

Buddhism

Questions answered

What are the main symbols of Buddhism?

The main symbols of Buddhism:

The wheel of life which symbolises the cycle of life and rebirth. The Eightfold Path is also symbolised as a wheel with eight spokes representing the eight laws. Lotus flowers outside temple in Cambodia

The lotus flower symbolises purity and divine birth. The different colour lotus flowers have specific meanings: for example, the red lotus signifies the qualities of the heart while the purple lotus is the mystic lotus.



What is meditation?

Buddhists believe that meditation is crucial to understanding the cause of suffering (the first noble truth). It is a way to clear the mind of worries and fears, and to see that suffering is caused by wanting something we cannot have (the second noble truth). Being free from wanting, wishing and desiring anything is what Buddhism refers to as the cessation of suffering (the third noble truth). To live in this way is the fourth noble truth (the Eightfold Path).

To meditate you need to find a quiet area where you can concentrate. There are lots of different ways of meditating. Some people sit on a cushion, with their legs crossed, focusing on the natural breathing. Others attend classes to learn different techniques and how to meditate for longer sessions.

What rites of passage are there in Buddhism?

At birth: There is no special ceremony to mark the birth of a child in Buddhism so people generally follow local customs. Buddhism teaches rebirth, a similar teaching to reincarnation, and the belief that everyone is influenced by past karma.

Samenera: In some Buddhist countries, sometime between the ages of 8 and 20, boys enter a monastery for a short time as a Samanera. They are treated as novices and help run the monastery.