



General Certificate of Secondary Education

Religious Studies (4051/4052)
Full and Short Course
Specification A

Unit 12 *Buddhism (405012)*

Report on the Examination
2010 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Unit 12 Buddhism

General Comments

Some candidates had been well prepared for this examination and others less so. The full ability range had been entered and the paper seemed to be accessible to all. The depth of knowledge and understanding shown by some of the candidates at the top end was a credit to the candidates themselves and to the way in which their teachers had prepared them for this examination. Some candidates were able to demonstrate their ability to utilise and apply a wide range of Buddhist teachings, as well as use their skill at comparing the different approaches of the main branches of Buddhism if and where applicable. Some candidates showed a well honed examination technique, using their time wisely and offering lucid and coherent responses, particularly to the longer response questions in Part B. Technical vocabulary usage was fairly widespread and examiners found this encouraging.

Question A1 *The Sangha*

Question A1 (a) was a good starter for candidates and on the whole was answered well. Candidates scored well by highlighting the vows, the possessions allowed for monastics and the acceptance of the three refuges as well as other peripheral points.

Some candidates' answers were a little too one-sided in part (b) but still gave an opinion supported by a developed reason which allowed them to score marks. Candidates highlighted the fact that monks and nuns have everything donated but that the simple and often austere life they lead is no compensation for this. Some went on to say that life is tough overall for monks and nuns.

Virtually all candidates made reference to religion in part (c) and so gained at least Level 3. Some of the more able candidates had clearly thought through, and learned in some depth, the various arguments about the mutual relationship between laity and monastics. Some even mentioned the three-fold relationship in Thailand, which was commendable though not a requirement. Some candidates appeared not to understand the word laity but still managed a good guess to get some marks. There were some generalisations and vagueness shown by a number of candidates.

Question A2 *The Dhamma (Dharma)*

Most candidates achieved full marks in part (a), and examiners were pleased to see some candidates accurately used Pali and Sanskrit words, although this was not a requirement of the question. Some candidates confused the Three Universal Truths with the Three Refuges, which was a pity.

Most candidates responded well to part (b) and knew kamma (karma) to be the law of cause and effect. Some went on to say that 'what goes around comes around', which was regarded as a slight development and enough for two marks to be awarded. Some of the more able candidates highlighted that, in Buddhism, Kamma (karma) is regarded as a natural law.

Some of the better candidates were able to distinguish between a physical consequence and a moral consequence in part (c) and these responses were enjoyable to read, though this distinction was not necessary to achieve full marks. Candidates responded well to the evaluative question here, and it generated some very good responses because it encouraged candidates to examine in detail some of the key teachings of the Buddhist faith, such as all life is unsatisfactory and actions have consequences. Many thoughtful arguments were given on both sides of the statement alongside some good balanced and structured viewpoints.

Question A3 *The Life of the Buddha*

In part (a) many candidates offered good solid examples of why the Buddha's birth stories must be made up, for example, he spoke and walked as soon as he was born and he was born out of his mother's side. Those who went on to gain full marks often balanced this by saying that special events equal a special birth, so why should the stories not be true? Some candidates also highlighted that the stories surrounding the Buddha's birth are entirely in keeping with the idea of legends developing amongst fledgling Buddhist communities shortly after the Buddha's death.

Many candidates wrote purely descriptive answers to part (b), but the question asked for the importance of the Buddha's ascetic life. Those who included the idea of experiencing the total opposites of palace life in his life with the ascetics were able to successfully link this to the Buddha's later teaching.

Many candidates had been taught well on what happened when the Buddha became enlightened and, as part (c) carried only four marks, many achieved full marks before they reached the end of their response. It was a descriptive question and candidates had obviously learnt the various legends associated with the enlightenment of the Buddha very well indeed.

Question A4 *Worship and Festivals*

Part (a) rarely troubled candidates, and many supplied all three of the events in the life of the Buddha that are celebrated at Wesak even though only two were asked for.

Most candidates had sound knowledge of different aspects of Buddhist worship, so part (b) was universally answered well. Most referred to the Buddharupa and meditation and many covered the chanting and the shrines. It was pleasing to see some responses incorporating different Buddhist traditions such as the Tibetan one where the spinning of prayer wheel takes place at a temple. Some candidates did not fully explain how temples are used but gave vague generalised assumptions about Buddhist worship generally. In reality, these may have overlapped with aspects of Buddhist worship in the home.

Examiners saw a wide variety of responses to part (c). Some offered well argued answers with reasoning and consideration about the importance of stupas in Buddhism but other responses were confused. This was primarily because candidates did not focus on the word 'importance'.

In part (d) some of the more able candidates were clear in their explanation of what duty means for a Buddhist and rightly discussed other forms of duty and general lifestyle. They went on to say that this might mean that the seemingly secondary nature of going on a pilgrimage is of little true worth to a Buddhist, but they still acknowledged the idea of wanting to do something, such as going on a pilgrimage, to show reverence to the Buddha. The less successful responses gave only one elaborated reason or two or more simple reasons without much clarification or depth.

Question B5 Attitudes to Life

This question was the more popular of the two Part B questions by a significant margin.

Part (a) proved popular with many candidates, but a few made generalisations about abortion while rarely linking it to any Buddhist belief or teaching. Some were able to apply principles from the Buddha's teachings to the issue and related it more generally to the relevant stages of the Noble Eightfold Path. Others were much more specific and gained full marks for their responses. A few candidates knew about the grave offence in the Vinaya Pitaka and what it is to have consciousness from the Buddhist perspective, and many included the lesser of the two evils debate which has led some Buddhists to agree with abortion under certain conditions even though it is against all the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Buddhist faith.

Part (b) was an evaluative question about the Five Precepts in Buddhism and seemed very popular with candidates. Some of the less able picked up reasonable marks too here. Most of the responses seen included something of value and worthy of credit. There were some lengthy explanations of two of the precepts, the most popular being 'Do not take life', compared with the merits of the one highlighted in the question itself: 'Do not take what is not given before'. Candidates who tackled the precept on false speech tended to provide the best answers as they covered all angles of what false speech means in Buddhism and whether, ultimately, this has a bearing on keeping all the other precepts. They covered false speech of the body and mind and were thorough in their treatment of this. There is clearly some good teaching taking place when candidates consider how widely the precepts can be interpreted and which one, if any, carries precedence. Perhaps the least popular precept for inclusion on which is the more important was 'To abstain from sexual misconduct'.

Part (c) allowed candidates to exhibit their grasp of some of the fundamental principles of Buddhism and apply them accordingly. Some of the better responses showed good knowledge and understanding of how people should act in the Buddhist faith, and frequent and accurate references were made to the Five Precepts and kamma, although fewer candidates could accurately relate ahimsa to metta and karuna.

In Part (d) there were some well balanced responses, with the more able candidates writing about the Buddhist precepts and their relationship to the issue of euthanasia. Many candidates questioned how active euthanasia could be reconciled with Buddhist principles. Here again, some candidates argued that euthanasia would be in keeping with the alleviation of suffering as a Buddhist ideal and could therefore be justified in certain circumstances. Comprehensive and detailed responses which included other aspects of their knowledge and understanding of the Buddhist faith were seen in answers. The less able gave more subjective responses but still made some creditworthy links with recent stories in the newspapers about euthanasia. Examiners were pleased to see, at the top end, such mature and thoughtful reflection in response to an evaluation question.

Question B6 *Global Issues*

Some less able candidates struggled to get beyond generalisations in part (a) and showed a more elementary knowledge and understanding about the environment from a Buddhist perspective. There were also some thoughtful responses from more able candidates which included reference to collective kamma (karma), ahimsa, and the Japanese term 'esho fumi' meaning that the environment and humans are not two but one. A few mentioned the link between the environment and the first two stages on the Noble Eightfold Path, and this was commendable and appropriate.

Part (b) provoked a better and more sustained line of argument in favour of the statement made on the paper than against. This led to some answers being a little one-sided as candidates struggled to consider how a Buddhist could reconcile their faith and, in particular, the acknowledgement of the precepts and the vows monastics take with being rich. Some candidates argued that being rich does necessarily equate to attachment. There were some excellent comments in the best responses about differences of opinion even within one faith, and some candidates commented on the different interpretations Buddhists could have of wealth and poverty and their own possessions.

Both sexism and racism were commented upon in part (c) on prejudice and discrimination, with a few candidates showing a sound grasp of the origins of Buddhism and the attitude of the Buddha himself to these issues. Those who included a reference to the role and status of women commented on the treatment of women from when Buddhism began, the different rules and expectations of the Sangha and some of the rules and scriptures detailing the duties of a wife, and related this well to the theme of prejudice and discrimination. Some candidates argued that people should not be prejudiced as they could have been members of a different race, social grouping or even religion in a previous life. Examples quoted from the Buddha himself and his life scored well here, as did contemporary teachings and attitudes by more recently revered Buddhists such as the Dalai Lama.

There were some well balanced responses to part (d), though the less able struggled to find evidence to support any argument they made. Candidates gained marks by discussing how the Buddha reacted in his life to certain situations. The links between the theme of this evaluative question and ideas of selflessness and attachment and the three fires or poisons (akusala) also helped candidates gain marks. More able candidates also wrote about the reactions of the Buddha and Buddhist monks to first allowing women to join the Sangha.