

Examiners' Report
June 2018

GCE Religious Studies 8RS0 4A

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Introduction

This specification was examined for the second time this year.

The examination was in 2 sections. Section A consisted of 3 questions. Section B consisted of a two part question. Candidates were required to answer all questions.

Questions 1 and 4a awarded marks solely for AO1, whereas the other questions in the paper were designed to assess both AO1 and A02.

Some candidates displayed an excellent detailed knowledge and understanding of specific Buddhist teachings and practices and were able to look at other points of view objectively. At the same time, there were candidates who appeared to have only limited knowledge and understanding of the specification and did not directly address the specific topic in the question.

Question 1

This question asked candidates to explore the distinctive emphases of Theravada Buddhism. Most candidates were able to correctly identify what Theravada Buddhism is and some were able to give short introductions to it being the Way of the Elders. For some candidates this was the extent of the knowledge that they showed, or perhaps they relied on general teachings of Buddhism that are shared between different Buddhist schools. This question did focus the candidates' attention on the distinctive emphases. As such the top level answers were able to utilise a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout. In this way they were able to use two emphases that may or may not be linked. Some candidates, for example, focussed on the stages to becoming an arahant and the beliefs that made this distinctive. Answers that reached the top level showed a depth and range of understanding.

1 Explore the distinctive emphases of Theravada Buddhism.

In Theravada Buddhism the 4 stages of arahantship are very important. The Stream Enterer is when someone will attain arahantship within seven rebirths, and they have confidence in the 3 refuges although they have occasional sense of separate self.

The Once Returner has advanced levels of tranquility and ~~can~~ can be reborn in the higher fetters, as they don't have ties to the physical body. The Non Returner has a vague sense of self, so has occasional restlessness but has eliminated attachment and craving. The Arahant has the fruit of nibbana, and upon death will not be reborn.

Another distinctive Theravada emphasis is renunciation.

Outward renunciation is when someone renounces homely life, shaves their head and dons the robe in hopes to eliminate attachment. True renunciation is when the monk ^(bhikkhu) tries to rid himself of unwholesome emotions and kilesa ^(defilements) in order to always react correctly. Ultimate renunciation is when the monk turns to face the true source of ill - his mind, in hopes to commit to the precepts and attain enlightenment.



This response achieved a level 3. The candidate was awarded 8 marks. The candidate chooses two emphases and explores each one in turn. Through this they are able to show the depth and breadth expected of a level 3 answer. It should be noted that there is no preamble but the candidate just begins the question with an answer which is advisable.



Consider the amount of time spent on each question. This candidate recognises that spending more time on this question would not enhance the skills that are in evidence.

Question 2

This question asked candidates to assess the importance of vipassana meditation. A small number of candidates latched onto the idea of meditation and developed their answer around this. This lack of specificity meant that candidates were unable to reach the higher levels as the understanding shown was not in sufficient depth. This question was answered in different ways including a comparison with other forms of meditation such as samatha, or focussing on the strengths and/or weaknesses of vipassana. Both approaches are equally valid and enabled candidates to access the higher levels. There is no need to look at both sides of the argument but most candidates did. The answers which were awarded the higher levels critically deconstructed the information they used leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, which in turn led to reasoned judgements of the question.

2 Assess the importance of vipassana meditation.

(a)

Vipassana meditation was created by the Buddha because he found Samatha meditation was not effective for attaining enlightenment when he meditated as an ascetic. This shows its importance because it was created by the Buddha so must be a successful way to attain enlightenment. However, it could be argued as less significant as it's used in conjunction with Samatha meditation. Overall, I think vipassana is important because the Buddha created it himself for the purpose of gaining liberation from *samudhacca*.

Vipassana meditation is used in Theravada tradition as it penetrates an object to reveal the true nature of reality. This is important because it helps one understand the world and the doctrine of Shunyata (or 'emptiness'). Although, it could be argued that it's more important to ^{contemplate} ~~assess~~ the 3 marks of existence to understand the true nature of reality. Overall, vipassana meditation can help us come to terms with the 3 marks of existence.

Another reason it's important is because it helps one understand the true meaning of the 4 Noble Truths. Furthermore, ~~the~~ meditation (samadhi) is a part of the three-fold way on the eight-fold path, highlighting ~~the~~ its significance as a vital way to ~~attain~~ reach nirvana. However, it could be argued that Sila and panna are more important parts of the eight-fold path to follow as they're ^{more accessible} for laypeople. Overall, all parts of the path are equally important because they work together.

(Total for Question 2 = 9 marks)



ResultsPlus
Examiner Comments

This candidate achieved level 3 and was awarded 9 marks. This response uses the information well and ensures judgements are made throughout. This is not necessary but the candidate is able to flag up where the judgements are being made and builds the answer throughout.



ResultsPlus
Examiner Tip

Ensure that the answer is always tied to the demands of the question- avoid over explanation without attempts to assess.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to assess the significance of the belief that there is a Buddha nature in everyone. A small number of candidates were unable to answer this question- leaving it blank. Candidates should be aware of the need to revise the different aspects of the specification in preparation for the exam. This question was answered in different ways including a comparison between Mahayana and Theravada ideas, or a focus on the importance of the idea of the Buddha nature mainly found in Mahayana traditions. Both approaches are equally valid and enabled candidates to access the higher levels. There is no need to look at both sides of the argument but most candidates did. The answers which were awarded the higher levels critically deconstructed the information they used leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, which in turn led to reasoned judgements of the question.

3 Assess the significance of the belief that there is a Buddha nature in everyone.

The belief there's Buddha nature in everyone is that of Mahayana Buddhism. Instead of focusing on the historical Siddhartha Gautama Buddha they focus on the Bodhisattva belief and refer to Siddhartha as the Sakyimuni Buddha due to his father's lead of the Sakya clan. Mahayana Buddhists believe there is Buddha nature in everyone and everyone can achieve enlightenment not just Arhats (worthy ones) as in Theravada. They believe that when the Buddha died he didn't pass onto pari-nirvana but chose to be reborn and is still somewhere in the world helping the suffering beings. This shows his compassion and is said to be revered that the Buddha said he will return to help in the Lotus Sutra. The idea of everyone having Buddha nature is positive as it encourages more compassion to help all beings and encourages metta and karuna. It also gives positivity to householders who can't renounce into the monastery that they can become enlightened and the 3-bodied doctrine emphasises more compassion such as, through Avalokiteshvara.

However, the Buddha nature in everyone belief would not appeal to conservative Buddhists such as Theravada schools as they emphasise they're the closest tradition to the Buddha's true teachings and that the Buddha has passed to pari-nirvana and no longer ceases to be (without substrate). They believe we only have one Buddha (although accept other Arahant's Buddhas) to learn from and follow the Dharma and we take ourselves to nirvana by following his teachings and living the eightfold path.



This answer achieved a level 3. The candidate was awarded 9 marks. This response begins with a large amount of AO1 information but the candidate is able to develop this and ensure that the information is assessed in light of the question. This question is worth 9 marks and consideration has to be given to the length of time, and therefore the depth necessary.



This candidate looks at both sides- this is not necessary to achieve level 3 but on this occasion adds more depth and breadth to the answer that is not in evidence on the first side alone.

Question 4

This question asked candidates to explore key events in the life of the Buddha. This question was answered very well by most candidates. They were able to utilise aspects of their knowledge to develop explanations of the key events in the life of the Buddha. The top level answers were able to utilise a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology appropriately, accurately and sustained throughout. In this way they used two or three events to explore in depth. Some candidates, for example, focussed on the four sights and the enlightenment. Answers that reached the top level showed a depth and range of understanding. Some answers that gave a brief narration of the Buddha's life were unable to show this depth of understanding necessary to reach level 3.

Part b asked candidates to analyse the significance of the historical, religious and social context at the time to the life and message of the Buddha. This question elicited some very interesting responses. It is important to note this question asked candidates to address all three of the historical, religious and social context. They did not have to be given equal weighting but all three needed to be addressed to meet the full range of elements in the question demanded by level 4. Candidates engaged well with the question and able to show understanding of the significance and lack of significance of the various aspects. Candidates were able to use specific examples from the Buddha's life and message to show the significance of the various contexts. Sometimes this was done in exploring a rejection of certain ideas rather than an acceptance. Some answers were very short which seemed to suggest that candidates were running out of time in the examination and careful consideration should be given to this. There is a need to look at both sides of the argument in an evaluate question. The answers which were awarded the higher levels critically deconstructed the information they used leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, which in turn led to reasoned judgements of the question. This was all supported by the comprehensive appraisal of evidence. This involves a weighing of the value and success of the evidence being used.

4 (a) Explore key events in the life of the Buddha.

(8)

The life of the Buddha is approached in a metaphorical way, with a mixture of myth and fact. His main purpose is to teach the Dharma and Buddhists do not claim truth to any of the myths. The two sources are the Pali Canon (historical life) and the Bodhisattva (a full account with myth and fact). The Buddha was born Siddhartha Gotama in 563 BC in Nepal, North India. He would of had a reasonably wealthy and good upbringing for the time, as his father was a clan leader. He also would have received a good education as he would have been expected to ~~take over~~ ^{engage} political struggles to take over his father as clan leader. His mother died two weeks after he was born and he was raised by his step mother. He never married his cousin at 16 (she became one of the first Buddha monks) and had their first child at 29. A key event was the four signs, which claimed that the Buddha left his home and witnessed four signs he supposedly hadn't seen before. These were Old age - everyone decays, no one can escape it, illness - everyone gets sick, death - no human is immortal and the happy ascetic who looks more content and happy the he is. The Buddha later reflects on this and this is his Great Renunciation, where he takes time to reflect on suffering and life in a pit to find happiness. It marks a crisis point for the Buddha as he is in a state of dukkha and tanha, craving answers. He leaves his wife and children alone, which at the time could have been considered selfish, although considering the benefits it did to him, his family and the majority of people throughout many years, it could be justified.

(b) Analyse the significance of the historical, religious and social context at the time to the life and message of the Buddha.

(20)

The Buddha lived in 6th Century India, where there were a number of historical, religious and social elements. The Indus Valley Civilization was located in the Indus valley, more modernly known as Pakistan. It had a good economy, water drainage, while maintaining a social structure that caused a very diverse society. The Indus Valley was then invaded by the Aryans from Ind-Europe, who ~~came~~ ^{became a} ~~a~~ ^{mix} of various cultures within the Indus Valley. The invasion was non-violent and therefore was accepted within the culture and welcomed. The Aryans based their teachings on scriptures called the Vedas, which included the 'knowledge of the Gods', in which introduced the Vedic religion into ^{the} society of the Indus Valley. The language of the scriptures were also written in Sanskrit, which later became the sacred language of India. Society ~~is~~ at the time (in India), had what is known as the Caste system, something which is still around today. It was originally a social stratification, that aimed to organise society in roles that would be allocated in suitability to their needs. There are five types of Caste, the first is the Brahmins, who are the priestly Caste, with lighter skinned, seen as spiritually superior, ~~etc etc~~ and with the more dominant jobs. The next is the Kshatriyas, ~~with~~ ^{who} maintained a similar ~~status~~ status and types of ~~job~~ jobs as the Brahmins and traditionally would be seen to uphold the rule and maintain justice. They also had slightly ~~lighter~~ ~~skin~~ red toned skin. The third Caste level was the Ushtriyas, who were ~~the~~ the middle Caste, with slightly darker more brown skin and dominated jobs such as trades people. The ~~four~~ next is the Shudras who had very dark skin and were seen as unskilled ~~etc~~ labours, with jobs such as servants. The lowest of the Caste system, ~~etc~~ is the untouchables (Dalits), who are considered spiritually impure and polluting, ~~etc~~ and would be regularly physically pushed out of temples and places of worship as they

would be seen to be polluting the environment. This meant they were more likely to be subject to abuse, Rape and being mugged, with a low prosecution rate for those committing the crime. Untouchables would have low job opportunities, and would be considered ^{as} manual scavengers with no real worth. The implications of the Caste System are huge, as it has caused a discriminate society, where your job opportunity and overall treatment and happiness is highly affected. While inter-caste marriages are extremely rare and it is believed that you should just accept your Caste as it is a result of your ~~to~~ Karma action in your past lives, therefore the lower down the Caste System the more bad Karma you would have had. Your Caste is extremely difficult to change, as it is seen as ~~more~~ a birth association more than your wealth. The Buddha rejected the Caste System, as he believed that all things are subject to change (Anicca) and therefore you should be able to change your Caste.

There were various different religions present around at the time of the Buddha, and mainly the Vedic religion, which originated from Vedic Scriptures and the Aryans, and is more commonly known as Hinduism. They believed that there was a universal entity ~~that~~ in all things, in an underlying reality, that is Brahman that universal spirit. The belief in the idea of the Atman (permanent self), in which the goal is to escape someone out of the cycle of rebirth and be re-united with Brahman, you do this through good Karma action. This includes the idea of Ahimsa and kindness to all living beings, while they also maintain the belief in Dharma, Karma and Samsara. There were ~~many~~ other similar religious groups, called Shramanas, who were wandering holy people, that reject the Vedic religion but were ascetics that were looking for happiness. The four types were the Ajivikas who rejected the idea of a permanent self and Karma, believing that no good or bad action could determine your fate. Everyone is subject to rebirth and Samsara. However the duty

believe that if you were Afikenas, you were on your last life. The Jews, believed in the idea of karma but believe that karma was in all actions, not just intentional, therefore they were extremely careful in actions. They also practiced extreme asceticism. The Materialists, ~~but~~ rejected life after death and karma, believing that human beings are just made up of elements that when we die will return to the atmosphere. ~~These~~ Skeptics, are known for their 'sitting on the fence' approach, and would answer questions about life after death, God and karma in a very non-committal way. The folk traditions, were the original beliefs of the Indo valley and practiced ~~for~~ fortune telling, as they believed in spirits.

The Buddha rejected the ~~caste system as the idea of~~ Jain idea that karma was in all actions, as he believed in ~~his~~ only intention. While he also borrowed the folk traditions but felt they had no real relevance to society. He rejected the caste system as he believed everyone should have a chance to obtain ~~Arhant~~ Arhant. He accepted the idea of Atman, and ~~to~~ Love to sentient beings, while ~~incarnated~~ life after death to the idea of Anatta.



ResultsPlus
Examiner Comments

This candidate achieved level 3 on part a (was awarded 8 marks) and Level 4 on part b (was awarded 20 marks). Part a is more than a recitation of the events of the life of Buddha but utilises and develops the information to show a depth and breadth of understanding.

Both sides of the argument are explored in part b and the candidate is able to weigh the various strength of the arguments being made. There is also a logical structure to the answer that ensures all aspects of the question are addressed. Judgements are made throughout the response showing that the logical chains of reasoning are leading to the logical judgements.



There is scope for a tighter conclusion that draws together the points made- but the candidate does address the criteria throughout the question.

Paper Summary

Following on from this report, it is possible to suggest a number of simple ways in which candidates can be helped to improve their performance:

- Candidates should read questions carefully to ensure they are answering the question set. This is reflected in the 'distinctive emphases' of question 1 or the naming of the various contexts in 4b.
- Candidates should allocate sufficient time for Section A. There is no requirement to begin at question 1 and work through the paper. Some candidates began with Section B. Whatever works best for the candidate is permissible.
- Candidates should prepare for the wide range of topics that are studied in the AS Level.
- Candidates should consider how they are appraising the evidence and arguments they are making in question 4b.

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