Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Keynote 10
Indian Religions: Buddhism

The following information is also relevant to Keynote 10:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project.

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from Racism No Way (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia
Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism
Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism
Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism (this document)
Keynote 11 – Bahá’í Faith

You can also download a full version of Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the Keynotes Explained (http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) web page on the Multicultural Education http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm site.
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Introduction

Buddhism, the second largest and fastest growing religion in Australia, was founded in north-eastern India in the 6th century BCE on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha or ‘Enlightened One’.

Because Buddhism does not entail a belief in a creator God it is sometimes referred to as a philosophy rather than a religion. It is a tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development: it espouses the path to enlightenment through the practice and development of morality, meditation, compassion and wisdom.

Buddhism is now over 2,500 years old and has upward of 350 million followers worldwide. Until 100 years ago, Buddhism was mainly an Asian philosophy but increasingly it is gaining adherents in Europe, America and Australia.

Although there are many different forms of Buddhism, all Buddhists follow the same basic teachings: the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path. All traditions are characterised by non-violence, lack of dogma, tolerance of differences, and, usually, by the practice of meditation.

Buddhists have no belief in higher deities, but propose a path towards freedom from suffering, or individual enlightenment, through deep reflection on the nature of existence. This focus on self-redemption makes it qualitatively quite different from other belief systems which base themselves around concepts of divine mercy or grace. Buddhists strive for a deep insight into the true nature of life and do not worship gods or deities. (Australian Broadcasting Commission)

Buddhism has shown great flexibility in adapting to different cultures, at the same time keeping the essential teachings of the Buddha intact.

Origins and historical background

Siddhartha Gautama was born into the royal family of a small kingdom on the Indian-Nepalese border. According to the traditional story, he had a privileged upbringing but after a realisation that life includes the harsh facts of old age, sickness and death, he was motivated to leave his sheltered life and become a seeker after Truth in the Indian tradition of the wandering holy man. He became very adept at meditation under various teachers, and then took up ascetic practices.

According to the traditional account (first written down in the 3rd century BC) Gautama followed an ascetic life for six years before deciding that a middle path between mortification and indulgence of the body provided the best hope of achieving enlightenment.

After six years of searching and meditation Gautama finally realized ‘the truth’. According to legend, while sitting alone under a banyan tree, he passed through the four stages of meditative trance, attained enlightenment, and thereafter began to teach. He travelled throughout the Ganges plain, gathering disciples.
and founding two monastic communities (sangha) which continued to expound his teachings after his death.

Buddhism spread rapidly in the 3rd century BCE when Samrat Ashoka Maurya, whose empire covered the greater area of northern India (including present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan), was converted to Buddhism. He sent missionaries not only to all parts of India but also to Sri Lanka, southern and south-east Asia.

By the first century Buddhism had expanded into China. From there it travelled to Korea and on to Japan around CE 600. Buddhism also took hold in Tibet during the 600s.

The Buddhist presence in India began to decline from about the 7th Century CE and by the 13th century it had all but disappeared.

Although Buddhism spread throughout Asia it remained virtually unknown in the West until recent times. The expansion of Buddhism in the West is due firstly to Western scholars who became interested in the ideas of Buddhism and secondly to Asian immigrants and refugees who settled in the west and helped to establish Buddhist centres.

Many Tibetans, for example, fled their country after the Chinese takeover in 1959 and the wars in Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s led many Vietnamese, Cambodians and Lao to move to and settle in Europe, Australia and America.

**Branches of Buddhism**

There are three main branches of Buddhism. Each branch has many sects within it:

- **Theravada Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia
- **Mahayana Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam
- **Vajrayana Buddhism**, the school of Buddhism found in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Mongolia.

**Theravada** Buddhists believe the individual alone is responsible for his/her salvation. There is a strong emphasis on meditation, the eighth step in the Noble Eight-fold Path, as a means to enlightenment (see below). Because of this emphasis, Theravada Buddhism emphasises monasticism, but is practised by lay supporters who take responsibility for supporting monks and nuns and attempt to live a life of morality, generosity and detachment.

**Mahayana** Buddhists believe that religious growth and salvation can be nurtured through assistance from others, namely wise beings or bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are persons beyond this world who have achieved enlightenment but who have delayed entrance to Nirvana in order to extend compassion and guidance to others still on the way.
Vajrayana, more popularly called Tibetan Buddhism, grew out of Mahayana Buddhism and was influenced by the ancient Bon religion of Tibet. Their teachers (Lamas) are said to be reincarnations of holy teachers who lived in earlier times. The spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists is the Dalai Lama who is believed to be the reincarnation of the bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara.

Zen Buddhism, which originated in China, grew out of Mahayana Buddhism. It has had a major impact in Japan and places emphasis on meditation rather than on scriptures or bodhisattvas as a means to enlightenment. Zen Buddhists maintain that direct experience alone leads to the truth.

Beliefs

The following information includes some elements of Buddhist beliefs and teachings. Readers are encouraged to refer to authoritative sources such as those listed in the Bibliography for a more comprehensive account.

The starting point for Buddhism is mankind’s suffering. The goal of all Buddhists is to attain enlightenment which means to be fully awake to the reality of life and to have an understanding of why there is suffering in the world and how it may be overcome.

Buddhists do not believe in a creator God or a saviour God. The relationship between a Buddha and his disciples and followers is that of teacher and student.

All branches of Buddhism believe in Nirvana as the ultimate goal.

The supreme goal of Buddhism is to reach Nirvana by following the Dharma (the teachings). This path can ultimately break the cycle of samsara whereby, after death, one is reborn (reincarnated) in another form. The form depends on the karma one has acquired through life (see below). The cycle of samsara stops once nirvana is reached.

Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected, so compassion for all living things is natural and important.

Karma

“The notion of Karma is based on the idea that the intention behind every action has an effect and similar actions will lead to similar results. The effects of karma may be long or short term but these effects will nonetheless come to transpire either in this life or the next life, or over several lives. Rebirth is part of the continuous process of change, so that not only are we reborn after death, we are reborn every moment” (Vasi p.2).

Dharma

Dharma is the path which follows the Buddha’s teaching, and which will ultimately lead to enlightenment. The Dharma teaches that compassion for self and others through an understanding of The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path leads to release from fear and ignorance. The path involves
embracing the teaching of the Buddha and applying that understanding to everyday life.

**Sangha**

The Buddha stated that interaction with others who are on the same path is essential for practice. *Sangha* refers to that community. In the original teaching and in current Theravada communities, the Sangha refers only to the monks, nuns and other ordained teachers. The concept of Sangha is more broadly interpreted in many Mahayana and Western groups to include all those who follow the Dharma.

**The Four Noble Truths**

In his first sermon after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha taught the "Four Noble Truths," which form the foundation of belief for all branches of Buddhism:

1. **Dukkha**
   
   Suffering exists: All of life is marked by suffering and has many causes: loss, sickness, pain, failure, the impermanence of pleasure.

2. **Samudaya**
   
   Suffering is caused by desire and attachment. It can take many forms: craving of sensual pleasures; the desire for fame; the desire to avoid unpleasant sensations, like fear, anger or jealousy.

3. **Nirodha**
   
   There is an end to suffering. Suffering ends with the final liberation of Nirvana. The mind experiences freedom, liberation and non-attachment. It lets go of any desire or craving.

4. **Magga**
   
   The way to end suffering and attain enlightenment is to follow the Eight-fold Path.
The Noble Eight-fold Path

The Noble Eight-fold Path defines the Buddhist way of life and the practices of Buddhism.

The Noble Path represents the Middle Way. Those who follow it avoid the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and live a balanced life in which material welfare and spiritual well-being run parallel and are complementary.

- Right understanding
- Right thoughts
- Right speech
- Right actions
- Right mindfulness
- Right effort
- Right livelihood
- Right concentration

Wisdom
Morality
Meditation

Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are not commandments in the strict sense but provide basic ethical guidelines. They prohibit intentional killing, stealing, telling lies, sexual misbehaviour and the use of intoxicants.

The Buddhist Council website is a useful reference for teachers and students, in particular, The History, Philosophy and Practice of Buddhism: The Three Jewels and Five Precepts (http://www.buddha101.com/p_jewels_frames.htm).

Sacred texts

A large numbers of Buddhist scriptures, religious and other texts are revered by different traditions. After the death of the Buddha his closest disciples gathered to recall and recite the master's teachings. Those teachings were transmitted orally until they were recorded in written form as the Tripitaka.

Tripitaka

The Tripitaka is the earliest collection of Buddhist teachings and the only text recognized as canonical by Theravada Buddhists. These scriptures were compiled by Sri Lankans in the Indian language Pali. Tripitaka means 'three baskets'. The text was originally written on long, narrow leaves which were sewn at the edges, then grouped into bunches and stored in baskets. The first basket contains laws governing the life of a monk or nun, the second contains
the Buddha’s direct teachings and the third, commentaries on his teachings. (Arquilevich, p.183). The collection of writings comprises 50 volumes.

**Mahayana Sutras**

Mahayana Buddhism recognises the Tripitaka as a foundation text, but adds to it the Sutras, which contain specifically Mahayana thought. Most of the Mahayana Sutras, which number over two thousand, were written between 200 BCE and 200 CE, the period in which Mahayana Buddhism developed.

Zen Buddhism rejects scriptures as an ineffective path to enlightenment.

**Structure and organisation**

There is no single organization or church governing the Buddhist religion. Rather than a hierarchically-ordered structure, Buddhism is practised through a wide range of temples and small groups, each of which may have its own structure.

The foundation of any Buddhist organisation is the *Three Jewels of Buddhism*: Buddha, the teacher, Dharma, the teaching, and Sangha, the community. The responsibility of the organisation is to venerate the Buddha, to venerate his teaching and to support the religious community.

Buddhist practitioners include monks and nuns who have been ordained. Buddhist communities involve both lay and ordained members. Monasteries and communities may have a hierarchy based on the point one has reached on the path to enlightenment.

In Australia, Buddhist Councils have been established in some states to further communication between individual groups and provide a point of liaison for governments and the community generally.

**Religious observances**

Buddhist religious practices and rituals vary depending on the tradition and culture of different sects.

Because Buddhism is focused on the internal life, it does not require the same strict religious observance and ritual as some faiths. Buddhists can worship at home or at a temple. Most Buddhists will however, visit the temple regularly.

One of the central daily rites of lay Buddhism is the generosity. Theravada laity makes this offering in the form of food to their monks and nuns. Mahayana laity also include offerings to the Buddha as part of the morning or evening worship.

A basic ritual is prostration or bowing before the statue of the Buddha.

**Meditation**

The practice of meditation is central to nearly all forms of Buddhism. It is through meditation that one can reach nirvana, or enlightenment. Meditation is
the central focus of Zen Buddhism and the only way to liberation from samsara in Theravada Buddhism. Mandalas which involve creating and meditating on diagrams of symbolic meaning are a key aspect of the meditative practice of Tibetan Buddhists.

**Mantras**

Mantras or chants are an important aspect of devotional practice. Mantras consist of one or more sounds which are intended to focus the mind. ‘Om’, the most sacred sound originated in Hinduism. The mantra, ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ translated means ‘the jewel in the lotus’ or ‘the heart of the teaching’ (Arquilevich, p. 202).

**Places of worship**

Buddhist religious buildings are called temples, stupas and wats. Temples or meeting houses are the focus for community life. They contain a shrine where meditation and religious ceremonies take place and often provide accommodation for monks and nuns. Buddhist temples come in many shapes for example, the pagodas of China and Japan.

In their design, Buddhist temples symbolise the five elements: fire, air, earth, (symbolised by the square base), water and wisdom (symbolised by the pinnacle at the top).

Stupas, which are traditionally bell-shaped, are built to hold relics, sacred texts and other items. They are a centre for pilgrimage and practice. An important Stupa in Australia is the Buddha Relic Stupa at the Phuoc Hue Monastery in Wetherill Park, New South Wales, a seven-storey stupa, built to house crystals which devotees believe were formed from the remains of the Buddha upon his death 2600 years ago. Another large stupa under construction is the Atisha Centre near Bendigo.

Pagodas are monuments, usually very decorative, consisting of a number of stories and eight sides. These are commonly associated with North-east Asia.

Most Buddhists have a shrine in their homes where there may be a statue, candles, incense and a vase of flowers and where family meditation and ceremonies take place and offerings are made.

Some Buddhist groups maintain refuges with a temple and accommodation for people on retreats.
Festivals

Some holy days are specific to a particular Buddhist tradition or ethnic group.

Most Buddhists, with the exception of the Japanese, use the Lunar Calendar.

The dates of Buddhist festivals vary from country to country and between Buddhist traditions.

Mahayana Buddhists have festivals to honour the Bodhisattvas, enlightened beings dedicated to the practice of compassion. Important among these is Avalokiteshvara, who in female form is known as Kuan Yin.

Some significant festivals

Vesak or Visakah Puja (‘Buddha Day’)

Vesak is the major Buddhist festival of the year as it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. It is held on the first full moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June.

Magha Puja Day (Fourfold Assembly or ‘Sangha Day’)

Magha Puja Day takes place on the full moon day of the third lunar month (March). It commemorates the Buddha's ordination of 1250 enlightened monks

Asalha Puja Day (‘Dhamma Day’)

Asalha Puja commemorates the Buddha’s first sermon. It is held on the full moon day of the 8th lunar month (approximately July).

Pavarana Day

This day marks the conclusion of the rainy season. In the following month, the kathina ceremony is held, during which the laity gather to make formal offerings of robe cloth and other requisites to the Sangha.

Ullambana Day (Ancestor Day)

It is celebrated throughout the Mahayana tradition from the first to the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. It honours ancestors.

Further information on Buddhist festivals can be found at Buddhanet, “Buddhist Ceremonies, Festivals and Special Days” (http://www.buddhanet.net/festival.htm).

The Buddhist Council of New South Wales publishes a list of festival dates for Australia (http://www.buddhistcouncil.org/).
Customs

Since the time of the Buddha, Buddhism has developed a variety of customs within the different branches and integrated many regional religious rituals and customs into it as it spread throughout the world. The precept of adapting to local customs is an integral part of Buddhism.

The following customs are relevant to all branches.

Venerating the Buddha

Honouring the Buddha through meditating on his qualities and perhaps through making offerings to relics or images of the Buddha and through bowing before his image.

Exchange of gifts

In the Theravada tradition, Buddhist laypersons often give gifts to Buddhist monks and nuns, but giving is also encouraged more generally, to one another and to good causes.

Giving to monks is also thought to benefit lay people and to win them merit.

Rites of Passage

Buddhism, unlike other religions, has few specific Buddhist ceremonies to mark rites of passage. There are no special Buddhist rituals for the celebration of weddings and births, for example. Blessings of the monks, however, are often sought at major life transitions.

Monks preside over ordinations, funerals, and death commemoration rites.

In the Theravada tradition, ordination is a puberty or coming-of-age rite. Theravada monks also preside over birthday and new-house blessing rites. Ex-monks, elders in the lay community, perform the rituals for childbirth and marriage” (Lester).

Settlement and history in Australia

Although it is unclear when Buddhism first came to Australia it is likely that there was contact between the early Hindu-Buddhist civilisations of Indonesia and the Aboriginal people of northern Australia. It is also possible that ships from the exploration fleets of the Chinese Ming emperors which landed on islands to the north of Arnhem Land may have reached the mainland of Australia between 1405 and 1433.

Gold rushes of the 1850s brought Chinese Buddhists to Australia.

From 1848 Chinese labourers arrived to work on the Victorian goldfields, some of whom had Buddhist beliefs but most of whom eventually returned to China. “Victoria had the greatest Buddhist population at 27,000 in 1857. In 1891 Buddhists represented 1.2 per cent of the
Australian population. By 1911, however the total number had fallen to just 3,269 or 0.07 per cent. This decline was in part due to decreased demand and opportunities within the gold industry. Many Chinese returned to their homeland. However, the introduction of the 'White Australia Policy' also had a significant impact. (Christian Research Association)

The first permanent Buddhist community was established in the 1870s by Sinhalese migrants from Sri Lanka who came to work on Queensland sugar plantations and in the Thursday Island pearling industry. By the 1890s the Thursday Island community was about 500 strong, a temple was built, festivals were celebrated and a monk was said to have visited to officiate. There were also mainly Japanese Shinto Buddhist communities in Broome and Darwin.

The first half of the 20th century saw the beginnings of a tradition of Western Buddhism.

From Federation in 1901 until the 1960s the number of Buddhists in Australia remained small but significant with the establishment of various societies and centres, and visits from overseas monks and nuns. A small but significant tradition of lay Buddhism among the Anglo-European community took root in the 1920s. In 1952, the Buddhist Society of NSW was formed, and their Queensland and Victorian counterparts in 1953. These organisations sponsored and supported visits from Buddhist monks in Asia. The first Buddhist monastery was set up in 1971 in the Blue Mountains in NSW (ABC).

A small circle of Western Buddhists also formed in Melbourne in 1925, and Australia's first female solicitor, Marie Byles, gave public lectures on Buddhism after World War II.

From the 1970s until the present, immigration from South-east Asia has been a key factor in the growth of Buddhism in Australia. “Initially the migrants joined already established Buddhist centres, and later formed their own temples which catered for both their cultural and religious needs” (Vasi, p. 7).

Buddhism is now Australia's second largest religion after Christianity. In 1991, nearly one-third of Australia’s Buddhists were born in Vietnam. National Vietnamese Buddhist temples began to be established in the 1980s and in 1981, the senior Vietnamese Buddhist monk, the Most Venerable Thich Phuoc Hue, arrived in Australia to form the Vietnamese Buddhist Federation of Australia. This organisation, now known as the United Vietnamese Congregations of Australia, has branch temples in all Australian states except Tasmania.

The 1970s also saw the introduction of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism into Australia. Following the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the repression of Buddhism in 1959, many Buddhist monasteries were destroyed and large numbers of nuns and monks were forced to flee Tibet; some of these Lamas came to Australia, the first arriving in 1974. This was followed by the opening of many Tibetan Buddhist centres in Australia. By 1980, some claimed that Melbourne had more Tibetan Buddhists per
head of the population than any other city in the Western world (Vasic, p. 21).

From 1991–96, the number of people identified as Buddhist grew by 43 percent, mainly through immigration. The 2001 Census recorded 358,000 people identifying Buddhism as their religion.

All three main traditions of Buddhism are represented in Australia.


**Population: Buddhists in Australia**

In 1981, there were over 35,000 Buddhists in Australia representing 0.24 percent of the population. By 2001, Buddhists had reached almost 360,000 or 1.9 percent of the population. This represents an increase of 158,000 in the five years since the previous census in 1996 and an increase as a proportion of the population, by 0.78 percent.

Buddhism is now the fastest growing religion in Australia with 79.1 percent growth since last census. During the same period there was a 75.5 percent increase in the number of Buddhists in Victoria. The population grew from 62,898 in 1996 to 111,664 in 2001.

Ethnic Buddhists comprise the majority of Buddhists in Victoria, and Australia-wide. Much of the growth of Buddhism in Australia is due to Asian immigration; some is as a result of Australians adopting Buddhism.

**Major birthplaces for Australian Buddhists**

As can be seen from the tables below, although Vietnam is by far the largest birthplace of overseas-born Buddhists, Australia is the largest birthplace of Buddhists overall. The data, however, does not show whether the Australian-born are children of Asian migrants or converts to Buddhism. Shiva Vasi in *Profile and Contribution of Buddhists in Victoria* concludes that, “Most Australian Buddhists are immigrants from Asian countries and their children but there is a significant following amongst other Australians” (Vasi.
Table 10.1 Major birthplaces for Australian Buddhists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>93,135</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>90,347</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>27,779</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>20,056</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>18,037</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>17,672</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>13,857</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>9783</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>7644</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>7548</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>51960</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>357,818</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Citizenship *The People of Australia. Birthplace of Selected Religious Groups – Australia 2001 Census.*
Major birthplaces for Victorian Buddhist

In general, the birthplace countries for Victorian Buddhists are similar to those for the whole of Australia. Vietnamese-born, however, exceed Australian born, and Sri Lanka is the third largest birthplace with 6.5 percent of the total.

Table 10.2 Major birthplaces for Victorian Buddhists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>33,145</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>27,979</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>7303</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>6948</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>6945</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>6796</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>4189</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12,763</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111,675</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of Buddhists in Melbourne

As with most religious minorities, the Buddhist population is concentrated in the metropolitan area (percent), with greater concentrations in Maribyrnong and Greater Dandenong local government areas. The only significant concentration outside the metropolitan area is in the Greater Geelong locality.

Figure 10.1 Distribution of Buddhists in Melbourne

[TOTAL NUMBER =106,574]

Figure 10.2 Distribution of Buddhists non-metropolitan Victoria

[TOTAL NUMBER = 4,925]

Community organisations

National

The Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils represents Buddhism at a national level. It was established in May 2003 and is comprised of the State Buddhist Councils of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Visit the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils, Australian Buddhist News (www.buddhistcouncil.org.au).

State

The Buddhist Council of Victoria (http://www.bcvic.org.au/) came into being in 1996. The council is both a representative body and a lobbying and liaison organisation that represents the Buddhist community to other religious organisations, community groups and government departments. It also provides a religious instruction program to primary schools and functions as a point of contact and referral.

Forty-one groups are members of the council, with roughly an equal number of ethnic and Western Buddhist groups. Membership of the Buddhist Council of Victoria is voluntary and not all Buddhist groups choose to become a member.

Local

According to a list compiled by the Buddhist Council of Victoria in 2001, there were 96 Buddhist centres in Victoria compared with approximately 45 groups in 1991. Most temples are ethnically based and offer a variety of religious, education and cultural activities. Some offer accredited language and culture courses. Many temples operate youth groups and offer part-time language and culture classes. Some offer religious instruction services to schools and will provide speakers on aspects of Buddhism.

Most temples offer a range of welfare services which may include prison and hospital visiting, settlement support for newly-arrived migrants, support for overseas students, temporary accommodation, and drug and alcohol dependency counselling.


For a list of Buddhist organisations in Victoria visit the Buddhist Council of Victoria website (http://www.bcvic.org.au/).
Considerations for schools

Dietary habits for Buddhists vary. It is a matter for individual conscience, although different traditions and cultures interpret the precepts differently. Some Buddhists are vegetarians, some will avoid meat and eggs, and others will eat meat but not beef. Some Mahayana Buddhists from China and Vietnam also avoid eating strong-smelling plants such as onions, shallots, chives and leeks. It is advisable to ensure that vegetarian options are available in the school canteen or for school functions such as parties and that ingredient lists are available.

Buddhists remove their shoes as a sign of respect when entering a temple. Visitors should do the same.

Holy books, the Tripitaka, in particular should be treated with respect.

Buddhist festivals, like festivals of other religions, should be acknowledged and respected.

In the classroom

Have students identify places of significance in the history of Buddhism on a map and show with dates the spread of Buddhism.

Identify countries of significant Buddhist populations on a world map. Show the different branches of Buddhism.

Investigate the significance of the Silk Road in the spread of Buddhism.

Investigate the observance of the various celebrations of Buddhists throughout the lunar year. Investigate parallels with other cultures and religions:

- What is similar in Buddhist life cycle events and practices to other cultures and religions?
- What is similar in Buddhist beliefs and rituals to practices of other religions?
- What is similar in the rhythm of the Buddhist year to students’ own practices, or others they know of? In other words, what happens in their traditions every day, every week, every month or every year?

Organise a visit to a Buddhist temple, a place of worship. Arrange for a speaker to explain the rituals and activities that take place there.
Compare the design, decoration and function of different kinds of Buddhist temples, for example the wat in Thailand with a:

- Hindu mandir
- synagogue
- mosque
- cathedral
- church.

Use a study of Buddhist art to trace the spread of Buddhism in Asia. In this series of lessons on the National Geographic website, students study and compare and contrast famous Buddhist art and Buddhist sites in Asia. See National Geographic: Xpeditions, Lesson Plans, The Spread of Buddhism (http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/06/g912/buddhism.html).

Investigate the symbols of Buddhism such as the dharma, (wheel of life) the lotus flower, images of Buddha, and the Bodhi tree.

Investigate the significance of Mandalas in Buddhism and study some designs. Have students create their own mandalas.

Invite speakers from a Buddhist community to talk about their religion, community organisation and activities. Have students prepare questions and discuss their appropriateness.

Investigate the connection between martial arts and Zen Buddhism. Arrange for a speaker to demonstrate and talk about martial arts and teach basic principles and movements.

Investigate the practice of meditation in the context of Buddhism and more broadly.

Discuss the issue of minority groups in a community and have students identify an experience in which they were a minority. A number of The Really Big Beliefs Project: Classroom Activities would be relevant to a discussion of this topic (http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/bigbeliefsbook/activities.html).

Have students read some of the children’s and young adult literature recommended in the Bibliography that is written by or about other cultural groups.

Have students explore their own cultural assumptions by writing from the viewpoint of different characters in different cultural contexts, e.g. write a story about a Buddhist boy who is to become a novice monk.

Compare statistics for different religions in Australia and then consider and research the reasons for the growth of Buddhism in Australia, see Lotuses and Lights: Statistics on Buddhism in Australia, Student Worksheet (http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotus1.htm).
Have students:

- identify major world religions founded on the Asian continent
- describe major characteristics of world religions
- describe factors that influence the spread or decline of religions in a region.

To further explore Theravada Buddhism in Thai Daily Life, including information for teachers and activities for students see: Asia Education Foundation, Access Asia: Thailand, Lotuses and Lights (http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/thailand/lotinfo.htm).

Debate the role of women in different religions.

**Useful websites**

*Buddhanet* is a major Buddhist information site (http://www.buddhanet.net/).


A good general description of historical and customary aspects of Buddhism in Thailand is available at *Mahidol University, Thailand, Buddhist Scriptures Information Retrieval: Buddhism, An Introduction* (http://www.mahidol.ac.th/budsir/buddhism.htm).

*Friends of the Western Buddhist Order* (http://www.fwbo.org/fwbo.html) provide information on history and practices of Buddhism in Western countries and lists of contacts in Australia.

**Bibliography**


- "Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia"
- "Australian Muslims: their Beliefs, Practices and Institutions"
- "Constructing a Local Multifaith Network"

*The History, philosophy and practice of Buddhism* (http://www.buddha101.com/).


