

Buddhism Workshop: with Ngakma Shé-zér Chatral

Buddhism and the Environment Four Corners Debate

Focus: should a Buddhist follow a vegetarian diet?

1. Faith representative to

ask the children if they have heard of Prince Siddhartha Gautama / the Buddha?
What, if anything, do they know about him?

Read or tell the story of Prince Siddhartha (see below) (5mins)

2. Ask the **pupils to** list 8 rules they would give to people if they were a wise teacher like the Buddha. (3mins)

Compare the pupils' rules with that of the eightfold path (use visual aid) (5mins)

Explain to the pupils that we are going to focus on the teaching of not harming living creatures and what this might mean for a Buddhist in relation to the food they eat.

3. **Faith representative to** ask the pupils to consider the question (20mins)
"Should a Buddhist be vegetarian?"

Faith representative to read one of the statements and ask the pupils to individually consider their response and then move to the area of the room that relates to their personal view i.e.

A Buddhist should be vegetarian.

It's Ok for a Buddhist to eat some meat but not a lot.

A Buddhist should eat as much meat as they wish.

I haven't made up my mind yet.

As each statement is read, pupils should reconsider their view and if they change their original view can move to another area of the room to reflect their revised viewpoint.

Once all the statements have been read, pupils have another chance to move positions.

Teachers / faith representative to ask pupils why they have moved to the position they are in (justify their view). Once all pupils have had time to listen to their peers, they can have a final chance to move to another position.

4. **Faith representative to** give her view about being vegetarian and explain why she takes this stance in relation to her Buddhist faith. (7mins)

Important Notes for Teachers:

- We will provide copies of the activity for pupils to work with on the day.
- For this workshop you do not need to do any preparation work in advance with the pupils.

Resources to be provided:

Display of Buddhist shrine items and artefacts (with orange cloth)

Four Corners Debate – statement cards and Viewpoint cards

Statements for pupils to consider:

The Buddha said refrain from killing, so that means a Buddhist shouldn't eat meat or fish that has been killed for food.

If a Buddhist is vegetarian, it would mean that less animals would be killed and that would mean they are following the Buddhist way of life.

If a Buddhist eats meat, it would be indirectly encouraging killing of animals and the Buddha taught not to kill animals.

The Buddha got his food either by going on alms rounds or by being invited to the houses of his supporters and in both cases he ate what he was given, which would have included meat.

The Buddha is often described as eating meat, he recommended meat broth as a cure for certain types of illness.

The Buddha said people should care for all living creatures. Eating meat encourages cruelty and death to millions of animals and a truly compassionate person would wish to limit all this suffering. By refusing to eat meat one can do just that.

Unless a person actually kills an animal themselves (which seldom happens today) by eating meat they are not directly responsible for the animal's death and therefore could eat the meat.

A vegetarian can only eat vegetables because the farmer has ploughed his fields (thus killing many creatures) and sprayed the crop (again killing many creatures).

Whilst a vegetarian will not eat meat he probably uses numerous other products that lead to animals being killed (soap, leather, serum, silk etc.) so he may as well eat the meat from an animal.

It is more important to concentrate on developing good qualities like understanding, patience, generosity and honesty than worrying about what one eats.

Each person has to make up his or her own mind.

The Buddha taught that people should not have more than they really need (the middle way). Therefore people can eat some meat to keep healthy but not just because they enjoy it.

It is possible to have a really healthy diet without eating meat so a Buddhist need not eat meat.

Prince Siddhartha Gautama The Buddha

Queen Maya lived in a grand palace with the king. One night Maya had a dream. In her dream she saw a shining white elephant stood beside a beautiful lake. The elephant held a flower in its trunk. Then flowers started to grow everywhere – on the trees and plants and on the water.

The next day, Queen Maya asked some wise men what they thought her dream could mean. They told her that she would have a special baby who would grow up to be good and kind. If he stayed in the palace he would be a good king. But if he left the palace he would become a very wise teacher.

A few nights later, when there was a bright moon and shining stars, Maya walked into the nearby woods. She was going to have her baby. A tree bent over its branches to protect her as the beautiful baby boy was born. Light shone all around him and straight away the baby could walk. He took seven little steps and in each footstep a flower suddenly grew!

They called the baby Siddhartha. The prince was a happy child and grew up in the beautiful palace. He loved all the animals and birds and one day saved the life of a swan.

When Siddhartha grew up he married a princess and they had a little boy of their own.

But Siddhartha began to wonder what life was like outside the palace. One day he left the palace grounds. Outside, he saw things he had never seen before. First he saw someone who was ill, and then he saw someone who was old and struggling to walk. Next he saw the funeral of someone who had died. Siddhartha had not known that these sad things happen. He was shocked and felt sad as he made his way back to the palace.

Siddhartha wanted to help people feel less sad. He wanted to help them find peace. He decided to leave the palace and do some thinking. He lived in the woods and wore simple clothes and did not eat much. He just thought and thought and thought...

One day whilst he was sitting under a Bodhi tree, Siddhartha suddenly realised he knew how to find peace. From that day on, he taught other people how to find peace. He gave them special rules and told them stories to help them understand. People called him the Buddha – the enlightened one – the one who knows!

The Buddha lived about two thousand five hundred years ago but people still tell his stories and try to follow his rules.

Four Corners Debate

Skills

Thinking, Decision-Making

What is it?

These activities explore diverse opinions and emotions on issues. They might be used as a lead into a particular topic and to gauge pupil interest and base understanding of the issue in question. They require pupils to take a stance on the issue and allow everybody to have a voice, even if they do not speak out. Pupils are confronted with ambiguity and grey areas, and it helps them to see that opinions often have to be justified with informed knowledge of the matter under discussion.

There are various types of walking debate.

Implications for classroom layout

A large space is needed for ease of movement and interaction. Alternatively, if there is not enough room, pupils could be given the four statements on a card (agree, disagree, agree strongly, disagree strongly). Pupils could hold up a particular card when each statement is read out.

How does it work?

1. A range of statements are read out.
2. Pupils are allowed time to consider their opinion.
3. Pupils then move to the corner that best describes how they feel about the statement. Pupils could be encouraged not to 'go along with the crowd', as there are no right or wrong answers.
4. Statements should evoke a range of responses
5. As pupils move, they should explain why they are in that corner. Views could be obtained from all corners.
6. Subsidiary questions could be used to draw out more complex issues and to refine the initial statement.
7. Pupils are allowed to move during the discussion of each statement if issues arise that challenge their original opinion.
8. If pupils do switch then they should explain why.
9. A **debrief** after the activity could discuss the issues upon which there was consensus and issues that divided the class.

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