

# Examiners' Report

## June 2019

### GCE Religious Studies 9RS0 4A

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# Introduction

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.

Centres and candidates are reminded to check the meanings of the five command words used in the A level papers found in Appendix 1 of the A level specification. The weightings of AO1 are 40% and AO2 has 60%.

## **Question 1**

This question asked candidates to explore the key teachings of Triratna Buddhism (formerly Friends of the Western Buddhist Order). Most candidates were able to correctly identify information about Triratna Buddhism. A significant minority focused their answers on the history of the tradition. This could only be credited when linked to or developed with teachings. The top level answers were able to utilise a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology appropriately and accurately, and sustained this throughout. Answers that reached the top level showed a depth and range of understanding.

Some candidates seemed to have spent a lot of time on this question as it covered an area of the specification with which they were familiar. This is an 8 mark question and as such candidates should consider the amount of time spent on each question.

In this response the candidate achieved Level 3.

1 Explore the key teachings of Triratna Buddhism (formerly Friends of the Western Buddhist Order).

(8)

Triratna Buddhism is a form of Buddhism in the West which was established in the late 1900's by Denis Lingwood, formally known as Sangharakshita. Triratna Buddhism places great worth on the three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and this is reflected in its name - 'Triratna'. First Triratna Buddhism aims to provide a way to combat the stresses of everyday modern life; as Vagbhata says, Triratna Buddhism is about "trying to see the Dharma in the everyday." The Buddhist school has links back to Theravada Buddhism as Sangharakshita was ordained as a Theravada Theravadin in Northern India after he was posted to the country in 1947 during WWII. As such, there is a great emphasis on 'Vipassana' and 'Samatha' meditation, and on developing 'sati'. The Triratna Buddhism also places a great emphasis on the 'Sangha' and communal life, with men and women living in communities separated by gender. This is reflected in the former name of the community 'Friends of the Western Buddhist Order'.



It is evident throughout this answer that as described above, the candidate is able to use a wide range of knowledge, specialist language and terminology appropriately and accurately, and this is sustained throughout. This candidate uses a broad range of key religious ideas and beliefs of Triratna Buddhism. The ideas did not have to be distinctive to Triratna. The historical information is used to develop understanding of a teaching. This enables the candidate to evidence and show a depth of understanding of the key religious ideas.



Ensure that the demands of the question are addressed in the response. The teachings of Triratna were the intended focus of this question, rather than writing everything that can be known about the tradition.

## **Question 2**

This question asked candidates to assess the significance of Mahapajapati Gotami for the development of the role of women in the ordained sangha. Most candidates were able to explain the events surrounding why Gotami may be important and were able to explain her significance, or reasons why her significance may be overstated. Some candidates drifted slightly in the answers as they tended towards over explanation without an attempt to assess. Candidates should always ensure that they assess rather than just explain. This was a particular proclivity in this question.

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 and progressed to coherent and logical chains of reasoning, which in turn led to reasoned judgements of the question.

- women although ordained were more restricted by specific rules once in the sangha — had to dress and cover up as men
- the Buddha's aunt
- 2 Assess the significance of Māhapājapātī Gotamī for the development of the role of women in the ordained sangha. (Maha)
- Bartholomew + Salgado (12) Feminist

It could be said that Mahapajapati Gotami was unsuccessful in developing the role of women in the ordained sangha as the ~~current~~ religion is still arguably male dominated. However, a stronger argument is that maha Gotami was a very significant role in the development of women in the ordained sangha as before her time, the sangha was purely restricted to males.

It could be said that, although the role of women was developed by maha Gotami, it was never fully developed to the point of equality between the genders in Buddhism. This is because, although the Buddha eventually gave in and allowed women into the sangha, they were restricted with many rules that didn't apply to Bhikkhus but only to Bhikkhunis, for example ~~female~~ women were not allowed any authority over males in certain Buddhist practices, however men were. There was also an overriding expectation that women were expected to be motherly figures and remain in the home so they still had weaker chances at attaining enlightenment than men.

Having said this, a stronger argument is that maha Gotami the Buddha's Aunt, was significant

in developing the role of Women in the ordained Sangha. Upon asking her Nephew, Siddhantha Gautama whom she raised from a child, to become part of the Sangha, Maha was initially refused and her efforts to prove her worthiness are what is notable in her role in Buddhism for women's rights. She, along with a following of roughly 500 other women, perished the Buddha on a journey having shaved their heads and dressed in robes. At the point of total exhaustion, she was assisted by ~~anapanna~~ Ananga, the Buddha's male servant, in persuading Gotama that women were deserving of their role in the Sangha. ~~There~~ He eventually relented and Maha Gotami's efforts paid off as herself and the other women involved were all ordained as nuns in the Sangha. This therefore shows that Mahapajapati Gotami was highly significant for developing the role of women in the ordained Sangha. \*

In conclusion, it could be said that the role of women in Buddhism, although advanced, was not developed by Mahapajapati Gotami as it still required help from a male dependent of the Buddha to persuade female ordainment into the Sangha. However, a stronger argument is, without

the efforts of strong female characters such as Mahapajapati Gotami, the role of women in Buddhism would have remained non-existent. Her efforts were recognised, hence the ordination of women into the Sangha. This can be backed up by the fact that women are still present roles in Buddhism today, with Modern developments such as Theravada Buddhism placing emphasis on equal ordination of both male and female.

Modern  
\*1 Feminists Teresa Bartholomew and Nirmala Salgado have <sup>also</sup> been influential female roles in the development and understanding of women in Buddhism. Their literature assesses the role of females in Buddhism and says that women's expectations in the 1st and 2nd century BCE, when Buddhism was at its growth point, were subordinate to males so it is unsurprising that the fight for female ordination into the Sangha was necessary.



The candidate takes each of the Poisons in turn to explore the significance. It is important to note that the candidate would have been limited to Level 2 in this response had they not covered the three in their answer. The candidate is able to evidence various aspects of the level descriptor. They are able to critically deconstruct religious information leading to coherent and logical chains of reasoning; this in turn leads to coherent and reasoned judgements of the full range of elements of the question.

## **Question 3**

### **Question 3(a)**

This question utilised an extract from the anthology, asking candidates to clarify the events illustrated in this passage surrounding the founding of the Sangha.

Candidates were often able to correctly discuss various aspects of the founding of the Sangha utilising the source as a springboard. Candidates who only regurgitated the source were not able to achieve well, but these responses were few and far between. 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 aspects of the source to develop into a wider discussion of the events of the founding of the Sangha.

A significant minority focused on describing what the Sangha is rather than the events of the founding. These could only be credited when linked to the events. Candidates should be careful in reading the question.

### **Question 3(b)**

This question asked candidates to analyse the significance of the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma. Candidates engaged well with the question and were able to show understanding of a variety of ways that the preaching of the dhamma is important. Candidates were able to use specific examples to show the significance of these ways. Sometimes this was done in exploring and recognising the lack of significance for certain Buddhists. 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.

In some responses candidates explained the various teachings of the dhamma; in Q03(b) candidates should always be aware of the need to analyse.

Answer ALL questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

Read the following passage before answering the questions.

But who should be first to hear the message? He next recalled the five bhikkhus who had practised the penitential disciplines of tapas with him. They had fled from him in horror when he had taken his first meal, but he could not allow this rejection to cloud his judgment. He remembered how helpful and supportive they had been during their time together, and set out directly to find them. Hearing that they were now living in the Deer Park outside Varanasi (the modern Benares), he began his journey, determined to set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion and, as he put it, 'to beat the drum of the deathless Nibbana.' He did not expect much. The Buddha mistakenly believed that his teaching would only be followed for a few hundred years. But people had to be rescued, and the Buddha was compelled, by the very nature of the Enlightenment that he had achieved, to do what he could for them.

(Source: Extract adapted from 'Lives: Buddha' - Chapter 3, 'Enlightenment', Armstrong, K., Phoenix Press, 2002, Edexcel Anthology)

- 3 (a) Clarify the events illustrated in this passage surrounding the founding of the sangha.

You must refer to the passage in your response.

- (P1) - where the members were  
(P2) - turning of the wheel  
(P3) - promises made to them (10)

The events illustrated in this passage by Karen Armstrong surrounds the founding of the Sangha. This passage first shows how the first five bhikkhus, monks, were the ascetics that Gautama practiced asceticism with after leaving the palace in the search for enlightenment, fulfilling the stages of renunciation. The Buddha "remembered how helpful and supportive" the ascetics had been implying that he should help them reach enlightenment as it is the ultimate goal and provides the answers to life. The Buddha rejected asceticism in the first place as he found

it only caused suffering, or dukkha, which was something he was trying to escape.

The passage states that the Buddha didn't want anything to "cloud his judgement" which is ~~a theory rejected~~ a prominent theme in Buddhism as it is part of the 5 precepts, for example, to abstain from intoxicants that cloud the mind, showing that a clear head is needed to be able to diminish lower fetters and the 3 poisons; lobha, avija and dvesha (greed, hatred and ignorance). The By not letting his judgement be clouded the Buddha was able to go find the ascetics to "set the ~~Wheel~~ Wheel of the Dhamma" in motion, this is sharing his teachings, to be able to permit the sangha from people becoming bikkhus. The Buddha held his first sermon, or the first turning of the wheel, on the ~~mount~~ mount at the Deer Park which attracted followers and enabled the sangha, or the fourfold sangha consisting of bikkhus and bikkhunis (nuns) and laymen and laywomen, to grow and carry Buddhism on for ~~many~~ hundreds of years later. Therefore, this extract shows that the ~~four~~ sangha was first made up of the 5 ascetics the

Buddha previously practiced with and then it grew due to his teachings and sermons spreading. As well as the Buddhas enlightened body, Nirmanakaya, preventing him from ~~not~~ lying and hiding the truth to enlightenment.

(b) Analyse the significance of the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma. → teachings

~~→ Buddha~~ <sup>①</sup> significant → 1st turning of the wheel: (20) enlightenment + Thatagatagarba

x → 2nd Turning of the wheel: Yogacara School - perceptions + our mind projections

② - Buddhas last words ~ dhamma to teach us how to act

x - Not sig as the Buddha also taught ahimsa - but perished pork

③ ③ - The Buddhas + parable of the mustard seed  
" - " blind men + elephants

The Buddhas preaching of the ~~dhamma~~ dhamma, ~~teaching to~~ meaning teachings.

~~It is~~ <sup>is</sup> arguably ~~what~~ <sup>are</sup> significant as ~~this~~ the dhamma is one of the three refuges, or jewels, the others being the Buddha himself and the sangha, his following. This shows that the dhamma is a key aspect of buddhism and of the Buddhas preachings. I will argue this in this essay.

There is evidence that the Buddhas preaching of the dhamma is significant due to the 'first turning of the wheel of the dhamma' which set his beliefs ~~in motion~~ and teachings in motion for all his followers to take up and believe. This first turning of the wheel showed that enlightenment was possible to reach as long as we followed the Noble Eightfold path that would guide us there. As well as in realising

the four noble truths, these being; there is suffering in the world (dukkha), the cause of the suffering is tanha or craving (samudaya), there is a cure to ~~there~~ this suffering (nirodha) and to achieve it we must follow the eightfold path (maggā). This is significant as this helped the buddha achieve tathagata-garbha (buddha-nature) and enabled him to share this truth with everyone in preaching the first turning of the wheel of the dhamma. However, it can be argued that this is not as significant in comparison to the second turning of the wheel of the dhamma which is the Yogacara school founded by Asanga. This school teaches about the perceptions of the mind and how everything is just a projection of the mind and <sup>are</sup> not actually reality. This creates insight of the mind, just like vipassana meditation, which causes more ~~faculties~~ mental faculties to be unlocked, allowing for enlightenment to be possible to reach. This is more significant because it helps us open our minds to reach enlightenment which is one step further than the first turning of the wheel by the Buddha because he only states the way to ~~do~~ reach enlighten-

ment. Overall however, overall, the first turning of the wheel and the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma is more significant because without this the second turning would have not been able to happen.

The Buddha's last words as preachings of the dhamma are significant because they encourage us to find our own way to enlightenment. The Buddha stated that "everything is impermanent, seek your ~~own~~ <sup>own</sup> path to enlightenment with diligence". This shows that everything in the world is temporary and impermanent, anicca, which causes suffering. To alleviate this we have to use upaya, skillful means, and find a way to enlightenment that works for us. This is significant in the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma because being his last words shows that there is great importance in their meaning and it is something to always remember as a follower of Buddhism. However, ~~it is~~ the Buddha's preachings can also be interpreted to not be significant because the Buddha also taught ahimsa, the idea of non-violence, but ~~was~~ one answer for his death was that he ate some poisoned pork.

Does this mean that the Buddha is contradictory and ~~fitting~~ eating animals doesn't ~~count~~ count as ahimsa? ~~This shows that overall~~ In light of this however, the buddha's life story is not didactic and is a hagiography. It is told this way to show his significance and the significance of his teachings and preachings of the dhamma.

Furthermore, the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma is significant in his parables that he uses to show his meaning of key concepts.

For example, the parable of the mustard seed tells the story of a mother who is distraught by the death of her child and goes to the Buddha to try to bring them back. The Buddha states that he can do this if she brings him a single mustard seed from a household that hasn't experienced death. The woman is unable to do this and learns that life is impermanent and filled with suffering, which we must try to eradicate. This shows that the Buddha's teachings are significant because parables make them accessible for anyone to understand. <sup>In contrast,</sup> However,

The story of the blind men and the elephant show that what we perceive to be the truth may only be part of a greater picture.

This showing that the Buddha's preachings may only be a section of life's answers and not the full thing. However, the Buddha's <sup>parables</sup> ~~teachings~~ are significant because ~~the~~ they project his teachings of the dhamma and are easy to remember, ~~and~~ enabling everyone to understand showing that ~~the~~ the teachings are for everyone and must be significant.

Overall, the Buddha's preaching of the dhamma is significant as he is the central figure in Buddhism. Although Buddhism is an atheistic religion, it would have not been discovered to provide the answers for life which the Buddha showed in his turning of the first wheel, the parables and his last words.



The part (a) response is a clearly focused answer that utilises the extract well. It examines aspects of the extract in turn and is able to clarify the various points that are made. It is not necessary to cover every aspect of the extract - the candidates are able to choose to focus on a couple of aspects. This response is able to fully meet the requirements of the level descriptor. The candidate is able to bring in their wider knowledge and focus the answer well.

The part (b) response is detailed in meeting the requirements of a Level 5 answer. There is a good balance between AO1 and AO2. The candidate is able to meet the demands of Level 5.

This candidate is able to tie the aspects which they are exploring to the question at different points. This is key in ensuring that the answer is focused around the demands of the question.



There may be a worry about spending too much time on part (a) of this question - candidates should be aware that this is worth 10 marks and an appropriate, rather than excessive, amount of time should be spent on it.

## **Question 4**

This question was worth 30 marks and asked candidates to evaluate the meaning and significance of the Eightfold Path in the contemporary world. This also included the added requirement to include links to Philosophy of Religion, Religion and Ethics, or New Testament Studies.

It should be noted that references to other religions do not count as a synoptic link, as it is impossible to study two religions. Where a candidate referenced aspects of Christianity, care was taken to ensure that this linked to the New Testament Studies part of the course rather than Christianity as a World Religion.

This question elicited interesting responses. Many candidates were able to provide good examples of the meaning and significance of the Eightfold Path in the contemporary world. Links were generally made to Ethics but other areas of the specification were explored, and while this opened up the possibility of a Level 5 mark, this did not guarantee such. The rest of the answer needed to be of a level standard, and while candidates were generally able to use information well they were slightly let down by the conclusion which may not have been a full and logical drawing together of justified ideas.

4 Evaluate the meaning and significance of the Eightfold Path in the contemporary world.

In your response to this question, you must include how developments in Buddhism have been influenced by **one** of the following:

- Philosophy of Religion
- Religion and Ethics
- New Testament Studies.

(30)

The Eightfold Path is a historic teaching of great importance in Buddhism, and acts as a collection of guiding principles aiding the attainment ~~of~~ of enlightenment. Aside from this, it is becoming particularly significant and useful in the contemporary world, for secular or atheist societies, as a reflection of the <sup>genocide</sup> last century and being witness ~~of~~ to some of the most horrific treatment of human and other life forms, many ~~of~~ <sup>are</sup> becoming intrigued into understanding the Buddhist Eightfold Path and applying it to promote peace, equanimity and stability.

The Eightfold Path can be categorised into three subcategories: moral conduct, wisdom and meditation. Right action and right speech suggest treating others respectfully and becoming aware and conscious of one's own behaviour towards others. Right speech may denote principles such as not to gossip or use profanity. This is similar to the Judeo-Christian teachings of the use of profanity, both implying that there is power and

potential harm caused by the words we ~~speech~~ speak, therefore encouraging that we become more conscious and considerate of the implications of our language. However the key difference is in the deliverance of such a principle, as Christianity encompasses commandments and the natural moral law which objectively dictate what actions are right or wrong. Whereas the Eightfold Path is more of a guide, offering potential ways to liberate the mind and attain nirvana, and therefore is a collection of suggestions as opposed to commandments because each individual is on their own personal journey to enlightenment and thus, a dogmatic approach would not effectively cater to this diversity. In this sense, the path is synonymous with teleological ethical systems such as Situation Ethics, expounded by Joseph Fletcher. Here, Fletcher argued against legalistic ethics but equally rejected antinomianism as 'purely ad hoc and casual.' Ultimately, the Eightfold path includes similar ideas as although there are no fixed rules, there is the guiding principle of nirvana, which is supposed to be the centre of all action and an individual should consider the implications of their actions on nirvana and the escape of samsara, when making moral decisions. Therefore the guiding principle of love in situation ethics - Fletcher stated that 'Only one thing is intrinsically good; namely love: nothing else at all,' - and this appears to be similar to the Buddhist notion that enlightenment is the

four.

Despite this, the Eightfold path appears to be less flexible when regarding right livelihood, which entails that the individual makes money in a morally acceptable way, therefore rejecting professions such as fishing which oppose ahimsa. Ahimsa is the belief in non-violence or non-harming, and teaches that all forms of violence are unacceptable due to the fundamental belief ~~that~~ is ~~anatta~~ anatta, which posits all life as one as there is no intrinsic 'self', just a collection of the five aggregates of form, perception, sensation, mental formations and consciousness, which are in a constant state of flux and thus, there is no self due to the impermanence of all things. This reflects the deep ecologists which are inspired by Buddhism, and appears to be extremely useful in the contemporary world ~~due to~~ due to the climate emergency we are currently facing. This approach to the environment, adopted by Arne Naess, which argues for the intrinsic value of the planet as opposed to its instrumental worth, is particularly helpful in helping tackle the climate problems, whilst encouraging individuals to take better care of the planet. This position is in direct opposition to that of dominion over the world, as seen in the Genesis creation story - 'rule over all the fish in the sea'. However, the anthropocentric

believed derived from Christianity dominion is arguably partly responsible or at least complicit in the current detrimental state of the universe, in regards to global warming and carbon pollution. Therefore, the ~~the~~ teachings of dharma, which can be derived from the Eightfold path, are somewhat more relevant to contemporary society than ever before. The 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, stated in an interview online that - "Destruction of your neighbour, or destruction of the so called enemy, is actually destruction of yourself." This summarises the interconnected nature of all life, and therefore the necessity to encourage harmonious living by not harming.

The middle path also teaches on meditation - right concentrating, and encourages individuals to participate in this ~~practise~~ practise to help attain nirvana. There are two main forms of meditation: samatha and vipassana. Samatha is appropriate for beginners, and therefore individuals in contemporary society who may not be as familiar with Buddhism, and encourages focusing the mind on a fixed subject to create tranquility and 'de-clutter' the autopiloted thoughts that often consume us. Vipassana is more sophisticated and is encouraged to be taught by a bhikkhu or monk, and consists of opening up the mind to different realms of understanding and insight into the nature of objective reality, as opposed to our impartial

perspective. This is similar to Immanuel Kant's noumena and phenomena, whereby he stated noumena, reality as it is, is actually impossible. However, the Eightfold Path teachings attempt to challenge this notion, encouraging individuals to take an objective stance to understand reality as it is. I think that the ~~proliferated~~ proliferation of concern of mental health in the contemporary world makes it perfectly suited to the teachings of meditation as they encourage letting go of fears and anxieties whilst attempting to dismantle the belief in an ego and identification with that.

To summarise, I think that the Eightfold path offers some incredibly useful techniques and strategies for dealing with the complexities of contemporary life, which is arguably in greater need for Buddhism due to materialism, which has increased desire or *tanha*, meaning that *dukkha* and the feeling of unsatisfactoriness is heightened. Also, the teachings of moral conduct (*sila*) in relation to the environment are especially useful and relevant to our current time which is in great need of such care. This reflects the nature of the path as somewhat eternal and fixed as it is equally applicable to contemporary society.



This response is able to evidence aspects of the Level 5 descriptor. While the candidate is able to use information well, they are slightly let down by the conclusion, which may not be a full and logical drawing together of justified ideas.

On the second page there is content that shows links to other aspects of the course. The candidate has also linked them well with the argument being made. These links do not guarantee a Level 5 mark but open up the possibility for such.



As this candidate does, please ensure that the links are a natural part of the discussion being undertaken.

## 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:

- Be prepared to make links to other components (papers) they have studied for Q04. Indicating in their answer that they are doing this is helpful.
- Read questions carefully to ensure they are answering the question set.
- Allocate sufficient time for all sections. There is no requirement to begin at Question 1 and work through the paper. Some candidates very obviously began with Section C. Whatever works best for the candidate is permissible.
- Ensure that the source is referred to but not regurgitated in Q03(a).
- Consider how they are appraising the evidence and arguments they are making in Q03(b) and Q04.

## Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>



