



# An Introduction to A-level Philosophy, Ethics and Buddhism Transition tasks 2021



# Introduction

**During A-level Religious studies we study three main components: Philosophy and Ethics which will be taught by Ms Elliot and the study of Buddhism taught by Miss Jenkins. If you have any questions about the different components, please contact:**

**Ms Elliot-Smith: [cae@churchdownschool.com](mailto:cae@churchdownschool.com)**

**Miss Jenkins: [klj@churchdownschool.com](mailto:klj@churchdownschool.com)**

## ***You will need:***

- 3 x lever arch 'archive folders' (for Philosophy, Ethics and Buddhism) with dividers named with the units covered
- 3 x ring binder 'working folders' with a sufficient amount of lined paper inside it for note taking (This is the folder the students carry with them to and from school and has the notes from the unit currently being studied)
- At least two working ball point or biro pens
- Coloured highlighters
- General personal stationary as preferred – suggested items to include pencils, ruler etc.

## ***Things to consider:***

Read 'Sophie's World' by Jostein Gaardner as an overview of Philosophy; watch the news regularly to keep up-to-date with current ethical affairs. There will be opportunities for trips and visitors from the Buddhist tradition.

The exam board we study for Religious Studies is Edexcel and our chosen religion is Buddhism.  
[Please see link below]

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/religious-studies-2016.coursematerials.html#filterQuery=category:Pearson-UK:Category%2FSpecification-and-sample-assessments>



A set of notes and tasks to help you  
with the move from GCSE to A Level  
Religious Studies

**2020**

# An introduction to Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Buddhism

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# An introduction to philosophical arguments for the existence of God

## Introduction

Certain questions seem to be asked by almost all individuals e.g. 'Who am I?' 'What is the meaning and purpose of life?' 'Is there a life after death?' 'Is there a God?' etc. Such questions involve serious thinking of a reflective and critical nature. To embark on such a course is to 'do philosophy'. The word 'philosophy' means 'love of wisdom' and hopefully you will find that this discipline will sharpen your mind by dealing with a variety of concepts and problems. You should become more aware of what does and does not constitute a valid argument. By studying philosophy you will also develop the skill of following and evaluating arguments.

A further benefit of the discipline of philosophy is that it will provide you with an insight into the 'history of ideas' and the critical debates that have accompanied them. In one sense the study of philosophy is not a neutral discipline. It will force you to examine your own ideas and presuppositions. It may also raise questions where before you thought that there was none, and answer others that you thought were unanswerable. As the ancient Greek philosopher **Socrates** (d.399 BC) concluded: "**A life that is not examined is a life not worth living.**"

## Does belief in God really matter?

People who believe in God or some forms of a divinity are said to be **theists**. Christianity, Judaism, Islam etc. are typical examples of what we would call theistic religions. Their believers assert faith in an all-powerful, creative, loving and eternal God who is guiding the journey of life. A person who denies all possibility of there being any God is an **atheist**. An **agnostic** is not convinced by an argument for or against the existence of God and is open to persuasion.

There are clearly a number of different attitudes towards the question of God's existence. Some of us will have no doubts whatsoever concerning the existence of a Supreme Being, whereas others will find such a notion as being either unverifiable (beyond all forms of proof) or totally illogical in a modern world. However, whatever our

conviction we have all given the question thought even if it has only been in a Religious Studies lesson.

It is interesting that **Blasé Paschal**, a 17<sup>th</sup> Century mathematician and religious philosopher once described the question of God's existence as the most important issue that any individual could face in his life and one which should receive the highest priority. Of course we may all personally disagree with Paschal but the point is that the problem of demonstrating the existence of God has (and still is) taken very seriously within philosophical and academic circles.

### **The philosophical concept of proof**

If I claimed that my dog can do 'A' level maths you would rightly all regard my claim as absurd and dismiss it outright. Unless of course I was able to 'prove' beyond all reasonable doubt that my dog was indeed an able mathematician. I would imagine, though, that you would only accept as 'proof' a good, compelling and logical argument. Although my illustration is clearly an absurd one the principle applies to all quests to prove God's existence since what we are attempting to establish is that God's existence can be verified by logical argument. Arguments for the existence of God, then, should always be thought of in terms of proofs.

But what do we actually mean by the term 'proof'? Here we should note that within the context of philosophical arguments for the existence of God there are different types of proofs some of which are more convincing than others. For a simple definition of the word 'proof' we would all agree that a proof consists of statements which cannot be false e.g.  $4+4=8$ , London is the capital of England, all circles are round etc. Such a proof is therefore logically necessary i.e. it could not be anything else. A logically necessary proof, then, consists of a set of premises (statements) and a conclusion, which cannot be disputed e.g. mathematical statements as above, or statements such as 'the angles of all triangles add up to  $180^\circ$ ' etc.

Some proofs, however, are only proofs in so far that they lead to conclusions, which are only possible or probable. The evidence points towards a certain conclusion but it is still possible for there to be a different conclusion e.g.

- P1: The sun is shining today.
- P2: The sun shone yesterday.
- C: The sun will shine tomorrow.

Although it is possible that the sun will shine tomorrow there is still a possibility that it will not. Forecasts may prove inaccurate and so it would be a 'probable' conclusion, and not a logically necessary one. Proofs of this kind, then, often work from a specific example to a more general conclusion. However, the conclusion is not necessarily conclusive or true. These examples illustrate perfectly the difference between 'a posteriori'; and 'a priori' proofs, both of which are important in the context of proofs about the existence of God. Let us now examine them more closely.

### **The difference between 'a posteriori' and 'a priori' proofs**

An '**a posteriori**' proof can be described as '**inductive**' proofs. By this we mean that they are proofs which are based on premises which can be argued or drawn from experience but which do not lead to a conclusion that is logically necessary i.e. cannot be false. The more evidence-stating factors we have, the greater the likelihood may be of the conclusion being correct. However, a posteriori proofs can be disproved. They do not conclusively prove it to be the case. We have all seen those films where the obvious suspect turns out to be innocent despite fingerprints at the crime scene, having a motive for murder etc.

An a posteriori argument, then, can be powerful, even probable, but not necessarily conclusive for there remains the remote possibility that the conclusion reached is false even though all the evidence suggests that the conclusion is sound. The following are two examples of 'a posteriori' and inductive proofs:

- P1: England has not won a major football tournament since 1966.
- P2: England will compete in the European Championships next summer.
- C: England will win their first trophy since 1966.

- P1: The best scientists are men.  
P2: I am a man.  
C: I am a good scientist.

On the other hand, 'a priori' proofs are **analytic** and **deductive** arguments. By this we mean that they are based on premises or statements that cannot be false.

The conclusion, then, must be logically necessary i.e. true. A priori proofs (unlike a posteriori proofs) are not drawn from experience.

With a priori proofs both the premises and the conclusion cannot be misinterpreted. If we agree with the premises in a deductive or a priori argument then we would have to accept the conclusion. To agree the premise and not the conclusion would be a contradiction. The conclusion follows on logically and is necessary. The following are two examples of 'a priori' and deductive proofs:

- P1: All teachers have a degree.  
P2: Mr Smith is a teacher.  
C: Mr Smith has a degree.

- P1: A bachelor is an unmarried man.  
P2: James has not married.  
C: James is a bachelor.

### **Proving God's existence**

Arguments for the existence of God traditionally move from premises to conclusion using inductive (a posteriori) or deductive (a priori) reasoning. An example of a traditional deductive argument put forward for the existence of God is the **ontological argument** introduced by **St Anselm of Canterbury** in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Anselm's

argument is a challenging one and will be considered in detail in Year 13; however the deductive nature of its presentation can be outlined as follows:

- P1: God is 'that being than which nothing greater can be conceived'.
- P2: 'That being than which nothing greater can be conceived' possesses (has) all perfections i.e. greatness, power, love, knowledge etc.
- P3: To be perfect and not exist is a contradiction.
- C: God must therefore exist.

The ontological proof demands that if we accept the definition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', we must accept that along with perfection, omniscience (all knowledge), omnipotence (all power) etc. God must also necessarily possess existence. If God does not possess existence i.e. exist, then how could He be 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'? This is a toughie (no need to worry about it in Year 12) but illustrates perfectly one argument for the existence of God that uses 'a priori' and deductive reasoning.

Now compare the ontological (a priori) argument with the following a posteriori (inductive) argument:

- P1: All events require a cause.
- P2: The universe is an event.
- C: God is the cause of the universe.

This proof is the basis of the **cosmological argument**. It is a proof, which leads only to a 'probable' conclusion because there is no logically necessary, a priori reason why we should conclude that God is indeed the cause of the universe and not anything else. Neither are the premises logically necessary-there is no compelling reason to agree conclusively that 'all events require a cause'. It is only on the basis of our regular experience that we assert that all events have a cause, and experience can be deceptive, limited and open to many interpretations.

The design (or teleological) argument, the moral argument and the argument from religious experience for the existence of God are also inductive and 'a posteriori'.



## The strengths and weaknesses of inductive ('a posteriori') and deductive ('a priori') proofs

Both types of reasoning have their strengths and weaknesses. **Inductive reasoning** (i.e. 'a posteriori' arguments) can be considered as **strong** for the following reasons:

- They rely on experience, which may be universal and testable.
- 'A posteriori' proofs are also flexible in that more than one possible conclusion can be reached.
- 'A posteriori' proofs do not demand that we accept the premises as fixed.

However, the **weakness** with inductive or 'a posteriori' reasoning is equally evident e.g.

- Alternative conclusions can be just as convincing. For instance the 'Big Bang' can be a plausible reason for the existence of our universe. We do not necessarily have to postulate a 'God'.
- 'A posteriori' arguments only convince if we accept the nature of the evidence. However, the evidence can be ambiguous or open to interpretation.
- For an 'a posteriori' argument to succeed there has to be overwhelming good reasons for accepting that its conclusion is the most likely.

The strength of **deductive reasoning** (i.e. 'a priori' arguments) can be set out as follows:

- 'A priori' proofs do not depend on variable or misunderstood experience.
- 'A priori' proofs accept that words and definitions have fixed and agreed meanings.
- There are no alternative conclusions with 'a priori' arguments.

However, the **weakness** with deductive reasoning lies in the fact that:

- It only works if we accept the premises as being analytically and necessarily true e.g. all circles are round, all angles of a triangle add up to  $180^\circ$ , all bachelors are men etc.
- However, is it necessarily true to say that God is 'that being than which nothing greater to be conceived'?
- Thus, when establishing the existence of God, the conclusions of 'a priori' arguments only lead to apparently logically necessary conclusions.

## Why have scholars offered proofs for the existence of God?

Although we may well live in a society in which God is viewed as being dead or non-existent the indisputable fact is that man has always had a sense of something greater than himself and who is responsible for his very own existence. Both the philosopher and the believers from all the great religious faiths have sought an explanation for certain phenomena within the universe, which are not self-explanatory and require an external explanation. They may interpret evidence in terms of God rather than something else. Since the universe is ambiguous, it can be interpreted in religious or non-religious ways. The traditional arguments for the existence of God that we will be studying in Year 12 will seek to demonstrate that the most satisfactory way of interpreting the universe is best done by reference to God.

### Problems with attempts to 'prove' the existence of God

Proofs, particularly in the context of arguments for the existence of God are problematic. As we have seen the evidence of our senses and experiences can be deceptive. There is also a difficulty in relying on the testimony of others. Their interpretation of the evidence may well be misguided. There is also a considerable degree of subjectivity about traditional arguments for the existence of God. The men that put them forward believed in God anyway. They did not come to believe in God through their rational and academic arguments. Furthermore, it could be argued that it is only inevitable that a person with a belief in God will see in a beautiful sunset or night sky the work of an all-powerful and all-knowing God. The rest of us will probably see no more than a beautiful sunset or night sky.

The weakness with these so-called proofs then is that they appeal to the believer and not necessarily to the atheist or agnostic.

Atheists may argue that since believers do not allow anything to count against their belief in God, then all proofs for His existence are flawed because the criticisms raised against them will not be allowed to carry any real weight. Atheists may also claim that their conclusions are just as likely as the conclusions of theists, and there is no way of verifying or falsifying either of them. In view of this **John Hick** argues that **eschatological verification** could be the solution to establishing whether the atheist's or the theist's claims are valid. This means that verification (i.e. proof) as to whether or not God exists will come at the end of time. Hick draws an analogy between two travellers who are heading down the same road. One of the travellers does not know where the road leads to, but the other traveller believes that it leads to the 'Celestial City'. He will be proven right or wrong when he gets to the end of the journey, but in the meantime he has to live by faith.

Of course such faith may be criticised as being anti-intellectual (**Richard Dawkins** is one such scientist who has no time for religious faith in a rational world) and the believer as having failed to weigh and balance evidence in a rational way. However, just as we draw conclusions on non-religious matters through testing the evidence, why can't it be said that the same skills are also used in matters of faith as well? The theist may well be misguided in concluding that there is a *God* but who is to say that his faith has not involved some process of testing, assessing and evaluating. People just don't conclude that there is a *God* without some form of rationalisation. If they did then their faith is no more than unsubstantiated opinion.

## Conclusions

It can be argued that we do have ways in which we can prove *God's* existence although we have to be clear about what we mean by the term 'prove'. We could amass evidence that makes it look increasingly likely that *God* does exist (inductive or 'a posteriori' reasoning) or we could argue deductively ('a priori' reasoning) from certain premises that, if accepted, would make *God's* existence more certain. Clearly, proof of this type is more preferable but as we shall see most traditional arguments for the existence of *God* are of an inductive type and throughout this course you will need to establish whether this weakens the theistic claim that *God* does indeed exist.

## TASK ONE

### Getting used to the language

Using the notes above create a definition list of the following useful philosophical words.

Word or phrase	Meaning or explanation
Agnostic	
Analytic	
A posteriori	

A priori	
Atheist	
Deductive	
Inductive	
Logically necessary	
Proof	
Theist	

## TASK TWO

In our philosophy course we will be looking at two **types** of philosophers:

**Empiricists** -believe that we gain knowledge is through using empirical evidence. Empirical evidence is evidence we experience using your five senses. The more evidence you have the stronger the proof.

**Rationalists** -believe that the knowledge we have is within us when we are born. It is unlocked by our experiences - we rationalise our experiences.

## Investigating the scholars

<https://www.the-philosophy.com/famous-philosophers>

<https://thebestschools.org/magazine/major-philosopher-ideas/>

<https://www.invaluable.com/blog/famous-philosophers>

Or simply Google the individual names of the scholars.

Complete the table below. Not all boxes will be relevant to every scholar.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Belief about God</u>	<u>Ideas known for</u>
Richard Dawkins					
John Hick					
Blasé Pascal					
St Anselm of Canterbury					

Socrates					
Plato					
David Hume					
Immanuel Kant					
Thomas Aquinas					

William Paley					
Rene Descartes					
St. Augustine					

**TASK THREE**

Explain using the notes above the basics of each argument listed above and say whether they are inductive or deductive.

<b>Cosmological Argument</b>	<b>Ontological Argument</b>	<b>Teleological Argument</b>

## TASK FOUR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RWOpQXTItA>

Welcome to philosophy. Watch the short film of Plato's Analogy of the Cave. In the space below summarise what you understand from the film.

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There will be things in that film that you might not understand yet. Don't worry. You are the man who has just been released from the shadows and it will take time to adjust to the new way in which philosophy wants you to think.

### **Something a little easier to start with!**

Watch the film 'The Matrix'. This film is essentially Hollywood's take on Plato's Analogy of the Cave. Whilst watching the film record in the space below the ideas of Plato shown in the film. You see, philosophy goes with everything. It can even help you watch and enjoy films on a new level.





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## TASK FIVE

The skills of philosophy are numerous. A philosopher needs to identify and analyse good methods of attaining reliable forms knowledge and sources of knowledge. They need to question and evaluate all they come across. Essentially philosophy will improve your critical thinking and problem solving skills. You can gain these skills through any subject but we are looking at and practising philosophy through Religious Studies. To help us learn these skills we will be looking at the following across the next two years:

- Arguments for and against the existence of God (hence our need to understand proofs from the beginning of this document);
- Religious experience such as miracles;
- The existence of Evil and Suffering;
- How we use language in relation to religion;
- Philosophy in relation to science, politics, psychology and sociology.

When we deal with religion there is one big character we have to address - GOD. As God means things to different people and people have different beliefs about his existence we have to establish a few key definitions from which we all can work. It does not matter what you believe about God to be a philosopher but you must acknowledge what you believe, how you acquired that belief and how does that belief affect the way in which you approach particular subjects. Here are the three key beliefs about God:



## TASK SIX

What is God? As there are many different ideas about God we could get very confused when talking about the concept. So philosophers of religion have come up with some crucial characteristics of God which can be accepted by the majority of people. This way, when discussing God we can be certain that we are all talking about the same thing. This description of God is known as **The God of Classical Theism**. (Classical = the traditional view; theism = beliefs about God)

### The God of Classical Theism

God is:

**Omnipotent** - all powerful; who can create anything out of nothing.

**Omniscient** - all knowing; who knows all that has happened, will happen, is happening.

**Omnibenevolent** - all loving; who loves his creation and is the ultimate example of love, compassion and kindness.

**Transcendent** - is not limited by form, time or space; who has no beginning and no end (infinite)

So essentially when philosophers talk about God these are the characteristics they are thinking of. However, in true philosophy form, there are problems with these definitions.

Think about the following and write down the problems that they can cause.

**Can God create an object that is too heavy for God to lift?**

**Can God create a creature which holds a secret that not even God knows about?**

**If God is all-loving, all-powerful and all-knowing why does evil and suffering exist in the world he created?**

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**An Introduction to the Study of Ethics**

In ethics we look at the ways in which society determines what is right and wrong, good and bad, who decides this and the processes and influences behind these decisions. We will identify key theories and methods used to unravel ethical dilemmas and then apply them to particular situations. Ethics is a universal topic but we are going to learn the skills and processes using the medium of Religious Studies. Below is a list of some of the theories and situations we are going to explore:

- Teleological Ethics
- Deontological Ethics
- Utilitarianism
- Situation Ethics
- Sexual Ethics
- Environmental Ethics

- Ethics of War
- Virtue Ethics
- Medical Ethics
- Religion and morality

To help you make the move between GCSE and A Level this document will look at the ways in which we make decisions and two particular ethical theories for you to practise.

### Normative Ethics

Normative ethics is the branch of ethics which looks specifically at how we decide whether something is right or wrong, good or bad. Normative ethics is easily divided into two ways of deciding.

**Deontological Decision Making** - Sometimes we follow rules and principles and we consider something wrong if it breaks this rule or principle. E.g. I will never tell a lie; I will always keep my promises; I will never tell another person's secret; Killing someone is always wrong.

**Teleological Decision Making** - At other times we decide what the right or wrong thing to do is by looking at the possible outcomes or the individual situations. E.g. Is it wrong not to do my homework; Is it right for someone to take a human life in self-defence; Should someone have an abortion because the pregnancy gets in the way of a holiday?

### TASK ONE

Look at these different dilemmas. Work out what you would do in each situation, why you would do it and whether or not you have acted in a teleological way or deontological way.

On the Wilderness trail in the pioneering days in America many people lost their lives to the Indians. On one occasion a woman had a crying baby which threatened to give her party's hiding position away. Should she strangle the baby?

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Your best friend has told you a secret that could prevent an innocent person going to prison. Do you tell the police?

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You are a high court judge. In front of you is an innocent man but the jury have just found him guilty of murder. If you overturn the jury's verdict many people in the country will riot in protest. Do you send the innocent man to prison?

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## Teleological Ethical Theories

There are both strengths and weaknesses to teleological theories and we will identify them as we investigate. We shall start by looking at **Utilitarianism**.

**Utilitarianism** which literally translates as **usefulness** has its origins in the Greek philosophical movement **Hedonism**. Hedonists believed that the aim in life was to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Hedonists believed an action was morally okay if pleasure was the outcome and pain was minimised.

**Jeremy Bentham (18<sup>th</sup> century philanthropist and social reformer)** is often referred to as the founding father of utilitarianism (in particular a form of it called Act Utilitarianism). He said that a decision should be based on the quantity of pleasure an action will provide and devised a formula to help people make their decision. This formula is known as the **Hedonic Calculus**.

The Hedonic Calculus has 7 main criteria:

1. Intensity—How intense will the pleasure be?
2. Duration—How long will the pleasure last?
3. Certainty—Is it certain to bring pleasure?
4. Fecundity—Will the pleasure be repeated?
5. Propinquity—Is the pleasure near to you?
6. Purity—Is it free from pain?
7. Extent—How many will experience the pleasure?

The quote that is often used to summarise Bentham's theory is 'The greatest happiness for the greatest number.'

## TASK TWO

What would Jeremy Bentham have said should happen in the following situations? What do you think of his decisions?

Two men are drowning in a river. You see that one is your father and the other is a well-known scientist close to a solution for cancer. You can only save one; the one you can't save will drown. Who should be saved?

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You are the Prime Minister. The armed forces have captured a prisoner of war who holds vital information which could bring about the end of the war that your country is involved in. Do you give permission for the prisoner to be tortured to get this information?

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### **Rule Utilitarianism**

John Stuart Mill (19<sup>th</sup> century radical M.P.) He agreed that people should pursue pleasure and avoid pain. However, he said that pleasure should be judged on its quality and not its quantity. He argued that if something brings pleasure to someone they should do it as long as it does not bring about harm to anyone else. This is known as The Harm Principle.

### **TASK THREE**

#### **Modern day uses of Utilitarianism.**

The current British political system is based on utilitarian ethics. Laws should be based around what brings about the greatest happiness for the greatest number. An example of this would be the referendum on BREXIT. In 2016 the British public were given the opportunity to leave or remain within the European Union. By a small majority, Britain voted to leave. This is an example of Act Utilitarianism in practise.

The NHS also uses Act Utilitarianism in its decision making. Look at the two examples below. Do you agree with what happened? Give your reasons. Explain what you think the strengths and weaknesses of utilitarianism are shown in these examples.



Jaymee Bowen



Jaymee had a rare type of blood cancer. At the age of 11, after having beaten it twice already, the oncology doctor said she had a 2.5% chance of beating it again.

The doctor said that to treat her would cost the NHS £75,000 and the money would be better spent on patients with a better chance of recovery. This is what the NHS did.

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The NHS has access to a treatment for terminally ill breast cancer patients. In the UK 3000 women each year are diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer.



Whilst Herceptin does not cure it, it gives the patient on average extra two years of life with their families. The NHS have decided to give only 1000 patients this treatment per year as it would cost £17 million to treat 3000 women with it. The NHS claim that the money saved is better spent elsewhere.

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## Ethical Language - read the section below then complete the tasks

### What do we mean when we say something is good?

The philosopher G. E. Moore thought that there is a difference between good things and goodness itself. The aspects or qualities that make something good are different from goodness itself. An action may be good because it is a generous action, but good isn't identical to generosity.

When we add 'good' to a sentence it has an effect that's different from that of the adjectives. If we call a hat 'a red hat' then it adds a quality, or aspect, to the description. If we call a person 'a good person', the word good certainly adds something to the person, but 'good' is just another word like 'red' or 'old' or 'tall'. A good knife is better than a bad knife, but here when we use the word 'good' we're probably talking about sharpness or shininess. A good knife isn't *morally* better than a bad knife. In fact, I may use a good knife to stab someone – a morally bad thing to do. I may drink good coffee that has been produced by farmers who aren't fairly paid for their work, in which case I may think that it is morally bad.

There are good footballers who aren't morally good at all. When we call someone a 'good' person we're saying something very different from calling them 'tall' or 'short', or 'old' or 'young'. We may be referring to the nature of their character, the kind of things that they do or the way in which they weigh up a situation. The moral sense of **good** refers to actions, consequences, situations, people, characters, choices and lifestyles.

### Tasks

- 1** We use the word 'good' in many different ways. Try to describe in different words what 'good' means in each of these sentences:
  - a** He was a good dog.
  - b** It was a good film.
  - c** We gave it a good shot.
  - d** They made us a good breakfast.
  - e** It was good that we double-checked the time of the flight.
  - f** She had a good soul.
  - g** This car's as good as any other.
- 2** Different philosophers explain the word 'good' in many different ways, according to their preferred ethical theory. Consider these examples and decide which you most and least agree with. Good means:
  - a** In accordance with the will of God.
  - b** The thing that produces the greatest good for the greatest result.



# An introduction to the study of religion (Buddhism)

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## Pre-knowledge Tasks

### I. **'The Life of Siddhartha Gautama'**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJWsLTt5zJU&feature=youtu.be>

(See also extract at the end of this section to help)

After reading: 'The Life of Siddhartha Gautama' complete the following:

- I. Make a timeline of the Buddha's life – include the key points of his conception, birth and early life. Include the reason he was kept in the Palace and the Four Sights – (those people who Siddhartha saw when he went out of the Palace that led to his departure). Then you need the experiences that led to his enlightenment, what he did after that and then finally the circumstances and location of his death

2. Now answer the following questions in full sentences based on your reading:
- a) What was unusual about Siddhartha's birth?
  - b) Why did King Shuddodana try to keep his son inside the Palace? Do you think that this could have worked?
  - c) What was so important about Siddhartha's journey outside the Palace and the people that he saw?
  - d) Why do you think that this had such a profound effect on the young Siddhartha and led him to leave his wife and baby son?
  - e) Do you think that his departure was selfish, what about his wife and baby son?
  - f) What do you think Siddhartha learnt during the years of asceticism? *If you are not sure what asceticism means then look it up to be sure*
  - g) After his enlightenment, why did the Buddha not want to teach what he had learnt?
  - h) What did the Buddha teach at the Deer Park Sermon?
  - i) What is the sangha?
  - j) What do you think the last words of the Buddha meant?



## The Life of Siddhartha Gautama

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There was a small country in what is now southern Nepal that was ruled by a clan called the Shakyas. The head of this clan, and the king of this country, was named Shuddodana Gautama, and his wife was the beautiful Mahamaya. Mahamaya was expecting her first born. She had had a strange dream in which a baby elephant had blessed her with his trunk, which was understood to be a very auspicious sign to say the least.



As was the custom of the day, when the time came near for Queen Mahamaya to have her child, she travelled to her father's kingdom for the birth. But during the long journey, her birth pains began. In the small town of Lumbini, she asked her handmaidens to assist her to a nearby grove of trees for privacy. One large tree lowered a branch to her to serve as a support for her delivery. They say the birth was nearly painless, even though the child was delivered from her side. Afterwards, a gentle rain fell on the mother and the child to cleanse them.

It is said that the child was born fully awake. He could speak, and told his mother he had come to free all mankind from suffering. He could stand, and he walked a short distance in each of the four directions. Lotus blossoms rose in his footsteps. They named him Siddhartha, which means "he who has attained his goals." Sadly, Mahamaya died only seven days after the birth. After that Siddhartha was raised by his mother's kind sister, Mahaprajapati.

King Shuddodana consulted Asita, a well-known sooth-sayer, concerning the future of his son. Asita proclaimed that he would be one of two things: He could become a great king, even an emperor, or he could become a great sage and saviour of humanity. The king, eager that his son should become a king like himself, was determined to shield the child from anything that might result in him taking up the religious life. And so Siddhartha was kept in one or another of their three palaces, and was prevented from experiencing much of what ordinary folk might consider quite commonplace. He was not permitted to see the elderly, the sickly, the dead, or anyone who had dedicated themselves to spiritual practices. Only beauty and health surrounded Siddhartha.

Siddhartha grew up to be a strong and handsome young man. As a prince of the warrior caste, he trained in the arts of war. When it came time for him to marry, he won the hand of a beautiful princess of a neighbouring kingdom by besting all competitors at a variety of sports. Yashodhara was her name, and they married when both were 16 years old.

As Siddhartha continued living in the luxury of his palaces, he grew increasingly restless and curious about the world beyond the palace walls. He finally demanded that he be permitted to see his people and his lands. The king carefully arranged that Siddhartha should still not see the kind of suffering that he feared would lead him to a religious life, and decreed that only young and healthy people should greet the prince.

As he was led through Kapilavasthu, the capital, he chanced to see a couple of old men who had accidentally wandered near the parade route. Amazed and confused, he chased after them to find out what they were. Then he came across some people who were severely ill. And finally, he came across a funeral ceremony by the side of a river, and for the first time in his life saw death. He asked his friend and charioteer Chandaka the meaning of all these things, and Chandaka informed him of the simple truths that Siddhartha should have known all along: That all of us get old, sick, and eventually die.

Siddhartha also saw an ascetic, a monk who had renounced all the pleasures of the flesh. The peaceful look on the monks face would stay with Siddhartha for a long time to come. Later, he would say this about that time:

*When ignorant people see someone who is old, they are disgusted and horrified, even though they too will be old someday. I thought to myself: I don't want to be like the ignorant people. After that, I couldn't feel the usual intoxication with youth anymore.*

*When ignorant people see someone who is sick, they are disgusted and horrified, even though they too will be sick someday. I thought to myself: I don't want to be like the ignorant people. After that, I couldn't feel the usual intoxication with health anymore.*

*When ignorant people see someone who is dead, they are disgusted and horrified, even though they too will be dead someday. I thought to myself: I don't want to be like the ignorant people. After that, I couldn't feel the usual intoxication with life anymore. (AN III.39, interpreted)*

At the age of 29, Siddhartha came to realize that he could not be happy living as he had been. He had discovered suffering, and wanted more than anything to discover how one might overcome suffering. After kissing his sleeping wife and newborn son Rahula goodbye, he snuck out of the palace with his squire Chandara and his favourite horse Kanthaka. He gave away his rich clothing, cut his long hair, and gave the horse to Chandara and told him to return to the palace. He studied for a while with two famous gurus of the day, but found their practices lacking.



He then began to practice the austerities and self-mortifications practiced by a group of five ascetics. For six years, he practiced. The sincerity and intensity of his practice were so astounding that, before long, the five ascetics became followers of Siddhartha. But the answers to his questions were not forthcoming. He redoubled his efforts, refusing food and water, until he was in a state of near death.

One day, a peasant girl named Sujata saw this starving monk and took pity on him. She begged him to eat some of her milk-rice. Siddhartha then realized that these extreme practices were leading him nowhere, that in fact it might be better to find some middle way between the extremes of the life of luxury and the life of self-mortification. So he ate, and drank, and bathed in the river. The five ascetics saw him and concluded that Siddhartha had given up the ascetic life and taken to the ways of the flesh, and left him.

In the town of Bodh Gaya, Siddhartha decided that he would sit under a certain fig tree as long as it would take for the answers to the problem of suffering to come. He sat there for many days, first in deep concentration to clear his mind of all distractions, then in mindfulness meditation, opening himself up to the truth. He began, they say, to recall all his previous lives, and to see everything that was going on in the entire universe. On the full moon of May, with the rising of the morning star, Siddhartha finally understood the answer to the question of suffering and became the Buddha, which means "he who is awake."

It is said that Mara, the evil one, tried to prevent this great occurrence. He first tried to frighten Siddhartha with storms and armies of demons. Siddhartha remained completely calm. Then he sent his three beautiful daughters to tempt him, again to no avail. Finally, he tried to ensnare Siddhartha in his own ego by appealing to his pride. That, too, failed. Siddhartha, having conquered all temptations, touched the ground with one hand and asked the earth to be his witness.





Siddhartha, now the Buddha, remained seated under the tree -- which we call the bodhi tree -- for many days longer. It seemed to him that this knowledge he had gained was far too difficult to communicate to others. Legend has it that Brahma, king of the gods, convinced Buddha to teach, saying that some of us perhaps have only a little dirt in our eyes and could awaken if we only heard his story. Buddha agreed to teach.

At Sarnath near Benares, about one hundred miles from Bodh Gaya, he came across the five ascetics he had practiced with for so long. There, in a deer park, he preached his first sermon, known as the Deer Park Sermon, which is called "setting the wheel of the teaching in motion." He explained to them the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. They became his very first disciples and the beginnings of the Sangha or community of monks.

King Bimbisara of Magadha, having heard Buddha's words, granted him a monastery near Rahagriha, his capital, for use during the rainy season. This and other generous donations permitted the community of converts to continue their practice throughout the years, and gave many more people an opportunity to hear the teachings of the Buddha.

Over time, he was approached by members of his family, including his wife, son, father, and aunt. His son became a monk and is particularly remembered in a sutra based on a conversation between father and son on the dangers of lying. His father became a lay follower. Because he was saddened by the departures of his son and grandson into the monastic life, he asked Buddha to make it a rule that a man must have the permission of his parents to become a monk. Buddha obliged him.

His aunt and wife asked to be permitted into the Sangha, which was originally composed only of men. The culture of the time ranked women far below men in importance, and at first it seemed that permitting women to enter the community would weaken it. It could also be that the life of a wandering teacher would be considered too dangerous for women. But the Buddha relented, and his aunt and wife became the first Buddhist nuns.

The Buddha said that it didn't matter what a person's status in the world was, or what their background or wealth or nationality might be. All were capable of enlightenment, and all were welcome into the Sangha. The first ordained Buddhist monk, Upali, had been a barber, yet he was ranked higher than monks who had been kings, only because he had taken his vows earlier than they!



Buddha's life wasn't without disappointments. His cousin, Devadatta, was an ambitious man. As a convert and monk, he felt that he should have greater power in the Sangha. He managed to influence quite a few monks with a call to a return to extreme asceticism. Eventually, he conspired with a local king to have the Buddha killed and to take over the Buddhist community. Of course, he failed.

Buddha had achieved his enlightenment at the age of 35. He would teach throughout northeast India for another 45 years. When the Buddha was 80 years old, he told his friend and cousin Ananda that he would be

leaving them soon. And so it came to be that in Kushinagara, not a hundred miles from his homeland, he ate some spoiled food and became very ill. He went into a deep meditation under a grove of sala trees and died. His last words were...

*Impermanent are all created things;  
Strive on with awareness.*



2. **Samsara – Research and draw the Tibetan Wheel of Life (Bhavachakra)** – label the different parts.

Add as many key Buddhist terms from GCSE that we have learnt – explain what the wheel depicts. Use Google as a starting point

3. **The main Buddhist teachings:** Research the following and fill in key details, this will make a great glossary to put in your folders when we begin to refer back to.

<b><i>Key Teaching</i></b>	<b><i>Meaning/translation</i></b>	<b><i>Key details/Quotes/Scripture</i></b>
Dukkha	Suffering	The first Noble truth and idea that all life involves suffering
Samudaya		
Nirodha		
Magga		
Tanha		
The Three Poisons		
Nibanna		
The Eightfold Path		
The Threefold way		
Karuna		

Metta		
Theravada Buddhism		
Mahayana Buddhism		
Khanti		
The Five Skhandas		
Three Marks of existence		
Karma		
Enlightenment		
The Three Refuges		
The Five Moral Precepts		

**Additional information:**

Please contact Miss Jenkins [klj@churchdownschool.com](mailto:klj@churchdownschool.com) for further information.

**Recommended reading list:**

- Dhammapada 153-4
- Erricker, C. (2001 2nd edition) Teach Yourself Buddhism, Teach Yourself Chapter 2
- Della Santina, P. (1970) The Fundamentals of Buddhism, Buddha Dharma
- Education Association Ltd, Chapter 1 (available online)
- Cush, D. (1994), Buddhism, Hodder Education, Chapter 2