

# WJEC AS Unit 1D: An Introduction to Buddhism - Knowledge Organiser:

## Theme 3B The Eightfold Path – Key Moral Principles

### Key concepts

- The fourth Noble Truth, that is the magga, outlines the Eightfold Path, which is also known as the Threefold Trainings: Morality, Wisdom and Meditation. Each 'step' of the path begins with the word 'samma' (correct/right) and each has to be understood in the context of how positive/wholesome karma is gained. There is no sequence to the magga as each 'step' may be practised alongside another 'step'.
- Trainings of Morality: (1) samma vaca (right speech) refers to how in relating to others there should be avoidance of negative/harmful words and instead the use of positive/helpful words; (2) samma kammanta (right action) refers to how in relating to others harmful actions should be avoided and instead there should be positive and helpful actions leading to the well-being of others; (3) samma ajiva (right livelihood) refers to work in society which causes no harm (thus not being a butcher, dispenser of poison/weapons/intoxicants) but which instead benefits others.
- Trainings of Wisdom: (1) samma ditthi (right view) refers to understanding reality as it truly is as, for example, explained by the lakshanas, pratityasamutpada, the skandhas etc.; (2) samma sankappa (right/directed thought) refers to thought which is directed to that which is pure/wholesome/beneficial.
- Trainings of Meditation: (1) samma vayama (right effort) refers to the determined approach to developing a positive mindset free from the Three Poisons; (2) samma sati (right mindfulness) refers to being fully aware/conscious of the body, mind and external reality, and being fully aware of one's motivation; (3) samma samadhi (right concentration) refers to having a mind fully focused on detachment and on the jhanas in following the example of the Buddha as the basis for correct meditation.

- The Buddha describes the Eightfold Path as the Middle Way because it steers Buddhists away from a path of luxury and indulgence, but also away from a path of asceticism and self-mortification. The Buddha experienced both paths and realised that the best path lay between the two extremes.

- The Eightfold Path is recognised as authoritative teaching by all Buddhists but how it is followed depends very much on the culture/context of the Buddhism being practised, e.g. heritage/convert or lay/monastic Buddhist.

- Generally, in Theravada Buddhism the Eightfold Path is practised most fully as can be seen in the monastic sangha. A bhikku, for example, lives a life of poverty – although extremes of fasting are not accepted - in order to keep focused on detachment and the removal of the Three Poisons. This promotes samma ajiva. Likewise, being vegetarian if possible, promotes samma kammanta, whilst the amount of time spent in a bhikku's day on meditation promotes the Trainings of Meditation.
- Mahayana Buddhists might focus on the Eightfold Path, but with a different emphasis, e.g. the Trainings of Meditation might be elaborate and advanced and development of the paramitas would be seen as a priority.

### Key quotes

'The purpose of the Vinaya rules was to provide ideal conditions for meditation and renunciation. They try to enforce a complete withdrawal from social life, a separation from its interests and worries, and the rupture of all ties with family or clan. At the same time the insistence on extreme simplicity and frugality was meant to ensure independence, while the giving up of home and all property was intended to foster non-attachment.' (Conze)

'The tool the Buddha holds out to free the mind from desire is understanding. Real renunciation is not a matter of compelling ourselves to give up things still inwardly cherished, but of changing our perspective on them so that they no longer bind us.' (Bhikku Bodhi)

### Key words

samma	magga	vaca	ditthi	ajiva
sankappa	vayama	samadhi	kammanta	

### Issues for analysis and evaluation

#### Key arguments/debates

Some focus on whether the Eightfold Path is a guide for everyday living for all Buddhists or only for those in the monastic sangha.

#### Key questions

To what extent is the Eightfold Path truly a Middle Way when it appears to ask for those following it to aim for complete detachment as the goal?

Could it be argued that the Eightfold Path is fundamentally selfish since it does not state clearly anything about obligations to neighbours/community/society?