

Curriculum Visions

# Buddhist

## faith and practice



# Teacher's Guide

in PDF format for printing

Lisa Magloff

# Curriculum Visions

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First published in 2005 by Atlantic Europe Publishing  
Company Limited, Greys Court Farm, Greys Court,  
Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG9 4PG,  
United Kingdom.

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## Designed and produced by

*Earthscape Editions*

## Printed in China by

*WKT Company Ltd*

## Buddhist faith and practice Teacher's Guide

– *Curriculum Visions*

A CIP record for this book is

available from the British Library

Teacher's Guide ISBN 1 86214 472 9

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# Unit 1: What it means to be a Buddhist

Some children may have a hard time understanding that Buddhists do not worship God. Like Hinduism and Sikhism, Buddhists believe in reincarnation – that after we die we are reborn in another body. Buddhists believe that life involves suffering and pain, and the only way to escape this cycle is to achieve Nirvana, or enlightenment. Buddhists do not necessarily disbelieve in God (in fact, some Buddhists also practise other religions, like Christianity), but simply feel that God has nothing to do with escaping the cycle of life, death and reincarnation. But the concept of Nirvana and enlightenment is a bit like some of the concepts of heaven. Enlightenment is a state of being where you are free from any worries or concerns; it is a state of bliss. So, it is a bit like the concept of being united with God in other religions.

There is a wide variety of practice in Buddhism, but the main branches of Buddhism are: Mahayana Buddhism (found primarily in China, Korea, Japan, Macau, Taiwan and Nepal), Theravada Buddhism (found primarily in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Vietnam, Bali and Thailand), Vajrayana Buddhism (found mainly in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and Mongolia), Zen Buddhism (Japan), and Chinese Buddhism. Most western Buddhists follow Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism. This may be because after China invaded Tibet, many Tibetan monks and nuns escaped to the west and westerners who were



concerned about the oppression of Tibet began studying Buddhism from these people. In the UK there are also many Zen Buddhist centres, where westerners and Japanese study, and also a number of monasteries and temples devoted to Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism where SE Asian families go to worship.

At one time, India was almost entirely Buddhist (Theravada Buddhism began in India), but around the 12<sup>th</sup> century it was replaced by other religions, like Hinduism and Islam, and now there are few Buddhists in India. Similarly, Indonesia was once almost entirely Buddhist, but today only Bali is predominantly Buddhist.

You may like to introduce Buddhism by showing the children a map of the world and point out the Buddhist countries listed above, so they can see the way Buddhism spread around SE Asia. Here are some dates you may like to use:

### **6th century BCE**

Life of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha.

### **3rd century BCE**

Reign of Indian Emperor Asoka (from 272–231 BCE) who converted to Buddhism and established Buddhism as the state religion of India. Asoka's son spread Buddhism to Sri Lanka beginning in 247 BCE.

### **2nd century BCE**

Mahayana Buddhism begins (around 200 BCE).

### **1st century BCE**

By 32 BCE, Buddhism had spread to Sri Lanka.

### **1st century CE**

In around 68 CE Two Buddhist missionaries from India arrived at the court of Emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty and Buddhism began spreading through China.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> century CE**

Buddhism became the religion of the kings of Cambodia around 100 CE and of Vietnam in 150 CE.

Buddhism spread to Central Asia and throughout all of China around 100 to 200 CE.



**3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Expansion of Buddhism to Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia around 300 CE.

Buddhism enters Korea around 372 CE.

**5<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Buddhism is established in Burma (Myanmar).

Mahayana Buddhism was introduced into Java, Sumatra and Borneo, mainly by Indian immigrants.

**6<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Many Chinese schools of Buddhism are developed and China becomes almost entirely Buddhist.

Buddhism becomes the state religion in Japan in 594 CE.

Buddhism is the state religion in Indonesia during the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

**7<sup>th</sup> century CE**

The Khmer kings build Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument.

**10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century**

Buddhism becomes the main religion in Thailand around 900–1000 CE

Islam replaces Buddhism in Central Asia around 900–1000.

The King of Burma becomes Buddhist around 1050 CE.

**12<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Buddhism spreads in Japan during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Buddhism begins to die out in India.

Buddhism flourishes in Korea under the Koryo dynasty (1140–1390).

**14<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Thailand adopts Theravada Buddhism as the state religion in 1360.

Theravada Buddhism is adopted as the state religion in Cambodia and Laos.

**20<sup>th</sup> century**

Buddhist Society of Great Britain is founded in 1907.

Chinese invade Tibet and take control of Tibetan Buddhism (1950).

The Dalai Lama receives the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

For more information on Buddhist philosophy, suitable for children, try  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/index.htm>



# Unit 2: The life of Buddha

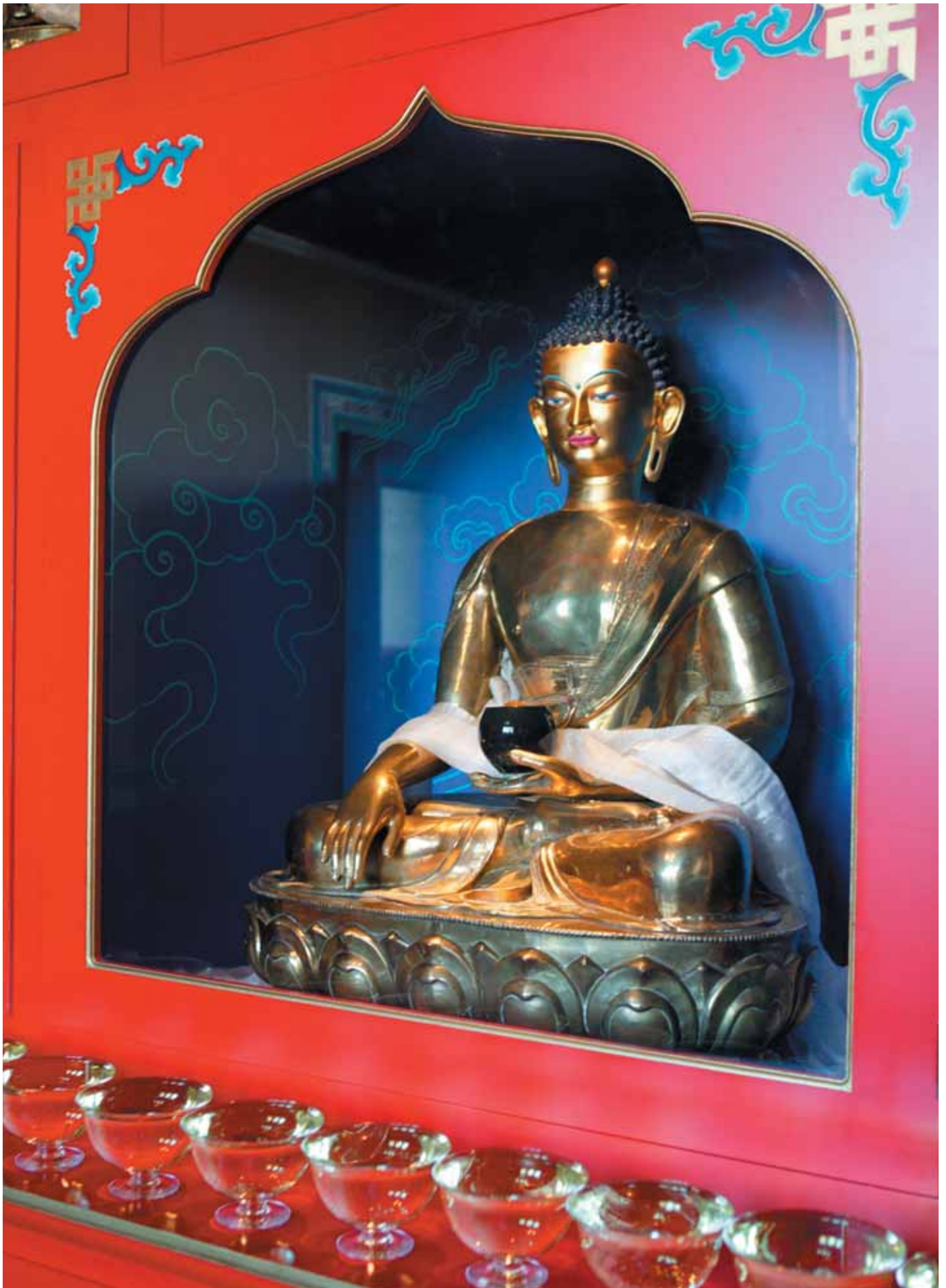
Buddhists do not worship God, so the Buddha is not considered a part of God, as Jesus was, but an ordinary person, like Mohammed, the Jewish patriarchs and Guru Nanak (Sikhism).

There are many stories told about the Buddha, but his life can be broken up into distinct parts: birth and youth; the four sights; the great departure; the period of austerity; enlightenment and the great passing (death).

According to Buddhist tradition, after Siddhartha Gautama was born, a holy man examined him and found 32 marks on his body, which meant that he would either be a great king or a Buddha (a person who has achieved enlightenment is called a Buddha, but Siddhartha Gautama is generally referred to as the Buddha). Thus, the Buddha's birth fulfilled prophecies, similar to the way that the manner of Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament.

After he had left home, Siddhartha Gautama tried many different ways to achieve enlightenment. Many of these involved hardship and denial, such as fasting for very long periods of time and living outdoors. But the Buddha eventually realised that the way to enlightenment was neither luxury nor hardship, but a life which is in balance. This is called the Middle Way.





# Unit 3: The Buddhist life

There is a lot of variety in the way that Buddhists incorporate their faith into everyday life. This depends partly on the type of Buddhism that a person follows. For example, there is a shortage of vegetable sources of protein in Tibet, because of the harsh climate, so Tibetan Buddhists are often not vegetarian. However, many Tibetan Buddhists walk around spinning hand held ‘prayer wheels’ constantly, which is a way of worshipping while going about daily life.

You may like to refer back to the Eightfold Path when studying this section. Children can see that the parts of the Eightfold Path really describe a way of living everyday life, not just a way of worshipping. For example, one part of the path is that we should always speak kindly to others. This means that we should not tell tales or say hurtful things all the time, not just during worship. Similarly, Buddhists often work for world peace or volunteer to help others. Children can see why this is part of Buddhism by looking at the Eightfold Path.

Children can compare this to the teachings of other religions to see the ways that faith can provide guidelines for everyday life. For example, the ten commandments tell about how we should behave all the time, and not only during worship, as do the teachings in the Qur’an and the Sikh Reht Maryada. You may also like to compare the various dietary restrictions of different religions: Jewish kosher laws, Muslim halal rules, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh vegetarianism, Christian fast days and Lent.

## Meditation

There are many ways to meditate. Some non-denominational meditations designed for children are given in the *Curriculum Visions Buddhist Temple Teacher’s Guide*. Here is a very simple meditation you may like your class to try. Remind the children that meditation is not worshipping. It is an exercise that helps people to become calm and to pay attention better. Many non-Buddhists meditate for these reasons.

Have the children sit comfortably. They can remain at their desks or sit on the floor if you have room. If they are on the floor, they should sit in a comfortable position (they should not attempt the lotus position, which is very difficult and painful), legs crossed, with their back straight and shoulders level, hands in laps. If at a desk, they should place their feet on the floor, their hands on the desk in front of them or in their laps, their back straight and shoulders level.

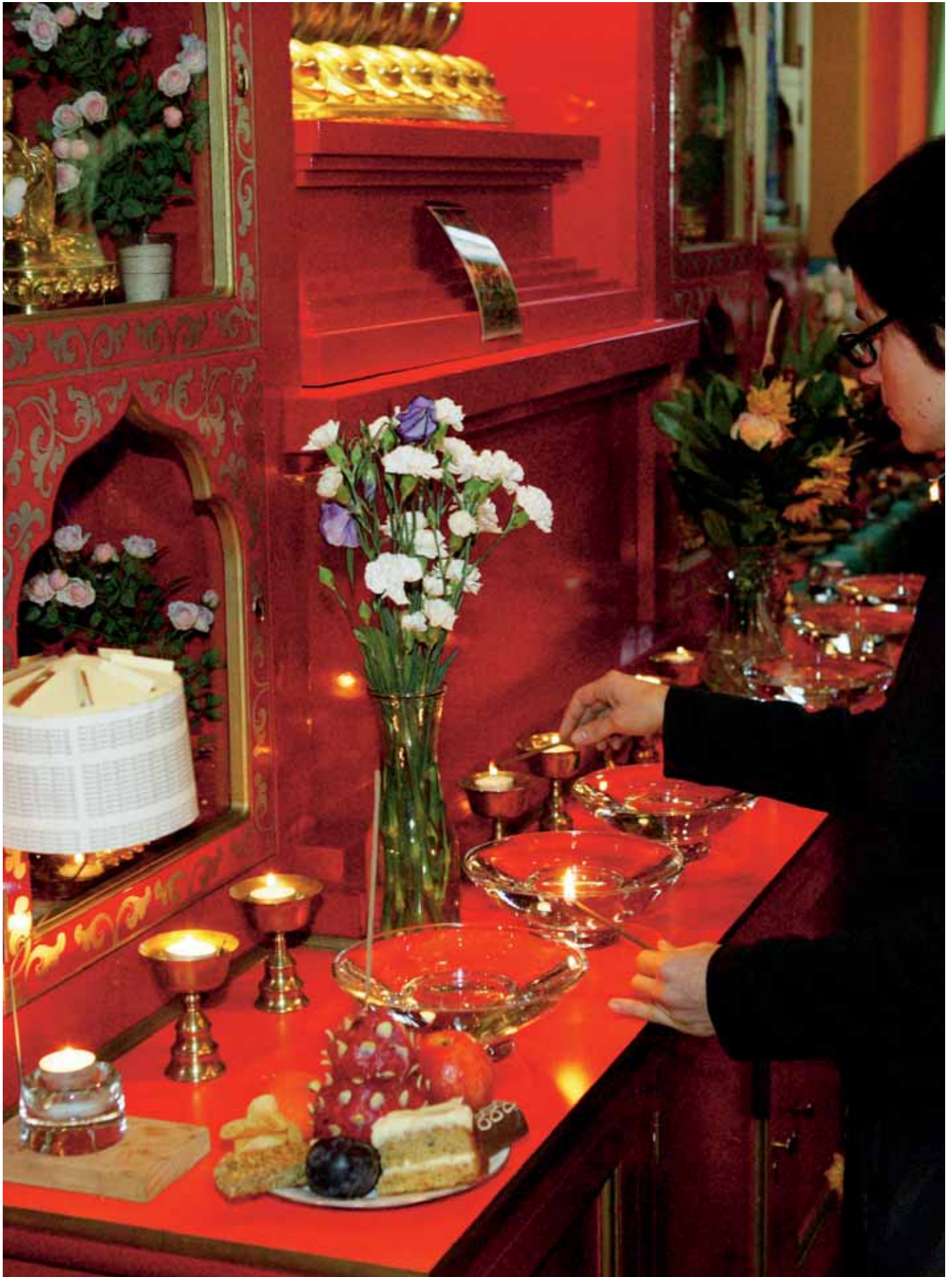


Tell them to gently close their eyes and begin to think about their breath. While they meditate, you can give them instructions in a quiet voice. Tell them that they should do nothing but breathe and think about breathing. Tell them that they should try to focus their attention on nothing but their breath as it goes in and out. As they begin, tell them that they should breathe in and out normally.

While they meditate, tell them that if a thought or a feeling pops into their head, they should just let it drift out of their mind and bring their attention back to their breath. You can say: “For example, if you feel hungry, you should say to yourself, ‘I am hungry, my stomach is grumbling’ and then think about your breath again. Or, if you are bored, you can say to yourself, “I am bored” and then think about your breath again.”

Continue this for 2 or 3 minutes and then tell the children to gently open their eyes. Do the children feel any different from before they meditated?





# Unit 4: Buddhist devotional worship

Children may have a difficult time understanding that Buddhist devotional practices are not the same as worshipping. Buddhists do not worship the Buddha the way that Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Jews worship God. Instead, all Buddhist devotional practices are a way of thanking the Buddha and also of focusing their minds on the Buddha's teachings. So, while the Buddhist is bowing or prostrating, they are saying thank you to the Buddha and may also be concentrating on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path and other teachings.

One way that children can understand this is by thinking of ways that they say thank you to others. Giving cards or gifts, giving someone a hug or a handshake, saying the words "thank you", doing something nice for someone we care about (such as bringing their mum breakfast in bed on Mother's Day), or even thinking nice thoughts about a person are all ways we say thank you. Buddhists do the same thing when they bow or make offerings to a shrine of the Buddha.

Some Buddhist devotional practices take place only in the mind. Sharing merit is one of these. This is not so different from believing in God, which also happens in the mind. Sharing merit is simply a way of reminding yourself that you want to help others and do good. In a way, it is like saying a prayer. Only, instead of asking God for something, you are asking yourself for something.



# Unit 5: Buddhist monks and nuns

The idea of devoting yourself to worship is common in many religions. In Christianity there are monks and nuns. Hinduism has holy men and women who give up all their possessions and devote themselves to God in various ways. Some do it by travelling around India, teaching and praying. Some of these people go through extreme tests. For example, one type of holy man in India is the 'sky-clad monk'. These are people (men) who never wear any clothes at all and have no possessions. They walk the countryside naked, teaching and praying to God. They believe this brings them closer to God. In many other religions people go on retreats, and spend a period of time focusing only on their faith, in places with no distractions like TV, phones or radio.

In Buddhism, it is common for most people to spend some time as a monk or a nun, usually when they are children or young adults. They are ordained as novice monks or nuns and follow all the rules of a novice for a few days or weeks. Traditionally, this occurs during the monsoon or rainy season. This is a time when no work can be done in the fields and so people devote their idle time to worship. Children may also go to school at the monastery during this time, so they do not miss any lessons.

In some poor countries, where there are few free schools, children may live as novices at the monastery for years, in order to get an education. In these monasteries there are classes in ordinary subjects as well as religion. (Or, if the children are from a rural area where there are no schools, the parents will send them to live in a monastery in a city where they can attend school while living as a monk or nun.)

You may like to have the children read from a Thai blog about the experiences of a Thai boy who became a novice for a month:

**[http://www.thailandlife.com/nattawud\\_02/monk.html](http://www.thailandlife.com/nattawud_02/monk.html)**.

The content and language of this site is suitable for children.

Or, you may like the students to compare the life of a Buddhist monk with that of a Christian monk. Here is a short example of a day in the life of a Buddhist monk, which you can compare to the reading on the life of a Christian monk in the *Christian faith and practice* section of this CD.

**4.00 a.m.**

The temple gongs are sounded. Monks rise, dress, use the bathroom, wash and clean their bedrooms. Then they meditate until it is light.

**7.00 a.m.**

Monks take their alms bowls and bags and go on alms rounds. They walk around the neighbourhood. People wait outside their houses with food and drink, which they place in the monk's bowl or bag. The people offering food bow. Monks are not allowed to say thank you, instead they say a short prayer.

**8.00 a.m.**

After an hour, the monks return to the monastery and eat breakfast. They choose what they want to eat from the alms they received.

**8–11.30 a.m.**

The monks either work or study. Some monks work in the community in ordinary jobs, while others work around the monastery, helping to run it. Children who are novice monks go to school.

**11.30 a.m.**

The monks may choose to eat another meal now, from the alms they were given in the morning. The meal must be finished by noon, because after noon they are not allowed to eat anything else until the next day.

**12.00 noon to twilight**

The monks go back to work or study. In the afternoon there may be religious lessons. They may study Pali language, Buddhist writings, or be instructed in Buddhist religion by an older monk. Sometimes the monks take a nap during this time. They must also clean the monastery and wash their own clothes.

**Twilight**

The monks gather for several hours of chanting. Around 10 p.m. they will go to bed.

# Unit 6: Written teachings

In addition to the Tipitaka, or Pali canon, which are the teachings of the Buddha, recorded after his death, there are a great number of other Buddhist teachings, written in various different forms. Each branch of Buddhism has its own canon of teachings and philosophy.

Buddhist philosophical teachings are very esoteric and difficult to understand, even for people who can read Pali and have been studying them for a while. For this reason, we do not discuss the Buddhist holy writings in great detail here. You may like to compare the holy scriptures of different religions. You can find more information about the holy scriptures of other religions in Unit 3 of the *Jewish faith and practice* section of this CD.

However, there are many modern books written by Buddhists that are designed to teach Buddhist philosophy to westerners. The books of Thich Nhat Hahn, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, are a very good introduction to Buddhist philosophy for adults. They are not well suited to children.

Jataka tales are Buddhist stories (not holy scripture) that are used to teach the ideas and concepts of Buddhism to children. They usually have morals. Here is one Jataka tale that you might like the class to read and discuss how they are different or similar to holy scriptures. You can find more Jataka tales at <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/budtale1.htm>.

## Finding a New Spring

Once upon a time a tradesman was leading a caravan to another country to sell his goods. Along the way they came to the edge of a large sand desert. During the day time the sun heats up the fine sand until it's as hot as charcoal, so no one can walk on it – not even bullocks or camels! So the caravan leader hired a desert guide, one who could follow the stars, so that they could travel only at night when the sand cools down. They began the dangerous nighttime journey across the desert.

A couple of nights later, after eating their evening meal, and waiting for the sand to cool, they started out. Later that night the desert guide, who was driving the first cart, saw from the stars that they were getting close to the other side of the desert. But he had overeaten, so that when he relaxed, he dozed off to sleep. Then the bullocks who, of course, couldn't tell directions by reading the stars, gradually turned to the side and went in a big wide circle until they ended up at the same place they had started from!

By then it was morning, and the people realised they were back at the same spot they'd camped at the day before. They lost heart and began to cry about their condition. Since the desert crossing was supposed to be over by now, they had no more water and were afraid they would die of thirst. They even began to blame the caravan leader and the desert guide – “We can do nothing without water!” they complained.

Then the tradesman thought to himself, “If I lose courage now, in the middle of this disastrous situation, my leadership has no meaning. If I begin weeping and regretting this misfortune, and do nothing, all these goods and bullocks and even the lives of the people, including myself, may be lost. I must be energetic and face the situation!” So he began walking back and forth, trying to think out a plan to save them all.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a small clump of grass. He thought, “Without water, no plant could live in this desert.” So he called over the most energetic of his fellow travellers and asked them to dig up the ground on that very spot. They dug and dug, and after a while they got down to a large stone. Seeing it they stopped, and began to blame the leader again, saying, “This effort is useless. We're just wasting our time!” But the tradesman replied, “No no, my friends, if we give up the effort we will all be ruined and our poor animals will die – let us be encouraged!”

As he said this, he got down into the hole, put his ear to the stone, and heard the sound of flowing water. Immediately, he called over a boy who had been digging and said, “If you give up, we will all perish – so take this heavy hammer and strike the rock.”

The boy lifted the hammer over his head and hit the rock as hard as he could – and he himself was the most surprised when the rock spilt in two and a mighty flow of water gushed out from under it! Suddenly, all the people were overjoyed. They drank and bathed and washed the animals and cooked their food and ate.

Before they left, they raised a high banner so that other travellers could see it from afar and come to the new spring in the middle of the sand desert. Then they continued on safely to the end of their journey.

The moral is: Don't give up too easily – keep on trying until you reach the goal.

# Unit 7: Learning from symbols

A great many symbols are used in Buddhism. The mudras given in the text are just a sample, there are many more mudras used in Buddhism. You may like to show the children a large, detailed photo of the Buddha and point out the symbols used on the Buddha. These include the topknot on his head, the spot between his eyes, his hand positions, the position of the body, long earlobes, and marks on his feet. Each of these things stands for something. You can also show the children a drawing of one of the Hindu gods or goddesses and point out that the god is dressed a certain way and holding certain objects which all have meaning. You can also show a painting of a scene from Jesus' life, and point out that all the parts of the painting tell us different things about Jesus (such as the halo). All of these use symbols to help tell about the person and their teachings.

Other common Buddhist symbols include the eight auspicious symbols (from <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/symbols.htm>)

## Right-coiled white conch

A white conch shell which coils to the right stands for the deep and melodious sound of the Dhamma teachings, which awakens people from the deep slumber of ignorance and urges them to accomplish good.

## Precious umbrella

The precious umbrella stands for the way that Buddhist teachings protect against illness, harm, obstacles and all types of suffering in this life.

## Victory banner

The victory banner stands for victory over obstacles and negative thought. It also stands for the complete victory of the Buddhist Doctrine over all harmful forces.

## Golden fish

The golden fish stands for the goal of all living beings in a state of fearlessness, without danger of drowning in the ocean of suffering, just as fish swim freely without fear through water.

## Dhamma wheel

The golden wheel stands for the turning of the wheel of Buddhist teachings.



## Auspicious drawing

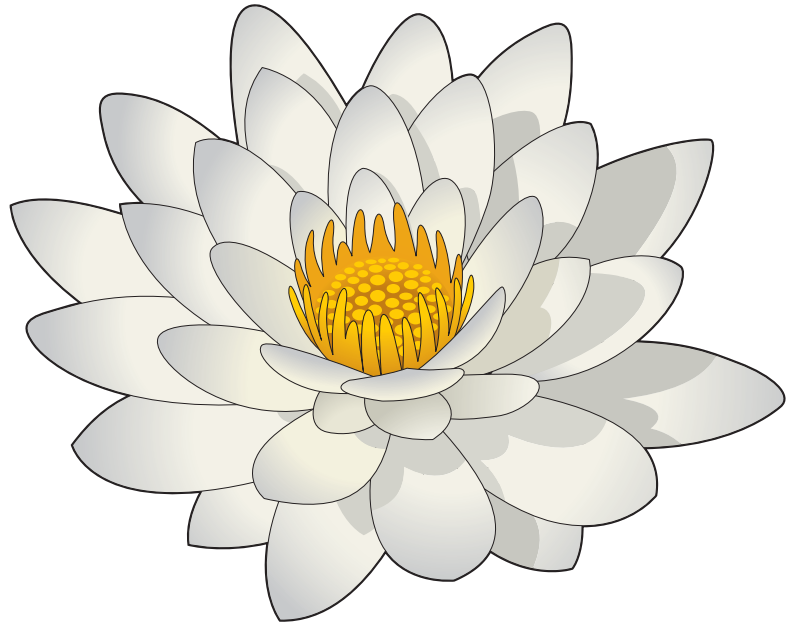
The auspicious drawing stands for the joining of religious doctrine and secular affairs. It represents the union of wisdom and method, and of wisdom and great compassion.

## Lotus flower

The lotus flower stands for purity of spirit and for liberation from suffering and unhappiness.

## Vase of treasure

The treasure vase stands for long life, wealth and prosperity and all the benefits of this world and of achieving Nirvana.



You may like to begin this section by asking children to describe some symbols used in everyday life. Some common symbols might include smileys in text messages, plus and minus signs in maths, school ties and football strips.

Most religions use symbols. These serve many purposes. Some symbols help to teach people about the religion and its beliefs; other symbols serve as an outwards sign that a person belongs to a particular faith; and some symbols are worn as a sign of faith. Christianity uses a huge number of symbols. Some of these are from the early days of Christianity, when Christians had to worship in secret and used symbols to identify each other. Many Christian symbols stand for different beliefs or teachings. You can find a huge number of Christian symbols and what they stand for at:

<http://home.att.net/~wegast/symbols/symbols.htm>

There are not as many symbols in Islam, largely because of the prohibition on worshipping images. But some common ones are the colour green, the Half Moon and star, and even Arabic words from the Qur'an. All of these are reminders of Islam and of Mohammed – green was said to be Mohammed's favourite colour; the Crescent Moon is a reminder of the desert of Arabia, where Islam began; words in Arabic are a reminder of the holy Qur'an, and also teach about Islam.







Judaism also has few symbols. The colours blue and white and the Star of David are both modern symbols of Judaism. Both of these are reminders of King David and the ancient kingdom of Israel.

There are several important symbols of the Sikh faith, five of these start with the letter K and are called the five Ks. They are kara (steel bracelet), kesh (uncut hair), khanga (comb), kaacha (special underwear) and kirpan (a sword). All of these stand for important duties of the Sikh. Sikhs also wear turbans as a symbol and as an outwards sign of their faith.

In Buddhism, many symbols are used for teaching. For example, statues of the Buddha are made in different positions. Each position stands for a different teaching of the Buddha. In Tibetan Buddhism, paintings and drawings that stand for different Buddhist teachings are found in temples and homes. Buildings called stupas are shrines for the Buddha, and each part of the stupa has a different meaning.

Hinduism uses statues of the gods and goddesses to teach about different parts of God. Each statue holds different objects in its hands and is dressed a different way. There are stories that are told about each statue that explain each object. These stories help to illustrate important ideas in Hinduism.

# Unit 8: Buddhist festivals

There are many special or holy days held throughout the year by the Buddhist community. Many of these days celebrate significant dates in the Buddhist calendar. The most significant celebration happens every May on the night of the Full Moon, when Buddhists all over the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha over 2,500 years ago.

Some holy days are specific to a particular Buddhist tradition or ethnic group. Most Buddhists, with the exception of the Japanese, use the lunar calendar and so the dates of Buddhist festivals vary from country to country and between Buddhist traditions.

## Vesak (Buddha Day)

Traditionally, Buddha's birthday is known as Vesak or Visakah Puja (Buddha's Birthday Celebrations). Vesak is the major Buddhist festival of the year as it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha on the one day, the first Full Moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June. This word Vesak is the name of the month in the Indian calendar.

## Magha Puja Day (Sangha Day)

Magha Puja Day takes place on the Full Moon day of the third lunar month (March). This holy day commemorates an important event that occurred soon after the Buddha began teaching.

After the first Rains Retreat (a period of intense meditation and study during the monsoon season) at the Deer Park at Sarnath, the Buddha went to the city of Rajagaha city. At the same time, 1,250 of the Buddha's disciples also went to Rajagaha, without having had any communication from the Buddha. They simply all felt that it was time to go to Rajagatha. Once there, they gathered in the Veruvana Monastery.

This gathering is called the Fourfold Assembly because it consisted of four 'miracles': (1) The 1,250 had all gone far along the path to enlightenment; (2) All of them were ordained by the Buddha himself; (3) They assembled by themselves without any prior call; (4) It was the Full Moon day of the month of Magha (March).

## Asalha Puja Day (Dhamma Day)

Asalha Puja means to pay homage to the Buddha on the Full Moon day of the 8th lunar month (approximately July). It commemorates the Buddha's first





teaching: the turning of the wheel of the Dhamma to the five ascetics at the Deer Park (Sarnath).

### **Uposatha (Observance Day)**

These are four monthly holy days which are observed in Theravada countries – the New Moon, Full Moon, and Quarter Moon days.

### **Pavarana Day**

This day marks the end of the yearly three month long rains retreat. In the following month, the kathina ceremony is held, during which worshippers gather to make formal offerings of robes and other goods to the monks and nuns.

### **Kathina Ceremony (Robe Offering Ceremony)**

The Kathina is held on any convenient date within one month of the conclusion of the three month rains retreat season for the monastic order. It is the time of the year when new robes and other requisites may be offered by the laity to the monks and nuns.

### **Songkran**

This Thai Buddhist festival goes on for several days during the middle of April. People clean their houses and wash their clothes and enjoy sprinkling perfumed water on the monks, novices and each other. April is so hot in Thailand that the ponds dry out and the fish would die if not rescued. So, the celebrations of this day include carrying fishes in jars to the river and putting them in. People also go to the beach or river bank with jars or buckets of water and splash each other. When everyone is happily wet they are usually entertained by boat races on the river.

### **Loy Krathong (Festival of Floating Bowls)**

The Loy Krathong Festival takes place in Thailand on the night of the Full Moon in the twelfth month on the lunar calendar. People make bowls out of leaves, put flowers, candles and incense sticks in them and float them in nearby rivers. As the bowls float out of sight down the rivers, all bad luck is supposed to disappear.

## The Elephant Festival

The Buddha once used the example of a wild elephant which, when it is caught, is harnessed to a tame one to train. In the same way, he said, a person new to Buddhism should have a special friendship of an older Buddhist. To mark this saying, Thais hold an elephant festival on the third Saturday in November.

## The Festival of the Tooth

Kandy is a beautiful city in Sri Lanka. On a small hill is a great temple which was especially built to house a relic of the Buddha – his tooth. The tooth can never be seen, as it is kept inside many caskets. But once a year in August, on the night of the Full Moon, the caskets are taken out of the temple and paraded through the streets.

## Ulambara (Ancestor Day)

This holiday is celebrated throughout Mahayana countries from the first to the fifteenth days of the eighth lunar month. It is believed that the gates of hell are opened on the first day of this festival and the ghosts may visit the world for fifteen days. Food offerings are made during this time to relieve the sufferings of these ghosts. On the fifteenth day, Ulambana or Ancestor Day, people visit cemeteries to make offerings to the departed ancestors. This festival is primarily observed in Japan, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. In Japan, Ulambana is called Obon. There, it begins on the thirteenth of July and lasts for three days.

