



# A VISIT TO BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST VIHARA DHAMMA TALAKA PAGODA

29-31 Osler Street, Ladywood, Birmingham B16 9EU

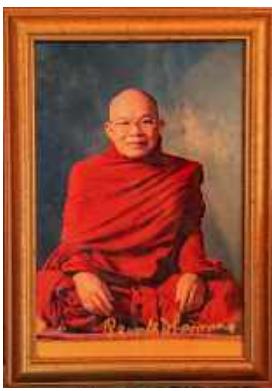


## EXPLORING BIRMINGHAM BUDDHIST VIHARA

A **Vihara** is a Buddhist temple where everyone can find peace and contentment. Buddhism is one of the world's largest religions. There are over 500 million

Buddhists across the globe.

In 1975, Dr Rewata Dhamma, an international scholar, was invited to Birmingham where he established a Buddhist **pagoda**. It is a place where Buddhists can hear the teachings of Buddha, perform



Dr Rewata Dhamma



ceremonies and meditate. In addition to the pagoda, there is also a **monastery** where the monks live and an **academy** where people can learn about the teachings of Buddha.



Monastery and Dr Rewata Dhamma Academy

The Dhamma Telaka Pagoda was opened in 1998. The design is based on a traditional pagoda (known as a **stupa**) found in Myanmar (which used to be called Burma). This is shown in red on the map. The countries shown in yellow, orange and red are where Buddhism is the main religion.



## THE STORY OF THE BUDDHA

About 2600 years ago, an Indian prince called **Siddarttha Gautama** said goodbye to his family, all his possessions and a life of luxury in his palace in north India to become a holy man. He was shocked by seeing the suffering of old people, the sick and the dying outside the palace. He wanted to find a way of ending suffering.

Guided by holy men, he denied himself food and drink but this made him ill. He realised that it was a mistake not to look after himself. The problem of suffering would not be solved by going to extremes. He vowed to find a '**Middle Way**'. He spent many days **meditating** (concentrating), thinking deeply about the meaning of life, while sitting in the shade of a Bodhi tree. He found the truth about life. **He became enlightened**. He saw that the path to reduce suffering is through wisdom, morality and meditation. He became The Buddha. He was a great teacher and those who follow his main teachings are known as Buddhists.



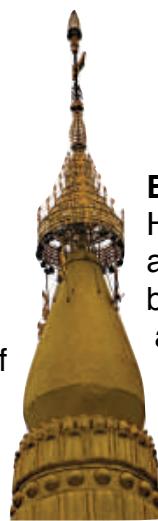
*'May everyone be well, happy and peaceful' – the Buddha*

## ENTRANCE



A lion – a symbol of protection.

The diamond bud on the apex of the crown mounted above the umbrella of the stupa is a symbol for striving to reach Enlightenment. The higher you get, the harder you have to try to reach the very top.



### Beautiful carved doors

- made from a very hard wood called teak.

Above the entrance is a **wheel**.



This is a sacred and ancient Buddhist symbol. It has become the universal symbol of Buddhism.

### Buddha is not a god but a man who is enlightened.

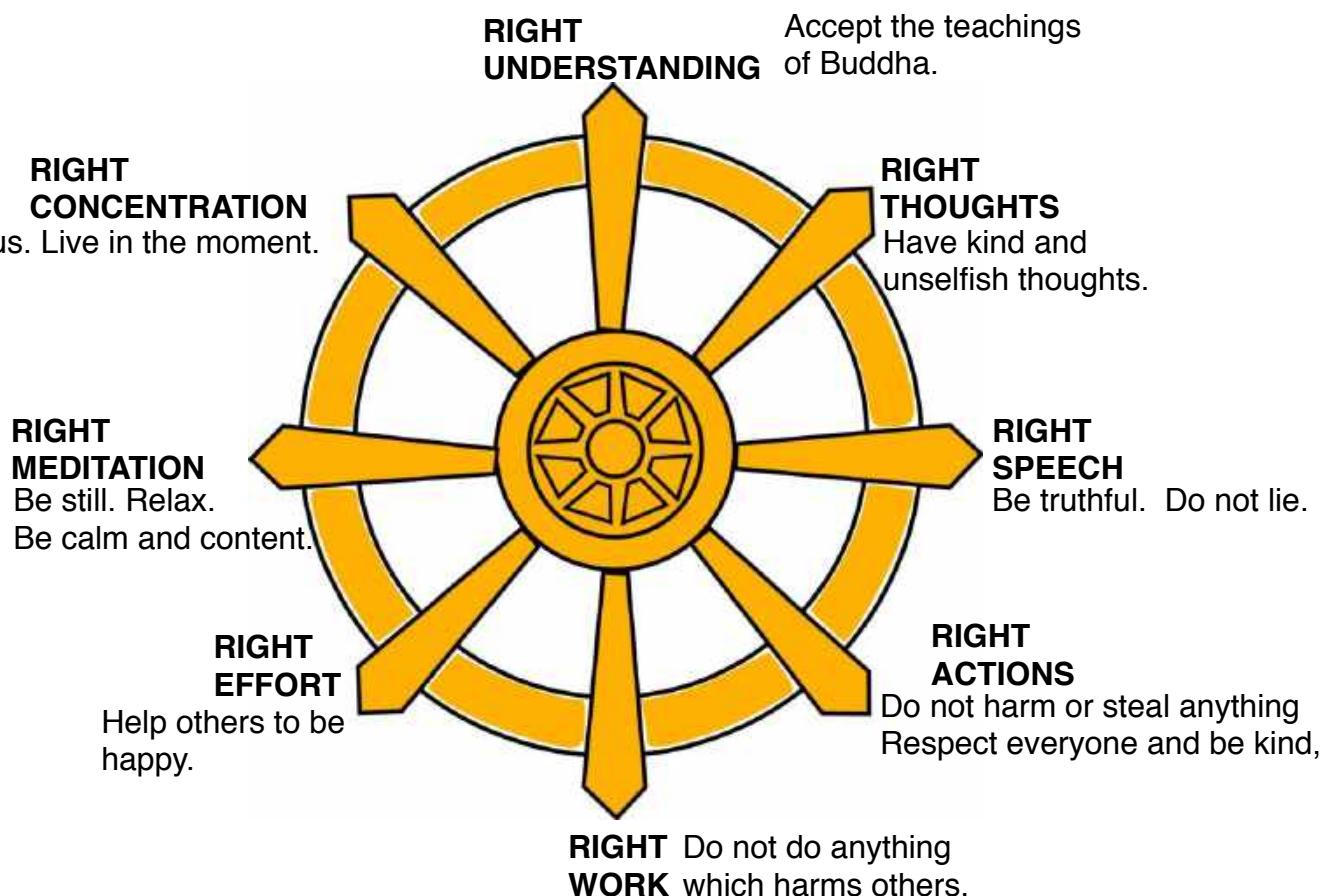
He tells us that life will not always be easy. We cannot avoid suffering. We will have difficult times. People are born, they live their life, they grow old or become sick and will eventually die.

A seed is sown, it becomes a plant ; it flowers and eventually dies.

**Every living thing has a life cycle. The Buddha teaches us to respect all living things.**

## THE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Buddha guides us on how to reduce suffering by being good in our daily life. His guidance is called **dharma** (which means **truth**.) Dharma is taught by the Buddha to help us to be more kind, thoughtful, gentle and loving. This is called **THE EIGHTFOLD PATH**.

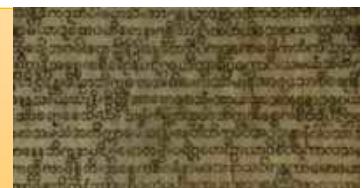


### Tipitaka

Buddha's original teachings are written in texts called **Tipitaka**.

They were written in **Pali**, the sacred ancient language of Theravada Buddhism.

*Ancient scripts were written on a palm leaf.*



## THE SHRINE

The Shrine is where devotees pay respect to the Buddha, perform ceremonies and meditate.

This is known as Puja. Shoes are removed and silence is respected. The five senses are engaged with Puja. You are aware of what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch .

Elevated on the stage is a marble statue of Buddha seated on a golden throne beneath a canopy and the Bodhi tree. Devotees sit on the floor, cross-legged so that their feet do not point towards the Buddha. All sit quietly, listening to Buddha's teachings, chanting prayers or meditating.



**Incense** which provides fragrant smoke to help devotees to feel calm and to concentrate.



**Lotus flower** represents **purity**. It grows out of mud and rises above the water in bloom and beauty.



Begging bowl is used to collect alms ( food ) from supporters.



Venerable Dr Ottara Nyana, Spiritual Director of the vihara.



**Light** is a symbol of freedom from ignorance.

**'Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle and the life of the candle will not be shortened.'**

**Happiness in no way decreases with being shared.'**  
The Buddha.

**Buddhist Monks** own nothing. They shave their heads as a symbol of simplicity. Traditionally, monks would search for cloth that had been thrown away. Five strips were sewn together. The cloth was dyed using natural dyes made from vegetables such as saffron, turmeric, cumin and pepper. Buddhist monks' simple robes are made in three parts: upper, lower and double. Every year there is **Kathina** festival where people offer cloth for robes.

### Wesak or Buddha Day is the main festival.

It is a celebration of the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha held when there is a full moon in April or May. Here are the monks thanking Buddha for his remarkable achievements.



**Gong** starts the beginning of meditation practice. It helps people to focus.



**Flowers** are symbols of joy, optimism and long life. But no living thing is permanent.



**Water** is a symbol of purity

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

On a School Visit to Birmingham Buddhist Vihara, you will hear about Buddha's teaching and meet the monks. The monks train people of all ages to meditate. For some schools, this has been a life-changing experience. Hillary Primary School in Walsall tells its story:

"It helps me to concentrate better."



"I feel calmer and more relaxed."

"My worries disappear."

The monks taught us a technique called the art of '**Mindfulness**'.

We know that Mindfulness activities can help children and adults to observe and identify their own thoughts and feelings.

We often do mindfulness activities to help us relax and take time for ourselves. Doing these activities in silence stimulates the creative side of our brain.

Some of the activities that we take part in include:

- Breathing and Listening activities
- Yoga
- Keeping a Mindfulness journal
- Drawing and colouring
- 5 Senses nature walk

*For School Visits to the vihara Email:[buddhistschoolvisit@gmail.com](mailto:buddhistschoolvisit@gmail.com)*

## WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY - LOTUS CHILDREN'S EDUCATION TRUST



**Lotus Children's Education Trust** The Birmingham Buddhist community reaches out to people in need with compassion. **The Lotus Children's Education Trust** (LCET) has been set up to provide education for orphans and children from very poor 'tribal' families who live in the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. LCET has raised the funds to build a primary and junior high schools and hostels for the children to stay. They have to provide food, equipment and money to pay teachers. Without

these schools, children from the remote villages would not be able to receive an education. They are taught to work hard, to have common sense, to be honest, fair and humble, to respect everyone and to look after the environment. Very heavy rainfall (called monsoons) often makes travel difficult and create landslides which damage roads and buildings. Fundraising is a challenge.

Dr Nagasena from Birmingham is the leader of this project.

[www.lotuseducation.net](http://www.lotuseducation.net)

*Photos BBV & A Murtagh*



*Dr Nagasena teaching at the Sunday school in Birmingham.*

*Designed by The Arts Society Birmingham, in collaboration with the monks of Birmingham Buddhist Vihara 2021*

There is a quiz to accompany this leaflet.



**We still**  
make things happen

**BIRMINGHAM FAITH  
LEADERS' GROUP**

