as a focus for refuge it plays an important role in the tradition. We can see this from the refuge prayer which I and other Buddhists will repeat at least twice per day and at each session the words are repeated three times. Here is a contemporary version in English:

*"Till my enlightenment I take refuge in Buddha, all Enlightened beings and my own Buddha Nature;
I take refuge in the Dharma, the universal truth and the path towards enlightenment;
I take refuge in the Sangha, the community of those who are ahead of me on the path."*

<http://contemporarybuddhism.com/universal-refuge-prayer/>

Here it is in Tibetan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzVw9Yi-qQ4>

In a way the Sangha, as those Buddhists who are ahead of you on the path, may play a more important role than other aspects of the refuge, in that they have ways to help those who follow to understand more clearly both the nature of the Buddha and his teachings - the Dharma.

The term Sangha can refer to both monastic and lay people, although different traditions of Buddhism have different ways of thinking about the ways the Sangha is constituted.

However, community can mean lots of different things! In one sense, the Gelug Buddhist community I belong to has a variety of programmes which are addressed to Buddhists but also to the wider society in which a Buddhist centre belongs. Lama Sopa Rimpoche, who is a leading spiritual director of the Gelug community tends to put this work under the theme of Five Pillars of Service.

6. Is it easy for you to practice your faith in Britain?

The feeling of a person practicing their religion in a country where they are a minority is always different from practising the religion of the majority – not just for Buddhism, but for every religion. Political policy in Britain tries to be fair to all the major religions, but prejudices still linger where people are ignorant or apathetic about 'the other' and Buddhists, being only 0.3% of the UK population (at last count) are 'others' to a lot of Britains. For Buddhists, there is no special way of dressing (except for monks) or other public behaviour which would draw the attention of others – so in many ways Buddhists avoid becoming figures of others' fun. However, although your school is lucky, there are many schools where Buddhists might never get the chance to hear about their own religion in school and others where they are not allowed to wear a Buddhist necklace or thread around their wrist – these little details sometimes causing alienation on impressionable young Buddhists.

7. Do Buddhists celebrate festivals?

The short answer to this interesting question is yes-however, one of the interesting things about Buddhism is that it is a very diverse tradition with many different communities, and there is no one special festival common to all.

If you would like to see a table of which festivals are celebrated by which Buddhist communities, you might like to check out the Buddhist Society:

<http://www.thebuddhistsociety.org/page/main-buddhist-festivals>

Buddhist festivals are based on the lunar calendar and are usually held at full moon, but they are calculated from varying starting points in different Buddhist traditions. Some calculate from Buddha's birth (about 565 BCE), some from his death 80 years later, some from a year after his death. So, Buddhists in various countries celebrate different festivals, or sometimes the same festival, but at a different time and in a different way.

Wesak is a well-known Buddhist festival:

Celebrated at full moon in May it is the most important Theravada Buddhist festival in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It honours and gives thanks for the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death on the same day. Temples and homes are cleaned and decorated, lamps are lit around stupas and statues as a reminder of Buddha's enlightenment and overcoming the darkness of ignorance. People abstain from agricultural work or any occupation that might harm living creatures. They visit the temples and make offerings by taking flowers, incense and gifts of food for the monks hoping this will bring them merit. They listen to sermons, meditate, pray, chant and try to save life by letting birds, fish, and animals go free. They may renew their refuge vows. There are processions around the monasteries carrying lighted candles. In Sri-Lanka huge lanterns decorated with paintings of the Buddha's life are erected in the streets. Smaller lanterns decorate the houses. Jataka tales (stories of the Buddha's life from the Pali Canon of Buddhist sacred texts), are told and street performers may re-enact scenes from the Jataka tales. Wesak cards may be sent.

You can find some examples here: <https://www.zazzle.com/vesak+cards>

Parinirvana Day is a Mahayana festival that is celebrated during February to remember the Buddha's death and his entry into nirvana. As might be expected, the festival is a more solemn occasion than Wesak. It is seen as an opportunity to reflect on the fact of one's own future death, and to remember friends or relatives who have recently passed away. The idea that all things are impermanent, which is central to Buddhist

teaching, has a real focus for the day.

The Parinirvana Sutta is an important Buddhist scripture that describes the Buddha's last days, and passages from it are often read on Parinirvana Day. Buddhists might spend the day reading this text and meditating at home or joining others in temples and monasteries for worship and meditation. Some Buddhist communities will organise retreats, as the day is seen as a suitable occasion for quiet reflection and meditation. A retreat is usually a period of time set aside for concentrating on a Buddhist practice. One of the author's teachers, a Tibetan called Kyabje Lama Sopa Rimpoche, says that retreats are best thought of as holidays from negative thoughts. They usually bring great benefit for participants but can be hard work! Parinirvana Day is also a traditional day for pilgrimage, and many Buddhists will visit the city of Kushinagar in India, which is where the Buddha is believed to have died.

In Japan the birth, enlightenment and death are celebrated on different days. The birth of the Buddha is celebrated at Hana Matsuri in April when shrines are erected in the temples around a statue of the infant Buddha which is then washed with perfumed water. His death is celebrated by extinguishing all lights in the meditation rooms then re-lighting them symbolising how Buddha's teachings stream out into the world through the teaching of the Sangha.

Tibetan Buddhists celebrate Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment at Saga Dawa. It is the holiest day in Tibet. Almost every person within Lhasa joins in circumambulations around the city before spending their afternoon on a picnic at Dzongyab Lukhang park at the foot of Potala Palace.

Each year on Saka Dawa-the celebration of Lord Buddha's birth, enlightenment and parinirvana-Buddhist practitioners around the world engage in many auspicious and merit-making activities such as personally devoting oneself to the path; sponsoring beneficial pujas, practices, and prayers; and making extensive offerings to our teachers, holy objects, and auspicious charitable activities.

'Whether one believes in a religion or not, and whether one believes in rebirth or not, there isn't anyone who doesn't appreciate kindness and compassion.' His Holiness the Dalai Lama
<https://fpmt.org/charitable-activities/projects/retreats-and-practices/pf-news/skies-of-merit-on-saka-dawa-june-9/>

8. What are your thoughts on Global Warming and Stewardship as a Buddhist?

The question you raise about Buddhism and global warming is a very important one. Especially with recent news about increasing levels of CO2 and its impact on global warming.

The Buddha did not teach specifically about global warming, so to answer your question we have to look at any relevant ethical teachings we find in Buddhism and then see what contemporary Buddhists might say about global warming. My aim here will be to provide you with information and ideas which you can use as 'a way in' to this complex issue.

While the Buddha did not address the matter of global warming he did teach about the nature of suffering (dukkha) and its causes. The word dukkha is a technical term which covers all kinds of unhappy or unsatisfactory states from feeling uneasy about the way the world is, to the experience of death and (in Buddhism), rebirth.

I think many Buddhists (from many Buddhist traditions) would consider the effects of global warming to be something that is really causing the climate to change and the impact of severe droughts and increasingly ferocious storms to be a cause of great suffering. They may also consider rich nations and western values to be responsible for this. The target here is a tendency to think that happiness comes from acquiring more 'things', which require using up the valuable resources the planet has or burning fossil fuels which increase the carbon dioxide 'footprint' in the atmosphere. It seems somewhat ironic that carbon dioxide in appropriate quantity in the atmosphere, helps to keep the planet warm and stop beings freezing to death, yet humanity might be turning it into a killer!

So where might we 'go' from here in relation to your question? What advice is given about not causing suffering? If we look at a famous collection of teachings and advice called the Dhammapada we find the statement 'to do no harm whatsoever'. In the first of a series of Buddhist principles called precepts it states: 'to avoid killing sentient being' and finally in the basic Buddhist teachings about how to live a Buddhist life called the Noble Eight Fold Path it suggests that Buddhists should choose a 'Right Livelihood'. Basically, this means making a living that does not cause harm and ideally that is ethically positive. Taken together these and other ideas have motivated Buddhists to be mindful in their treatment of the environment. This may mean helping out with 'clean-up' operations in a stretch of canal or river so that people can enjoy it once again, or installing energy efficient solar panels for heating water or simply being mindful about what and how they recycle materials.

We need to consider a warning here-the Buddhist scriptures do not have a neat title labelled 'Stewardship' to which we can simply find answers. There are many ethical precepts which are important to framing an answer though and in what follows I hope this will give you some ideas about that.

Clearly the world we live provides the environment for sustaining life (resources etc.) Generally speaking, Buddhist ideas are that the world is a valuable thing that belongs to nobody but is everybody's responsibility. As Nagapriya suggests in Nagapriya, K.J. (2016) AQA Religious Studies BUDDHISM:

'There are two further reasons why Buddhists might consider the world to be so valuable:

1. The world provides Buddhists with all the conditions (challenges and help) that are needed in order to develop perfect wisdom and compassion, to become enlightened and to free oneself from suffering.
2. The Buddha taught that there are other worlds into which it is possible to be born. Buddhist tradition teaches that to be born a human, in this particular world, is enormously fortunate, and follows many lives in other, less conscious forms. Humans are able to make ethical choices not available to other species, and thus move towards enlightenment. In this world, there was once a Buddha who explained the origins of suffering and the way to end it. Had people been born in another time and world, they might never have heard this teaching.'

Though it might seem strange to some, being reborn into a world such as the one we live in is considered a favourable place to develop the kind of wisdom and compassion necessary for enlightenment.

The idea of stewardship of the earth is a familiar one in monotheistic traditions and perhaps others, but the term is not commonly used in Buddhism -though that does not mean Buddhists are not interested in such matters.

The Buddha never talked of how the world came into being, or who owned it. He said it just is a fact that it is here and so are we. Knowing this, it is people's responsibility to develop more and more wisdom and compassion to move towards enlightenment. Many Buddhists would say that this is the meaning of life. There are Buddhists who would say that there is a lot to wonder about, this and other universes, even though they do not assume they are created by any being. I myself have a keen interest in astronomy for example and as a young person was fascinated when a neighbour asked me to take a look at our nearest neighbouring galaxy- Andromeda. It was like observing a hazy thumbprint (and no-the optics of the telescope were operating really well on that clear November night!). As I looked, the neighbour outlined how far it was thought to be away from earth, that it was an island universe like our own Milky Way etc. I've been hooked ever since!

I'm going to 'make a jump' here-the Buddha taught about the inter connectedness of all things, it is given the technical term 'dependent arising'. It means that absolutely everything happens because of other things, and they must be interconnected throughout time and space. That interconnectedness has led, at its best, to a motivation for caring for all beings and their environment. Here you will find clips of a very important teacher in my tradition, His Holiness the Dalai lama speaking on the environment which you might find helpful: <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/environment>

Certainly, rapid growth in the world's population, consumption of natural resources and problematic attitudes to nature are stacking up to cause disasters. We are at the moment in the midst of record-breaking temperature rises which are probably not solely due to regular planetary changes. Animals and humans are

suffering as a result. Buddhists will also ask here –how much is greed contributing to the demand for resources? As Nagapriya suggests:

‘Many Buddhists are aware of the importance of avoiding damage to their environment. Here are some of the reasons why:

- The concept of dependent arising teaches that everything depends on other things. We live in a complex network of people, animals and plants, all of whom depend in various ways on a healthy planet to survive.
- The second noble truth is that suffering is caused by greed. The Buddha encouraged people to practice contentment, having just as much as they need for a simple but dignified life. Taking too much from the environment goes against this teaching.
- The teaching of kamma says that everything people do has an effect, positively or negatively. Looking after the environment creates good kamma; misusing or abusing the environment creates bad kamma.
- The first of the five moral precepts is to avoid causing harm to any living being. This means looking after the earth so that other people and living things, and those who come after us, can live on a planet worth living on.
- Making efforts to care for others is part of the Buddhist path of training which leads people gradually towards enlightenment. This includes caring for the earth and everything that depends on it.

In order to protect the environment, we must protect ourselves. We protect ourselves by opposing selfishness with generosity, ignorance with wisdom, and hatred with loving kindness. Selflessness, mindfulness, compassion and wisdom are the essence of Buddhism. We train in Buddhist meditation which enables us to be aware of the effects of our actions, including those destructive to our environment. ‘

For further ideas you might like to further research:

- the Holy Island Project: <http://www.holyisle.org/the-project/buddhism/>
- Buddhist Action Month (June) – an annual British festival of Buddhist social action which began in 2012 and is spreading to other countries
- the Dharma Action Network on Climate Engagement (DANCE)
- the Sarvodaya movement in Asia.

At the heart of this discussion it is useful to remember that the Buddha taught that all things are impermanent- it is natural and expected in Buddhism that things change all the time. Over geological time earth has been through many climate changes already. Buddhist approaches to the environment might focus not so much on the fact that there is change but on the fact that this change may cause enormous suffering to many living things, including people. And, where possible, it is necessary to prevent the human impact on this precious environment completely degrading through a lack of wisdom and greed. The Eightfold Path teachings of the Buddha may be helpful in facilitating such an aim.

Like the Buddha, we too should look around us and be observant, because everything in the world is ready to teach us. With even a little wisdom we will be able to see clearly through the ways of the world. We will come to understand that everything in the world is a teacher. Trees and vines, for example, can all reveal the true nature of reality.

Ajahn Chah, from the Forest Sangha, Thailand

9. How does the Eightfold Path affect Buddhists' daily lives?

The big picture is that the Eightfold Path helps practitioners integrate meditation into everyday life because meditation improves the quality of one's everyday life and wholesome everyday life improves the quality of one's meditation. The Eightfold Path is a series of eight links each of which has a knock-on effect of improving the next link in the chain. When you get to Right Concentration, it comes back to 'knock-on' Right View to a higher level of practice, rather like an upward spiral. Breaking down the links into practical behaviours:

RIGHT VIEW would mean developing confidence in the working of the law of karma and the power of the Triple Gem maybe by finding the chance to hear monks giving teachings at the temple, reading the scriptures or meditating for oneself.

RIGHT INTENTION would mean fostering and listening to the wholesome intention in oneself to remove oneself from the influence of desires, hatred, vengefulness and aggression in life by being generous, keeping the Five Precepts and meditating.

RIGHT SPEECH would mean refraining from telling lies, divisive speech, idle chatter and swearing -- but rather cultivating artful speech.

RIGHT ACTION would mean refraining from cruelty towards living beings, stealing and sexual relations outside marriage. It would also mean doing things by the rules.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD means abstaining from unwholesome forms of livelihood like crime, but also trading in weapons, slaves (or prostitution), animals (not sending them to the slaughterhouse), alcohol or drugs or poison. It would mean not misleading customers through abuse of weights and measures -- but rather choosing a livelihood which is compassionate and truly a service to society.

RIGHT EFFORT would mean avoiding evils not yet done, breaking of bad habits, development of virtues not yet mastered, and maintenance of good habits already mastered.

RIGHT MINDFULNESS would mean keeping our mind on wholesome thoughts without any deviation, especially by practising meditation until attaining one-pointedness of mind.

RIGHT CONCENTRATION would mean cultivating the absorptions of the mind to the point of equanimity -- ultimately to see and know the Four Noble Truths and attain enlightenment.

10. How do Buddhists worship? What is meditation

Prayers

I think it is important to note that the idea of prayer in Buddhism is not quite the same as you would find in, for example, Christianity or Islam. Buddhists are not generally asking gods or God for something. For many Buddhists, the difference is that they do not expect the Buddha to answer or respond in any way to their offerings; they are simply given as a sign of respect and gratitude.

In my community (Mahayana-Tibetan Buddhist), we do have prayers which pay honour to the Buddha and our teachers (some of whom are monks and nuns) at the beginning of a teaching or practice session where we try to set our motivation for the religious practice we are going to do. At the end there will be dedication of any merit or virtue we have gained from the practice for the benefit of all beings, all of which we believe have the possibility of attaining enlightenment just as the Buddha did.

Here is one we say for His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Tibet

We recite it in the Tibetan, but the English translation is also there for you.

GANG RI RA WÄI KHOR WÄ ZHING KHAM DIR

In the land encircled by snow mountains

PHÄN DANG DE WA MA LÜ JUNG WÄI NÄ

You are the source of all happiness and good;

CHÄNRÄZIG WANG TÄN DZIN GYA TSHO YI

All-powerful Chenrezig, Tenzin Gyatso,

ZHAB PÄ SI THÄI BAR DU TÄN GYUR CHIG

Please remain until samsara ends.

https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/teachers/zopa/advice/prayers_for_HHDL_and_tibet_0711_c5.pdf

Mantra recitation

A mantra is a sequence of sacred syllables or words that is usually chanted repetitively. It can either be chanted out loud or said silently in the mind. Mantras are believed to have spiritual powers, and they are frequently used in meditation to calm or focus the mind. An example of one of the most popular mantras is 'om mani padme hum', which can be roughly translated as 'praise to the jewel in the lotus'. Each of the different syllables or words has different meanings connected with it; together they are said to summarise and encompass all of the Buddha's teachings. For example, 'om' is said to symbolise the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind; 'mani' (meaning 'jewel') symbolises love and compassion; 'padme' (meaning 'lotus') symbolises wisdom. A common teaching in Buddhism is that the enlightened mind of the Buddha is like a beautiful lotus which comes out of a muddy pond (the symbol of the unenlightened mind of samsara). Chanting this mantra helps to remind Buddhists of the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

Malas

It is interesting that many religious traditions have similar practices to the Buddhist chanting mantras. They may also have aids to help in counting the mantras said – if they have committed to saying a number of them. Buddhists use their malas or prayer beads to do the same. Normally they have 108 beads (wrist malas have fewer beads, but the user would have to 'go round' the circle of beads more often to achieve the desired count!) and can be made from beautiful wooden or semi/precious gems such as amber and lapis lazuli.

Meditation

Meditation is perhaps the most well-known of Buddhist practices. It may not be a surprise to find this out as the Buddha experienced final enlightenment when he was in deep meditation. It is a spiritual practice of calming and focusing the mind and reflecting carefully on things in order to understand them better. To help a Buddhist begin this practice Buddhists might offer homage to the three refuges: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. They may then recite the five moral precepts (see: <https://www.clear-vision.org/Schools/Students/Ages-12-14/Five-Precepts.aspx>). This is said to help set the motivation for undertaking the practice.

The practice of mindfulness is often included. This requires the meditator to focus intently on one thing in a calm and detached manner. The aim is to check that the mind does not wander or become distracted by other thoughts or emotions. Buddhists will use breathing to help in the process of concentration.

Using the mindfulness of breathing.

Breathing is something most people can easily do without having to pay any attention to it, but the idea in samatha meditation is to become more mindful of your breathing. This means really paying attention to and concentrating on the sensation of breathing, and all the tiny ways it changes your body: feeling your chest expand and contract, focusing on the flow of air in and out of your nose, feeling how your shoulders rise and lower, and so on.

Shamatha and Vipassana meditation

Mentioned above was the need for reflection. This also includes familiarisation - but what with you may ask? Buddhists teach that we need to become familiar with how our mind works (something the Buddha continually emphasised) and in order to do that we need to 'step back' from our close involvement with mental activity (our chatty minds) and just observe. All of the types of meditation described, at some level, work from starting observations.

For those who like new words we can move to the Sanskrit word bhavana. This word is also associated with meditation and it means something like the production of something new, of bringing something about. What might that be? Read on!

There are many different forms of meditation in Buddhism all of which are intended to produce what we might call good new states of mind.

Samatha (also spelled shamata) meditation

This is sometimes called 'placement meditation', concentration meditation' or tranquil(calm) abiding, because the aim is to make the mind feel calmer and more tranquil, leading to a greater state of concentration. There

are a number of different ways to 'do' samatha meditation, but many Buddhists focus on using the technique mentioned above of mindfulness of breathing. The calmness of mind and ability to concentrate that samatha meditation develops is an important step in developing wisdom and understanding. Shamata meditation is often used prior to or alongside meditational techniques we call analytic or insight. The technical term for this is vipassana.

Vipassana meditation

This type of meditation aims at developing wisdom and focuses on training the mind so that it can gain insight into the true nature of reality – to see things as they really are. So, as you might guess, this is linked into the ideas and structure of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.

In these meditations Buddhists may focus on a variety of different things during their practice, for example holy objects such as the Buddha, emotions that are difficult to deal with – for example anger or jealousy (in order to deal with these emotions), when they meditate. Of course, they may focus on developing wholesome attitudes or virtues such as developing compassion.

Some final thoughts:

For most Buddhists, meditation is not like prayer, where a person might ask for favours or help from a god. The idea instead is to use meditation to become closer to enlightenment, without the need for any external help. Meditation is used to better understand the nature of reality as it was seen by the Buddha.

When I emerge from meditation I feel as if my mind is cleansed. I feel that my mind is of a higher quality and thus happier. My mind feels more stable (not so easily disturbed by external influences) and yet flexible and creative enough to lend itself to challenging tasks. The decisions I take after meditation are usually more inspired, with more insight into circumstances. My thinking will be more thorough and it will seem to come more naturally than usual to do the 'right thing' in any situation. However, don't take my word for it - it is like trying to describe a new food to someone who never tasted it - the best way to answer this question is to sit down and do twenty minutes of meditation (using a proper method) and then you can answer this question for yourself!