BUCOVERY KIDS STORIES™

The Teaching of Buddha

A first book about Buddhism



READ AND EXPLORE • AGES 6–10

READING TOGETHER

Four short sessions

Read this book with a grown-up, a friend, or on your own. You can read a few pages and come back another day. Try saying each new word out loud and explaining it in your own words.

1 Meet the Buddha • pages 3–9

Read about the Buddha, the Three Jewels, and the Four Noble Truths. Follow Nia’s rainy-day story and draw the wheel.

2 Try the Eightfold Path • pages 10–17

Take turns acting out the school and playground stories. Add the eight names to your wheel.

3 Practice caring • pages 18–23

Talk about choices, change, and the ways we care. Try sitting and walking practice together.

4 Explore symbols • pages 24–29

Sketch the symbols, talk about generosity, and tell someone what the symbols mean. Finish by acting out two endings to the seat story.

FOR GROWN-UPS

Allow about 30–40 minutes per session, including reading aloud, discussion, drawing, and role-play. Let children choose which activities to spend more time on.

Who was the Buddha?



Long ago, a teacher named Siddhartha Gautama lived in South Asia. Buddhist tradition says that seeing old age, illness, and death led him to ask a big question: How can we live wisely when life is hard?

He left a comfortable life to look for an answer. After years of learning and practice, he sat beneath a tree and awakened to a deep understanding of suffering and freedom. People called him the Buddha, meaning “Awakened One.” He spent the rest of his life teaching others.

TRY IT

Imagine Siddhartha sitting under the tree. Write or tell a big question you would like to ask him. Then share why you chose it.

The Middle Way



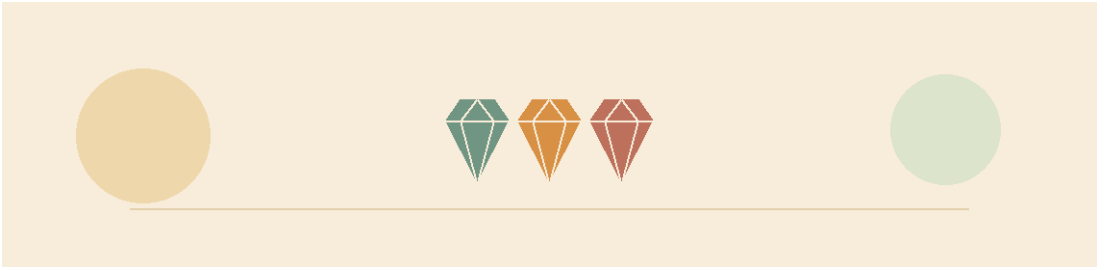
Before his awakening, Siddhartha tried living with great luxury. Later he tried being so strict with himself that he barely ate. Neither way helped him understand what he needed to know. He taught a Middle Way that makes room for wise effort, care, and attention.

Ari wanted to learn a song. At first he played only when he felt like it. Then he tried playing for hours until his fingers hurt. Finally he practiced a little each day, took breaks, and listened closely. He began to hear where the tune was going.

TRY IT

Draw two edges of a path. Write “giving up” on one side and “pushing too hard” on the other. Draw a way through the middle for something you are learning.

The Three Jewels



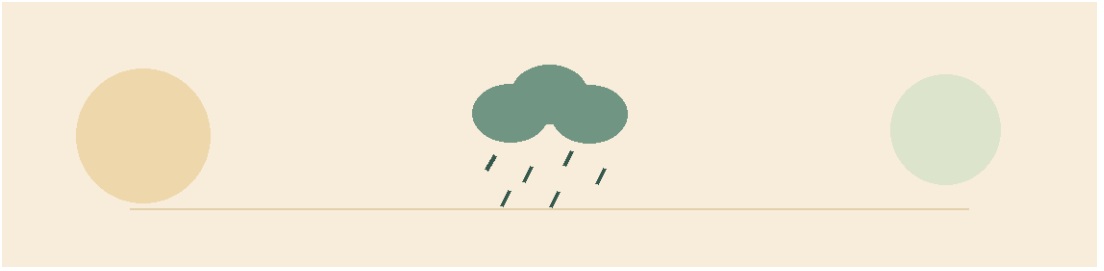
Buddhists look to three sources of guidance. The Buddha is the awakened teacher. The Dharma is the teaching and the way people practice it. The Sangha is the community that carries the teachings. In a traditional sense, Sangha can mean the monastic community or those who have realized the teachings. People also use it for a wider community of practice.

Imagine learning to swim. A teacher shows you how. You practice the strokes. Other swimmers help you learn and keep going. Buddhists call turning to the Three Jewels for guidance “taking refuge.”

TRY IT

Draw three jewels. Label them Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Explain to a partner how each one helps someone learn.

The First Noble Truth



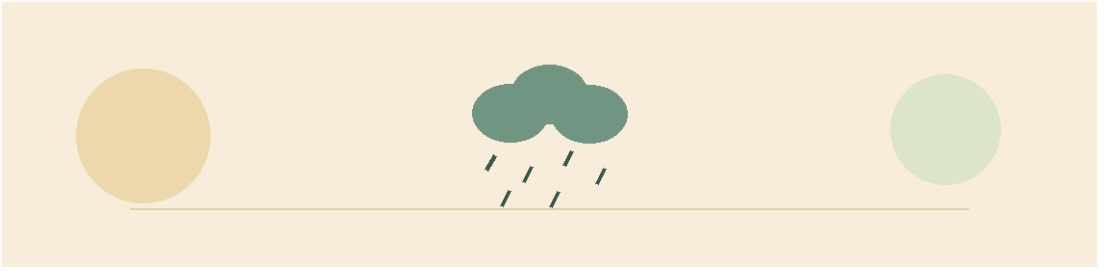
The Buddha began with something everyone can notice. Life includes pain, loss, and experiences that don’t satisfy us for long. Buddhists use the word dukkha for this kind of suffering or unease.

Nia waited all week for a picnic. Then rain began to fall. She felt disappointed. Later the family played a game indoors, and she laughed. The first truth makes room for the hard moment and the happy one.

TRY IT

Think of a plan that changed. Draw or name one feeling you had. What helped you notice the feeling without hiding it?

The Second Noble Truth



Craving is the pushy feeling that says, “I have to get this,” “I have to keep this,” or “This has to go away.” Clinging to what we want can add suffering, especially when life changes.

Nia liked picnics. Wanting one was ordinary. But when she kept thinking, “The whole day has to go my way,” she felt stuck even after the rain had stopped. She began to notice how tightly she was holding the plan in her mind.

TRY IT

Make a loose fist and gently open your hand. Think of a time your mind said “it has to be this way.” What else was possible?

The Third Noble Truth



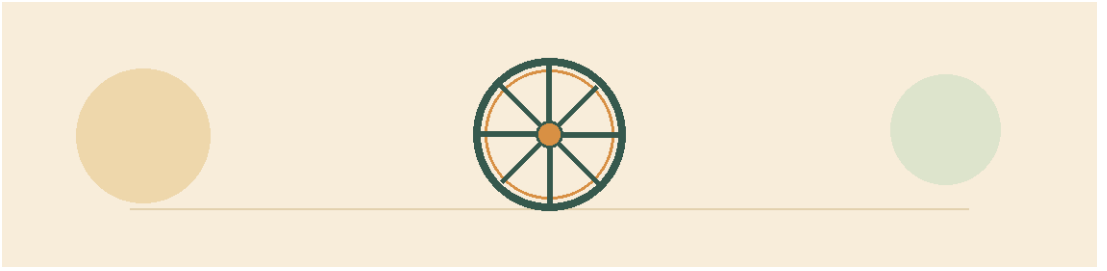
The Buddha taught that suffering rooted in craving can end. Buddhists call complete freedom from greed, hatred, and confusion nirvana. Those three habits of mind are sometimes called the three poisons. A small moment of letting go can give us a glimpse of how it feels when our grip loosens.

Nia still wished she could have a picnic. Then she heard her brother laughing over the game. She set the picnic basket down and asked to play. Her disappointment eased when she made room for what was happening.

TRY IT

Tell about something you enjoyed after a plan changed. What helped you make room for it?

The Fourth Noble Truth



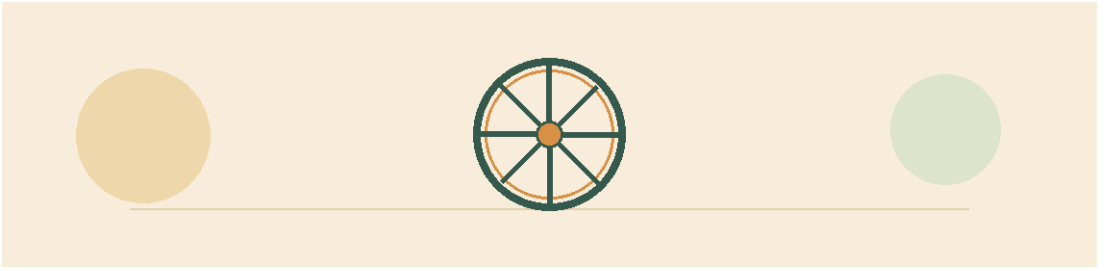
The Buddha taught a way to practice that freedom. It is called the Noble Eightfold Path. Its eight parts help us develop wisdom, act with care, and train our minds.

Think of eight spokes supporting one wheel. The parts work together. A moment of mindfulness can help us speak kindly. Honest words can make it easier to sit quietly later. We can practice several parts in one day.

TRY IT

Look at the wheel. Count its spokes. As you read the next eight pages, add one name to each spoke on a wheel you draw.

Right View



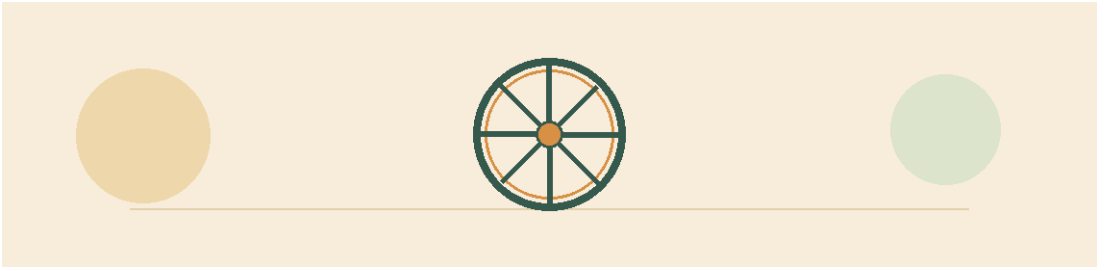
Right View means learning to see things clearly, including how actions have consequences and how suffering can grow or ease.

A ball knocked over Bea’s chalk castle. “They did it on purpose!” she thought. Then she saw that the ball had bounced off a bench. Bea was still sad about the castle. Seeing what happened helped her decide what to say.

TRY IT

Someone walks past you without waving. Think of two possible reasons. What could you ask before deciding what happened?

Right Intention



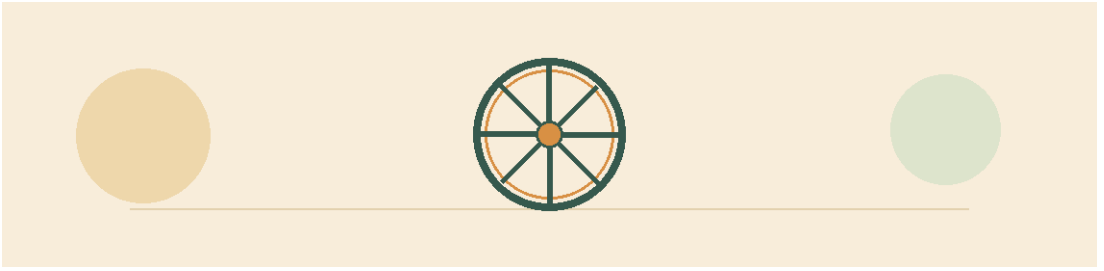
An intention is what you mean to do. Right Intention encourages us to loosen our grip on wanting, wish others well, and choose actions that avoid harm.

Omar wanted to win the class game. When his teammate made a mistake, he wanted to blame her. He paused and chose a different aim: “I want to help us try again.” That aim changed the words he used.

TRY IT

Before you join a game, choose an intention. Try “I will make room for someone” or make up your own. Notice what your intention helps you do.

Right Speech



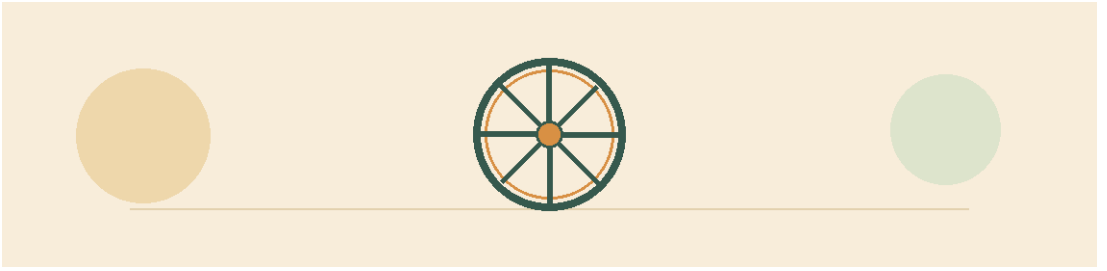
Right Speech means speaking truthfully and with care. It asks us to avoid lies, cruel words, words that split people apart, and chatter that serves no helpful purpose.

Luz saw a friend’s pencil snap. Someone told her to say another child broke it. Luz said, “I saw it roll off the desk.” Later, when someone teased her friend, she said, “Please stop.” Careful words can be firm.

TRY IT

Practice saying something true and kind about a problem, such as “I need a turn” or “That hurt my feelings.” Take turns listening.

Right Action



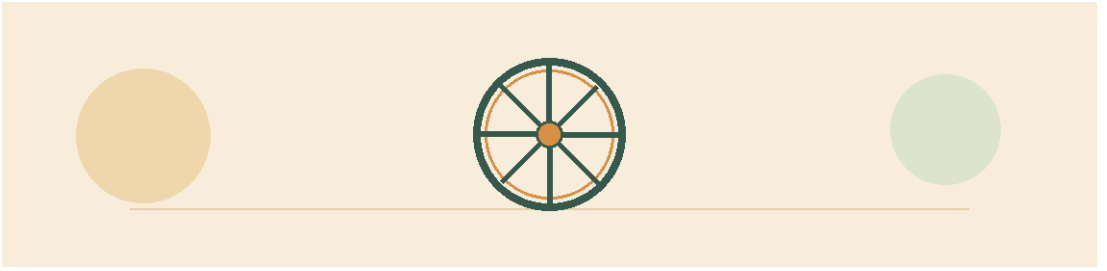
Right Action is about what we do with our bodies and how our choices affect others. It includes protecting life, taking only what is given, and treating people and their bodies with respect.

Dev found a shiny toy beside the playground. He wanted to keep it. He turned it in at the office so the person who lost it could find it. Later he walked around a line of ants carrying crumbs.

TRY IT

Pick one scene to act out. Then invent a new example of protecting a living thing or returning something that belongs to someone.

Right Livelihood



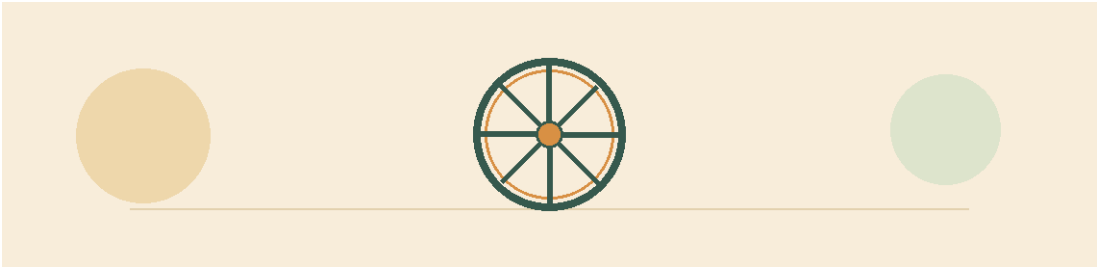
Livelihood means the work people do to earn a living. Right Livelihood asks people to choose honest work that avoids causing harm.

Two neighbors sold fruit at a market. One hid bruised fruit at the bottom of the bag and charged full price. The other explained which fruit was bruised and offered it for less. The second seller helped customers make a fair choice.

TRY IT

Imagine running a stand or doing a job. Draw it and describe one way you could do the work honestly and with care.

Right Effort



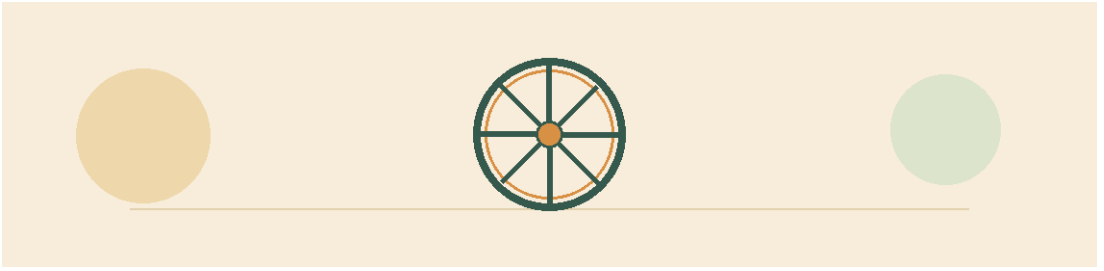
Right Effort means noticing what leads toward harm and practicing what helps. It includes preventing harmful habits when we can, letting go of them when they arise, and helping good habits grow.

Maya wanted to interrupt while her cousin was speaking. She noticed the urge, waited, and asked a question when he finished. The next day, she remembered how good it felt to be heard and tried listening again.

TRY IT

Draw two seedlings. Label one with a habit you want to grow. Label the other with an action you can take today to help it grow.

Right Mindfulness



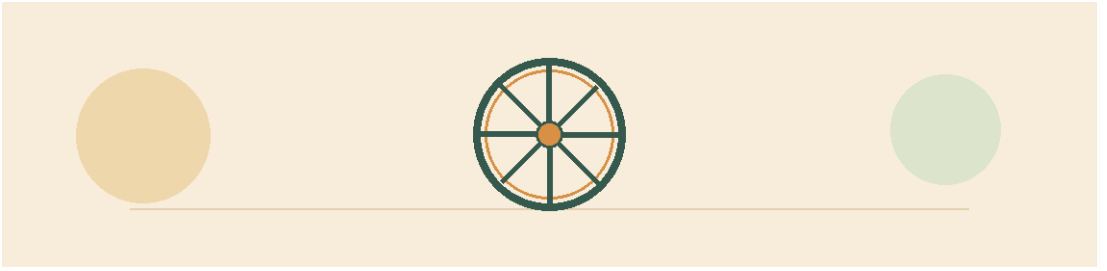
Mindfulness means paying attention to what is happening in your body, feelings, and mind as it happens.

When Eli lost his turn, he felt warmth in his cheeks and tightness in his hands. He noticed, “Anger is here.” He felt his feet on the ground and waited before moving. Then he could ask when his next turn would be.

TRY IT

Feel your feet, notice one sound, and name a feeling if you can. If you’re unsure what you feel, try noticing one thing in the room instead.

Right Concentration



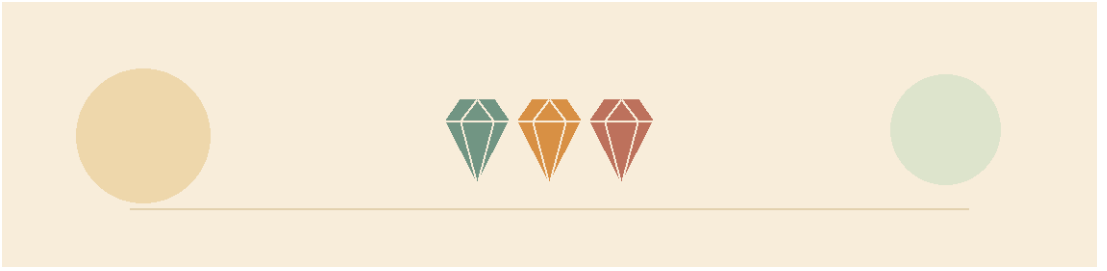
Concentration gathers the mind so attention can become steady. Buddhists develop it through meditation. One way to start is by choosing something to notice, such as the breath.

Kim tried listening to the sound of a bell. Her mind wandered to lunch. She returned to the sound, and when it faded, she noticed her next breath. Each time she remembered to return, she was practicing.

TRY IT

Choose a quiet sound, your breath, or a spot to look at. Spend half a minute returning to it when your attention wanders. What did you notice?

The Five Precepts



Buddhist laypeople often train with five promises. They practice caring for life, taking only what is given, behaving responsibly in sexual relationships, speaking truthfully, and avoiding intoxicants that cloud the mind.

For children, a way to begin is to protect living beings, ask before borrowing, respect body boundaries, tell the truth, and stay away from alcohol and other intoxicants. If you forget a promise, you can notice what happened, make repairs where possible, and begin again.

TRY IT

Make up a short scene where a character has a chance to keep one of these promises. Read it aloud and let someone guess which one.

Karma and Rebirth



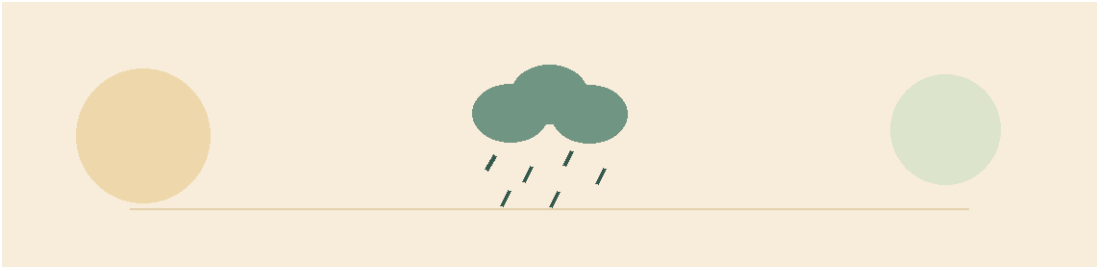
In Buddhism, karma refers to intentional action. What we choose to do, say, and think can shape our habits and have consequences. Many Buddhists also teach that karma can shape rebirth, the continuation of the cycle of lives after death. This cycle is called samsara.

When Iris makes a habit of welcoming a new classmate, it may get easier for her to include someone next time. Many things shape what happens to people. A person’s pain gives us a chance to help.

TRY IT

Draw a choice and two things that might follow from it. Who could be affected by the choice?

Three Things to Notice



Buddhist teachings describe three marks of life. Impermanence means that things made from changing causes change. Dukkha reminds us that changing things cannot give us lasting satisfaction. Not-self means that what we call “me” has no separate, unchanging core.

Look at a photo of yourself as a baby. Your body has changed. Your ideas and tastes have changed, too. You can still tell the story of your life even though the pieces keep changing.

TRY IT

Draw yourself at two different ages. What changed? Name one thing about you that is still growing or changing today.

How Things Depend on One Another



The Buddha taught that experiences arise when the conditions for them come together. This is called dependent arising. In his teaching on suffering, one example is how craving can lead to clinging, and how changing a condition can change what happens next.

A seed grows with water, warmth, and other conditions. A quarrel can grow with tiredness, sharp words, and quick replies. If someone pauses or asks for help, what happens next can change.

TRY IT

Draw a plant. Around it, draw or write what helps it grow. Then name one thing that helps a quarrel grow and one thing that could help it cool.

Four Ways to Care



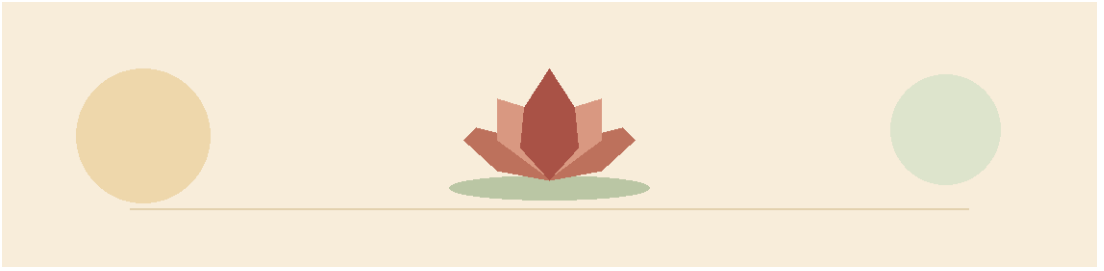
Buddhists practice four qualities of care. Loving-kindness wishes others well. Compassion wants suffering to ease and looks for ways to help. Appreciative joy feels glad when someone else does well. Equanimity helps us stay steady and caring when things change.

Jules hoped to win a race. When Priya won, Jules felt disappointed and still cheered for her. Later, when Priya tripped, Jules asked if she needed help. Different kinds of care can show up in a single afternoon.

TRY IT

Take turns offering a wish for someone, cheering for a success, or helping with a small problem. Which kind of care did you practice?

A Short Sitting Practice



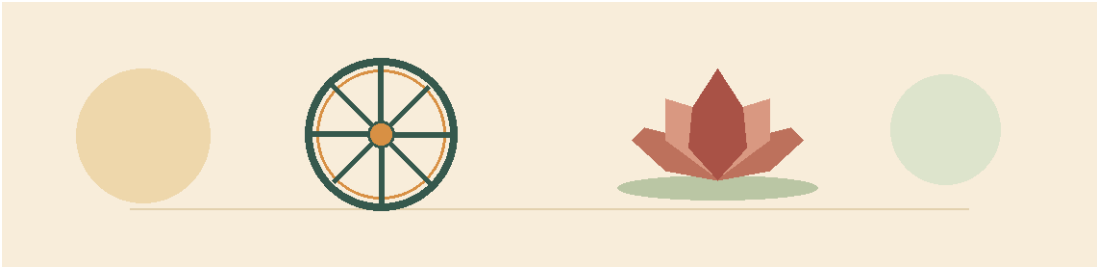
Sit on a chair or cushion in a way that feels steady. Let your hands rest. Keep your eyes open or lower your gaze. Notice a breath or the feeling of your feet touching the ground.

When thoughts or sounds catch your attention, gently come back. If you feel uncomfortable, you can change position or stop. Buddhist communities teach many kinds of meditation, including sitting, walking, and practices that cultivate kindness.

TRY IT

Try this for one minute with a grown-up. Then walk slowly for ten steps. Share one thing you noticed while sitting and one while walking.

The Wheel and the Lotus



The Dharma wheel reminds Buddhists of the teachings. A wheel with eight spokes can represent the Eightfold Path. Buddhists sometimes call the Buddha’s first teaching “turning the wheel of Dharma.”

The lotus rises from muddy water and opens above the surface. In Buddhist art it often suggests purity or awakening. Images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas sometimes show them sitting or standing on a lotus.

TRY IT

Sketch an eight-spoked wheel and a lotus. Explain to someone why each can remind a Buddhist of a teaching.

The Bodhi Tree and the Stupa



The Bodhi tree recalls the tree beneath which the Buddha awakened. Bodhi means awakening. The tree connects the story of the Buddha to a place called Bodh Gaya, in India.

A stupa is a sacred monument that may hold relics or mark an important place or event. Some Buddhists walk clockwise around a stupa as an act of respect and reflection. Stupas have many shapes in different places.

TRY IT

Look at the two drawings. Point to the place where you would sit beneath the tree, then trace a circle around the stupa with your finger. Tell what each symbol remembers.

Footprints and Buddha Images



In some early Buddhist art, footprints suggested the presence of the Buddha. A footprint can remind people that a teacher walked this earth and left a path others could follow.

Buddha images can show the Buddha teaching, sitting in meditation, or touching the earth. A meaningful hand position is called a mudra. Hands resting in the lap can show meditation. Images are treated with respect and may help people remember the teachings.

TRY IT

Draw a footprint. Inside it, write or draw one way you could follow a teaching today.

Buddhist Communities Today



Buddhism spread across Asia and is practiced around the world. Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana are names you may hear. There are many schools within these traditions. A bodhisattva is someone on the path to awakening for the benefit of others, an ideal especially important in Mahayana Buddhism.

Some communities chant, meditate, offer flowers, or give food to monks and nuns. Some Tibetan Buddhist communities use prayer flags. Many Buddhists celebrate Vesak, which in many places remembers the Buddha’s birth, awakening, and passing away. Customs vary by community.

TRY IT

Pick one practice from this page. What would you respectfully ask someone who does it?

PUT IT TO WORK

Generosity in Everyday Life



Giving is called dana in many Buddhist communities. People may offer food, time, or help. In many places, laypeople offer meals to monks and nuns, and monastics share teachings and guidance.

Ren wanted to welcome a child who had just moved nearby. She had no money to buy a gift. She brought an extra piece of chalk outside, offered it, and asked if the child wanted to draw with her. They made a sidewalk garden together.

TRY IT

Plan one gift that costs nothing. You could teach a game, share your time, or help with a chore. Ask the person what would be helpful.

Put the Teachings to Work



Two friends want the same seat. One says, “I have to sit there.” The other says, “You always get your way!” Both start to feel angry.

Pause the story. Where do you see dukkha? What are the friends holding on to? Which parts of the Eightfold Path could help? There may be more than one wise choice.

TRY IT

Act out two endings. Try using Right Speech in one and a moment of mindfulness in the other. Draw or write what each friend could do next.

KEEP EXPLORING

Words to remember

Buddha Awakened One, a title for Siddhartha Gautama.

Dharma The teachings and the way people practice them.

Sangha The Buddhist community that carries the teachings.

Dukkha Suffering, unease, or the feeling that something cannot satisfy us for long.

Karma Intentional action and its role in shaping what follows.

Nirvana Complete freedom from greed, hatred, and confusion.

Bodhi Awakening.

Mudra A meaningful hand gesture.

For grown-ups

The everyday stories and illustrations are original. The explanations are introductory and reflect teachings and symbols shared across many Buddhist traditions. Individual communities may explain or practice them differently.

Harvard Pluralism Project • The Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha

Harvard Pluralism Project • The Three Treasures

The Metropolitan Museum of Art • Buddhist art and symbols