

# The Buddha Image



## PUPIL INFORMATION SHEET

The Buddha image is a symbol, not a portrait of a person. Nobody knows what the Buddha looked like.

The first images were probably made a few hundred years after the death of the Buddha. As Buddhism spread from India into south-east Asia, China, Japan and Tibet, artists in each country began to make Buddha images. These images can look very different but they are all trying to show an Enlightened being. Most Buddha images have certain features in common.

Size and style vary. There are giant-sized images such as the one at Bodhgaya, and small images for use on personal shrines at home. Each Buddhist monastery or temple will have a Buddha image as the central feature of its shrine room.

When Buddhists look at an image, they remember the Buddha, who lived 2,500 years ago in India. They are reminded of the qualities that they too are seeking to develop in their own quest for Enlightenment.

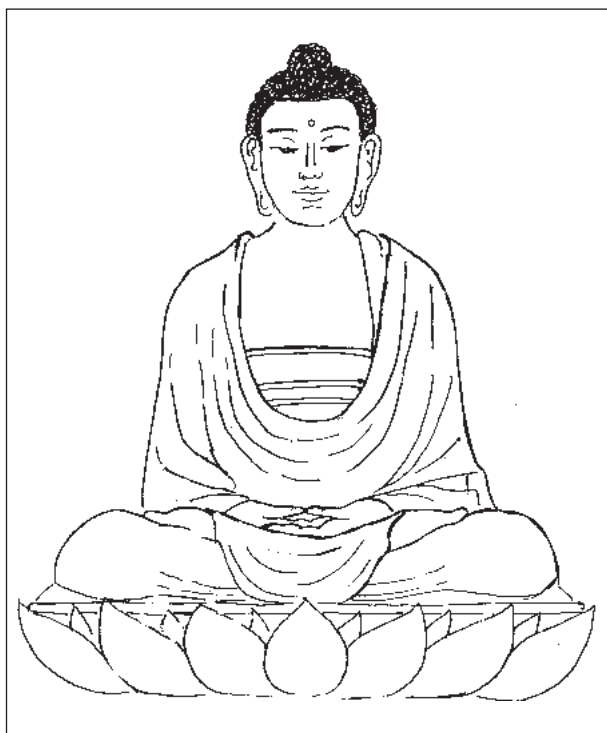
### Posture

The meditation posture is the most common. The figure is seated in the “full lotus” position, legs crossed with the feet resting on the opposite thigh. Other positions include standing and lying on one side.

### Hands

The symbolic hand positions are called *mudras*. Each mudra has a meaning: the hands resting together in the lap symbolise meditation; hands held as if

turning a wheel symbolise the Buddha as teacher; the right hand held in front of the chest is a symbol of fearlessness.



### Face

Closed or half-closed eyes indicate stillness and concentration. A gentle smile shows friendliness. Sometimes a symbolic “third eye” can be seen on the forehead. This shows that the Buddha “sees” life differently from us; he understands the Way Things Really Are.

### Body

Buddha images are often covered in gold leaf. The Buddha is precious to Buddhists. Shining gold reminds them of

the Buddha’s beauty and radiance. The outer beauty symbolises the inner beauty of an Enlightened being.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Look at a Buddha image and draw it from observation.
2. Think of someone you admire and want to be like. Draw a picture of them. Make up symbols to show their special qualities. Explain the symbols.

3. **Web quest** Using the internet, look at figures or images of the Buddha (sometimes called Shakyamuni Buddha). Choose three or four different figures or images and write a presentation explaining where they come from, what they have in common and what’s different; such as the hand positions.

**Webquest sites appear online.**