

Week 1: Life of Buddha

Lesson Time: 1 hour

Facilitators Required: In-person: 2, Virtual: 1- 2

Supplies:

- Activity paper
- Bodhisattva vow chant cards
- Buddha themed adult coloring sheets
- Clipboards
- Large newsprint
- Markers, crayons and colored pencils

Learning Objectives

- *Create safe, fun and participatory environment*
- *Introduce story of Buddha*
- *Connect basic Buddhist concepts of four noble truths to participant's daily life*
- *elicit examples of dukka and dissatisfaction from youth*
- *Connect examples with opportunities to relieve suffering*
- *Introduce role of ritual in Buddhist practice*

Outline

I. Gather & Morning Message	20 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Morning Message• Alter Practice/Gassho and Bow• Fun & Games	
II. Dharma Lesson - Life of Buddha	15 mins
III. Movement & Meditation	5 mins
IV. Main Activity - Who is Buddha to You?	15 mins
V. Closing Chant	5 mins

Gather & Morning Message

Begin day with informal questions to get participants talking.

- Ask name, age and what school they attend.
- Ask if any student would like to share what excites them most about attending today.
- Ask students if they have heard the words Buddhism, meditation, or mindfulness.
- Ask if any students would like to share what they may have heard or learned about Buddhism, meditation or mindfulness.
- Ask if any students have attempted meditating or to practice mindfulness before.
- For those who say yes, ask if they can demonstrate what they have learned.

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Alter Practice/Gassho & Bow

Introduce Alter

Introduce the alter to participants. Inform participants the group will explore alters and alter practice throughout the coming weeks.

- Ask participants if any of them have an alter at home. If so, ask what is on it.
- Ask participants what they notice is on the alter.
- Ask participants if they know what the items on the alter are.
- Inform participants why items are located on alter and what they represent.
- Ask participants if they were to have an alter at home, what important mementos would they place on it.

Gassho & Bow to Each other & Alter

Inform participants that offering a gassho and bow is important when approaching an alter. Tell participants that to gassho and bow is an opportunity to show peace and lovingkindness to others. Demonstrate to participants a formal bow and gassho.

- Ask participants to follow along before trying on their own.
- Instruct participants to gassho and bow to the alter and then to the people next to them.
- Ask students how it felt to gassho and bow and what thoughts came to mind while doing so.

Fun and Games: Draw an Alter

Pass out clipboards, paper and crayons, markers and/or colored pencils. Instruct participants to draw the alter. Let them know that they can add anything to their alter that is important to them (pets, pictures of friends and family, special mementos, etc.).

Virtual Activity

Ensure to position webcam so those participating virtually can follow along. Ensure to let parents know in advance of needed supplies. You're welcome to e-mail a photo(s) of alter to parents in advance to use if webcam image is not visible enough.

Modifying for Age of Participants

Older participants uninterested in drawing are welcome to list items they may chose to have on an alter at home. Encourage youths to write a sentence or two why they would include their items on the list. Also, ask students to think about where they may place their alter at home and why. *Older participants are also welcome to use the adult coloring sheets and colored pencils to draw.*

Dharma Lesson: Life of Buddha

Facilitators are encouraged to develop dharma lesson content in a manner that most resonates with them.

Suggested talking points

- Explore Buddha's early life shielded from desire or aversion.
- Illustrate the Buddha's experience witnessing sickness, old age and death for the first time.
- Illustrate the Buddha's years wandering as a forest monk.
- Explore the Buddha's enlightenment under Bodhi tree
- Outline the Buddha's first sermon on 4 Noble Truths

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Movement & Meditation

Take participants through a series of mindful movement postures as a way to give participants an opportunity to move around, stretch, and explore mindfulness.

Suggested movements with instruction:

One: Begin with your feet slightly apart, arms at your sides. Breathing in, keep your elbows straight as you lift your arms in front of you until they're shoulder level, horizontal to the ground. Breathing out, bring your arms down again to your sides. Repeat the movement three more times.

Two: Begin with your arms at your sides. Breathing in, lift your arms in front of you. In one continuous movement, bring them all the way up, stretching them above your head. Touch the sky! This movement can be done with your palms either facing inward toward each other, or facing forward as you reach up. Breathing out, bring your arms slowly down again to your sides. Repeat three more times.

Three: Breathing in, lift your arms out to the side, palms up, until your arms are shoulder level, parallel to the ground. Breathing out, touch your shoulders with your fingertips, keeping your upper arms horizontal. Breathing in, open your arms, extending them until they're stretched out to a horizontal position again. Breathing out, bend your elbows, bringing your fingertips back to your shoulders.

Four: When you breathe in, you are like a flower opening to the warm sun. Breathing out, the flower closes. From this position with your fingertips on your shoulders, do the movement three more times. Then lower your arms back down to your sides.

Five: In this exercise, you make a large circle with your arms. Breathing in, bring your arms straight down in front of you, centered between your hips, palms together. Raise your arms up and separate your hands so your arms can stretch up over your head. Breathing out, continue the circle, arms circling back, until your fingers point toward the ground. Breathing in, lift your arms back and reverse the circle. Breathe out as you bring your palms together and your arms come down in front of you. Repeat three more times.

Six: Start by putting your hands on the sides of your waist. As you do this exercise, keep your legs straight but not locked, and your head centered over your body. Breathing in, bend forward at the waist and begin to make a circle with your upper body. When you're halfway through the circle, your upper body leaning back, breathe out and complete the circle, ending with your head in front of you while you're still bent at the waist. On your next in-breath, begin a circle in the opposite direction. On your out-breath, complete the circle. Repeat the series of movements three more times.

Seven: Begin with your hands on our waist, heels together, feet turned out to form a V, so that they make a 90 degree angle. Breathing in, rise up on your toes. Breathing out, stay on your toes, keep your back straight, and bend your knees. Keeping your upper body centered, go down as low as you comfortably can maintain your balance. Breathing in, straighten your knees and come all the way up, still standing on your toes. From this position, repeat the movement three more times, remembering to breathe slowly and deeply.

Note: *Introducing and exploring together zazen posture and breathing is entirely appropriate.*

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Activity: Behaving Like a Buddha

Begin by reviewing points from the story of the Buddha. After brief review, engage participants in an informal Q&A. Questions to ask include:

- Why do you think people keep telling the story about Buddha?
- Why do you think this is an important story after all these years?
- When they think of loving, kind, and wise people like the Buddha, who comes to mind.?

Transition to discussion that explores Buddha figures that participants may know. Inform participants that a Buddha is not just one person who lived in the past, but can be anyone - including the participants themselves. All that is required is to act in a way that is kind, loving and wise.

- Ask participants if they know anyone who reminds them of the Buddha?
- For those who share, ask in what ways does individual(s) act Buddha like.

Tell participants that you want them to help you think of ways that we all can be Buddha like. Using newsprint and a marker, ask participants to name ways Buddha's act in the world. Offer participants examples like "Tell my parents I love them," "Act kind in class," "Be nice to siblings, etc."

Using papers and a writing utensil, ask participants to write three things they can do at home, at school, or when at play in the week ahead to act like a Buddha. When participants are done writing, go around to each participant and ask them to share what they wrote if they are comfortable.

Closing Chant

Pass out closing chant to participants. Show participants how you plan to put your hands together and chant the four line Bodhisattva Vow. Go through once on your own. For the second time, invite participants to follow along.

May we develop a deeper understanding in order to live peacefully with people, animals, plants and minerals.
May we develop compassion in order to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals.