

Information for pupils

Manchester Buddhist Centre



Welcome!

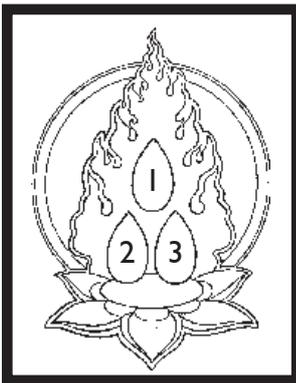
Manchester Buddhist Centre is a meeting place for Buddhists. They come here to meditate, to study the Buddha's teachings, to worship him, and to relax with their friends. Some Buddhists work here; a few live here.

Anybody may visit the Centre. Many people who are not Buddhists come here to learn to meditate, or to find out about the Buddha and his teachings. Others come to look around, to eat in the cafe, or to use the health centre. Some people who have painful disabilities or illnesses come to learn how to use meditation to help them live with pain. About 1,500 young people come here in school groups each year, to find out about what it is really like to be a Buddhist.

This is a very large, old building. Built by the Victorians, it used to be a factory and warehouse, and then it was empty from the 1950s until the 1990s. From 1994 to 1996, Buddhist women and men worked here to turn it from a ruin into a beautiful place for everyone to enjoy.

The Buddhist Centre is a place where people come to be quiet and thoughtful. You will be very welcome - especially if you try to be quiet and thoughtful too! There may be people meditating while you are visiting so please try not to disturb them.

- As you come in, check what's written on the blackboard by the front door.



What makes this place special to Buddhists?

Over the front door is a very important symbol: the **Three Jewels**. You'll also notice that the downstairs windows are protected by iron railings in the shape of lotus plants growing up and up through water. This place is special to Buddhists because they love the Three Jewels:

- 1 They love the **Buddha**, who showed that it is possible to change for the better and reach Enlightenment. (This jewel is yellow, like the Buddha's robe.)
- 2 They love the **Dharma** (his teachings), which has helped them to become happier, kinder and freer from suffering. (This is blue, like the sky and sea.)
- 3 They love the **Sangha**, the community of Buddhist friends, who help and encourage each other to follow the Buddha's path. (Red, like the heart.)

Many people feel this building is so beautiful they feel happy just to be in it. Buddhists believe that everything we do has an effect, on us and on others. The Buddhists here keep their Centre as beautiful and clean as possible because they see it makes them and other people happier, and happy people are usually kinder to others. If people who visit the Centre go away and behave better to other people, then the Centre is having an effect on a lot of people, all over Manchester and maybe even the world.

- Before your visit, find out what the lotus symbol means.
- During your visit, try to notice how you feel while you're here. Look out for unusual smells, sounds and colours. Notice how people behave at the Centre.

The Lotus Hall

The largest and most important room in the building is the shrine room, which is called the Lotus Hall. Buddhists come here to meditate, to worship the Buddha and to hear talks about his teachings. There is also another, smaller shrine room.

Buddhists and visitors take off their shoes before they enter any Buddhist place of worship, including the Lotus Hall, as a sign of respect, and to keep it clean. You'll be sitting on the floor, like the Buddhists, on mats and cushions.

As another mark of respect, the first thing Buddhists do on entering their place of worship is to bow to the Buddha-figure. You can't miss ours; he's about two metres high and covered in gold leaf. He sits on a large lotus flower, on the shrine, which is a long low table. Around him you will see three traditional offerings, placed there to make the shrine beautiful and express the great love and admiration Buddhists feel for this extraordinary man. Buddhists believe he showed people the way to live kinder, happier and more satisfying lives, leading to Enlightenment: a state of perfect kindness, wisdom, generosity and fearlessness.

Before you come

- Find out what the three offerings are, and what they mean.

What happens in the Lotus Hall?

People behave respectfully and quietly here.

In the evenings there are classes where people study the Buddha's teachings, or learn to meditate. One night each week the Buddhists meditate together and worship. (Buddhists do not have a special day each week.) Although there is no God in Buddhism, Buddhists believe worship is important. To "worship" means to state what is worthy or valuable to you; so when Buddhists worship the Buddha, they state how precious they consider his life and teaching to be. They remind themselves that, like Siddhartha before he became the Buddha, they are trying every day to become kinder and wiser and more fearless and generous. They remember that, like the Buddha, they too can one day become Enlightened, if they keep making an effort to change for the better.

Before you come

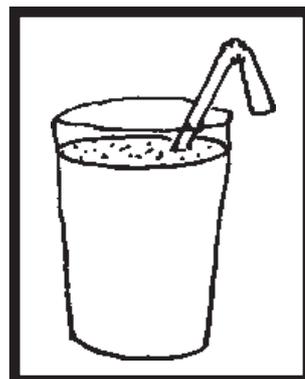
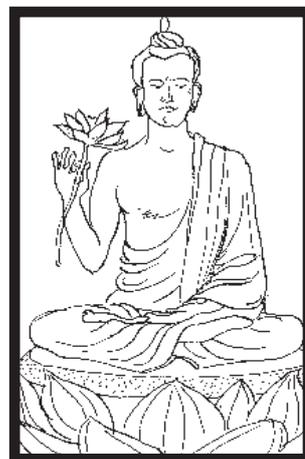
- Find out what meditation is.
- Discuss how an Enlightened person might behave.
- Think of someone who is very special to you. How do you show how much you care about them?

How Buddhists live

Buddhists believe it is important to be kind, generous and thoughtful, to try not to be greedy, and to do work that is helpful to others. The more we can do this, the happier we and the people around us will be.

Most Manchester Buddhist Centre Buddhists have ordinary jobs elsewhere, but some have jobs in the Centre itself: some teach about the Buddha and meditation; some work in the vegetarian cafe, serving healthy food that does not involve hurting or killing animals; some keep the Centre clean and beautiful; some answer the telephone and pay the bills; some teach the visiting school groups.

If they need it, some of these people are paid a small amount of money, but many people work here as volunteers; they love the Centre and the Three Jewels so much that they work here in their spare time even though they don't get paid.





- Discuss: have you ever done anything that helped others, without getting any money for it? Why did you do it, and how did it make you feel?

Other Buddhist places of worship

Buddhist places of worship vary a lot and have many different names in different countries all over the world. In English they may be called temples; or if there are monks or nuns living there, they may be called monasteries, or nunneries.

(Buddhist monks and nuns are men and women who want to live a simple life with other Buddhists and meditate and study most of the time. To have more time for this, they have decided not to have things like children, partners, jobs or private houses to look after. They usually shave their heads and wear robes, to show that they are living this special life - see picture. There are monks and nuns in other religions too.)



Many different types of Buddhism from around the world can be found in Britain today. The Manchester Buddhist Centre is part of a worldwide organisation called the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). In this tradition, there are no monks or nuns. FWBO Buddhists wear ordinary clothes and hairstyles but the most committed and experienced of them also wear a *kesa* - a kind of sash round the neck - when they are teaching (see picture). These people have been given the *kesa* at a ceremony where they were also given a Buddhist name, made up specially to describe the best thing about them, or something they are trying to do better at. (For example, one of the men is called Priyavadita, which means Perfect Speech. He used to get angry and swear a lot!) For them, being a Buddhist is the most important thing in their lives, but they may still choose to have partners, children, jobs or private homes.



Discuss

- How can you tell what a person is like?
- What might make you think someone was a Buddhist even if they weren't wearing any special clothes?

Reflect

- What's the best thing about you?
- What things are you trying to improve about yourself or your behaviour?
- What would you like to be called if you were given a new name that described what you were really like?
- Think about a place that is special to you and others. What do you do there together?
- Think of a time when you wanted to be quiet and thoughtful. Where did you go?
- Think of an activity you do or a group you go to with friends. Why do you go? Would it be just the same, better or worse, if you did the same thing by yourself?



What else do you want to know?

Think of a couple of questions you want to ask when you come and visit us.

We look forward to seeing you soon!