**Awareness Mystery Value (AMV)**

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| **Key Stage 3 Unit 8: What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it? [A&E]**  **This unit explores ideas about the nature of life on earth and relates them to religious and other beliefs** |
| **About this example**  This example is based around philosophical questions about suffering and life after death. It is intended for a **Year** 7 class. It was written by Dave Francis and incorporates learning objectives from the [Big Ideas for RE](https://www.reonline.org.uk/resources/putting-big-ideas-into-practice-in-religious-education/) Project. Additional ideas were provided by Jo Backus.  The focus here is on a comparison of teachings in three worldviews: Buddhism Humanism and Islam.  We wanted to build Y7’s depth of thinking about Buddhism, Humanism and Islam in an engaging way. To do this we decided to make use of the [‘Big Ideas for RE’](http://www.bigideasforre.org/) project materials. These ‘Big Ideas are like ‘lenses’ through which the content of different religions / worldviews are seen and examined. This in turn is intended to provide a means for deep learning and progression in the subject. In this way we ensure **religion and belief** are the focus of the learning.  The new exemplar described here focuses on Big Idea 6: ‘The Big Picture’ and its age-related statement which describes what students undertaking this unit will get to know and understand in greater depth:  *Many religions / worldviews provide a coherent account of what the universe is like and why it is as it is. These accounts may be called ‘grand narratives’. For many religious people the most important source of their big picture of the world is found in sacred texts, often believed to have been divinely inspired. Many people identify with narratives that deny the existence of any divine beings or predetermined purpose in life. Other people believe that science and reason can explain everything and that there is no need for religious explanations.* |
| **Where the example fits into the AMV programme of study**  This example connects with Areas of Enquiry A (Beliefs, Teachings and Sources) and E (Meaning, Purpose and Truth).  In terms of Big Ideas for RE, it connects with BI6, ‘The Big Picture’, which examines how religions / worldviews provide comprehensive accounts of how and why the world is as it is, and how their ‘grand narratives’ interpret and understand these traditions in different ways. |
| **Prior Learning**  Students will have appropriate ICT competency.  In *RE*, students may have completed units in the Primary School that include learning on Christianity, Humanism and Islam. They may not have had much direct teaching about Buddhism at this key stage. |

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| **Featured Religions / Beliefs** | **Focus ‘Key Concepts’** | | | |
| Humanism | **AT 1: Learning ABOUT religion** | | **AT 2: Learning FROM religion** | |
| Islam | A. Beliefs, teachings and sources | 🗸 | D. Identity, diversity and belonging |  |
| Buddhism | B. Practices and ways of life |  | E. Meaning, purpose and truth | 🗸 |
|  | C. Forms of expressing meaning |  | F. Values and commitments |  |
| **Key Question: *What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it?*** | | | | |
| **Supplementary Questions** | | | | |
| 1. What might be the different purposes of life on earth? 2. Why is there suffering in the world? 3. What beliefs do people have about life after death? 4. How did the world begin? | | | | |
| **Resources**   * YouTube Filosofix film ‘Ship of Theseus’: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGAnLY46zAk&list=PL1NXgjXDUNJk\_51d5AJzCj0Rl7avL5E9W&index=13](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGAnLY46zAk&list=PL1NXgjXDUNJk_51d5AJzCj0Rl7avL5E9W&index=13) * Understanding Humanism video, That’s Humanism - How do we know what is true?: <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/how-do-we-know-what-is-true/> * [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): Grand Narratives * YouTube film ‘Islamic Golden Age: Scientific Method’: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI0kwcr83R0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI0kwcr83R0) * [Information Sheet 1](#IS1): ‘A Muslim Grand Narrative’ * [Information Sheet 2](#IS2): ‘A Buddhist Grand Narrative’ * You Tube video ‘The Enlightenment of the Buddha’: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVKK-WVW2uw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVKK-WVW2uw) * Background information on Buddhism: [www.reonline.org.uk/knowledge/buddhist-worldview-traditions/](http://www.reonline.org.uk/knowledge/buddhist-worldview-traditions/) * [Task Sheet 2](#TS2): Respect Yourself Quiz * BBC film: My Life, My Religion: Islam: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mwkxn](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mwkxn) * Understanding Humanism video: How can I be Happy?: <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/how-can-i-be-happy/> * Understanding Humanism video: Afterlife: <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/afterlife/> * [Task Sheet 3](#TS3): Muslim Beliefs about Life After Death * [Task Sheet 4](#TS4): Buddhist Beliefs about Life After Death and the Creation of the World * YouTube video: How did life begin on Earth? by Prof. Brian Cox: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0GyMvq\_Fjg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0GyMvq_Fjg) * God and the Ultimate in different traditions: [www.reonline.org.uk/teaching-resources/concepts-of-god-and-the-ultimate/](http://www.reonline.org.uk/teaching-resources/concepts-of-god-and-the-ultimate/) * A Muslim understanding of the origins of life on earth: <https://islamonline.net/en/the-origin-of-life-an-islamic-perspective/> | | | | |

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| **Expectations. By the end of this sequence of learning:** | | |
| **[Developing] Students:** | **[Secure] Students:** | **[Exceeding] Students :** |
| * recognise important questions about the meaning of life; * suggest answers to big questions of life; * identify different views in religions / worldviews on the nature of life on earth; * provide good reasons for the views they have and the connections they make. | * ask questions about the meaning of religion and spirituality and suggest answers relating to the search for truth; * use reasoning and examples to express insights into the relationship between beliefs, teaching and philosophical issues; * suggest reasons for similar and different interpretations of scriptures and other important texts; * use reasoning and examples to express their own views on how Buddhism, Humanism and Islam have affected the world. | * evaluate questions about the meaning of religion and spirituality and suggest answers relating to the search for truth; * use reasoning and examples to show an ability to evaluate different insights into the relationship between beliefs, teachings and ethical issues; * analyse the different reasons given for similar and different interpretations of scriptures and other important texts; * use reasoning and several examples from differing viewpoints express their own views on how Buddhism, Humanism and Islam have affected the world. |

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| **Key Question: *What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it?*** | | | |
| **Supplementary Question (a) What might be the different purposes of life on earth?** | | | |
| **Learning objectives** | **Suggested activities for teaching and learning** | **Outcomes** | **References and notes** |
| **Lesson 1**  Students will:   * start to investigate the complex nature of a person’s life and choices; * begin to sketch out a ‘personal narrative’; * begin to investigate the possible purposes of life. | 1. Introduce the unit: investigation of possible answers to some of the biggest questions of life: What is the story of our world and how we came to exist in it? What is the universe like? Why is it as it is? Where’s it all going? Is there a life after death? Why is there so much suffering in the world?  Explain that students are going to investigate these questions in relation to contrasting views of life – Buddhism, Islam and Humanism. They will also have a chance to develop their own ‘Big Picture’ of the way things are. That is, their own ‘Grand Narrative’.  **ACTIVITY**  Show the short YouTube film [‘Ship of Theseus’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGAnLY46zAk&list=PL1NXgjXDUNJk_51d5AJzCj0Rl7avL5E9W&index=12) and ask the students such questions as:   * Are we the same person if all our atoms are now different from seven years ago? [e.g. People may have running narratives (or self-stories) which fit together their different experiences] * Is the *story* of our life who we are? * What *more* might there be? For example, do we have a ‘soul’? If so, what might that be?   Get some feedback from the class and then explain that we are exploring the idea of ‘narrative’, which is a story that connects different ideas or events. Ask students if they think we are all trapped in our own narrative. How much choice do they think they have in the way their lives run? How far are we all affected by (a) our encounter with other people and (b) our own thoughts?  Get some further feedback from the class then explain that ‘self-stories’ or ‘personal narratives’ can help answer ‘Who am I?’ whereas ‘grand narratives’ can help answer such questions as, ‘How did the universe come into being?’, ‘Who or what is God?’, ‘What is ultimate reality?, ‘What is the meaning and purpose of human life?’, ‘How should we live?’, ‘Is there a life after death?’ and so on.  **ACTIVITY**  Ask students to sketch a quick mind-map of their own personal narrative, i.e. their life so far. Ask them to include some key contextual features, such as family members, place of birth and where they have lived growing up, friends, likes and dislikes, things they would say they can do well, and so on.  Get some feedback from the class and start to investigate with them, a key question for this unit: what is the purpose of life on earth? Encourage them to identify what things in their own lives have had a *positive* impact on them. | Students:   * give their initial views on human nature and the possible meaning and purposes of life. | **Key vocabulary:** grand narrative, personal narrative, soul, spirit  ---- |
| **Lesson 2**  Students will:   * continue to investigate the complex nature of a person’s life and choices; * consider the implications of different beliefs on a person’s general view of the world; * continue to investigate the possible purposes of life. | 2. Remind the students of the difference between a personal narrative and a ‘grand narrative’. Explain that, for many people, our personal story is intimately related to a bigger picture; an idea of how and why things are the way they are. Depending on what you believe about the nature of the universe, you may make different choices about the way you live your life.  Ask the students, for example, how they think that the belief that every human being has an ‘immortal soul’ might have an impact on a person’s life.  Bring out a range of views about how people might treat each other and what attitudes they might have to the use of their own life.  Explain that they are going to investigate some contrasting religious and non-religious views on the ‘Big Picture’ of life so that they can develop their own thinking. Warning! These lessons may change your life!  **ACTIVITY**  Ask students to imagine that they have been granted permission to speak with ‘the wisest person on Earth’. They will be allowed to ask TWO questions. These questions should be ‘big’ questions; not ones that could be answered easily via an internet search engine. Ask them to think for themselves, on their own, for a while and to write down the questions they would like the answers to. Next, encourage them to compare their questions with a partner. Can they agree on TWO big questions to ask? Then move the pairs into groups of four. Give them some time to work out an agreed list of questions; put them in order of importance.  Get a question from each of the groups to put up on the board and then ask them to vote for one question to ask other than the one their group is putting forward. Provided that the ‘winning’ questions are really ‘Big Questions’ about the nature of the Universe, life and death, you can let students know that they will be investigating these questions over the next few lessons. Some other interesting questions might also be included – perhaps students can investigate these as part of an ongoing homework? Some questions might be quite specific, perhaps to do with climate change or of threats to humanity or to certain groups of people: these can be included in the wider investigations in this series of lessons.  Point out that one of the ways of investigating big questions is to find out what has already been said by the world’s great thinkers and traditions. Explain that they are going to be investigating three different ‘Big Pictures’ of the world as examples of how we might go about finding the best possible answers to the big questions of life: Buddhism, Islam and Humanism. Note that this is not to set one up against the other so much as to illustrate how human beings are constantly seeking understanding and deeper knowledge of how best to live in the context of the ultimate mysteries of life. There will be differences, but these three approaches may have more in common than students at first imagine.  **ACTIVITY**  Ask them to consider the idea of belief in God. Is it a ‘Yes I do believe’ or ‘No I don’t believe’ sort of question? Or does it depend on what is meant by the word God? Get them to define the word ‘God’ in pairs or threes and to write down an agreed definition.  Share answers in the wider class and point out any differences and similarities in their definitions. Point out the possible complexities and note that they will be returning to this kind of question. | Students:   * give their views on how particular beliefs about life can impact on behaviour; * ask ‘big questions’ about the meaning of life. | **Key vocabulary:** immortal soul, God  ---- |
| **Lesson 3**  Students will:   * start investigating the question, ‘What might be the different purposes of life on earth?’ in terms of a humanist ‘grand narrative’ * learn about the differences between such terms as ‘supernatural’, ‘superstitious’, ‘faith’ and ‘truth’ * engage with Humanist ideas on the importance of the scientific method and truth. | 3. Explain that in the is lesson, students are going to start investigating the question. ‘**What might be the different purposes of life on earth?’** and that we are going to begin with a Humanist ‘grand narrative’. Was this one of the ‘big questions’ – or something like it – that came out of their question forming activity?  Explain: A key feature of many ‘grand narratives’ is the idea that ‘there is more to life than meets the eye’. That is, there are forces acting on our lives – and life in general – that go beyond our complete understanding and may even be called ‘divine’ or ‘supernatural’ or ‘metaphysical’ – that is, going above or beyond the world that can be ‘physically’ sensed or measured. Most people in the world probably have some form of metaphysical belief, for example, in God, or life after death.  **ACTIVITY**  Ask students what other sorts of supernatural beliefs they know about, e.g., beliefs in ghosts, angels, other spiritual forces. Ask if there is a difference between ‘supernatural’ and ‘superstition’ and to name some superstitions that people have.  Tell students that superstitions are usually defined ‘irrational’ or ‘excessive’ belief in supernatural influences and explain that most traditional religions reject superstition and say that their beliefs and practices are not ‘irrational’, even if they cannot always be proved beyond doubt. That is why religions are often called ‘faiths’.  Refer to the ‘big questions’ that students identified in the previous lesson. Explain that the answers to big questions need *wisdom*, and one of the components of wisdom is *humility*. That is, however clever we think we may be as a species, our actual knowledge and understanding is always going to be *provisional*. Explain the terms ‘humility’ and ‘provisional’.  The trouble comes, some people say, when one group of people think they have sole access to ultimate truth, and other people are absolutely wrong. What do students think: is it possible that one group of people in the world have found the Truth about everything?  **ACTIVITY**  Show the short video, [That’s Humanism - How do we know what is true?](https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/how-do-we-know-what-is-true/) and ask students for their responses to such questions as:   * What are the two different views of the life that are contrasted in the film? * What examples are given to illustrate the power of the scientific method? * Do you think that some people who follow religions would disagree with this presentation? In what way? * Do you think that scientific methods are incompatible with religion? Why / why not? * In what ways does the scientific method demonstrate *humility*? * The video was made by Humanists UK, a group that believes that you don’t need religion to lead a good life: what do you think helps them to lead a good life?   **ACTIVITY**  Provide small groups of students with [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): ‘Grand Narratives’ and ask them to complete the column on Humanists, as far as they can. Ask them to bear in mind that not all people who call themselves ‘humanists’ believe exactly the same things! | Students:   * give reasons for beliefs that they have about the supernatural; * respond with reasons to beliefs expressed in a Humanists UK video. | **Key vocabulary:** grand narrative, supernatural, metaphysical, superstition, humility, provisional, scientific method, faith, truth  ----  **Notes** |
| **Lesson 4**  Students will:   * explore differences and similarities in Humanist and religious beliefs; * engage with ideas about historic Islamic contributions to science; * learn about Muslim teaching on human and divine wisdom. | 4. Remind the students about the Humanist belief in the power of the scientific method of testing hypotheses through controlled experimentation and the evaluation and re-evaluation of evidence. Do they think this is opposed to what religious people could believe? Why / why not?  Get some feedback from students and point out that many scientists today also identify as religious and that the very first scientists were pretty much all religious.  Explain that they are going to investigate how, in the case of Islam for example, followers of a religion can also believe in science and the power of the scientific method.  Show a part of the YouTube film [‘Islamic Golden Age: Scientific Method’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI0kwcr83R0) from 1’ 55” to 8’ 30”  **ACTIVITY**  Ask students what they can remember about ibn al-Haytham’s work [on inductive reasoning] and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni’s work [on the importance of preventing bias in experimentation]. Also ask about the work of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi [the base-ten ‘Arabic’ numerical system and the origins of algorithms, the use of decimals to record fractions and the invention of algebra].  Point out the from the earliest times of Islam, Muslims have been encouraged to take learning from wherever they find wisdom and that they have rarely been opposed to mathematical and scientific discovery. Muslims believe that one of the reasons Allah made people intelligent and self-aware, or Sentient, is so that they can discover the wonders of the natural world.  **ACTIVITY**  Provide students with [Information Sheet 1](#IS1): ‘A Muslim Grand Narrative’ and read it through with them, stopping after each paragraph to take any questions and briefly exploring possible answers to their questions.  Encourage them to work on pairs or threes to complete column two of their [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): ‘Grand Narratives’, using what they have learned from the discussion on the Information Sheet.  Get some feedback from the class in order to clarify their understanding, and compare with some of the Humanist views collected so far.  Finally, bring together the students thoughts on different purposes of life on earth, as far as they have explored so far.  **ACTIVITY**  Ask for their views on such questions as:  Where do you find purpose and meaning in life?  Where do Muslims and Humanists agree?  Where do they differ?  In what sense do both Humanists and Muslims have to show some ‘faith’? | Students:   * respond with reasons to beliefs expressed in a video about Islamic science; * provide an account of Muslim teaching on a range of big questions about life; * compare some similarities and differences in Humanist and Muslim beliefs. | **Key vocabulary:** scientific method, faith  ---- |

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| **Key Question: *What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it?*** | | | |
| **Supplementary Question (b) Why is there suffering in the world?** | | | |
| **Learning objectives** | **Suggested activities for teaching and learning** | **Outcomes** | **References and notes** |
| **Lesson 5**  Students will:   * learn about the story of the Buddha’s search for, and attainment of, enlightenment; * engage with Buddhist ideas on why there is suffering in the world and how to deal with it | 5. Point out that, for Buddhist, as for Muslims, there is no *necessary* conflict with the scientific method in practising religion, though there may well be differences in matters that go beyond what may be currently discovered through that method.  For example, what is the ‘purpose’ of life for Buddhists? Why is there so much suffering in the world and what can we do about it?  Introduce the Buddhist concept of ‘dukkha’ – that the world is full of suffering of one sort or another; even good things are temporary and will pass away, leaving us feeling dissatisfied.  Tell, or re-tell the story of Siddhartha Gautama’s quest for, and attainment of, enlightenment. You could show this 6 minute YouTube video, ‘[The Enlightenment of the Buddha](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVKK-WVW2uw)’.  **ACTIVITY**  In order to clarify their understanding, ask students such questions as:   * When Siddhartha was meditating, who tried to persuade him to give up his quest? [Mara – ‘Lord of Hell’] * When Prince Siddhartha was born, what was he predicted to become by Asita, the Seer [A great leader: a king or holy man] * How was the Prince protected from suffering in his childhood? [His father ensured he lived in luxury, never going out to see the real world] * What did the Prince see when he finally got outside the Palace? [An old woman, a diseased man, a dead body, a holy man] * When the Prince left the Palace and met some holy men, what method did he try to find the answer to the world’s suffering? [By joining them in making their bodies suffer through starving] * After 49 days of meditation what happened? [The Prince found the Middle Way, achieving peace through the stopping of wanting things, he ‘awoke’ and became enlightened; the Buddha]   **ACTIVITY**  Provide students with [Information Sheet 2](#IS2): ‘A Buddhist Grand Narrative’ and read it through with them, stopping after each paragraph to take any questions and briefly exploring possible answers to their questions.  Encourage them to work on pairs or threes to complete column three of their [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): ‘Grand Narratives’, using what they have learned from the discussion on the Information Sheet. | Students:   * talk about the story of the Buddha’s journey to enlightenment * provide an account of Buddhist teaching on a range of big questions about life. | **Key vocabulary:** enlightenment, dukkha (suffering or ‘unsatisfactoriness’), anicca (impermanence), anatta (no-self or soul)  ----  **Notes**  Depending on the group, you may or may not wish to take them through the Noble Truths, Eightfold Path and Links of Dependent Origination found in [Information Sheet 2](#IS2).  Buddhist interpret the word ‘dukkha’ in different ways, but here we are thinking about suffering and unsatisfactoriness being part of everyone’s experience of life.  Work on Task Sheet 1 could be completed or tidied up for homework. |
| **Lesson 6**  Students will:   * learn about the teaching of Buddhaghosa, a great Buddhist scholar; * begin to investigate their own personalities and tendencies; * think about ways of dealing with the suffering in life. | 6. Provide students with some feedback on the Grand Narratives sheet so far. Let them know that they are building up a picture of the three worldviews being studied and they should also be thinking about where they stand.  Ask them to spot where the similarities and differences are emerging amongst the different worldviews.  Point out that suffering appears to be built into the way the world is, and a lot of suffering would appear to take place through natural causes, including ‘natural disasters’ like earthquakes, fires, floods and so on, but what can be done about it? Part of the answer, for Buddhists, is to think about how we look at the things that cause us distress. Is there something we can do, ourselves, that could make things better or worse?  Explain that in the 5th Century CE, that is, around 800 to 900 years after the Buddha lived, a great Buddhist scholar named Buddhaghosa devised a way of analysing people’s personalities and fitting advising certain methods of meditative practice to help them make spiritual progress. In honour of his teaching this unit includes a modern version of Buddhaghosa’s methods and teaching. This is partly in fun, and represents a vast oversimplification of his advice, but may prove useful in thinking about students’ own approach to life!  **ACTIVITY**  Provide them with a copy each of [Task Sheet 2](#TS2): the ‘Respect Yourself! Quiz’. (You can either include the advice section on the back, or reveal it by copying the information into a display on the board.)  Encourage them to fill in the quiz, without thinking too much about the right or best answer, just choosing a, b or c as a ‘best fit’ answer. They don’t have to show anyone else their results. They then use the guide on the next page to see how many 1’s, 2’s or 3’s their answers produced. (They don’t add them up!) Then they can read what Buddhaghosa’s advice might have been. Do they think their reading fits or not? How many students in the class think it was pretty accurate? And what do they make of the ‘solution’? Might this be a way forward and help at least in some small way to deal with the suffering they encounter in life?  **ACTIVITY**  Engage the students in some simple reflective practice, asking them to silently contemplate the advice they have received, sitting up straight, but relaxed, and breathing steadily. Do not prolong it if any appear uncomfortable. Get some feedback from the students on the experience and ask for views about meditation as a practice: what benefits do they think it might have? Encourage them to make an account of their ideas in writing or drawing. | Students:   * complete the ‘Respect Yourself!’ quiz and consider how well the related advice fits; * participate in simple reflective or meditative practice; * make a record of possible benefits of meditation as a practice. | **Key vocabulary:** enlightenment, dukkha (suffering or ‘unsatisfactoriness’), anicca (impermanence), anatta (no-self or soul), Buddha, meditation  ----  **Notes**  There are many forms of reflective or meditative techniques; some are specifically religious in nature and others non-religious. It is important to take care that parents are aware of this part of the course and that they are happy for their children to participate. Usually, alternative activities can be found for those who are uncomfortable for any reason with meditation practices; though most can be reassured through discussions. |
| **Lesson 7**  Students will:   * learn about Buddhist, Muslim and Humanist views on how best to live life in times of difficulty. | 7. Explain that, for many Buddhists, the remedy to the ‘unsatisfactoriness’ of life is to follow the Buddha’s teaching on the Eightfold Path’ (see [Information Sheet 2](#IS2): ‘A Buddhist Grand Narrative’ – 2nd page for the list).  **ACTIVITY**  Focus on point 5 ‘Right Livelihood’ and ask students what jobs they think a Buddhist should do and which ones they shouldn’t do in order to avoid or minimise suffering in the world. Encourage then to consider whether following this path would also alleviate some of the so-called ‘natural’ disasters in the world, e.g., those caused by ‘climate change’.  After some discussion, tell them about the ‘Bodhisattva Vow’ in some forms of Buddhism (see notes). This can be seen as a form of ‘selflessness’ for the good of others. This promise or ‘vow’ to be unselfish is found in many religions / worldviews.  Show two short films:  BBC: [My Life, My Religion: Islam](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02mwkxn)  Understanding Humanism: [How can I be Happy?](https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/how-can-i-be-happy/)  Ask to students to say how (a) Muslims and (b) Humanists try to reduce suffering in the world and then to write down their thoughts. Bring out some key points from the film about the possible meanings of life and how people can best live their life when there is so much suffering going on.  **ACTIVITY**  Encourage them to go back to [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): ‘Grand Narratives’ and to adjust their answers to items 4, ‘What human beings should do to lead a good life’ and 5, ‘Why there is evil and suffering in the world’, in the light of their learning.  Where do they all agree and what differences are there? | Students:   * compare some similarities and differences amongst Buddhist, Humanist and Muslim beliefs. | **Key vocabulary:** selflessness, bodhisattva, nirvana  ----  **Notes**  The Bodhisattva vow is a promise made by some Buddhists following the Mahayana ('Great Vehicle’) tradition, to turn away from their own attainment of Nirvana and to return to another life in order to help bring all beings along the path to enlightenment. So a bodhisattva, in this understanding, is one who strives to liberate all beings from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. |

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| **Key Question: *What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it?*** | | | |
| **Supplementary Question (c) What beliefs do people have about life after death?** | | | |
| **Learning objectives** | **Suggested activities for teaching and learning** | **Outcomes** | **References and notes** |
| **Lesson 8**  Students will:   * participate in class discussions about mysteries of life, including life after death * learn about some Buddhist, Muslim and Humanist beliefs about life after death. | 8. When students engaged in the question-forming activity, was one of the questions to do with life after death? It’s worth looking into anyway!  **ACTIVITY**  Engage students in an opinion continuum activity: ask them to stand along an imaginary line in the classroom according to their view on the following statements, with ‘Yes, I agree’ at one end and ‘No I disagree’ at the other (Make a selection from this list – you need not cover all of them!):   * There are such things as ghosts * All people who say God talks to them are mad * This planet has been visited by beings from another world * Science will one day be able to answer all the mysteries in the word * Nobody could hypnotise me * It is possible to contact the dead * Nobody can reliably predict the future * The stories of Jesus’ resurrection are all made up * Healing is all in the mind * I believe in some form of life after death.   After each question, encourage a few students to justify where they stand and let students change their mind on where they stand if they wish.  Leave enough time for students to choose one or more of the statements they have discussed, copy into their books and then to write their own views on the topic(s) chosen.  For homework they should find out more about what Buddhists, Muslims and Humanists say about life after death and adjust their answers to the last item on [Task Sheet 1](#TS1): Grand Narratives, ‘What happens to a person’s body and spirit when they die?’ | Students:   * give their views with reasons on a range of mysteries and puzzles in life; * listen to the views of others with respect; * deepen their understanding of arguments relating to questions that go beyond immediate or secure scientific conclusions. | **Key vocabulary:** voodoo, resurrection, healing, paradise, nirvana  ----  **Notes**  The continuum activity can be quite lively; ensure students practise listening to each other’s views respectfully! |
| **Lesson 9**  Students will:   * consolidate their learning about a range of beliefs about life after death; * make comparisons between different worldviews. | 9. Explain that this session focusses on an investigation of different answers to the question about what happens after death. Ask students for their findings relating to Buddhist, Muslim and Humanist views on this question and conduct a straw poll of students’ views, noting that they are entitled to change their minds, if not today, then in the light of subsequent experience in life.  Show the students this short film from ‘Understanding Humanism’: [Afterlife](https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/films/afterlife/) and ask them such questions as:   * Why do Humanists say they do not believe in life after death? * Are there scientific reasons for not believing in life after death? * What things are said to be wonderful about life here and now? * What do Humanists say they should try to do while they are alive? * Do you think all Humanists are atheists (i.e. people who believe there is no God)? Why /Why not? (Bring the idea of *agnosticism* into the discussion. Why might some Humanists say they are agnostics rather than atheists?)   Provide students with [Task Sheet 3](#TS3), ‘Muslim Beliefs about Life After Death’. Read the information through with them and ask them to complete the questions at the end. Encourage them to write a longer answer to Q.9, perhaps finishing this one for homework. | Students:   * deepen their understanding of different views about life after death; * compare Humanist and Muslim views. | **Key vocabulary:** akhirah, paradise, nibbana / nirvana  ---- |

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| **Key Question: *What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it?*** | | | |
| **Supplementary Questions (c) What beliefs do people have about life after death? and (d) How did the world begin?** | | | |
| **Learning objectives** | **Suggested activities for teaching and learning** | **Outcomes** | **References and notes** |
| **Lesson 10**  Students will:   * learn about Buddhists beliefs about some of life’s big mysteries; * research a range of different religious and non-religious responses to the big questions of life. | 10. Check the answers to students’ responses to the questions about Muslims beliefs and explain that they are now going to investigate and compare some Buddhist views on life’s big mysteries.  Provide students with [Task Sheet 4](#TS4), ‘Buddhist Beliefs about Life After Death and the Creation of the World’. Read the information through with them and ask them to complete the questions at the end. Encourage them to write a longer answer to Q.8.  Encourage those who finish first to check through their answers and then to extend their knowledge and understanding of Buddhism, Humanism or Islam through reading of an appropriate text book. See, e.g., RE Today’s [‘Examining Religion and Belief’](https://shop.retoday.org.uk/category/.erab.se) series.  Leave time at the end of the session to get feedback from students on their answers. Point out how stories told by followers of the worldviews being studied often relate to a ‘big picture’ of how things really are according to each tradition. | Students:   * give an account of Buddhist responses to some of life’s big mysteries;   identify some similarities and differences when comparing Buddhist, Humanist and Muslim guidance on living a good life. | **Key vocabulary:** nibbana / nirvana, meditation, rebirth  ---- |
| **Lesson 11**  Students will:   * learn about the role of photosynthesis in the growth and expansion of life; * consider religious responses to scientific accounts of the origins of life on earth; * consider an interpretation of Qur’anic teaching about life. | 11. Explain that we have been investigating mysteries of the universe from a range of different perspectives and have started to think about how the world came into being.  Show this short YouTube film: [How did life begin on Earth?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0GyMvq_Fjg) by Prof. Brian Cox.  Recap the main points with the students; first that “No one knows exactly how life on earth emerged.” Note the role played by photosynthesis, driving “the evolution of complexity” and ultimately making human life possible.  Ask the students whether they think Muslims and Buddhists would disagree with Cox’s view and why.  Is it the case that science tends to look at ‘how’ things happen and religion and philosophy investigate ‘why’ things happen?  But what is the answer to the question ‘WHY did life begin on earth?’ Students should know enough by now to say how most (a) Humanists, (b) Muslims and (c) Buddhists might answer this question. Get views from the class.  The ‘why’ question could simply be answered ‘No one knows’, or ‘It’s a meaningless question’. But for some religious people, the ultimate purposes of life on earth are part of the ‘Big Picture’ of life that involves belief in God as Creator of the universe and everything in it. The Islam Online website contains a Muslim understanding of [The Origin of Life](https://islamonline.net/en/the-origin-of-life-an-islamic-perspective/).  Take students through some of the key points, for example:   * The Qur’an comes from Allah so provides all the people need to know * The Qur’an says that the origin of space and the earth is to found in Allah * There are things in the Qur’an that we are only now beginning to understand * The Qur’an uses physical aspects of nature to illustrate spiritual principles * The human concept of time is a limited one. Allah stands above time as we understand it * Human beings have been created with intelligence, better to discover the wonders of the natural world * According to the Qur’an, ‘Allah knows best’, so all human beings can do is study, research, test and reflect * Allah caused the creation of the universe and set up its laws, so science should increase faith not diminish it.   After some discussion, encourage students to write their own notes on ‘A Muslim Understanding of the Origin of Life.’ | Students:   * identify differences and similarities between religious and scientific accounts of the origins of life; * compare a range of answers to the question ‘Why did life begin on earth?’; * write notes on a Muslim understanding of the origin of life. | **Key vocabulary:** photosynthesis, creation, evolution  ----  **Notes**  Encourage the students to investigate more on the ‘how’ question in their own time by checking out the [‘The Entire History of the World’](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_aOteuWIY8ITg7DQQspG1g) YouTube channel and especially the [‘How did life begin’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZCeOUSYb4g) video.  They can find out more about [God and the Ultimate](http://www.reonline.org.uk/teaching-resources/concepts-of-god-and-the-ultimate/) in different traditions on RE:ONLINE. |
| Lesson 12  Students will:   * revise key teachings from the unit’s study; * give examples and their own views on what they have learnt. | 12. Encourage students to make a new ‘best copy’ of their answers to [Task Sheet 1](#TS1).  Extension questions:   1. Give an example of how religion is important to some people when thinking about the purposes of life 2. Compare a humanist / non-religious view of why there is suffering in the world with a religious one 3. Muslims believe that Qur’an was dictated to Muhammad by the Angel Jibril. Why might Muslims interpret some of the Qur’an’s verses in different ways? 4. Why do you think Buddhist teaching about meditation has been influential in today’s world? 5. In your studies of Buddhism, Humanism and Islam:    * what has impressed you most?    * what has made you think further about the Grand Narratives and personal ones?   Give reasons for your answer. | Students:   * offer summaries of key points of Humanist, Muslim and Buddhist worldviews; * provide arguments, evidence and examples to justify their own views on a range of big questions of life. |  |

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| **RECORD OF ATTAINMENT** | | |
| **KS3 Unit 8: What do people believe about life and the place of religion and beliefs within it? [A&E] Year 9** | | |
| **[Developing] Students:** | **[Secure] Students:** | **[Exceeding] Students :** |
| * recognise important questions about the meaning of life; * suggest answers to big questions of life; * identify different views in religions / worldviews on the nature of life on earth; * provide good reasons for the views they have and the connections they make. | * ask questions about the meaning of religion and spirituality and suggest answers relating to the search for truth; * use reasoning and examples to express insights into the relationship between beliefs, teaching and philosophical issues; * suggest reasons for similar and different interpretations of scriptures and other important texts; * use reasoning and examples to express their own views on how Buddhism, Humanism and Islam have affected the world. | * evaluate questions about the meaning of religion and spirituality and suggest answers relating to the search for truth; * use reasoning and examples to show an ability to evaluate different insights into the relationship between beliefs, teachings and ethical issues; * analyse the different reasons given for similar and different interpretations of scriptures and other important texts; * use reasoning and several examples from differing viewpoints express their own views on how Buddhism, Humanism and Islam have affected the world. |
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**Task Sheet 1: Grand Narratives**

Most traditional religions or worldviews have established sets of beliefs about life, the universe and everything. As you learn more about Humanist, Muslim and Buddhist worldviews, fill in the boxes below. Remember that there is often a range of opinion WITHIN as well as BETWEEN worldviews, but here you can showing your understanding of their beliefs in broad terms.

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| **Area of Belief** | **Humanist Big Picture** | **Muslim Big Picture** | **Buddhist Big Picture** |
| 1. How the universe and human beings came into existence |  |  |  |
| 1. The existence and nature of God / Allah |  |  |  |
| 1. How we can know about the meaning and purposes of life |  |  |  |

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| 1. What human beings should do to lead a good life |  |  |  |
| 1. Why there is evil and suffering in the world |  |  |  |
| 1. The existence of supernatural beings or powers, such as angels |  |  |  |
| 1. What happens to a person’s body and spirit when they die |  |  |  |

**Information Sheet 1: A Muslim Grand Narrative**

Islam teaches that Allah is the creator and that human beings are the best of his creation.

The Qur’an includes 99 names for Allah, each describing a particular quality. For example, Allah is *transcendent,* *just, immanent, omnipotent*, *beneficent, merciful* and *wise.*

Allah provided guidance for humans on how to live a good life through messengers and books.

The messengers of Allah include several of prophets in the Old Testament / Tanakh, such as Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses). Muslims also respect Isa (Jesus) as a prophet.

The last and greatest of the prophets was Muhammad, who received the final revelation from Allah, which was written down in the Qur’an.

The Qur’an requires ibadah (service / faith in action) of all Muslims. This includes key obligations such as *Salah* (prayer), *Sawm* (fasting), *Zakah* (charitable giving), and also everyday matters such as hygiene and modesty.

The *Hadith* are writings about Muhammad’s life and the *Sunnah* give the customary practices of the Prophet. Both of these sources are important guides to following Muhamad’s example.

According to the Qur’an, Allah has control of the world, so suffering in this life has a purpose that may go beyond human understanding. Muslims sometimes see suffering as a test of faith, or perhaps as a punishment for wrongdoing. In any event it is important for Muslims to show patience and faith; these are the characteristics that will bring reward in the afterlife.

Allah’s will is communicated to the prophets by angels. Angels are very important to in Islam, particularly to Sunni Muslims, many of whom believe that they each have two personal angels. One sits on the right shoulder, keeping a record of all the good things the person has done and the other sits on the left shoulder, recording all the bad deeds.

This information is given to Allah, who will judge whether the person will go to Paradise or Hell.

**Information Sheet 2: A Buddhist Grand Narrative**

Human beings are neither essentially evil or essentially good, but have tendencies towards greed, hatred and delusion that can be replaced by kindness, compassion and wisdom. Life is characterised by ‘three marks’: dukkha (suffering or ‘unsatisfactoriness’), anicca (impermanence) and anatta (no-self or soul).

Humans are bundles of physical body, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness, which are all changing.

Our actions, both good and bad, lead to consequences in this life and in future lives. This is known as the law of karma, or ‘action’. Although there is no unchanging soul, these processes of cause and effect lead to experiencing many lives. There is a way out of this situation to a state of peace and no more rebirth, known as nirvana or nibbana, which can be experienced in this life, as the Buddha did.

The Four Noble Truths and the links of dependent origination (see below) explain how this works.

There are many different traditions in Buddhism, simplified into two: Theravada and Mahayana. In Theravada, the ultimate aim or purpose is to reach nirvana / nibbana and become an arhat, a ‘worthy one’. In Mahayana, the ultimate aim is to become a bodhisattva, a ‘being of enlightenment’, who dedicates their lives to liberating others, and eventually to become a Buddha.

There is not just one world, but many worlds, with many levels of existence, and in Mahayana Buddhism many universes, some with active Buddhas and some without. There is no supreme creator God behind it all, though some Buddhists say there is an underlying Buddha-nature within all. Gods (with a small g) and similar beings are one of the life forms in the universes, but like humans and animals, are mortal and not all-powerful or all-knowing. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are many Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the universes who can help people who call upon them.

Buddhism is sometimes referred to as a philosophy rather than a religion, and there many profound types of philosophy which developed over the centuries. However, the historical Buddha refused to discuss issues or ‘ultimate questions’ such as whether the universe was eternal or infinite, whether a Buddha could be said to exist after death, or the exact relationship between the physical body and the self, as this wasted time that should be spent on getting on with getting rid of greed, hatred and delusion and practising kindness and meditation.

* **The Four Noble Truths**
  1. Life involves suffering (*Dukkha*).
  2. The origins of suffering lie in wanting, which is made more intense by greed, hatred and ignorance (*Samudaya*)
  3. The ending of suffering is possible (*Nirhodha*).
  4. The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to end suffering and become enlightened (*Magga*).
* **The Noble Eightfold Path consists of:**
  1. Right Understanding (seeing the world as it is, in terms of the Four Noble Truths).
  2. Right Thought (commitment to follow the path).
  3. Right Speech (truthfulness, gentle and useful speech).
  4. Right Action (following the Five Precepts with love and compassion - don’t kill, steal, lie, commit adultery or become intoxicated).
  5. Right Livelihood (avoiding work that causes harm or injustice, choosing work that is beneficial to others).
  6. Right Effort (avoiding bad thoughts, encouraging good).
  7. Right Mindfulness (attentiveness and awareness).
  8. Right Meditation (training the mind in meditation).
* **The links of dependent origination** is acomplex Buddhist philosophy of cause and effect (*karma*), where one state of mind and being inevitably leads to another. It is explained well in the online [Encyclopedia of Buddhism](https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Wheel_of_Life). In very brief summary, it explains how, once a person is born, they immediately begin to be conscious of different sensations. Using the senses, people start to become attached to things which give pleasure, and want to avoid what is unpleasant. This leads to forms of suffering when people don’t get what they desire. Reactions to these states of mind and being create the energies that determine how one life leads to rebirth in another form. And so a new life comes into existence and the whole process of birth, aging and death begins again. For Buddhists, the only way to escape this cycle is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

**Task Sheet 2: Respect Yourself!**

The Buddhist teacher, Buddhaghosa (C5th CE), made meditation practice fit the personality. There are, he said, at least three different sorts of people.

To find out what sort of person you might be, try this quiz, based on Buddhaghosa's teaching.

Put a circle around the letter that best describes you at the moment. Be honest! Ask a friend to help if you get stuck.

1. When you walk, do you:
   1. move gently and evenly with a bit of a spring in your step
   2. move quickly and heavily as though leaving your footprints in the ground
   3. move slowly and hesitantly as though wondering what the next step will bring?
2. When you are sitting down do you look:
   1. straight and a little tense
   2. as though you are lost
   3. relaxed and friendly?
3. When you wake up in the morning, do you:
   1. curl up in a ball, unwilling to get up
   2. make a grunting noise and go back to sleep, sprawled face down
   3. jump out of bed straight away?
4. When you have to cook a meal or make something from materials such as wood or metal, do you:
   1. work inaccurately, with confused and clumsy movements
   2. work carefully without hurrying
   3. work quickly and a little unevenly?
5. Are the clothes you are wearing now:
   1. quite tight fitting
   2. loose, baggy style
   3. neither too tight nor too loose?
6. When you eat, do you tend to:
   1. enjoy the taste of sweet or fatty foods, savouring each mouthful
   2. stuff the food in quickly, not paying much attention to the taste
   3. let your mind wander on to other things, slopping your food around a bit?
7. When you meet a person for the first time, do you:
   1. notice all their minor faults
   2. let yourself be swayed by the opinion of your friends
   3. look at their good points, not really noticing any faults?

*Now turn over and read Buddhaghosa’s advice >*

Give yourself marks as follows:

Q1. a3 b2 c1

Q2. a2 b1 c3

Q3. a3 b1 c2

Q4. a1 b3 c2

Q4. a1 b3 c2

Q5. a2 b1 c3

Q6. a3 b2 c1

Q7. a2 b1 c3

Did you get MOSTLY 1’s, 2’s or 3s?

**Mostly 3’s.** On the bad side, you can be quite a greedy person, a little bit conceited and unreliable. However, you are capable of great generosity, cheerfulness and honesty. You should meditate on good moral acts and not shut yourself off completely from the suffering in the world.

**Mostly 2’s.** you can be quite mean and angry when you are in a bad mood and you don’t always give people due praise for their achievements. All the same, you are a loyal friend and capable of great wisdom and intelligence. You should meditate on friendliness to others, compassion and fairness. Work on making yourself feel peaceful.

**Mostly 1’s.** Sometimes lazy and stubborn, you can get over-excited about some things. You worry too much! But never mind; you are good company most of the time and you usually get things done in the end. Try mindful breathing to calm yourself down. Try to get things in perspective and focus your mind.

**Task Sheet 3: Muslim Beliefs about Life After Death**

Read the following account and answer the questions at the end.

Muslims believe in Allah, his angels, his books, his messengers and in life after death. They believe in God’s *tawhid* (one-ness and unity). God’s name is never to be misused. He can be known by many ‘beautiful names’ (7:180), such as the Provider, the Loving, the Appreciative, the Wise, the Victorious, the Forgiving, the Beneficent, the Truth, the Slayer and the Giver of Peace. There are said to be 100 such names, 99 of which are known to humankind.

Life after death is known as *akhirah*. Muslims should have no doubt that Allah has the power to raise people from the dead. He created human life from dust, sperm, blood and flesh. He appoints each individual’s allotted life-span. He pours down rain in the desert and turns a barren waste into a place teeming with life:

*This is so because Allah is the Reality. It is He who gives life to the dead, and it is He who has power over all things. And truly the Hour of Judgement will come, there can be no doubt about it, or about the fact that Allah will raise up all who are in the graves (22:5-7).*

The *akhirah* will be quite different from this life:

*Then when the Trumpet is blown, there will be no more relationships between them that day, nor will one ask after another! (23:101)*

Nevertheless, it may be encouraging to think of heaven in earthly terms. For those who have lived in submission to Allah, the Qur’an paints a picture of heavenly bliss, particularly for those used to a life in desert lands: ‘their reward is in Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They are fed constantly with fruits from the Garden. And they have pure and holy companions and they live there forever’ (2:25):

*Enter the Garden of Paradise, you and our wives, in beauty and rejoicing. To them will be passed round dishes and goblets of gold. There will be there all that the soul could desire, all that the eyes could delight in, and there you will live (43:70ff).*

But for those who have turned their backs on the messengers and signs of Allah:

*The sinners will be in the punishment of Hell, to dwell therein. In no way will the punishment be lightened for them, and in despair they will be there overwhelmed … And those whom they call on besides Allah have no power of intercession (43:74-75, 86).*

*Therefore do I warn you of a Fire blazing fiercely. None shall reach it but those most unfortunate ones who give the lie to Truth and turn their backs (92:14-16).*

How long will it be before the dead are raised up? The Qur’an indicates that there is a barrier, called the *barzakh*, which divides those who have died from the time of Judgement. Once dead, a person cannot pass back over this barrier in to life, but must wait for God’s Mercy:

*When death comes to one of them, he says ‘O my Lord! Send me back to life in order that I may work righteousness in the things I neglected.’ By no means! Before them is a Barrier till the Day they are raised up (23:99-100).*

No one knows when that Day will be, but when it comes, Allah’s Judgement will be swift:

*To Allah belongs the Mystery of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour of Judgement is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker (16:77).*

In the meantime, Muslims prepare for Judgement by being faithful to Allah, keeping to their duty and doing their best to live out the virtues taught in the Holy Scriptures, namely: truthfulness, justice, mercy, kindness, compassion for all those in need, generosity, forgiveness, humility, chastity, modesty, patience, unity with fellow Muslims and respect for those who believe in other honourable faiths.

Answer the following questions using full self-explanatory sentences:

1. What is the Muslim word for life after death?
2. Choose TWO of the ‘beautiful names’ (from the list in the first paragraph above) that Muslims give to Allah, and say how they may be relevant to their beliefs about life after death.
3. Why, according to Muslims, is Allah able to give new life to those who have died?
4. In what way will life after death be different from this life, according to the Qur’an?
5. The Qur’an uses picture language to portray the life after death. What sort of things await (a) Muslims (i.e. those who are obedient to Allah) and (b) sinners?
6. What is the *barzakh*?
7. When, according to Muslims, will the Day of Judgement be?
8. Give THREE things that Muslims should do in preparation for the afterlife.
9. What is there in this account that Humanists might agree with?

**Task Sheet 4: Buddhist Beliefs about Life After Death and the Creation of the World**

Read the following account and answer the questions at the end.

The Buddha taught that there were more important questions about life than worrying over whether there is a God who created the world or whether there is life after death.

At the time of the Buddha there was a strong belief in Brahma, the creator god. The Buddha accepted that there may be a god Brahma, but not that he created the universe. It is more likely, he said, that Brahma was the first being to be reborn in the world and then, when others arrived, he believed that he had created them by his wish! *(Digha Nikaya 3:2ff.)*

The Buddha was once questioned by a monk called Malunkyaputta. The monk threatened to give up the Buddha’s Path unless he would tell him whether the world had a beginning and an ending. The Buddha responded with a parable:

*A man was once pierced by a poisoned arrow and his friends immediately sent for a surgeon. But the man said, “I will not have this arrow pulled out until I know the name and the clan of the man who shot this arrow … I will not have it pulled out until I know of the bow-string ... the type of arrow … the feathers … and the type of arrow head.” In the end, that man died, and he still didn’t know the answers to his questions (Majjhima-Nikaya 1:63).*

For the Buddha, questions of the origins of the universe, whether it would last for ever and so on, were not so important, What was important was the truth that birth, decay and death were in the world, along with sorrow, grief and despair. What was important was the way that the Buddha had taught to overcome suffering. The Buddha’s Path led to calming, to supreme wisdom and to Nibbana. No questions about how life began were more important than this.

In any case, Buddhists believe that our experience of this world is somewhat illusory. Our limited sense cannot experience the universe as it *really* is. Buddhists do believe that worlds evolve and follow a pattern of decay, death and rebirth. To this extent there is no quarrel with modern scientific views of life on earth, but Buddhists say there is a lot more to life than can be measured with scientific instruments.

Buddhist believe that meditation can help a person come to a clearer understanding of the Buddhist teachings about the nature of reality and even about life after death. To understand the Buddhist notion of rebirth it is important to focus on the ‘karmic’ energy which drives the processes of life. What is it that caused life to occur on earth in the first place? Why is it that everything that is born, grows old and dies? What forces lie behind the evolution of life on earth?

For Buddhists, the answers to these questions are bound up in the idea of desire. For as long as creatures continue to *want* things, according to the Buddha, they cannot find peace. The way to true peace is to overcome selfish desires. Once selfish desires are subdued, a moral life can be led and peace can be realised.

This is at the heart of the Buddhist teaching about life after death. When a person dies, their body is an empty shell. The body cannot be reborn. But the desires that a person had and the consequences of the things they did, live on. These desires and consequences are said to take a new form and become embodied in a new life. This is known as rebirth.

The idea is explained further by the saintly monk Nagasena, who is said to have lived in the 2nd century BCE, but whose ‘conversations’ with a Greek king were written down much later (c.10th century CE: the *Milindapanha*). The Greek king, named Milinda in the text, asks, ‘When someone is reborn … is he the same as the one who just died, or is he another?’ Nagasena tells the king that he is neither the same nor another. He tells the king to think of himself as a newly born baby, then as a fully grown man. In one sense, it is the same person, but in another sense, they are quite different. Nagasena says, it is like a lamp which burns all night long. As the night goes on it is the same lamp, but a different flame, which is burning.

Put in modern terms we might say that energy, once created, cannot be destroyed; it has to go somewhere. But for Buddhists, the karmic energy that we create can come to rest in peace, in *Nibbana* (*Nirvana*), once the flame of desire has been extinguished.

The Buddha taught his older disciples to prepare for death before it was too late:

*You are going to meet Death. There is no resting place on your way, and you have no provision for the journey. Make therefore an island for yourself. Hasten and strive. Be wise. With the dust of impurities blown off, and free from sinful passions, you will be free from birth that must die, you will be free from old age that ends in death (Dhammapada 237f).*

Answer the following questions using full self-explanatory sentences:

1. How did the Buddha challenge the idea that the world was created by Brahma?
2. In the Buddha’s story of the man shot by an arrow, what was the man’s fatal mistake (apart from being in the way of an arrow!)?
3. For the Buddha, what was more important than questions about the universe?
4. For Buddhists (and many others), why is it that people cannot experience the world as it *really* is?
5. For Buddhists, what is driving the processes of life, death and rebirth?
6. When you think of yourself as a baby, in what ways are you (a) a different person and (b) the same person?
7. Summarise in your own words what the Buddha taught his followers to do to prepare for death.
8. What is there in this account that Humanists and Muslims might agree with?