

Mock Revision notes – B601 – Buddhism – Belief in Deity

Syllabus

<u>Belief about Deity</u>	
Nature of Gods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beliefs about the nature of the Gods• Reasons for views on the limited status of Gods
Belief in Gods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasons given in support of belief
Miracles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concept of miracles, including different beliefs within the religion• Gods, Buddhas and bodhisattvas intervening in the world and their relevant importance

Past question on this unit

(a) What is a god? [1]

(b) State two things which Buddhists might believe about miracles. [2]

(c) Describe Buddhist beliefs about the gods. [3]

(d) Explain why some Buddhists may **not** believe in the gods. [6]

(e) 'If the gods existed we would know it.'

Discuss this statement. You should include different, supported points of view and a personal viewpoint. You must refer to Buddhism in your answer. [12]

Total: [24]

Nature of Gods

A **deity** - is a recognised natural, preternatural (beyond what is normal or natural) or supernatural (beyond scientific understanding) immortal (never dying) being, who may be thought of as holy, divine, or sacred, held in high regard, and respected by believers, often religiously referred to as a god. Believers may consider or believe that they can communicate with the deity, who can respond supernaturally to their entreaties, and that the deity's myths are true. Some religions have one supreme deity (monotheistic), others have multiple deities of various ranks (polytheistic).

The majority of Buddhists do not believe in a God the way that other religions do. The Buddha was not a God but a human who reached enlightenment, his followers, Buddhists, follow his teachings because they too want to reach enlightenment. However, some Mahayana Buddhists do believe that the Buddha is a superhuman Buddha and they believe that his powers over life are unlimited and it could be argued that this belief is very similar to a belief in a God.

Buddhists give the following reasons for not believing in God;

1. Humans have created gods to deal with their fear.
2. There is no evidence to support the existence of gods.

3. Humans have the ability to reach perfect happiness and Nirvana with the power of their own mind.

Useful quotes from the Dhammapada;

"No one saves us but ourselves,
No one can and no one may.
We ourselves must walk the path,
But Buddhas clearly show the way".

"Gripped by fear men go to the
sacred mountains,
sacred groves, sacred trees and
shrines".

Belief in God

Some Buddhists do believe in God although Buddhists believe that life is a never ending cycle of births and deaths they might not consider God to have created the universe. They also wouldn't spend too much time contemplating the nature of God as they would appreciate that God can not end their suffering and they wouldn't want to clutter their minds.

The Buddha

Although the Buddha is not considered as a deity you may be asked about him in this unit because he is the most influential person to Buddhists.

A Buddha is an enlightened being. This means someone who has come to understand the true nature of life. Anyone has the potential to become a buddha which means that buddhas may exist today. However, the person now known as the Buddha became so influential because after he had reached enlightenment he spent 45 years travelling and teaching others how to reach enlightenment and he gained a large number of followers.

Buddhist teachings – You will find this section useful for all aspects of the course.

Dhamma means something that you base your life on. For example your Dhamma could be football if that is what you base your life on and what guides you. Dhamma, for Buddhists, is the real nature of life and a Buddha is one who is enlightened to it. Therefore, a person becomes a buddha when they fully understand and appreciate what life is all about. Buddhist teachings help people to understand the nature of life and reach enlightenment for themselves. All of the following teachings are based on the Buddha's teachings and words but some have been developed over the past 2500 years.

- With single mindedness and determination a person can reach enlightenment as demonstrated by the Buddha himself.
- Enlightenment can be reached by following the middle way. The middle way is living a life that does not involve self denial or luxury.
- The Three Universal Truths – Anicca, anatta and dukkha. Translated as impermanence, interdependence and suffering.

- The Four Noble Truths – All life is suffering (dukkha), suffering is caused by craving (tanha), the way to stop suffering is to stop craving and the way to stop craving is by following the middle way.
- The Eightfold Path – You can live the middle way by adopting the right concentration, the right mindfulness, the right effort, the right livelihood, the right action, the right view, the right intention and the right speech.
- Kamma – People create positive or negative consequences for themselves by acting positively or negatively. This Kamma can move on to a person's next life. Easily reflected in the phrase, 'what goes around comes around.'
- Samsara – The idea that the world is like a great wheel of life and death with creatures constantly being born, growing old, dying and being born again. However, Kamma can affect the nature of our rebirth.

Miracles

Miracle – an occurrence outside and beyond the order commonly determined or observed in nature.

Many religious people view miracles as an event that has been caused by God. Therefore, God can be revealed through miracles.

The Buddha seems to have accepted miracles and classified them as follows;

1. The marvel of supernormal power to appear as many persons, to pass through walls, to fly through the air, walk on water. All these are physical actions the ordinary people cannot perform.
2. The supernormal power to read other people's minds.
3. The supernormal power to be able to guide people according to their mental development, for their own good, using suitable methods to fit these people.

However, he believed that miracles were caused by the power of the mind and only considered the third type of miracle to be acceptable.

Theravada and Mahayana beliefs about Miracles

Theravada Buddhists believe that the Buddha disappeared once he died. However, Mahayana Buddhists believe that the essence of the Buddha remained and Buddhahood can show itself in three different ways;

1. Transformation Body - The Buddha nature can take on physical form. Therefore, great religious or political people can be viewed as Transformation Bodies of the Buddha used to teach people the Dhamma.
2. Truth Body – The Buddha nature is represented in enlightened qualities such as, compassion, courage, determination and energy and therefore can be shared by all human beings.

3. Enjoyment Body – The Buddha or characteristics of the Buddha as seen in visions or through meditation.

The above belief is known as Trikaya and can be likened to the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, it is possible that Mahayana would accept that miracles could be explained by the Trikaya. Mahayana Buddhists also believe that Bodhisattvas exist to help others reach enlightenment, these could be physical or spiritual beings and so it is conceivable that these beings could be responsible for miracles worked to help others reach enlightenment.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Buddhas are people who have reached enlightenment. The Buddha is the most famous.

The word *bodhisattva* means "enlightenment being." Very simply, bodhisattvas are beings who work for the enlightenment of all beings, not just themselves. They vow not to enter Nirvana until all beings enter Nirvana together.

Non-Mahayana Buddhists may only use the word Bodhisattava to describe the Buddha' past lives. However, Mahayana Buddhists may recognise a number of Bodhisattvas as they believe that some enlightened beings choose to stay in the universe to help others reach enlightenment. These Bodhisattvas might be represented as human beings or transcendent (not part of the physical universe) beings. Bodhisattavs are highly respected and called upon in times of need or to help Buddhists to reach enlightenment. Other Buddhists may treat Bodhisattva statues and images as symbolic representations of the Dhamma and focus on them during worship.

Examples of Bodhisattvas are;

Avalokiteshvara – A Bodhisattva of compassion.

Manjushri – A Bodhisattva of wisdom.

Kshitigarbha – The saviour of beings in hell.

Be an independent learner – If there is anything that you do not understand see me for extra support, consult another student as it may be a lesson that you missed or search the internet for more information.

