

Theme 1B The Awakening/Enlightenment of the Buddha

**Key concepts**

- Depending on the interpretation of the accounts, the Buddha married Yasodhara at the age of 16 and had one son called Rahula. The Buddha and his family lived in the palace until he was 29, when he saw the Four Sights.
- Again, depending on the interpretation of the accounts, even before the Four Sights, the Buddha had had some experience of meditation and of questioning.
- The name 'Rahula' means 'fetter' or 'bondage' and implies that the Buddha saw that his son was another factor binding him to his unsatisfactory life.

- The Mara/temptation narratives may be interpreted as: general obstacles each Buddhist faces on their spiritual path, psychological conflicts in the Buddha's mind and his own self-doubt, physical challenges in the battle with the senses and a threefold attack on the mind, body and character.
- The Buddha progressed through four jhanas (meditative stages): unbroken attention, complete detachment, equanimity and rising above differentiation.
- He finally gained knowledge of past lives, of karma/samsara and of the end of dukkha. He gained insight into the way things are in life and how to deal with them – sammāsambodhi or perfect enlightenment.

- The Great Renunciation meant that the Buddha left the palace and took on the life of an anagarika (homeless one).
- The Buddha shaved his head, gave up his rich clothes and gold earrings, and took a single robe and a begging bowl.
- As an anagarika, the Buddha was a wandering ascetic who sought out ascetic teachers who could instruct him in yoga – Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, but ultimately their teaching resulted in his physical exhaustion.

**Key quotes**

'The Buddha was but one of many youths who left home, attracted by the challenge of the wandering life.' (Carrithers)

'His body was reduced to almost a skeleton. The more he tormented his body, the farther his goal receded from him.' (Narada Thera)

'Mara's daughters – Tanha, Arati, and Raga – approached the Blessed One and said to him: "We serve at your feet, ascetic." But he paid no attention, as he was liberated in the unsurpassed extinction of acquisitions.' (Samyutta Nikaya)

'That this account of Buddha's struggle with Mara is literally true, none but the most ignorant of the Buddhists believe, even at the present day.' (Malalasekera)

'Lacking nothing of the earthly joys of life, he lived amid song and dance, in luxury and pleasure, knowing nothing of sorrow.' (Piyadassi)

- Receiving milk rice from Sujata, the Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree going through the four jhanas (levels of meditative insight) and achieving nirvana.
- The Buddha had knowledge of his past lives as described in the Jatakas when he was a human being, an animal, bird and fish, a male and female.
- The Buddha acquired knowledge of karma: intentions leading to actions, causes leading to effects; of karma determining present and future existence.
- The Buddha saw that the path to the cessation of dukkha involved awareness of the three lakshanas, the removal of ignorance and the 'blowing out' of the three poisons: ignorance, greed and hatred.

**Key words**

anagarika	jhanas	Mara	yoga	Rahula
lakshanas	sammāsambodhi	Yasodhara	karma	

**Issues for analysis and evaluation**

**Key arguments/debates**

Some focus on the Buddha's enlightenment as being a goal for all Buddhists.

Others focus on simply gaining a better rebirth and each following their own path.

**Key questions**

Can/should the Buddha's enlightenment as a spiritual experience be described?

How should Mara and Mara's temptations best be understood by heritage/convert Buddhists?

- The Mara/temptation narratives are based on the idea of Mara's purpose being to ensure that existence was driven by delusion and ignorance.
- Mara's army of demons are defeated by the Buddha's ten perfections and by his fearlessness in leaving the accepted path and following his own path.
- Mara's three daughters become hundreds of beautiful women to tempt him back onto the path of attachment to the illusion of pleasure.
- By touching the earth, the Buddha confirmed that his place and his path were the right ones and that he was unmoved by temptation.