

# Statues of the Buddha

The statue of the Buddha is the most important part of the temple.

**Q1.** What do the poses of the Buddha statues remind worshippers of?

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**Q2.** What is the Buddhist word for the poses of the Buddha statues?

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**Q3.** What event does the parinirvana pose remind worshippers of?

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**Q4.** What is the Buddhist word for the hand positions of the Buddha statues?

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**Q5.** What is the meaning of the 'earth-witness' hand position?

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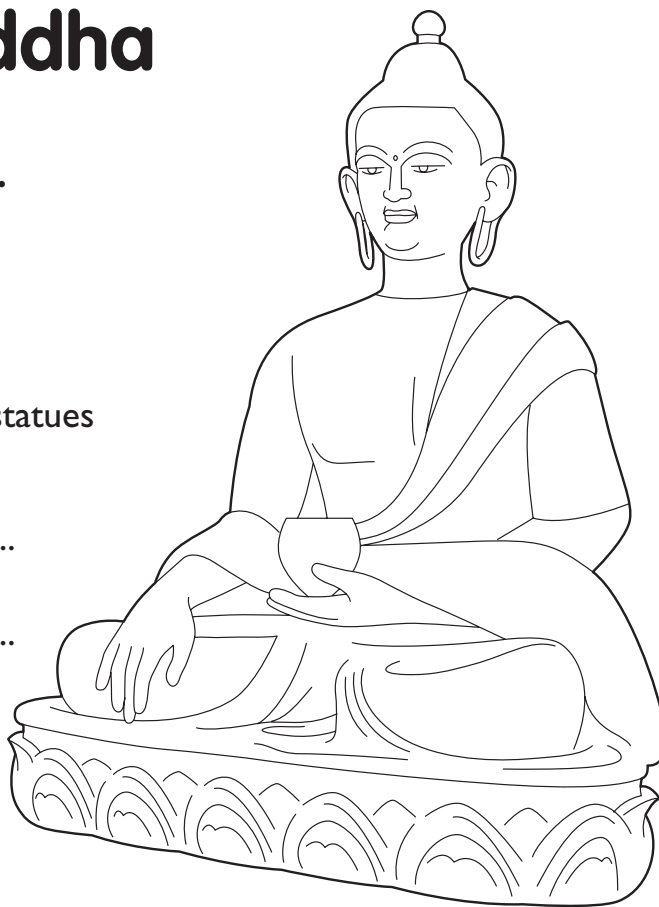
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**Q6.** Why do Buddhists feel that being calm is important?

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## Answers

1. Different events in the Buddha's life.
2. Asanas.
3. The day the Buddha died.
4. Mudras.
5. It reminds Buddhists of the time the Buddha was tempted by evil and he asked the earth to witness that he would not be tempted.
6. Buddhists believe that being calm helps them to become enlightened.

## Lesson objectives

- To help the children understand the importance of Buddha statues in worship.
- To help the children understand that the position of the statues has important meaning in Buddhism.

## Teaching notes

### Statues

The children may notice that the expression on the face of the Buddha tends to look the same in all statues. This is because the statues are designed to represent an ideal view of the Buddha, not necessarily to show exactly what he looked like. The elongated ear lobes were a sign of royalty (royals wore heavy earrings) at the time the Buddha lived and a reminder that the Buddha began life as a prince, but gave up the luxury of the palace to find enlightenment. The raised bump on the Buddha's head is a sign of enlightenment, as is the mark in the centre of the Buddha's forehead, called the Eye of Wisdom or Uma. In statues, the Buddha's arms are usually very long, and all the fingers are the same length – this represents generosity.

### Asanas

The word asanas simply means poses, and is also used in yoga to describe different yoga poses. There are actually many different asanas for Buddha statues, but the four most common are: standing, walking, sitting in the lotus position, and lying on the right side.

### Mudras

Mudras are symbolic hand positions or gestures. Mudras are an ancient form of symbolism, used in ancient Chinese worship, in Hinduism and in classical Indian dance, as well as in Buddhist worship and statues. Each mudra has a separate meaning, and placing a statue in a particular mudra allows worshippers to focus on that particular meaning (worshippers also sometimes place their own hands in particular positions during worship, for the same reason). There are hundreds of different mudras, but there are six main mudras, which are the most common. These are: the earth-witness gesture (*bhumisparsa mudra*); the gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*); gesture of turning the Wheel of Law (*dhammachakra mudra*); gesture of fearlessness and granting protection (*abhaya mudra*); gesture of granting wishes (*varada mudra*); and the teaching gesture (*vitarka mudra*) (see page 30 of this guide).

## Complementary work

The children can look at secondary sources or photographs of different statues of the Buddha and try to recognise different asanas and mudras.

### Resources

Secondary sources and photos of statues of the Buddha. There are many sources for these. You could print photos from a web site such as [www.buddhamuseum.com](http://www.buddhamuseum.com) or [www.lotussculpture.com](http://www.lotussculpture.com), or use a book such as *Buddhas of Burma* by Jean-Pierre Grandjean or *Buddha Book: A Meeting of Images* by Frank Olinsky and Robert AF Thurman.