

Living at the temple

Some Buddhists choose to dedicate their lives to studying Buddhism. These are monks and nuns.

Q1. Where do Buddhist monks and nuns live?



Q2. Why do Buddhists give alms to monks and nuns?





Q3. What are two rules a monk or nun must follow?





Q4. What are some things a temple might provide for the community?





Q5. (i) Who else might live at a temple or monastery?



(ii) How long might they live there?



Q6. What type of clothing do monks and nuns wear?





Answers

1. In a temple or monastery.
2. They believe it helps them to be a better person.
3. Only eat one meal a day, do not sleep on a soft bed, follow the Five Precepts.
4. Medical clinics, orphanages, schooling, counselling.
5. (i) Children; (ii) A few months or years.
6. Robes.

Lesson objectives

- ▶ To discover how monks and nuns live and what they do.
- ▶ To understand that many Buddhists are only monks temporarily.

Lesson outcomes

- ▶ The children can understand how monks and nuns live at the temple.
- ▶ The children understand that being a monk or nun can be temporary.

Teaching notes

When a person wishes to join a Buddhist Order, they are first ordained as a novice. As a symbol of renunciation of their worldly life, they first shave off all of their hair and put on a robe. The novice then enters a period of training which may last several years. At the end of this, the novice may become a monk or nun.

Monks and nuns are given shelter, food, clothing (robes) and medical care by the order. They spend their time studying, working to keep up and maintain the monastery, meditating, reciting prayers and performing services for the lay community.

Monks and nuns give up almost all of their personal possessions and must obey a fairly strict code of conduct which may include only eating between dawn and noon and only using things that are given (never buying anything).

Monks' and nuns' robes consist of three pieces of cloth: a sarong (or a type of plain dress made from a single piece of cloth for women), an upper robe which covers the body and shoulders, and a thicker outer robe, which is for cold weather. Ochre and saffron are the most popular colours for robes, but colours and style can vary from place to place.

In some Buddhist countries, particularly in South East Asia, it is common for children to spend some time living as a monk or nun. Not only do they learn about Buddhism in depth, but in some areas, this may also be the only way that poor children can get a general education, since schooling at the monastery or temple is free. Children are taught regular school subjects and practical skills in addition to Buddhism, but they also have to obey most of the rules of a monk or nun.

Becoming a monk or nun is not necessarily considered a lifetime commitment, and many adults also choose to spend time living in a temple.

Complementary work

The children can investigate what it is like to live as a child in a temple or monastery. They may like to start a pen pal project with a child living at a monastery in another country. Try the Drepung Loseling Institute (www.drepung.org)

Resources

Computer with internet access. Secondary sources on living as a monk or nun. You may want to view the film *The Cup*, which is an engaging story about young Tibetan monks who are trying to watch the World Cup on TV while staying within the rules of their order. Content is appropriate for children, but film is subtitled in English.