

INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM



BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST VIHARA

INTRODUCTION
TO
BUDDHISM

Spiritual Director

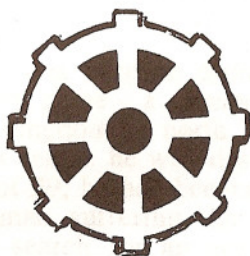
Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma

Dhamma-talaka Publications

Freedom of Thought

"Come, O Kalamas, do not be led by report, by tradition or by heresy or by the authority of religious texts; or by claims of knowledge and truth that are based on any type of reasoning or speculation, or on the basis of the reliability of the person, or by the respect for your teacher. Rather, Kalamas, when you know for yourself these things are unprofitable, blameworthy and conduce to loss and sorrow, then, indeed, you should reject them. And when you know for yourself that certain things are profitable, blameless and conduce to profit and happiness, then indeed you should accept them and abide by them."

The Buddha



INTRODUCTION

There are as many reasons for coming here to the Vihara as there are people who come. Perhaps yours was simply one of interest. You may have heard about Buddhism and you decided to investigate further. May be you have come along to experience this particular Buddhist practice. You may have come along in the hope that meditation will help you sort out problems:- personal, interpersonal and social, or even that Buddhism will become your long searched for 'life's answer'! Whatever your personal reason for coming, this booklet is only an introduction and it would be impossible to include in it answers to all the questions we get asked. So if after reading it, you have not been satisfied, then please ask one of the meditation teachers or one of the monks.

Buddhism in a very small nutshell

The life of the Buddha

The Buddha was born an ordinary human being - Siddhattha Gotama by name - a member of the Sakya clan which ruled a small kingdom in north India bordering onto present day Nepal. It seems he was destined to become its ruler. But at the age of 29, he had become so concerned with the problems of human suffering that he renounced his princely life in the search for an answer. He became a wandering ascetic, much like the ones which can be seen in India to this day, and he placed himself under the guidance of the famous masters of the time. So well did he train that he came to be recognised as their equal, but he had not yet attained the answer to his all consuming problems.

Why do human beings have to suffer and is there an escape or liberation from it? It was under a fig tree, known as the Bodhi Tree (the tree of Enlightenment), near to the present day village of Bodhgaya that the ascetic Gotama through deep, sustained meditation realised the answer and

became the Enlightened One - the Buddha. He was by then 35 years old. The search in earnest had taken him six years, and for the next 45 years he walked around that same northern part of India explaining his understanding to anyone who wanted to know. By the end of his life he had established a very large order of monks i.e. Sangha and an even larger following of lay disciples. He asked his monks to wander and spread his teachings (Dhamma) for the good of the many. And so it was that Buddhism spread first to Sri Lanka, eastwards to South East Asia, then across China and Japan, northwards to Afghanistan, Tibet and Mongolia and, today, west to Europe and America and south to Africa and Australia.

The Problem

The Buddha's teaching is very simple, but like most simple things very difficult to put into practice. You can read how to play an instrument easily enough, but it takes a long time to play it well. The instrument the Buddha wanted us to master was our own body and mind - what we call our "Self."

He likened Himself to a doctor, diagnosing and healing a disease. He came to see the human situation as one which was fundamentally unsatisfactory (Dukkha). He not only meant the obvious bodily aches and pains and emotional sufferings. He also pointed to the very nature of life here on earth which never leads or can ever lead to everlasting happiness or peace. This intrinsic characteristic of life, of 'nature' itself, is change, nothing lasts. Everything springs up anew only to change, decay and disappear. Of course, we can see this in the course of a day with its cycle of dawn to dusk. We can see it in the turning of the seasons and in the passing of the years. But do we perceive it directly and realise it to be our own true nature also? This changing process (Anicca) means that not only are our bodies in a state of change and irrevocably moving towards death, but also our minds and hearts - what we so treasure as our personality with all its thoughts, opinions, emotions and imaginings. Nothing is still or static. Of course, we do have good times-the happy celebration, the holiday, the great party. But it all passes,

impossible to re-create, and we are left with nostalgia and foolish hopes of being a repetition.

Then why do we fall into the self-deception of 'I am happy' and 'everything's all right'? It is because we do not know who we really are. We usually presume that there is a permanent self, an everlasting "soul" which we can identify with and which when it comes to death will be 'us', and we shall be saved. But on investigation, it is impossible to find anything that is lasting. In fact, to our horror, everything really is in a state of flux. A Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once said that we never step into the same river twice because the waters are ever flowing and consequently the river is always changing. The Buddha would have pointed out that the same foot doesn't step into the same river twice since it too is ever-changing. There is nothing abiding. Even consciousness disappears with sleep! The Buddha taught exactly this - the body and mind do not constitute or contain a permanent or everlasting self or soul (Anatta).

So from an objective scientific point of view, we can say that there is nothing permanent within the whole of nature. Everything is transient. From a personal, human point of view this means that there is no permanent element within us either and this is hard to accept! If I am not my body and mind, then who am I? Am I anything at all? This is beginning to sound grim! These sorts of thoughts may lead us to believe in annihilation at death, and so on to despair and even suicide. But in fact to understand and realise these facts - the First Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha)- means that we are simply freeing ourselves from a distorted view of life.

The Cause of our Problem

The Buddha said that the problem lay in our not seeing things as they really are. Our vision or understanding is deluded. We identify with the wrong things - our desires. We create all sorts of wishes to be and become someone. We define ourselves by our jobs, our relationships, our interests, our wealth, our physique and so on, making the wonder our lives can be ruined on losing a partner, our health, wealth or work! Such self-definitions cannot be trusted to last.

These wishes or desires then, and their expansion into grasping, clinging and obsession, are the cause of our discontent. They lead us to seek our heart's deepest desire - happiness and peace - in objects which by their very nature of transiency, cannot possibly last. Pleasure, prosperity, success and fame are short term gains. This is what the Buddha taught as the Second Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering - Desire (Tanhā). Well, this all sounds really gloomy. Does nothing have any permanent meaning? Is there just obliteration? Just annihilation? Is that it - life's hard and then we die?



The Solution

No, indeed! The Buddha said we could be liberated from this discontent. In fact from all suffering. And we could actually experience this release from such suffering here and now. He called it Nibbāna. This realisation, which is the personal experience of Nibbana, is the Third Noble Truth of the end of Suffering. But this experience is impossible to describe since it does not belong to this order of nature; words, pictures, the cleverest concepts or arts cannot describe it. The Buddha himself resorted to negative definitions.

He said it was not what nature was as we commonly experience it. Nibbana is beyond all worldly or sensual experience. Yet it can be experienced because we have in all of us the potential qualities to achieve this experience of enlightenment.

The Solution - The Eightfold Noble Path

So now we have covered the Buddha's understanding of the human predicament. We can see it is one of hope, based on a realistic appraisal of our life situation. All we need to know now is what course of medicine we have to take to put an end to the disease and so achieve the Nibbānic peace. The Buddha laid down the rules of self-healing and called it - the Fourth Noble Truth of the Path.

The first step on the Noble Path is Right Understanding (Sammā Dīṭṭhi). This means to have understood the first two Noble Truths of Suffering and the Cause of Suffering. The Buddha did not want blind adherence to His words. He wanted people to investigate and see whether there were any inconsistencies or contradictions in His teaching. Indeed, it is only on a firm understanding that the conviction comes to practice the second step which is Right Intention or Thought (Sammā Saṅkappa) and so change the whole disposition of our hearts and minds. This Right Intention necessarily moves into Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood. And these are the next three steps. They are concerned with morality. But not the morality imposed by a Superior Being who punishes or rewards. This is a morality, a code of behaviour by which we can begin to clean our hearts and minds of negative attitudes and begin to do good for ourselves and others. This touches upon the teaching of Kamma.

Kamma

Now just as Right Understanding determines the intentions we have, so Right Intention determines our actions and behaviour. This is the teaching of Kamma. It is simply the law of cause and effect we so readily accept in science. If you put various substances together and do this and that in a certain way, you have an atomic explosion. There is a reason or cause for everything that happens. So it is in the moral sphere of good and evil. Everything I do affects not only the world out there, but also the world of my mind within. When I do something I set up a chain of events that finally comes

back to me since I am not a being in isolation, but a being in relationship with everyone else. Just as a pebble dropped in a pool causes ripples to the farthest bank, so do our actions affect the world. Just as the ripples then return to the source, so the result of our actions come back to us. If we do good, good will come back to us. If we do harm, harm will come to us. There is no concept of punishment in Buddhism, only consequences of our actions; repetition of the same action produces an habit; a collection of habits is a personality; and this personality will produce its own destiny. Morality in Buddhism then is understanding what will bring good. What we do, therefore, can be wholesome or unwholesome, skilful or unskilful. We do indeed reap as we sow!



The Solution--- Right Moral Code

So what are the rules whereby we can produce a good future for ourselves and which will lay the ground upon which the process of enlightenment can take place? The first is Right Speech (Sammā Vācā). This means not only not to lie, but also not to backbite, use coarse language or indulge in useless gossip. Then there is Right Action (Sammā Kamma-anta). This means to stop harming any living creature; not to take anything which is not freely given; and not to misuse the senses by indulging in food, drink and sex to the detriment of ourselves and others. Then there is the way we spend the greater part of our lives - our livelihood. Certain jobs and professions are immoral and harmful in themselves - anything to do with killing or harming, with prostitution, with the traffic of arms, drugs or drink, for example. It is not always possible to find work which mirrors our ideals of great compassion, but if the work is not harmful to ourselves or others and is helpful, then it is Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājiva). Of course, if one observes right speech and right action, right livelihood follows automatically.

This is all the negative aspect of morality - following the Buddha's advice - not to do evil. But he also advised us - to do good. Positive morality is about developing the

Perfections -Paramitas . And by developing a wholesome life, we begin to develop the highest states of mind - loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. As we develop these qualities in ourselves, so we lay the foundation of a calm and untroubled heart and mind upon which we can now develop wisdom and insight and so gain a glimpse of that supreme end and goal of all this endeavour - Nibbana.



The Solution - the Destruction of Ignorance - Wisdom

The last three steps of the Eightfold Noble Path - Right Effort (Sammā Vāyāma), Right Mindfulness (Sammā Sati) and Right Concentration (Sammā Samādhi) - are concerned with the meditation practice and the development of awareness. In our meditation practice, sitting meditation, the purpose is to become more and more aware of the changing (anicca) and insubstantial (anatta) nature of the self. This leads to perceiving who or what we really are and to realising the Third Noble truth of Nibbana.

The further practice of meditation is explained in the next section. However, these three steps - Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration - are also important in our daily lives. This aspect of Buddhism, the development of awareness throughout the day, is also explained in a further section.

So we have now covered some of the basic understandings and tenets of Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths, The Eightfold Noble Path, Kamma and Moral Causation and the Three Characteristics of Nature - transitoriness (Anicca), unsatisfactoriness (Dukkha) and insubstantiality (Anatta).

Summary

1. The First Noble Truth of Suffering:- The Three Characteristics of existence; Life is - ever-changing - unsatisfactory - insubstantial
2. The Second Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering:- Desire and attachment; craving of - sense objects - becomings - annihilation
3. The Third Noble Truth of the End of Suffering:- Nibbāna; - there is a state beyond body and mind, - a Peace beyond peace.
4. The Fourth Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the End of Suffering.

Moral Conduct (Sila)	- Right Speech - Right Action - Right Livelihood
Meditation (Samādhi);	- Right Effort; - Right Awareness - Right Concentration
Wisdom (Paññā);	- Right Understanding - Right Intention/Thought

"Following this Path you should make an end of suffering. This verily is the Path declared by me when I had learnt to remove the arrow (of suffering)."

"You yourselves should make the effort; the Awakened Ones are only teachers. Those who enter this Path and who are meditative, are delivered from the bonds of Mara (Evil)."

Dhammapada-275,276

Vipassanā-Insight Meditation

These are general guidelines for the practice of Vipassana Bhavana-- Insight Meditation. Vipassana means to see things as they really are. The Buddha taught this as a way to liberate us from all suffering. It is good practice to read through the following before meditating.

"Choose a suitable time: - early morning or evening is the best time for most people. Sitting twice for half an hour is better than sitting once for an hour. The optimum is to sit for two hours daily."

Resolve to set this time aside for meditation.

Choose a suitable place: secluded and quiet.

Sit in a comfortable posture without leaning against anything. You can use a well-padded cushion or even a chair. Whatever posture you adopt, make sure that before you begin the meditation proper it fulfils these three conditions: comfort, a straight back and easy natural breathing. Lying down is not advisable since sleep comes too easily. Keeping the eyes gently closed fix your attention on the breathing process. Become aware of the breath as it passes over the upper lip or through the nose. Breathe naturally, just watching the breath as it is. Don't try to control it or change it. Simply observe the rising and falling of the abdomen or the touch of the air in or around the nostrils as you breathe in and out.

When you feel your mind is somewhere steady, become aware of all the passing sensations, feelings, emotions, images and thoughts that come into your attention. As with the breath, do not try to control, change or in any way interfere with the mind. Simply observe what comes into your attention. If your mind begins to wander a lot, just notice it and bring the mind gently back to the breath, staying there until you have regained your steadiness of observation. This bare attentiveness - simply watching all that arise and passes away in our minds; this choiceless awareness - that does not control or manipulate the mind; this impartial observation - that does not judge or question; this intuitive introspection -

fully experiencing each mental and bodily phenomenon as it really is, leads us to the realisation that our lives are impermanent and insubstantial - anicca and anatta.

These insights will liberate us from all suffering - dukkha, and we shall come to experience the bliss of Nibbāna - ultimate peace.

Remember to end any meditation period with sharing your merits and developing loving-kindness, metta towards all living beings.

Mettā Bhāvanā - :

The Development of Loving-Kindness

Metta Bhavana is a meditation practice that balances the Insight Meditation. During Insight Meditation we are mostly concerned with purifying the mind and making insights into a more profound reality. In Metta Meditation, we are concerned with the development of wholesome qualities of mind and to share this merit with all beings. Metta, indeed, can be developed only if one gives it to boundless beings without discriminating and without expectation of some thing in return. It should be free of selfishness or attachment. The object of metta meditation should be infinite beings. Therefore metta should be extended towards all beings without exception. May all beings be well and happy, it embraces all living beings.

This meditation simply uses the power of positive thinking and self-suggestion. as soon as I say to myself - I need a holiday - I have made a suggestion to myself. I think it over and then I make a decision to organise one. This is positive thinking. Soon enough, I go on holiday. That's the outcome, the result of suggesting a holiday to myself, of thinking about it and then of making a positive decision.

This meditation uses these techniques to develop good qualities we already have and introduce new wholesome qualities. Once I feel established in these qualities, I can easily share them with others. We are all too familiar with the

negative side. If I'm depressed, for instance, and I go out with some friends, it isn't long before everyone wishes I hadn't come. I make everyone miserable. Depression is catching! I'm sure you have experienced walking into a room where there has been an argument and felt the 'atmosphere'. But in this meditation we try to develop quite the opposite states of mind - friendliness compassion joy and peacefulness. It is these we try to share with others and this is called the Sharing of Merit. Here is a simple formula, but once you feel you understand it, you can add to it or make up your own if you wish.

Before we send our wholesome qualities to other beings, we have to develop them in ourselves, so we should give metta to ourselves.

Firstly, therefore, one should give Metta to oneself:-

May I be free from anger and hatred.
 May I be free from greed and selfishness.
 May I be free from fears and anxiety.
 May I be free from all pain and suffering.
 May I be free from ignorance and delusion.
 May I be free from all negative states of mind.
 May I be happy and peaceful.
 May I be liberated from bondages.
 May I experience Nibbanic peace within.

Then practise metta towards all beings sharing peace and happiness:-

May all beings be free from anger and hatred.
 May all beings be free from greed and selfishness
 May all beings be free from fears and anxiety.
 May all beings be free from all pain and suffering.
 May all beings be free from ignorance and delusion.
 May all beings be free from all negative states of
 mind.
 May all beings be happy and peaceful.
 May all beings be liberated from bondages.
 May all beings live in Peace and Harmony;
 May all beings experience the Nibbanic peace
 within.

After this, we can bring to mind family, friends, teachers and others and offer them goodwill in the same way. We can even bring to mind people we dislike or who dislike us and offer them at least an attitude of 'no harm'.

How Meditation works

The practice of Vipassana Bhavana, sometimes called Insight Meditation works on two levels - the psychological and the spiritual.

On the psychological level, it first helps us to come to terms with our negative mental states. By learning to look closely at our changes of mood and accepting them, we come to know our inner selves - the angry, guilty, anxious, sad and depressed states of mind. It teaches us how to deal with them. Being aware of them not by trying to escape from them, but accepting them as they really are. It means we don't develop them either and make things worse by allowing fantasy, day dreaming and thinking to get us caught up in these emotions. Instead, by developing mindfulness and attention, we allow them to be themselves. We then experience for ourselves exactly what the Buddha taught that just by observing and watching, these states of mind lose energy, fade away and over a period of time die out altogether.

In this way even deeply repressed subconscious feelings come up and fade away until we have purified the mind of all negative states. Gradually we begin to experience more and more the positive states of mind - love and compassion, joy, harmony and peace. This has its effect on our relationships and daily life, making us happier people.

On the spiritual level, as this process of purifying the mind continues, with concentration and awareness, intuitive wisdom arises and begins to see the real nature of mind. It perceives and understands the basic characteristics of our human life - its essential unsatisfactoriness, its ever-changing nature. The awareness continues to do this until, when the conditions are right, it penetrates into the absolute, beyond body and mind - Nibbana, the Deathless.

This is a very brief outline of how the meditation works, but remember that when we meditate, we don't think about this, we just develop the watchfulness, the awareness. We look at what comes into the attention, not look for something.

You will have realised by now that the Buddha did not teach a system that everyone had to believe in before they could start to practise. What he did was to teach a theory and give us a method, a technique - the meditation practice, whereby we can test that theory. Since it is not a belief system, it can be practised by anyone regardless of religion or personal beliefs. It is simply the Path of Mental Purification, useful to each and every human being.

We hope you continue to practise for your own benefit and the benefit of all beings. May your meditation be fruitful.

In Conclusion

So there are two sides to the meditative life. The first is the daily practice of sitting meditation where we deal with the inner person, purifying the mind. The second, meditation in action, where we deal with the outer person, the social person, purifying our relationship to people, to our work and to the world at large. When we practice like this, the wisdom we gain in sitting meditation manifests as friendliness, compassion and joyfulness in daily life; and the inner peace expresses itself as harmony with the world.

Meditation and Daily Life

The practice of Vipassana - Insight Meditation

The practice of sitting meditation is a training to develop mindfulness. This training is much like learning to play an instrument. It's no good practising the guitar all Sunday and leaving it for the rest of week. You simply forget everything you've learnt and every Sunday you have to start all over again. So it is with meditation practice. It is the continuity of effort that eventually brings the instrument of the mind under control. Most teachers advise two times in the

day. Once in the early morning to set the mind right for the day and once in the evening to clear the mind of the day's agitations and secure a restful sleep. To begin with at least twenty minutes at one sitting is recommended. As a result, the mind will become more clear and less agitated so that work and other tasks are done more efficiently. Less energy is wasted on negative emotions. As these negative states of mind lose their power over us, our relationships become more harmonious. It all adds up to a longer and more energetic day and a life more calm and contented.

If you were determined to put this sort of effort into practice for a period of six months to see if it's all really true, by the end of that period you may very well find, as so many others have done, that it really does work.

It is also a great help to spend the occasional weekend on a course. It helps to boost resolution and energy. And if once a year you can find time to do a week's course, this would help to deepen your practice. In this way steady progress in the meditative life is assured.

Meditation in Action

It is important to keep reminding ourselves that sitting meditation is only training. We have to take that alert and aware mind into ordinary daily life. We have to become more and more mindful of how we react to people, to different situations, and how others react to us. We have to come more and more aware of our effect upon the world and the world's effect upon us. The Buddha asked us to practise the four Efforts (Right Effort of the Noble Eightfold Path). Whatever is unwholesome or negative in our minds, we should try to undermine and root out, we shouldn't act upon it, we should guard against allowing any new unwholesome or negative habits to develop. Whatever is wholesome and positive in our minds, we should try to develop. We should encourage ourselves to develop new habits that are beneficial to us and to others. In this way we slowly re-condition our minds away from the negative to the positive, from the unwholesome to the wholesome, from darkness to light.

Another way of understanding meditation in action, is to develop moment to moment awareness of everything we do. To try and do everything deliberately. Even when drinking a cup of tea, we shouldn't allow the mind to wander off thinking, dreaming and worrying. If there is something to really think about or worry about, then set the mind to the problem deliberately until a solution or temporary answer has been found. Then drink the tea! In this way, because the mind is only doing one thing at a time, it remains calmer. In this mode, it thinks more clearly and efficiently. This is the sort of mindfulness the Buddha asked us to cultivate within all our daily activities.

Remember- this is the same mind that also penetrates with insight into Nibbana.'



Sila (morality) is the beginning and the
refuge,
Sila (morality) is the mother of all good.
It is the foremost of all good conditions,
Therefore, purify your Sila (morality).

The Buddha

Birmingham Buddhist Vihara

History:-

The Birmingham Buddhist Vihara was originally founded by the Karma Kagyu Trust in 1981, but it was transferred to the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust in 1982. It is supported mostly by the Burmese community and local native-born Buddhists. The Vihara itself is used mainly by local people.

The Spiritual Director:-

The Ven. Dr. Rewata Dhamma, a senior Burmese monk, is the spiritual director and has been teaching in England and in the West since 1975. He has a Ph.D. in the Philosophy and Psychology of Buddhism and has published authoritative texts on the subject. Currently, he is the spiritual director of other centres in Britain and Europe. He presently conducts yearly courses of meditation in England, Scotland, Holland, Belgium, Germany, France, Czech Republic and Switzerland.

Facilities

Main Shrine Room :-

Meditation, ceremonies and discourses are held in the shrine room which is in the Burmese style with a magnificent golden throne and marble statue of the Buddha.

Library :-

A lending library is situated in the front room where books, mostly of an introductory type, are available to members. There is a reference library in an upstairs shrine which again is open to members and contains scriptural texts-books which are strictly reference and not for lending.

Bookstall - :

Next to the library is a small book stall which carries basic texts. The librarian is happy to order books if needed.

Newsletter:-

A newsletter is issued quarterly, giving information of past and future activities. Those wishing to receive a copy are asked to contribute towards its cost by donation. If you wish to be

included on our mailing list, please make sure the Vihara has your name and address.

Weekly Activities-:

Mondays - 7.30 p.m. simple meditation instruction for beginners followed by a meditation session, discourse and discussion, often by a resident monk.

Courses in Meditation-:

Weekend Courses - usually held every second weekend of the month, starting Friday evening at 8.00pm. and finishing Sunday afternoon around 4.00pm.

Ten Day Courses - usually held twice a year at Easter and in August.

Courses in Buddhism-:

There are eight week courses in Buddhism for those who want to know about Buddhism. This course consists of eight Wednesday evening sessions as well as a full day of practical experience in meditation. In this course various schools and traditions will be introduced and examined including Theravada, Tibetan and Zen. The course is usually held twice a year

The Vihara is open to meditators at virtually all times. If you wish to visit, please phone to make sure someone is available to open the door.

CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

The Vihara--:

A Vihara is a dwelling place for monks and because of the life a monk tries to lead, like any other establishment it has its in house rules. Really, it is just a matter of respecting the rules and styles of life of the monks which the Buddha himself established. Please dress fully, talk quietly and move calmly.

Our monks--:

Monks are addressed as Bhante (pronounced bhantay), it is equivalent to Venerable Sir. It is not usual for monks in the East to shake hands. The rule is that monks do not touch

women and nuns do not touch men. The manner of greeting is usually Anjali, which is to put the two hands together in greeting, but it is not necessary.

In the Shrine Room--:

We keep to the Eastern custom of taking our shoes off, since we sit on the floor; we try to keep an attitude of calm and quiet. This doesn't stop us having a lively discussion!; we usually sit on a cushion on the floor, but those with physical problems can use a chair; it is considered disrespectful to point your feet towards the shrine or another meditator.

The Statue of Buddha--:

The sitting posture of our statue (Rupa) is common in the East and is called the Bhumisparsha Mudra. It symbolises the moment just after the Buddha's Enlightenment, when he touched the Earth as witness to his overcoming illusion, delusion and ignorance- Mara; the other posture more commonly known in the West, is the meditation posture, with hands overlapped on top of a lotus position, called the Padmasana Mudra.

Offering--:

There are three offerings (Puja), usually made to the shrine -;

- i. Flowers, which symbolise the passing nature of our lives just as the fresh bloom fades;
- ii. Candles, whose light symbolises the Enlightenment.
- iii. Incense, which symbolises the effects of good deeds that spread in all directions as does the fragrance of incense.

Bowing--:

Many Buddhists practice bowing: out of reverence and gratitude to the Buddha as their Teacher; out of reverence and gratitude for the Teaching itself, the Dhamma; out of reverence and gratitude to the Community of Noble Ones, the Ariyas including the Arahats and Buddhas; out of reverence to the latent Enlightenment in all beings. This is by no means a

compulsory practice, but for those who wish to do so, the traditional way is to kneel with both hands joined (a way of centring heart and mind) and then to place both hands flat on the floor and bend to touch the forehead onto the floor. This is usually done three times in honour of the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dhamma and Sangha.

Chanting--:

This isn't praying, but calling to mind the words of the Buddha. There are other customs and practices. Please don't be too embarrassed to ask. You are always welcome to visit the monastery to talk about Buddhism or to meditate. But please always ring before hand to make sure someone will be there to greet you. There is of course much more to cover, but hopefully this has whetted your appetite to read one or two of the books listed below.

Beginner's Booklist

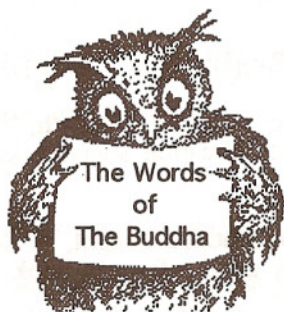
1. The Buddha's Ancient Path, Piyadassi Thera (Buddhist Publication Society) An easy to read, first introduction.
2. What the Buddha Taught, W. Rahula, (Gordon Fraser) A good reference book - very readable.
3. The experience of Insight, J. Goldstein, (Unity Press) Buddhism from a meditator's point of view.
4. The Heart of Buddhist Meditation, Nyanaponika Thera, (Rider) A classic on the subject of meditation.
5. A Short History of Buddhism, E. Conze, (George Allen & Unwin) A short, interesting account of how Buddhism grew.
6. The Wheel Publications, (Buddhist Publication Society). Pamphlets on various subjects:-

Buddhism in a Nutshell
 Buddha the Healer
 The Four Noble Truths

Buddhism and Peace
Lay Buddhist Practice

All these books and pamphlets can be ordered
through our bookshop.

Happy reading!



Indeed wisdom is born of meditation,
Without meditation wisdom is lost,
Knowing this twofold path of gain and loss of
wisdom, One should conduct oneself so that
wisdom may increase.

Dhammapada--282