



# Places of worship —teacher's notes

*These notes follow the powerpoint slides on the [Windows into Buddhism](#) website.*

1. When Buddhists visit places of worship they always make offerings of some kind. The most common forms of offering are candles, flowers, food, and money.
2. Buddhists usually bow to a shrine or other holy place. Bowing takes different forms. The slide shows a short prostration. People can also do long prostrations when they throw themselves full length on the ground. It is also possible to simply bow from the waist.
3. Places of worship and of pilgrimage include all the sites associated with the life of Shakyamuni Buddha. These are situated in modern-day India and Nepal. Buddhists make pilgrimages to these sites and then say personal prayers or engage in group prayer festivals.
4. Stupas are an example of sacred Buddhist architecture and are found throughout the Buddhist world. They symbolise the enlightened mind, and therefore the Buddha himself, and are often used to house sacred relics or scriptures. Buddhists walk round and round the base of a stupa saying prayers; this is called 'circumambulation.' In southeast Asia one walks anti-clockwise, in the Himalayas one walks clockwise. Stupas have different shapes in different countries. In the Himalayas the structure is somewhat squat, in southeast Asia the top of the stupa is very elongated.
5. The Shwedagon stupa in Myanmar is very large and draws thousands of devotees every day, as well as tourists. It is especially holy because it is said to house sacred relics of all four buddhas of this historical age (Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth buddha).



6. Buddhists engage in prayers and ceremonies both inside temples and in the open air or in nature. Some natural places are considered sacred, especially certain mountains and lakes. Mount Kailash is considered sacred in Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Bon, the shamanistic religion of Tibet. Buddhists consider this mountain to be the central axis of the cosmos (known as Mount Meru by Tibetans) and the home of Demchok, a deity representing great bliss. It is a place of pilgrimage.
  
7. Many Buddhists only go to temples occasionally, for festivals or big occasions. For everyday worship they create small shrines in a corner of a room in their home and they do their daily meditation and prayers in their homes.