



## FEZANA Age-Appropriate Lesson Plan

**Subject Category (circle one):** Religion/Ceremony Celebration History Prayer  
Gathas **Comparative Religion** Shahnameh

**Age Group (circle one):** PreK-K Grades 1-3 Grades 4-5 Grades 6-8 **Grades 9-12**

**Lesson # (if applicable):** 4

**Subject of the Lesson:** Buddhism

### Background Knowledge for the Teacher:

#### BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a religion and philosophy founded in India circa 525 BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, called the Buddha (which means the 'awakened one'). Siddhartha Gautama was born circa 563 BCE in Nepal. There are over 300 million Buddhists worldwide. One of the great world religions, it is divided into two main schools: the Theravada or Hinayana in Sri Lanka and SE Asia, and the Mahayana in China, Mongolia, Korea, and Japan. A third school, the Vajrayana, has a long tradition in Tibet and Japan. Buddhism has largely disappeared from its country of origin, India, except for the presence there of many refugees from the Tibet region of China and a small number of converts from the lower castes of Hinduism.

#### Basic Beliefs and Practices

The basic doctrines of early Buddhism, which remain common to all Buddhism, include the "four noble truths":

1. Existence is suffering (dukhka)
2. Suffering has a cause, namely craving and attachment (trishna)
3. There is a cessation of suffering, which is nirvana.
4. There is a path to the cessation of suffering.

This path is an "eightfold path" of

- 1) right views
- 2) right resolve
- 3) right speech,
- 4) right action
- 5) right livelihood
- 6) right effort
- 7) right mindfulness
- 8) right concentration

Buddhism believes that living beings are trapped in a continual cycle of birth and death, with the momentum towards rebirth provided by one's previous physical and mental actions (see karma). The release from this cycle of rebirth and suffering is the total transcendence called nirvana.



From the beginning, meditation and observance of moral precepts were the foundation of Buddhist practice. The five basic moral precepts, undertaken by members of monastic orders and the laity are:

- 1) to refrain from taking life
- 2) to refrain from stealing
- 3) to refrain from acting unchastely
- 4) to refrain from speaking falsely
- 5) to refrain from drinking intoxicants

Members of monastic orders also take five additional precepts:

- 1) to refrain from eating at improper times
- 2) to refrain from viewing secular entertainments
- 3) to refrain from using garlands, perfumes, and other bodily adornments
- 4) to refrain from sleeping in high and wide beds
- 5) to refrain from receiving money

### Early Buddhism

Buddhist tradition tells how Siddhartha Gautama, born a prince and raised in luxury, renounced the world at the age of 29 to search for an ultimate solution to the problem of the suffering innate in the human condition. After six years of spiritual discipline, he achieved the supreme enlightenment and spent the remaining 45 years of his life teaching and establishing a community of monks and nuns, the 'sangha', to continue his work.

After the Buddha's death his teachings were orally transmitted until the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, when they were first committed to writing.

### The Spread of Buddhism

In the 3rd century BCE, the Indian emperor Asoka greatly strengthened Buddhism by his support and sent Buddhist missionaries as far afield as Syria. In succeeding centuries, however, the Hindu revival initiated the gradual decline of Buddhism in India. However, its beliefs had spread widely. Sri Lanka was converted to Buddhism in the 3rd century BCE and Buddhism has ever since remained its national religion.

After taking up residence in Sri Lanka, the Indian Buddhist scholar Buddhaghosa (5th century CE) produced some of Theravada Buddhism's most important scholastic writings. In the 7th century CE, Buddhism entered Tibet, where it has flourished, drawing its unique philosophical influences mainly from the 'Vajrayana' Buddhism, that 'Nirvana' can be attained in this lifetime, here and now. They developed the institution of clergy called the 'lamas', headed by the 'Dalai Lama'.

The invasions of the Huns (6th century CE) and the Muslims (11th century CE) were also significant factors behind the virtual extinction of Buddhism in India by the 13th century CE.



Buddhism came to SE Asia in the first five centuries after it was founded. All Buddhist schools were initially established, but the surviving forms today are mostly Theravada. About the 1st century, Buddhism entered China along trade routes from central Asia, initiating a four-century period of gradual assimilation.

The sacred book of Buddhism is called the Tripitaka (called Tipitaka in Pali). It is written in an ancient Indian language called Pali which is very close to the language that the Buddha himself spoke. It is also called the Pali Canon, after the language (Pali) in which it was first written.

Temples are centers for study and worship for the whole Buddhist community. Worship in the temple includes chanting from the scriptures, giving offerings in front of an image of the Buddha, lighting candles, burning incense, meditating, and listening to sermons. The most important part of a Buddhist temple is the shrine room, which contains one or more Buddharupas (statue of Buddha in one of the varied forms). Any place where an image of the Buddha is used in worship is known as a shrine, and many Buddhists also have shrines at home.

Before entering the shrine room, people take off their shoes as a mark of respect and also to keep the shrine room floor clean. They also dress modestly, often in white in Theravada countries. They bow in front of the Buddharupa, and sit with their feet tucked under, as it is rude to point the soles of one's feet towards someone. Bowls of water and other food offerings are placed before the Buddharupa on a raised platform or altar.

Traditionally in Theravada Buddhism, the laity were not expected to meditate or know the scriptures. That was the job of the monks and nuns in the Sangha. The laity gain merit by supporting the Sangha and living a life of reverence and devotion which they express through worship and ethical living. Another feature of worship involves visiting stupas. While there, Buddhists often circumambulate the stupa (a burial mound or shrine built to house relics of the Buddha or an important disciple or teacher.), reciting a mantra or a prayer, and concentrating on the importance of the Buddha for their lives. In conclusion, Buddhism is a unique religion, in the sense that it focuses on the human being, not on the supremacy of a divinity, and even more unique in its denial of a self, or soul.

Note: There is no Divine creator God or supreme being in Buddhist teaching, therefore it is often referred to as a nontheistic religion. His enlightenment was not bestowed through communion with a superior external force but through his own efforts. From the Buddhist point of view, a personal god is not necessary; we each have the resources to achieve our own liberation.

#### Buddhist Celebrations:

1. Lunar New Year-Best known Buddhist holy days. Most Mahayana Buddhists observe it on the first day of the first month in the Chinese lunisolar calendar (January or February). It is often called Chinese New Year. Families put up red decorations and lanterns and give red envelopes of money to children. Other important customs include paying respects to household gods and

ancestors and enjoying a feast. Communities perform the traditional lion dance to bring good luck.

2. **Wesak-** This is the celebration of buddha’s birth. For Theravada Buddhists, it is also the celebration of Buddha’s enlightenment and death. During this celebration, statues of Buddha are decorated. Offerings are taken to the monasteries, and sometimes there are fireworks. It is also called **Nehan-e (Parinirvana)**- Mahayana Buddhists remember Buddha’s death on this day, usually on February 15<sup>th</sup>. The Buddha died at age 80, after attaining enlightenment and then teaching for 40 years. At his death, he was in a state of meditation and reached Nirvana, a state of peace and freedom from the cycle of death, rebirth, and suffering. Believers celebrate his passing because, having become enlightened, he was freed from the physical world and its misery. Observances include meditating, visiting temples or monasteries, and reflecting on life’s impermanence and one’s own future death. Believers offer meditations for recently deceased family and friends to support them in their new existence.
3. **Higan-e**  
*March 17-23, 2022; September 20-26, 2022* Mahayana Buddhists observe Higan-e or Higan, a weeklong festival, at the spring and autumn equinoxes. “Higan” (short for to-higan), means “to reach the other shore” (of Nirvana or Enlightenment). It teaches six components: giving, precepts, perseverance, diligence, zazen (meditation), and wisdom. By practicing these, believers strive to rise above the world of delusion and reach Nirvana. Customs include offering rice cakes and sweets at the family altar. Believers make offerings to Buddha at temples and pay respects to ancestors at the cemetery.
4. **Other Festivals-** Different countries have different Buddhist celebrations. For example in Japan, Buddhists celebrate the flower festival, or Hana Matsuri, to honor Buddha’s birthday. Temples are decorated with cherry blossoms and children pour scented tea over statues of the baby Buddha. In India, Buddhists celebrate the Festival of Sacred Tooth in honor of Buddha’s first teaching. One of Buddha’s teeth is paraded around in the streets as an expression of this celebration.
5. For more celebrations visit: <https://theguibordcenter.org/faiths/buddhism/buddhist-festivals/>

### Lesson for students:

1. Make a PowerPoint of the Material for teacher. Use the PowerPoint to teach the lesson and to stop at appropriate sections to start a discussion.
2. Make a printout of the Material for teacher for each student or use a projector to display it on classroom wall (in a virtual class share screen the information). Have each student read a section before discussing it as a class.
3. Enhance the lesson by following up with a YouTube video.
  - a. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTI3P9zx-oY>
  - b. Show section/s of: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_qPxSplUdKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qPxSplUdKE)



### Activity for Students:

1. Fill out the comparative religion chart for Buddhism and discuss the results with the class. Using the chart compare each section with Zoroastrianism.
2. Plan a field day to a Buddhism temple close to your center.
3. Invite a representative of Buddhist faith to your virtual or in person class to share information about the religion. Have each student have a question ready to ask the representative.
4. Have each student write one thing they found interesting about Buddhism on a small sheet of paper along with their name, fold it, and place it in a jar. Then have each student take out one of the folded sheets of paper, read the content, and ask the person whose name is on the sheet of paper why they found what they have written interesting and discuss with class.
5. How can we use Buddha's teachings today to improve ourselves and our world? Give current event examples when possible.
6. Visit the Teacher's Guide section of [fezana.org/education](http://fezana.org/education) and get ideas for in class and virtual activities by using "Activity Menu" and "Virtual Class ideas".

### Sources:

1. <https://www.buddhanet.net/ans73.htm>
2. <https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/do-buddhists-believe-in-god/>
3. <https://www.uri.org/kids/world-religions/buddhist-celebrations>
4. <https://buddhismforkids.net/holidays.html>
5. <https://theguibordcenter.org/faiths/buddhism/buddhist-festivals/>

### Bibliography

See H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (1896, repr. 1963); D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism* (1956); A. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (1959, repr. 1979); E. Conze, *Buddhism* (1953, repr. 1959), *Buddhist Scriptures* (1959), and *Buddhist Thought in India* (1962, repr. 1967); E. Zürcher, *Buddhism* (1962); K. S. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (1964, repr. 1972); W. T. de Bary, *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China, and Japan* (1969); T. Ling, *The Buddha* (1973); R. Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (1973); W. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (2d ed. 1974); D. and A. Matsunaga, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism* (1974—76); S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer* (1976); L. Hurvitz, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (1976); R. H. Robinson, *The Buddhist Religion* (3d ed. 1982); R. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism* (1988); J. Ishikawa, *The Bodhisattva* (1990); and Jeffrey Brodd, *World Religions, A Voyage of Discovery*

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