

*Website of BESS (Buddhist Education Services for Schools Inc)
Main menu item titled 'For Students'
Sub-menu item titled 'Questions & Answers'*

YEAR 11, 12 ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

School children in years 11 and 12 in non-government schools are often asked to do assignments in Buddhism (or other religions). This section lists common questions asked by students followed by very brief answers. The authors of the answers are:

Rahu Sarath-Chandra (Questions 1 to 7)

Peter Hawkins (Venerable Thich Thong Phap)(Questions 8 to 11)

Mrs. Vinitha Sarath-Chandra

Some students prefer to conduct oral interviews and record the answers electronically. The information so developed is not included in this presentation.

For detailed answers they need to make arrangements to visit a Buddhist Centre and consult a suitable person, often a monk or nun. BESS can help them with directions to visit a centre in their area or arrange to meet a consultant working with BESS.

You can select a Buddhist centre close to you by browsing through the website of the Queensland Sangha Association Inc www.sanghaql.org Left click on Buddhist Centres to see a full list of centres in Queensland. Below each address if there is a Virtual Tour, then click on that to see a full description of the centre so that you can do a more meaningful selection. Please note that not all centres have supplied their virtual tour data for publication.

To make it easy for readers to go to questions of interest directly, a comprehensive index is provided below. The index shows the broad topics covered in questions and answers. For each topic, the numbers of questions that attempted to deal with that or a similar topic, are given. The index is updated from time to time.

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QUESTIONS ASKED BY STUDENTS AND BRIEF ANSWERS SUPPLIED

1 Does Buddhism believe in Almighty God?

No.

2 If you do not believe in God, then how do you have such an ordered world?

Buddhism agrees that the universe has some order. That order is attributed to the operation of a system of laws. The main laws are listed below:

- a. Physical norm (e.g. physics, chemistry, mathematics etc.)
- b. Biological norm (e.g. botany, zoology, genetics etc.)
- c. Astronomy (e.g. planets, seasons, eclipses etc.)
- d. Super normal norm (e.g. miracles performed by the Buddha, unusual acts and occurrences not explained by the sciences that we know of, etc.)
- e. Mind norm (e.g. Western psychology, Buddhist psychology etc.)
- f. Causation norm (e.g. Karma, action and result, dependent origination etc.)

3 How do you explain creation when you do not believe in God?

For a Buddhist what is called original creation is irrelevant. What is important is current and continuous creation. You create your world of tomorrow, pretty much on the basis of what you do today. Look at the six norms. The last two afford you an opportunity to create your world all the time. Perhaps you could do less in relation to the first four norms. Instead, take control of what you are able to control, which are the last two norms above.

4 How do you explain pain and suffering?

All of it is due to the operation of the six norms. At least in part you have to take responsibility, as norms 5 and 6 are under your control.

5 In this world of science what is the relevance of an old religion like Buddhism?

Science deals with matter and energy. Only in the last 100 years it has even tried to deal with the mind. What is more important, the mind or matter? Think.

Even in regard to matter and energy, science is still developing. Quantum science is now challenging the very basis of modern science. Science stands on shaky ground but it is bound to develop.

Without any instruments at all the Buddha was able to see that matter and energy are two forms of the same thing. It was as recently as 1930 that modern science realized the truth of that assertion of the Buddha.

In regard to the mind, Western psychology is still looking for a strong theoretical foundation although its clinical aspects are developed.

All in all, if the Buddha was an epitome of super-knowledge, the scientist is more akin to a crawling baby. But it is growing up. There is simply no comparison.

6 Are you born as a Buddhist or can one be converted to Buddhism?

A Buddhist by birth means a person born to Buddhist parents. That does not necessarily mean that such a person is a practising Buddhist. In the same way you can belong to another religion, yet you could be practising teachings of the Buddha. To that extent you will be acknowledged as a Buddhist. The label 'Buddhist' is meaningless. What matters is how you think, speak and act. According to Buddhism most labels (such as religion, race, country etc.) are irrelevant for most purposes and they cause more harm than good.

Not so strangely, converting and proselytizing are strange to Buddhism. The ability of a human being to make his own decisions is respected. What right do I have to say that only I am right and that you are definitely wrong? In fact people who make this type of statement are acting extremely foolishly most of the time. Truly wise people do not brag about their wisdom.

In very practical terms, just look at the turmoil in the world today. What is the main cause? Some people think that only they are right and want to impose their views on others. When they fail, hurting and killing is the result. Can that be part of any religion?

7 Are all religions right or is it that only Buddhism is right?

There are useful teachings in all religions. It is disrespect to pass judgment on other religions. Millions of people follow every religion. We need to respect their faith. However, we should be able to discuss matters in a civilized manner.

Where Buddhism is concerned, you are invited to consider its teachings. If your experience is that these teachings are useful, then you learn more and practice more. It is as simple as that.

8 How has the Sangha adapted to the contemporary Australian life?

In some cases Sangha haven't had to adapt particularly when they are well supported by particular ethnic groups such as the Thai, Burmese, Vietnamese, Sri Lankan communities etc. However their impact tends to remain limited to their ethnic community.

In some instances the support is given to monasteries belonging to well-known lineages in the west such as that of Ajahn Chah and it may be given by larger communities that are Theravadin in base or occasionally by communities that may also be Mahayanist. The major support is given by ethnic communities rather than by native-born Australian communities. In the case of the monasteries in Ajahn Chah's tradition, the monastics are mostly westerners.

There are a few other monasteries supported by overseas wealth and these are usually Chinese or are supported from Taiwan and Singapore. In any instance when monastics are well supported, they can lead a more traditional life, which includes a more traditional relationship to lay people.

For those of us, mostly Westerners but some Asians, who are not well supported or are not supported at all, we are self-funded either from our savings, Centrelink benefits or from work. While this can be a whole lot tougher, it also means we have a lot more contact with the community at large, we are not bound to the religious demands of a particular community and we can find new ways of being alongside people and sharing the Buddha's teaching with them. In my case I am funded by Centrelink and work in an approved voluntary capacity as a University chaplain. So my adaptation includes intensive involvement with other Australians in non-religious ways (mostly). It also means I have little contact with the wider Buddhist community and no real support. While this is isolating and hard work, I am able to evolve as an Australian monastic.

These latter adaptations, which are not greatly common, may bring greater changes if, for example, monastics ordained in different lineages, doing "their own thing", decide to live together for mutual support and spiritual companionship. While it hasn't happened yet, it is an interesting possibility. I think for the whole of the human history of this continent, it has required adaptations by the human population and this is not likely to exempt Buddhist monks and nuns.

9 How has technology threatened the lives that members of the Sangha community lead?

I don't think it has. Buddhism values self-reliance and adaptability. The late Cha'n master Most Venerable Sheng Yen encapsulates this adaptability in his maxim: "A young person is not yet old; and old person is not yet dead. Work with what you have and do not resist change." This means for me, for example, that my favourite mantra is "Plan B".

As to the adaptability of Buddhist monastics, all of us have email addresses, web sites, downloadable dharma talks, mobile phones and so on and so forth. Indeed the Venerable Pannyavaro Thera is a senior (Australian) monk in the Theravadin tradition and is concurrently abbot of a meditation monastery and webmaster of buddhanet.net, the most extensive Buddhist website in the world. It all happens from an adapted garage in Lismore, NSW.

10 Do you believe that the Sangha community is struggling in the modern day world?

I hope so otherwise it will become flabby and irrelevant.

11 What core beliefs do you think contribute to the faith that members of the Sangha show?

Strong determination, confidence in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), respect for the beliefs of others, compassion towards the community around us, energy (viriyā) and adaptability. We are small and young and it is possible that we may not last but I don't think so. Much will depend on whether Australians grow to appreciate the contemplative life and the value of generosity. But for some human beings the monastic form of contemplative life will always appeal and give expression to our deepest longings as, indeed, it always has.

[Please send your question to BESS and we could post an answer here after emailing you hopefully for the benefit of others in the future.]

AMENDMENT TO BESS WEBSITE PAGE TITLED "FOR STUDENTS"

DATE: 1 OCT 10

Questions (12) to (14) asked by CG, answered by Rahu Sarath-Chandra

12 The first precept is not to kill living beings. So does this mean Buddhists are vegetarians? And is that first precept to do with killing beings or does it have a deeper meaning such as to not kill time and wealth?

13 How is the first precept related to right action in the eightfold path? To not kill a human being is the right act but I mean how else are they related?

14 How important is not killing beings to you? Why is it important? How will it affect your life by not following this teaching?

FIRST REPLY TO QUESTIONS 12 TO 14

The information you are seeking is on our website www.bessqld.com

Please click 'For Teachers' on the home page and then click on 'Lessons'. Now go to Year 8 lessons. At the bottom you will see the book on Buddhism for Year 8. Click on that and give a minute for the book to open.

Chapters 6 and 25 will answer your questions.

If you need more information, please go to e-books under the teachers section on the home page. Open the book titled "Buddhism-12 Key Questions Answered etc.'.

You can read the articles by Rahu Sarath-Chandra in answer to key questions 3 and 4 of that book. The other articles under 3 and 4 are also good.

Trust this will help you with the information you are seeking. Otherwise please send an email to BESS.

Questions 15 to 21 are also from GC and answered by Rahu Sarath-Chandra

15. How do the signs and symbols in meditation interact with worshippers?

This question is not clear. Please clarify what you want to know.

16. How does meditation influence you in your daily life?

Daily life becomes very peaceful and happy with meditation. It makes the mind clear, and the person has a better chance of studying well, stay in good health, relating well to others and doing work better with less problems.

17 Why is meditation such an important ritual in Buddhism?

Buddhist practice has three elements, generosity, morality and mind development. Meditation is the key to mind development. In fact generosity and morality step up in the spiritual ladder with increasing degrees of meditation. Meditation is the ultimate practice in Buddhism.

18 Is there a specific time and place that is best for the process of meditation to reach a state of enlightenment?

To reach enlightenment the level of meditation must be very high. For that a quiet place such as a thicket, foot of a tree, an empty building with no activity are helpful. A time of relative relaxation is needed. The body must be settled at that time, just nourished and in reasonable health. After long and ardent practice, any time any place becomes alright. But for beginners the above conditions are worthy of attention.

19 How does Meditation help worshippers gain a state of enlightenment?

Enlightenment is the awakening of true wisdom. Usually our wisdom is clouded with our thoughts of craving and hatred. Such thoughts can be cleared only by meditation.

20 What values and beliefs are involved with meditation?

Meditation aims at cleansing the mind in stages. That is its greatest value. Cleansing the body is possible but is subsidiary. Buddhist meditation does not aim at worldly advantages or super-human powers (like doing miracles). These may be results but no value is attached to them.

The only belief attached to meditation is to accept tentatively that it is the ultimate way to enlightenment. For this one needs to learn the essentials of the Dharma or Buddha's teaching. That knowledge brings meditation into the true focus. Through practice itself the person gets convinced about it. So at the end there is no belief necessary. It becomes experiential conviction.

21 How are these values and beliefs carried out in Australia?

The Australian scene is no different from that of other countries. Dharma is imparted through temples by the monks and nuns. They also teach the techniques of meditation. The temples and more especially the forest monasteries provide the proper places for learning and practice. They also provide group help to practitioners of meditation via discussions of experiences.

Questions 22 to 36 are from YD, answered by Rahu Sarath-Chandra

22 What are the key beliefs in Buddhism?

The following is a sample of key ideas taught in Buddhism. It is not quite correct to call them beliefs:

Living beings are not satisfied with life

There is a cause for this dissatisfaction-CRAVING

An end to this dissatisfaction is possible-ENLIGHTENMENT

There is a way (the middle way) to reach that end

The Buddha achieved the result on his own and discovered the Way

Many others attained to release from dissatisfaction and are examples to follow

Generosity, morality and meditation form the basic practice

Morality, Concentration of mind and wisdom form the higher practice

23 Do you use the five precepts as rules or guidelines?

There are no rules or commands in Buddhism as such. These are guidelines recommended by the Buddha.

24 What are your views/ ideas on the meaning of the word "God"?

The idea of 'GOD' taught in other religions is not found in Buddhism.

The Buddha mentions the existence of GODS or Heavenly Beings, but they too have not risen above the universal norm of dissatisfaction; they are happier than we are but are also subject to decay after a life term in a particular heaven. Many such beings are on the way to enlightenment and often they have visited and consulted the Buddha on further spiritual advancement.

25 Do you think that Buddhism is 'relaxed' in Australia?

In some ways yes, we have. Adapting to the environment is our way. However we try not to abandon key ideas, although the way we practice may be different as it depends on the social environment.

26 Do you know any differences/similarities in practicing Buddhism in Australia than any other countries?

The teaching is exactly the same. The practice may be slightly different. In traditionally Buddhist countries, practice begins from generosity and an element of belief in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. They start from generosity, morality, meditation and try to reach wisdom.

In Western countries, people think they should start from wisdom. May be they assume they are already wise (???), I do not know. Hence meditation is the initial attraction. Ultimately the practice becomes similar.

27 What is your value of being a human being?

A human being has the best chance of attaining enlightenment because human life gives fleeting happiness while teaching lessons in suffering.

28 In your opinion how does someone find their identity and destiny in life?

They need to understand the core concepts and see the value of emancipation.

29 What are the foundations of faith in Buddhism, and how are they incorporated in your life?

'Faith' or rather 'confidence' is developed through understanding the Buddha and his unparalleled qualities and by learning the Dharma..

30 Why is there pain and suffering in our world?

That is the way it is. Pain and suffering are accentuated by the operation of the law of impermanence. So also by our own thoughts, words and deeds in this life and in lives before this.

31 What is meditation and how often do you meditate?

Buddhist Meditation means the cultivation and GROWTH of the mind. This growth needs knowledge of the Dharma and also sustained practice of mindfulness and concentration, two natural gifts of the human mind. One can meditate as often and as much as one would like and can afford in prevailing circumstances.

32 What sacred texts are there in Buddhism?

In the Pali scriptures, Discourses of the Buddha are found in a collection called SUTTA PITAKA. Rules of discipline for monks and nuns are found in a collection called VINAYA PITAKA. The core philosophy and psychology are found in the ABHIDHAMMA PITAKA.

Then there are explanatory commentaries and treatises on difficult topics. The treatises on philosophy and psychology form one example. The Dhammapada is a collection of some 500 short sayings of the Buddha. In Sri Lanka for example there are 'commentaries' on the main scriptures. Then there are compendia such as the 'Path of Purification'. What is considered sacred is quite a large collection.

33 What is a Buddhist meaning in life?

Life is treated as a result of one's own thoughts, words and deeds in times before and in past births. If one wishes for a better life, then one needs to improve on these three aspects continuously. One can wish to be born again and again or may wish to attain enlightenment.

34 What is a Buddhist's purpose in life?

At a practical level the purpose is to live happily and in peace.
At a spiritual level the purpose is to train oneself to attain enlightenment.

35 Is practicing Buddhism in Australia easy, or are there cultural 'restrictions'?

There are no cultural restrictions in Australia. On the other hand a Buddhist in Australia would show compassion to believers in other religions and try not to interfere in their practices. Monks and nuns may have some problems with dress and conduct that are not known in Australian culture but they seem to have adapted effectively.

36 How does someone reach enlightenment or nirvana, are they the same?

They are the same. The method is to practise generosity, morality, mind development and wisdom, spirally and continuously. To speed up one needs to become a monk or nun. Others will proceed slowly due to household and economic obligations.

Questions 37 to 44 (April 2010) are from KR. Answers are from Rahu Sarath-Chandra

37 What physical/material items do you use in Rituals?

See examples given below.

38 What do these material items represent during the ritual?

It depends on each item and each ritual. For example if the ritual is to recollect the noble attributes of Lord Buddha, as a meditation, then most items represent either the Buddha or his qualities. For other illustrations, see below.

Examples of material objects used in a Meditation on the Buddha:

A casket of Buddha relics (from the body of the last Buddha)

A statue or picture of the Buddha

A Bodhi (Pipal, Ficus Religiosa) tree, as the Buddha attained enlightenment under such a tree in Buddh Gaya, India.

A stupa (reliquary, pagoda, or dagoba) as it enshrines relics from the body of the last Buddha.

Flowers represent the sweetness of the Buddha's personality. The sweet smell also represents the purity of character of the Buddha.

Incense represents the purity of the Buddha.

Lights remind us about the wisdom of the Buddha that help us to attain enlightenment.

Examples of material objects used in a Calming Meditation ritual:

A gong with modulating sound to help develop basic focusing

A tape or CD of chanting scriptures to energise attention before focusing

Examples of material objects used in a Concentration Meditation:

There are many physical objects that are used to develop full concentration, particularly to help develop Absorptions (or Jhanas). Some people use these techniques to develop miraculous powers or super-human powers, but the Buddha recommended these to be used as a base to practise Insight Meditation for the attainment of enlightenment.

The human body is one of these objects.

A disc made of brown earth is another

A vessel of clear water

A small low candle power light

A pinhole picture of the sun (that you can see in a poorly thatched house)

A light object that moves in a breeze

And so on

39 How is a material item relevant in the Mediation Ritual?

It depends on each ritual.

Essentially all rituals in Buddhism are connected to meditation.

So every object is expected to help in focusing the mind.

40 When does the material item get used in the Mediation Ritual?

It depends on each ritual as described above.

41 Can your religionists participate in Meditation Rituals without these items?

Yes. It depends on the person or group. If they are spiritually advanced to that extent material items are not necessary, they do not need the material items.

42 How do the material items get used in the Rituals?

It depends on each ritual as described above.

43 Why does the material item get used in Rituals?

Material items help a person to focus on the non-material objects in meditation. For example the great attributes of Lord Buddha can be recollected by looking at a Buddha Statue.

Because it difficult to see the mind visually or mentally, a newcomer to meditation begins to see the mind with the help of material objects. For example when you listen to a mild repeated sound for a few minutes the mind stops wandering around and gets absorbed in the sound. At that time the selected meditation commences.

44 Are there different materialistic items for different rituals?

Yes. See above.

Questions 45 to 57 (May 2010) are from AT. Answers are from Rahu Sarath-Chandra

45 How devoted to your religion are you?

Very much

46 What is the most important aspect to Buddhism?

Mind development theory, methods and techniques aiming at absolute happiness

47 How does your religion (Buddhism) affect your everyday life?

It affects us in everything connected with life. We need to be generous and considerate, ethical in conduct, develop the mind and use and develop our wisdom.

48 How does being away from a country that is famous for the practice of Buddhism affect you?

In my case, when I came here in 1979, there were no temples or libraries or teachers of Buddhism. So, I felt I had lost a main purpose in life. Now it has changed completely. It seems easier to practise Buddhism in Australia, than in Sri Lanka although the picture there is changing very fast. However we do not have access to Sri Lankan experts in Buddhism and Buddhist meditation. However, even at this early stage, there are some very competent monks and nuns in Australia no doubt. When Dhamma masters visit Australia, we have close access to them which we might not have had in Sri Lanka because of the large numbers of people who seek access to the masters. So, there are a few shortcomings for the time being but there are also obvious advantages in Australia.

49 How does Australian culture affect your religion and your commitment to it?

I do not see much impact of culture. In fact we are supposed to get adjusted to new cultures and live in harmony with believers of other religions and it looks as if we are doing it effectively.

50 How has recent times affected your religion- 21st century technology

Technology particularly in computers, IT and communications has helped Buddhism a great deal. The entire teaching of the Buddha which consists of a large number of books in modern print, have been digitised and there become more accessible and

cheap. You can hear the Dharma on radio and television. Things created in one small place soon become spread all over the world. Libraries are linked. Research is better publicised.

51 How does modern day influences change your meaning/ purpose of life?

It depends on whom you ask. Commerce and the mad rush for materials and money, that fail to satisfy most people, makes the teachings of the Buddha even more relevant today. To put it simply, the richest countries do not have the most satisfied people. So, one needs to explain this phenomenon. In that explanation the Dharma furnishes valid and lasting answers. There is no need to amend the teachings of the Buddha.

52 Rituals that belong to Buddhism-do you have to practice differently?

Most Buddhist rituals are either meditation oriented or are preparations for meditation. These can be practised at home or in a temple. What is missing is the social and some cultural aspects such as public processions, parades etc These in any event have no real relevance to most educated people.

53 Of Buddhism's key beliefs what are the main ones you follow?

The law of Karma

Law of change

That existence is not satisfactory

That in the final analysis there is no soul or substance in a being or a thing

The Buddha is the supreme teacher and example to follow

One needs to practise and convince oneself about the validity of the teaching

Blind faith is not helpful but tentative confidence in the teacher is useful

The purity of thoughts, words and actions is core practice.

Concentration meditation must not be used to develop miraculous powers, but should be used to raise the level of wisdom

54 What kind of religious experiences have you been through?

Perhaps I have experienced high levels of concentration for many years. During formal meditation I have experienced total calm and serenity. Of course these are subjective views and my interpretation could well be incorrect. The ability to stay unperturbed in difficult or overwhelming circumstances is another long term experience. It is a blessing in day to day life. A general sense of contentment is another. This I find is extremely beneficial. I have also managed to keep strong desires, strong aversions and general stupidity at bay, and that has made life easy.

55 How do you feel about death, pain, suffering and evil? How does your religion explain the occurrence of this? Why do you think it occurs?

I take these as aspects of the world we live in. It is part of our lives we cannot avoid. They come and go. Probably I do not fully understand these and so I could be failing look at them with wisdom.

These things occur as a result of the operation of the five norms of the universe, one of which is KARMA (or intentional actions that bear fruit now or later). Many of the other norms are explained in science. Some things, may be most, are due to Karma. Karma is generated due to greed, hatred and ignorance operating together every moment in our lives.

Give pain to others and you get it back.

Evil is due to untrained minds that have deviated from spirituality.

Death is like any other change. Real death happens every moment. Many people who do not understand this are frightened of 'conventional death'. (if you need more information on death please read the Year 8 text book on Buddhism written by Rahu Sarath-Chandra. It is an e-book in the following website:

www.bessqld.com

56. What does your religion expect from you?

Good thoughts, words and actions all the time regardless of what others do.

57 What are your thoughts on the following statement?

“Since orientating in the east and Indian regions, Buddhism has adapted to different cultural beliefs of the Australian culture. It is evident that there are slight changes from the traditional beliefs and practices to accommodate to the Australian way of life. However Australian Buddhists are still striving for to reach Nivana-enlightenment.”

I assume I have understood your statement although the wording is not clear. It is generally true. Buddhism teaches adaptation to the environment and to be flexible in attitudes. The differences are mainly due to the fact that the culture in Asian countries and India is very different from the culture in Australia and the western world. Most Australians are Christians and we have a responsibility as good Buddhists not to disturb their religious beliefs and the connected culture of Australia. So, in the way we do some things visible to the general public, we need to be mindful of those who do not accept Buddhism and Buddhist culture.

However, we can practise at home, in the work place, in schools etc without disturbing the environment. That is what most Australians do. To move towards enlightenment one does not have to make 'public shows'. In Asian countries the culture is so much mixed with religion that Buddhist practises are very visible. That is not necessary from a religious point of view.

Questions 58 to 84 (May 2010) are from BS. Answers are from Mrs. Vinitha Sarath-Chandra

58 What are the major beliefs and practices of Buddhism?

Living beings are not satisfied with life
There is a cause for this dissatisfaction-CRAVING
An end to this dissatisfaction is possible-ENLIGHTENMENT
There is a way (the middle way) to reach that end

The Buddha achieved the result on his own and discovered the Way
Many others attained to release from dissatisfaction and are examples to follow
Generosity, morality and meditation form the basic practice
Morality, Concentration of mind and wisdom form the higher practice

59 What is the role and status of women in Buddhism?

Men and women have the same status and similar roles.

60 What is the authority that determines that role and status of women?

Sacred writings
Interpretations
Organizational structure i.e. leaders at various levels

61 What has been the role and status of women in Buddhism historically?

Women have played a major role. They lead in looking after monks and nuns.
They lead in looking after the family.
Generally they are closer to the religion than men.

62 What has empowered or unburdened the role and status of women in Buddhism?

Buddha gave equal status to women. Women's liberation apparently started from that. They were treated as inferior before the Buddha. All references to parents in discourses start with the term mother and not the father. Men have to show utmost respect to women first as daughters, then as sisters, then as spouses and then as mothers. Mother is called the Buddha at home. Women have the same opportunity and capability to attain enlightenment as men.

63 How does Buddhism understand the nature of a woman?

A woman makes the world as she brings up children who ultimately run the world. A mother's love is unsurpassed. Her compassion to a child is as noble as it could be.

Experience:

1 How long have you been a member of this religious community?

From birth (say 70 years or so).

2 What type of Buddhist are you?

Theravada

3 How has your knowledge of your religious tradition been developed?

By learning from books, monks and nuns. We were also taught in regular school and also in Sunday Dharma schools.

4 What status/ role for you have in your religious tradition?

I played the lead role and was president of two fairly large Buddhist organisations that succeeded in setting up temples in Brisbane at a time when there were not enough people to take responsibility on such a large scale.

5 How do you feel about the role and status you have in your religious tradition?

Fully satisfied! At least we are equal to men.

Sacred Writing

64 What do the sacred writings of your religious tradition that speak about the role and status of women?

Many discourses bear this out. In the Sutra on Loving kindness for example, the Buddha recommends that the thoughts of goodwill to the world should be maintained just the way a mother looks after her only child.

65 Are these writings an authority for you and your understanding of your role and status as a woman? Why/ why not?

The scriptures and commentaries abound with such instructions.

Beliefs

66 As a women are there particular beliefs in your religion that you struggle with/ questions/ don't believe?

None

67 Does your religion teach masculinity of god? Does your religion teach that women are subverting to men?

No.

Ritual

68 What role do women take in the ritual practices of your religion? Do women in your religion/ you have an active role in public ministry? Are there rituals only preformed by women?

It is generally the same as for men.

Ethnic Practice

69 What re the behavior/ code of conduct prescribed for women in your religious traditions? Why/ why not?

There is no separate code for women. The precepts are the starting guidelines. The practice is the same for men and women.

Social Practice

70 Are women/ you empowered by the organizational structure of your religion? Can you become a leader or accept a position of authority in your religion?

Yes. See above.

Note: In the following the terms Bhikkhus (monks) Bhikkhunis (nuns) are used,

Sub- questions regarding nuns:

71 What are the requirements for Bhikkhunis ordination?

Monks and nuns together sit in ordaining a women.

72 Why do Bhikkhunis follow more precepts (sikkhapada) than monks? Would you follow that?

That is partly for the protection of women and nunneries, and partly for the perpetuity of the Order of Monks and Nuns. Also, they all are committed to celibacy, and while sitting together they need to stay apart too.

73 Can you explain the Eight Garudhammas (eight rules of respect) required of nuns ?

1 Salutation protocol. A nun always salutes a monk.

2 Nuns do not have retreats where there are no monks.

3 Self review meetings (uposatha) needs a monk's approval

4 Self reviews are conducted by a nun for nuns in the presence of monks

5 When a nun commits a major offence disciplinary action is decided by both monks and nuns

6 Higher ordination is given to a nun by both groups sitting together

7 A nun cannot rebuke or abuse a monk

8 The order of admonition is monks to nuns and not in reverse

74 The Bhikkhus have three robes whilst the Bhikkhunis have five robes. What are they? And why is this?

This is for the special needs of nuns.

75 Once women joined the Sangha (assembly of monks and nuns) how were they treated by the Bhikkhus? Where there any concerns of sexism?

They were treated with due respect according to rules.

76 What was the status of the Bhikkhunis?

Subject to the 8 rules nuns were treated as equals of monks. A lay male needs to worship a nun when meeting her or when departing (Thervada).

77 In the time of the Buddha, what role did women play in Buddhism?

Before the Buddha, women were treated as inferior. When they joined the order and many became enlightened and famous, they became to be respected as equals.

78 Is it time that monks are not to touch women as they are seen as unclean/ why are women seen as unclean?

Wrong. You cannot say women are unclean. Monks and nuns both are celibates (they keep away from sexual relations). So there are rules to help a nun or monk to protect their celibacy.

79 Why can women not become Buddha's?

A person training to become a Buddha has to do that over thousands of lives usually in the human world. Meditation in solitary places is essential practice. A person training like that is born as a male for his own effectiveness. I know of women who have decided to become Buddhas in the future. You cannot achieve such a result in one life. But in this life right here in Australia they can become Arahant Buddhas (that is get enlightened by following the Buddha's instruction.

The Buddha though born as a male does not classify himself as a man. He has unique features in his body. We'll leave it there.

80 What are some examples of gender role issues in Buddhism?

From all the Suttas I have been taught, there are no such issues. You can see that if you visit any temple.

81 How do women play a role in Buddhist beliefs?

Exactly as men do.

82 In the time of the Buddha what was the thinking about women and celibacy?

Women were treated as inferior in many ways. They were subjugated. But celibacy was practiced in prevailing religions (commonly called Hinduism nowadays). Celibacy was held in high regard as a stepping stone for spirituality. But in those religions women still stayed at home as if only men can practice the holy life. The Buddha attacked that belief right from the start. That is one reason why Buddhism got thrown out of India by Brahmins.

83 Why do men have only two levels of ordination while women have to go through three levels?

That does not seem correct. For both sexes there is a lower ordination and a higher ordination. But before any ordination we are encouraged to take lower precepts for many months, both men and women.

84 What do you think of the Eight Garudharmas?

I think there is no philosophic issue. It is just a set of practical rules expecting practical outcomes. I do not consider these rules as an affront to women. Rather these create a new opportunity for us women.

The fact that women need protection (at least more than men) is recognized even in the law of Australia. Ultimately this seems to be the aim.

When decisions are taken the nuns have the same say as the monks. So I see no problem with these.

Questions 85 to 99 (May 2010) are from AA. Answers are from Mrs. Vinitha Sarath-Chandra

85 Can you describe Buddhism?

A way of living a happy life

A system of training to attain the end of discontentment.

86 Why did you become Buddhist? (When/How?)

I was born to a Buddhist family.

87 Do you attend Temple's regularly? If so, how often?

Yes. At least once a week

88 What is your outlook on the Buddha?

The ideal personality to follow, the epitome of all that is good, a shining example to brilliance and skills

89 What is your view on life after death?

Death occurs every moment we are living. If you are referring to conventional death recognized by the government, it is just one case of death where the body dies.

So long as we cling on to any thing whatever even a strong belief, life continues after the conventional death. It may be in a different plane of existence

90 What is your view on pain and suffering?

These are properties of existence here, in heavens or in woeful states.

These end only on full enlightenment

91 Do you meditate? If so how often?

Yes.

Regularly meaning daily

92 How/why do you dedicate yourself to the Path of Enlightenment?

Establish confidence in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

Practise generosity with a wide connotation

Meditate

Practise rules of morality

Practise concentration

Develop wisdom through insight meditation

93 What are the other ways you devote yourself to the Buddha?

Reflecting on His great attributes

Examining in detail what he taught and how he taught

94 Do you follow the Four Noble Truths? What is your outlook on these?

Yes

The truths fit into almost any problem you face in day to day life

The scheme helps to solve problems without blaming others.

95 Do you attend Buddhist Festivals? If so which ones/describe

Yes.

Making offerings to the Buddha

Devotional practices

96 Does the Australian Secular Society affect the way you practice your beliefs? How?

It does not affect my practice.

My practice is primarily in my mind.

A lot of secular people have many good attributes that are held in high regard in Buddhism

97 Please explain your Daily Life as a Buddhist? (E.g. daily prayers)

Meditation early morning, and before going to sleep

Activity meditation during the entire day before retiring to bed

Observance of the changing nature of all things around us

Observing that our desires cannot be ended by gratification

Observing the lack of substance in most of what we run after

Accepting difficulties as part of existence

98 What is your outlook on Karma?

It looks real to me most of the time.

I can see how actions bear results right here and now though not in all cases.

It explains our situation

It eliminates the tendency to blame others for our problems.

99 What is your view of the 5 promises?

Assume you mean the five precepts

These ensure minimum personal conduct

Also these ensure social harmony

The most valuable benefit is that these promote higher practice.

Questions 100 to 105 (May 2010) are from SS. Answers are from Mrs. Vinitha Sarath-Chandra

100 What is the purpose/intention of taking refuge?

Refuges are taken as a commitment to follow the path shown by the Buddha for self development.

101 What is the setting for taking refuge?

Refuges can be taken in any setting so long as there is reasonable tranquility. A temple is chosen with this in mind.

102 Who participates from a Buddhist temple in the ritual and what are their roles?

There is no need for anyone else to participate. If monks or nuns are available, it is the custom for one of them to listen to the taking of refuges by a person. If the person is not familiar with the refuges they explain these and also recite these for the person to follow.

103. How is the ritual of taking refuge structured or planned?

If the person asks for a ritual, then the clergy will arrange it. Usually flowers, incense etc are offered to the Buddha in front of a shrine. Then the refuges are explained. Then these are chanted and the person asked to repeat these three times. Usually a brief sermon follows.

104. What are the significant features of taking refuge?

The significant features of taking refuges are as follows:

- (a) Understanding the meaning of the three refuges these being Buddha, Dharma (the teaching) and the Sangha (the clergy).
- (b) Understanding the commitment made to follow the Dharma
- (c) Seeing the Buddha as an epitome of perfection in the universe
- (d) Seeing the Dharma as a body of knowledge and a path of practice
- (e) Noting the possibility of taking the clergy as teachers and role models
- (f) Laying a foundation for eventual realization of the Four Noble Truths
- (g) Establishing a fall back net just in case one goes astray in life
- (h) Establishing a preparation prior to meditation
- (i) Serving as a simple though valuable object of meditation
- (j) For those who like rituals, to make taking refuges as an easy ritual
- (k) Providing a formula of practice before going to sleep, or in other situations

105. What are the affects of taking refuge on the participant now and in the future?

The participant gets set on a clear and definite base to embark on a program of spiritual development, leading to a happier life here and now. It also implies a pleasant future in this life and in a life hereafter, for example in a heaven. Ultimately, it opens the opportunity to reach towards the release from suffering, to enlightenment.

Questions 106 to 113 (June 2010) are from AM. Answers are from Mr.Rahu Sarath-Chandra

106 How did Buddha discover the Noble Eightfold path?

The Buddha spent innumerable lives practicing the holy way to attain Buddhahood. In the last life, he practiced meditation ardently. This he became enlightened. As a result of enlightenment he understood the whole of the Dhamma. That included the Noble Eight Fold Path.

107 What is the Noble Eight Fold Path and could you explain the strands of the path?

Please go to the following website and get more information especially from chapters 7 and 8.

REFERENCE:

www.bessqld.com

Go to 'For Teachers' section. Then go to e-books. Read Chapter 8 in the book titled "Buddhism for Year 8"

108 Why do all the paths start with 'Right'?

Please see the above reference for question 107.

109 How does the Noble Eight Fold path stop suffering?

Please see Chapter 7 in the same book.

The cause of suffering is CRAVING. The gradual practice of the 8 elements of the path results in the reduction of craving and hence the reduction of suffering.

Right view comes from a wakeup call like advice from a friend or reading a book or having an unusual experience. It leads to right mental effort, and then to mindfulness. Together these lead to right thinking and hence to right morality. Right mindfulness supported by morality helps to develop right concentration. This, in turn arouses wisdom that helps to discover the cause of suffering.

110 What else do you achieve by following the Eightfold path?

See chapters 7 and 8 in the same reference as in Q 107.

111 Does the Eightfold Path relate to Nirvana and if so how?

See chapter 7 as above.

112 What is the most important strand in the path to attain and why?

All are equally important but they need to go from the easy ones to the more difficult ones for practical reasons.

113 Is it hard to stick to the eightfold path and if so why?

It is not hard at all. Today you do what you can do today and the next tomorrow and so on. For example you can start from right speech, and it leads easily to right action and so on.

Questions 114 to 123 (June 2010) are from AP. Answers are from Mr.Rahu Sarath-Chandra

114 What kind of Buddhism do you practice?

Theravada Buddhism

115 Why do you practice Buddhism?

To become better equipped to live a meaningful life and to attain enlightenment

116 What are some of the common rituals you do, as a Buddhist?

Alms givings

Higher Precepts days

Meditation

117 What do you believe are the fundamental Buddhist beliefs?

The law of Karma

Law of change

That existence is not satisfactory

That in the final analysis there is no soul or substance in a being or a thing

118 What festivals do you celebrate? And what are they for?

Day of enlightenment of the Buddha (to reinforce confidence in the practice of Dharma)

Robe offering day (to promote maintain the Sangha)

Are you originally from Australia? If no, where are you from? NO

119 How is what you practice here in Australia, different to other countries?

Slight adjustments to suit the natural and social environment

120 How do you think Australian culture has affected Australian Buddhists?

We can see the ill effects of loss of family life, drinking and extreme commercialism and running after worldly things including money, more than in Buddhist countries.

121 What do you believe happens after enlightenment?

Time has no relevance in relation to enlightenment

122 What is the meaning and purpose of life for you?

An opportunity to learn and practise the Dharma
To attain enlightenment

123 What are your main beliefs as a Buddhist?

Exactly as stated before

Questions 124 to 131(May 2010) are from AP. Answers are from Mr.Rahu Sarath-Chandra

124 How devoted are you to your faith? How so?

Very devoted.

Because a life time of practice has convinced me that there is great value in Buddha's teaching.

125 Buddhism is made up of many different strands. What stand of Buddhism do you follow and how is this strand's ways of life different to those of other forms of Buddhism?

Theravada

There are two other main forms Mahayana and Vajrayana. The moral/ethical aspects are similar. Many rituals are different as they have come from the dominant countries in which each system is practised. Basic philosophy is the same. When it comes to ultimate aims and methods of practice, each system emphasises specific factors. For example in Theravada, the aim for all is to attain enlightenment at the Arahant level. Mahayana suggests that everyone should aim at becoming a Buddha.

126 How do your religious beliefs affect you everyday life?

We have to mind our thoughts keeping away evils, and cultivating good thoughts. Our speech needs to be wholesome all the time. Our actions need to be wholesome all the time. We need to keep precepts like the 5 precepts or higher. We have to constantly perform good actions.

127 How does Australian culture affect your religious practices?

It is more helpful because there is peace here. There is less worry about existence and so we have more time to study the Dharma and practice.

128 What are your views/ thoughts on evil and suffering? Death and re-birth? Do these affect you in anyway whilst living your life?

I take these as aspects of the world we live in. It is part of our lives we cannot avoid. They come and go. It really does not matter if I understand these and look at them with wisdom.

These things occur as a result of the operation of the five norms of the universe, one of which is KARMA (or intentional actions that bear fruit now or later). Many of the other norms are explained in science. Some things, may be most, are due to Karma. Karma is generated due to greed, hatred and ignorance operating together.

Give pain to others and you get it back.

Evil is due to untrained minds that have deviated from spirituality.

Death is like any other change. Real death happens every moment. Many people who do not understand this are frightened of 'conventional death'. (if you need more information on death please read the Year 8 text book on Buddhism written by Rahu Sarath-Chandra. It is an e-book in the following website:

www.bessqld.com

These ideas do affect our lives. The more you understand, the less painful suffering and death are. So there is a better chance of being happy.

129 According to 'Living Religions' (1993), the Four Noble truths are the central problem of human life. What do the Noble truths mean to you and how could you best explain them?

That statement is not correct.

The four noble truths set down the two basic problems of life and then the solutions are also given.

These are the truths:

1 That people seem to be unsatisfied about existence. This is wrongly translated as 'suffering'. DUKKHA means the absence of continued satisfaction or happiness. Any situation that is difficult to bear is classified as one of Dukkha.

2 That there is a cause for this dissatisfaction. It is craving SAMUDAYA.

3 That Nibbana or enlightenment is the end of dissatisfaction

4 That there is a way to attain Nibbana. It is the noble eight fold path.

Whenever you come across a problem or difficulty, you can analyse the cause of it. There is always a cause or many causes. Some causes are beyond your control and others are. You can get a solution if you deal properly with the controllable causes. There is always a 'best' way to do this, without creating more problems. If your dad's car stops in the middle of a highway, it is a problem. Observe how he gets to a solution.

The four truths deal with a common problem faced by all of us all the time and the Buddha has discovered and taught us a method of finding a solution.

You can summarise the 8 Fold PATH as Morality, Mind development (Bhavana) and the Sharpening of Wisdom.

130 The five precepts have been described as the rules followers live by, and has been compared to the Christian 10 commandments. Is this true to you? Explain.

The idea behind these is apparently the same. They aim at ensuring people lead good lives and move towards happiness. There are some differences probably.

In Buddhism we take precepts only if we understand their usefulness.

No one can command us to follow these and in fact no one does. It is voluntary.

The aims are also different. A Buddhist hold precepts as a little step towards enlightenment. Precepts help in developing mindfulness and therefore concentration. These in turn help promote wisdom leading to Nibbana. We do not aim at being born in heaven because even heavenly beings (though enjoying pleasures) are not above DUKKA. They also die after a time and they lament when death is approaching. That is the reason. Heavenly beings do visit the Buddha and

seek teachings to attain enlightenment. There are scores of stories about this in the scriptures.

131 What do you believe the meaning of life to be?

The meaning of life as a human is an opportunity to practise as above and to put an end to DUKKA.

Questions 132to 146(June 2010) are from JH. Answers are from Mr.Rahu Sarath-Chandra

132 What sacred rituals do Buddhists participate in?

Strictly speaking there are no rituals in Buddhism, however in traditionally Buddhist countries people have developed rituals depending on their cultures. These have nothing to do with the teachings of the Buddha, and what a person tries to achieve through Buddhism.

Common rituals seen in other countries (and now even here due to migrants) are mentioned here:

- (a) Making offerings to the Buddha
 - (b) Offering food to monks and nuns, especially in the Theravada tradition
 - (c) Ceremony to offer “Kathina’ robes also in the Theravada tradition
 - (d) Chanting of scriptures, particularly all-night chantings
 - (e) Processions carrying relics of the Buddha
 - (f) Inauguration of religious structures like Stupa (Pagoda)
- Etc

Preparatory practices before meditation look like rituals but are elementary forms of meditation.

133 When and why do these rituals take place?

- (a) Early morning or before noon
- (b) Same
- (c) On an assigned day between the full moons of October and November
- (d) Any agreed day
- (e) Any assigned day usually full moon days
- (f) Any assigned day

134 What kind of religious experiences do Buddhists go through?

Practising generosity and consideration for others in every possible way
Observing various types of precepts to discipline the body and for the good of society
Meditation of a multitude of types as recommended by the Buddha
Sharpening one's wisdom by studying the Dhamma, questioning and practicing
In concentration meditation experiencing peace and harmony within
Deeper experiences (including super human or miraculous experiences) via meditation

135 What does the dharma mean to Buddhists?

The teaching of the Buddha
The knowledge of methods and techniques to reach enlightenment

136 The Pali Canon is sacred text, how does it help you in everyday life?

The Pali Canon is a record of Buddha's teachings in the Theravada system. We study the discourses (Suttas), discuss them, see where the teachings can be applied in each one's life, and then applying them on a day to day basis.

137 What sacred places are significant to Buddhists? If these place are in a different country how can they be substituted in the new country?

Strictly there is none.
However, people have come to treat the following as sacred:
Place of birth of the Siddhartha (Buddha when he was born), Lumbini, Nepal
Place where he attained enlightenment, Buddh Gaya, India (at the famous Bodhi Tree)
Place where he first taught, Varanasi, India
Place where he was cremated, Kushinara, India
Other places associated with the life of the Buddha, mostly in India
Places visited by Buddha in other countries such as Sri Lanka
Etc
The tallest and most ancient Stupa in Sri Lanka (Ruvan Veli Seya)
The sacred Bodhi tree in Sri Lanka (a sapling from the main one), the oldest known tree in the world
The temples of the Tooth Relic in Kandy, Sri Lanka and in China

Etc

In Australia Bodhi trees are grown from seeds from the Maha Bodhi in India
Pictures and sculptures are made of known sacred places.
Many stupas have been erected enshrining Buddha relics, for example there is one in the Sri Lanka temple in Ellen Grove

138 What values and morals do Buddhists have?

Various precepts contain a system of values and morals.
You can visit the website www.bessqld.com, and look for the Year 8 text book under e-books, there are chapters on precepts. There are too many to list here.

139 What are some of the key beliefs of Buddhist believers?

The law of Karma or Kamma (that every action attracts a similar result in reverse)
The law of impermanence (that everything keeps changing)(ANICCA)
That living beings are not entirely satisfied and keep searching for satisfaction (DUKKHA)
That there is no indestructible and substantial self in us (ANATTA)
That enlightenment is the only way to attain absolute happiness
The four noble truths
Reduction of cravings add to happiness
Calm helps us to develop the mind through meditation

140 What is the meaning and purpose of life to Buddhists?

Life as a human helps us to attain enlightenment

141 How is life in Australia for Buddhists different to other parts of the world?

Strictly speaking it is not different.
If you practice privately then this country is better than Asian countries.
If you are more interested in cultural aspects and show, you need to be careful to respect the populace who are mostly Christian.

142 How do you as a Buddhist follow the Eight Fold Path and the Four Noble Truths?(in Australia and other parts of the world)

The four noble truths have to be understood. There is nothing to practice.
8 Fold path is the practice. The 8 strands can be summarized into three:
Morality (right speech, action and livelihood)
Meditation (right *mental* effort, mindfulness and concentration)
Wisdom (right view, right thought)

143 What do Buddhists believe about life after death?

- (A) Life continues elsewhere unless a person is enlightened to stage four
- (B) Those who reach the first stage of enlightenment are always reborn in heavens or in the human world, that too not more than seven times (they attain enlightenment for sure)
- (C) Those who reach the second stage have not more than one more birth similarly
- (D) Those who reach the third stage are reborn in the highest non-sensual heavens similarly

The material and mental constituents of the person function as the causes for the re-birth (which is the result of those causes).

Strictly speaking according to Buddhism DEATH as we call it is a non-event. We die and are reborn every moment. The difference is that the government recognizes only the conventional death, which even a child can see!

Our attitude to death is totally different. We do not worry about it.

144 What do Buddhists believe about the importance of the human being?

The most important thing about human life is that there is not too much suffering and not too much happiness. Therefore a human has the chance to develop spirituality right up to enlightenment in this very life. Heavenly being (gods) have too much of happiness; so need not bother about spirituality unless they have already reached a certain level of attainment and had learnt the Dhamma before. In the lower realms like animals their faculties are undeveloped for advancement in spirituality. But they sometimes collect enough merit to enter the human world. So, we are the most fortunate. The Buddha repeatedly says “do not waste this life as a human as enlightenment is within your reach. I have taught you the way”.

145 How does karma affect you?

My current experience is primarily due to kamma I have collected in the past including the last moment. But I can change my 'fate' with the kamma I collect from this moment onwards. So, kamma determines who we are, but we have the power to change the course of our kamma, if only we want to do so. Some accept life as their fate; that is not the Buddhist view. An extreme example is the story of ANGULIMALA who was a mass murderer, who turned over a new leaf after he met the Buddha, and in fact attained enlightenment in the same life!

We have to take responsibility according to the Kamma Law, but our future is within our power to change.

146 Comment on this observation:

"With a change of setting many other changes occur too. Buddhists beliefs and religious practices may also be altered due to a change. The way Buddhists believers follow the Eight Fold Path the four Noble Truths and the Three Jewels could change with the move. With a move to Australia the way Buddhists feel about the meaning and purpose of life, the value of the human being and identity and destiny will be changed with the relocation. Therefore the beliefs and practices of Buddhist believers will change with the move."

Yes, such a change can occur in the case of people who have not understood the Dhamma. They are like sticks erected in the mud. At any time they can fall down.

Those who are well educated in the Dhamma, they make their island even in a roaring river and practice successfully to the very end.

It is inherent in the practice of a Buddhist to welcome adjustments to suit the social environment but yet the mental environment can be maintained effectively.

147-150 QUESTIONS FROM STUDENT 'A' ANSWERED BY A MAHAYANA NUN

147. In your personal opinion is it wrong for a Buddhist adherent to eat meat? How do you justify your answer?

ANSWER. In my personal opinion it would be best if any and every kind of person (not just Buddhists) could do without eating meat, poultry, seafood--the flesh of any living creature. The reasons you can research online. They include, but are not limited to: better for our health, better for the future of our planet, better from the perspective of humaneness and compassion, and better for our karma.

That said, different traditions of Buddhism deal with the issues of what to eat, when to eat, how to eat, etc differently, so I will not place a moral judgement like 'right' or

'wrong' on what Buddhist practitioners choose to do. I can only say I choose to be a complete vegetarian.

148. How is a Buddhist following the five precepts if they are eating meat when the first rule is "Do not kill"? Is it meant to be taken literally? What is the other interpretation of this rule?

ANSWER. The first precept has various interpretations. Again you must look to how a given tradition explains that precept. For me, as a Mahayana Buddhist, receiving that precept meant becoming a complete vegetarian.

149. If rules or practices contradict, which tradition is more important to abide by? e.g to eat meat or put someone out of their way to provide a vegetarian alternative (compassion).

ANSWER. For the Theravada, the choice is to strictly abide by 'eating what I am given' without making any distinctions about the kind of food'. What the donor gives is what the monk will eat. (And it should be noted that sincere donors want to give the monks the best they have--which is possibly considered to be meat.) So the choice to eat what one is given is also interpreted as compassion-- toward the donor(s).

In the tradition I was trained under, eating veggies is an act of compassion for the victims--who will not get killed for me to eat, for humankind--as it nurtures our humaneness, and for the planet---since sustaining the process of raising livestock for slaughter is depleting our earth's resources at an alarming rate.

**150. Does Australian culture affect or influence Buddhist traditions?
If there is any more information you think would help in my research which isn't covered in the questions could you please add it below. Thank you so much for all your time and knowledge, I really appreciate it.**

ANSWER. Every culture affects the interpretation of Buddhist principles! Hopefully the meshing of cultural traditions with Buddhist traditions will strengthen both! It makes perfect sense that in order for the Buddhist principles to be acceptable to a given culture, those principles must enter the hearts and minds of the people. But in doing so, we must be careful 'not to throw the baby out with the bath water.' The essential teachings, moral interpretations, and means of practice that Buddhism offers (in all its traditions) must not become so 'watered down' that their value is lost or obscured by cultural overlays.

151-157 QUESTIONS FROM STUDENT 'B' ANSWERED BY RAHU SARATH-CHANDRA, A LAY PERSON IN THERAVADA

151 Explain the Buddhist view on capital punishment

ANSWER

We are not aware of any teachings of the Buddha on this directly. However we can answer this question on the basis of principles embodied in the teaching. In general, taking a life is contrary to the teaching. If a life is taken, the one doing it is likely to suffer consequences, irrespective of reasons. However, the mental condition of the doer at the point of killing matters. If he regrets and kills as a matter of duty, the results would be mitigated but not eliminated. If he enjoys the act of killing the result is enhanced. This is due to the law of Karma.

There is another principle. The Buddha recognised that the state is run by the rulers. He was not a part of the rulers or the state. If he was asked for advice, he would have advised, if he thought fit to do so.

152 Do the Buddhist congregations take its stance on capital punishment more from five precepts or from other teachings and texts?

ANSWER

If one takes the five precepts, one should not kill another even as a duty. The best thing is not to take this job. In fact there were no applicants for duties at the gallows in Sri Lanka last year or the year before.

Karma (or Kamma) is more important. Buddhists do believe that if one does something, eventually one will suffer the consequences. So if you kill someone, you have to expect a matching result. That is a powerful teaching.

The massive collection of sacred texts is full of teachings connected to Kamma. Kamma sees no excuses. It is an invisible law like gravity. We can see it in operation. A still more important teaching is that in any event the murderer is followed by his own Kamma and will suffer for it. We as individuals or as a state need not mete out capital punishment. By killing the murderer, we get involved in the cycle of Kamma. In any event it does not look fair if the murderer suffers two punishments for the one crime, one by the state and one by Kamma!

153 Does the Buddhist community propose an alternative punishment to the death penalty for people guilty of crimes such as murder?

ANSWER

Yes. The Buddhist community does not interfere in state matters like this. But in formulating policy they would try to avoid capital punishment. There are many alternatives in society.

1544 Do Buddhists believe that Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden should not have been killed?

ANSWER

Yes. Killing for whatever reason is not acceptable to Buddhists. Teaching and rehabilitation are more effective and reasonable. In Sri Lanka after the 30 year war ended in 2009, more than 11, 000 LTTE combatants including leaders were rehabilitated and re-settled; they were given money, food and other needs to get

back to society as human beings. That was the Buddhist way. The deputy leader of the LTTE is a Minister of state now. He may have killed many Sinhalese civilians. No one ever suggested that the combatants or leaders of the LTTE should be killed. That was easy to do in the heat of war, but it was contrary to Buddhist principles. About three hundred thousand people were liberated by the army and that number included many thousands who had fought for the LTTE.

When the Second World War ended in 1944, some wanted the Emperor of Japan to be killed or at least punished for war crimes. Retribution was demanded from Japan. It was Sri Lanka that stood up for Japan and said hatred does not cease by hatred. Because of that a considerate policy was adopted and the results were good. Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country.

155 If someone assassinated the Dali Lama (or any other Buddhist leader) would the Buddhist community (in general) agree to their execution?

No.

156 What about the family of the victims? Do Buddhists believe the right of life for the criminals is more important than peace and justice for them?

ANSWER

Families of victims deserve support from compassionate people. 'Justice' for the victims has the smell of vengeance and it has no place in Buddhism. This is foreign to Buddhism. Buddhists would let the law take its own course without seeking satisfaction in punishing the criminal. If the victim seeks satisfaction in that manner he incurs bad karma. Who would seek bad karma?

Everyone has a right to live and so does a criminal. There is no comparison between the two matters.

157 Has the view of capital punishment ever changed from the Buddhist perspective?

ANSWER

The fact that more nations are giving up capital punishment shows that they align with the Buddhist perspective. The Buddhist view itself on capital punishment has not changed over time. The increasing inclination to look at circumstances and the condition of the mind of the criminal are also welcome changes in the modern world. What has happened in the past pales into insignificance compared with what can be done in the future of a person's life.

157-168 QUESTIONS FROM STUDENT 'C' ANSWERED BY RAHU SARATH-CHANDRA

From: Mary Grace Camus [mailto:mcamus@mybce.catholic.edu.au]

Sent: Thursday, 14 March 2013 2:55 PM

To: info@linhson-qld.org

Subject: school assignment Hi, my name is Mary and I am a current year 12 student at Southern Cross Catholic College in Scarborough. This term, for my religion class we have been asked to research three views from three different faiths on an ethical issue of our choice. I have chosen to address the issue of abortion. I was wondering if you could possibly take a couple of minutes to answer a few questions i have put together from a Buddhist perspective. Thank you for your time and i look forward to hopefully hearing from you sometime soon.

1. At what stage of fertilisation does a foetus become a human being? Is there any particular stage where termination of a foetus may be legitimate?
It is a living being at the time it becomes conscious of its existence. The question of termination is not discussed in the books.
2. How does the Buddhist Faith approach abortions if the person is economically unstable and is unable to produce a stable, fair life for the child? Loving kindness needs to be extended to unborn babies at whatever stage. External circumstances do not justify the killing of a living being.
3. Are there circumstances in which it is necessary to terminate pregnancy (rape, severe handicap)? How do you justify this?
This is not discussed.
4. How has this teaching on abortion evolved through time?
This is not discussed.
5. What are the Buddhist support networks for those who are involved in abortion (support, forgiveness, judgement)?
We need to be compassionate towards being in difficulty, whatever has happened in the past.
6. Are all types of abortion procedures as bad as each other seen through a Buddhist's eyes?
Generally abortion is not in conformity with the teachings and practice of Buddhism
7. Are there many discrepancies and debates within the Buddhist community regarding abortions?
Generally this is not discussed but abortion is discouraged..
8. What are the Buddhist Faith's views on abortions when the mothers risk of death is at an extremity?
This is an extreme case has to be decided on its own merits. It cannot be decided on the basis of religious thinking. There are laws and social norms that have to be respected.
9. Explain specific passages from relevant texts that communicate the Buddhist perspective on abortion.
The fact that love has to extended to living beings yet to be born is included in the famous discourse on Loving Kindness (Karaniya Metta Sutta).
10. Are there any church documents or religious leaders that stand out and depict the Buddhist perspective on abortion?
There are none known to us. The literature is so vast that we might not have seen some publications. Rules applicable to monks and nuns are strict in the matter of abortion. They break some rules if they participate in abortion.

[For more information read Wikipedia articles on the subject. You can reach these via google search function.]