Your notes

GCSE Religious Studies: revision notes

Buddhism: beliefs and teachings

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The Buddha

- Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in what is now Nepal. After seeing the Four Sights (old age, sickness, death and a holy man), he left his palace to find an end to suffering.
- He tried extreme self-denial, then chose the **Middle Way** between luxury and hardship. He gained **enlightenment** while meditating under the Bodhi tree, becoming the Buddha, 'the awakened one'. He gave his first sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath.

The Dhamma (Dharma)

- The Three Marks of Existence: **dukkha** (suffering, or unsatisfactoriness), **anicca** (impermanence: everything changes) and **anatta** (there is no fixed, unchanging self).
- The Four Noble Truths: life involves suffering (**dukkha**); suffering is caused by craving (**tanha**); suffering can end (**nibbana**); and the way to end it is the Eightfold Path (magga).
- The Eightfold Path: right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. These are grouped into wisdom, ethics and meditation.

Other key teachings

- Dependent arising: everything depends on conditions. The Three Poisons (greed, hatred and ignorance) keep beings trapped in **samsara**, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
- The Five Aggregates (skandhas) make up a person: form, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

Theravada and Mahayana

- In Theravada Buddhism, the ideal is the **arhat**, a perfected person who reaches **nibbana** through their own effort.
- In Mahayana Buddhism, the ideal is the **bodhisattva**, who delays their own **nibbana** to help all beings. Mahayana ideas include sunyata (emptiness) and Buddha-nature. Pure Land Buddhists trust in Amitabha Buddha.

Key terms

Enlightenment	Understanding the truth about reality, which ends suffering.
Dukkha	Suffering or unsatisfactoriness.
Anicca	Impermanence: everything changes.
Anatta	The teaching that there is no fixed, unchanging self.
Tanha	Craving, the cause of suffering.
Nibbana	The end of suffering and rebirth (nirvana).
Samsara	The cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
Middle Way	The path between luxury and extreme self-denial.
Arhat	A perfected person who has reached nibbana (Theravada ideal).
Bodhisattva	One who delays nibbana to help others (Mahayana ideal).
Pratitya samutpada	Dependent arising: everything exists because of causes and conditions, and nothing exists on its own. (Eduqas)

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What were the Four Sights?
2. What is the Middle Way?
3. What does 'Buddha' mean?
4. What is dukkha?
5. What is anicca?
6. What is anatta?
7. According to the Second Noble Truth, what causes suffering?
8. What is nibbana (nirvana)?

Answers

1. Old age, sickness, death and a holy man
2. A path between luxury and extreme self-denial
3. The awakened or enlightened one
4. Suffering or unsatisfactoriness

Your notes

5. Impermanence: everything changes
6. There is no fixed, unchanging self
7. Craving (tanha)
8. The end of suffering and rebirth

What to do next

Practise 13 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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