

**THE GOLDEN RULE:** Each religion is different, but all teach people to be good. They all teach the "Golden Rule": that we should treat others the way we'd like to be treated. Here is the Buddhist version of the Golden Rule...

*What is not pleasant or delightful to me must be so for him also; and what is not pleasant or delightful for me, how could I inflict that on another?* – Samyutta Nikaya



## More about Buddhists

**A PRINCE'S AWAKENING:** Buddhism started around 2,600 years ago in India, where a prince named Siddharta Gautama meditated and found answers to his questions about human suffering. He became the Buddha, which means the Enlightened One. The day that this event happened is celebrated as Vesak Day, a public holiday in Singapore.

**TWO FORMS:** There are two main traditions of Buddhism. One is called Theravada, which is more common in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. The other is called Mahayana, practised mainly in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

**VEGETARIANS:** In Buddhism, all living beings are equal. That's why many Buddhists are vegetarians – they think it's wrong to kill animals.



**THE WORLD'S LARGEST** Buddhist structure – and one of the wonders of the world – is Borobodur (above). It is on the Indonesian island of Java. It was built around 1,200 years ago. You can think of it as a giant "interactive" building: it was designed to help Buddhist pilgrims to pray (right). The monument has nine levels, with thousands of pictures carved into the stone. Pilgrims walk slowly around each level, gradually reaching the top.

Looking at the carvings helps them to meditate. Meditation is about clearing your mind of distractions and concentrating on one thing. Through meditation, Buddhists try to develop their minds and come closer to enlightenment, just as the Buddha did (see above). Most religions encourage meditation. They may do it in different ways, but the goal is similar – to focus on important things and not be distracted by what's unimportant.



# Showing compassion through charity work

**Our series on religions continues with Buddhists and their work for the old and poor.**

Like people of other faiths, Buddhists believe it's their duty to show compassion by helping the needy. In Singapore, there are many Buddhist groups that don't just believe in compassion – they act it out, through their selfless charity work.

Several of these groups make a special effort to assist the elderly. "Buddhism teaches that one should always respect and care for one's elders," says Mr Lee Bock Guan, who heads a group called the Buddhist Lodge.

Buddhist Lodge volunteers visit old folks' homes and elderly residents who are living in flats all by themselves. They bring along food and other gifts. Most importantly, they bring their love and care. They spend time listening and talking to the elders.

The Buddhist Lodge is just one of several charities inspired by the teachings of the Buddha. The Singapore Buddhist Federation even runs free clinics where poor people of any religion can get medical care without worrying about money.

The Metta Welfare Association is another Buddhist group that never forgets about Singapore's senior citizens, even those who are too sick to leave home. It helps to look after hundreds of elderly people who are suffering from incurable illnesses. Metta's team of doctors, nurses, social workers and counsellors visits these dying people at home, helping to make their final months as painless and dignified as possible.

Believing deeply in Buddhism doesn't mean that volunteers stay away from people of other religions. "We always work together to include other religions," said Buddhist Federation president Venerable Sik Kwang Sheng in an interview last October. For their Vesak Day celebrations at Ngee Ann City last year, they invited other religions to put up their posters or set up stalls. "We are going to continue that in future," he promised.

Buddhism teaches its followers to be compassionate so that non-violence will spread in the world. In the Dhammapada, the Buddhist holy book, the Buddha says, "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased by love. This is an eternal law."

• This page is an initiative under the Community Engagement Programme, supported by the Inter-Religious Harmony Circle.