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## Religious Studies visit

### Upper VI visit the Buddhist Vihara

Here is a report from the recent visit of Upper VI to the London Buddhist Vihara, a centre for Theravada Buddhism. Founded in 1926 by Anagarika Dharmapala, the Vihara was the first Buddhist monastery to be established outside the continent of Asia.

'On Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April we visited the London Buddhist Vihara in Chiswick. This helped us in our preparation for our upcoming Religious Studies examinations.

We were met by Venerable Ari, a Buddhist monk from the Vihara. He took us into the shrine room where he showed us the statues of the Buddha and the candles, flowers and incense which are used in daily prayers and worship.

Venerable Ari showed us the small cutting of the Bodhi tree that the Buddha sat under when he achieved Enlightenment. We learnt that the tree was a banyan tree and that any tree can become a Bo tree if someone sitting under it becomes Enlightened.

We also learnt about Vesak Day and Dharma Day, the major festivals celebrated by Buddhists. They both show how the original religious experience of the Buddha informs religious practice and behaviour today, a great example for us to refer to in our synoptic paper!

Venerable Ari then explained to us the rituals surrounding death in Buddhism. He showed us the white cloth that the family give to the monks which symbolises the passing on of merits to the deceased, this ensures their happiness in the next life. He also explained that the family gathers together after three days and ninety days after the death of a family member to undertake charitable work, which again passes on good merits to the deceased. This helped us to understand the concept of karma and the cycle of birth, death and re-birth for our unit on Body, Soul & Personal Identity.

Our visit ended in the Vihara's kitchen, where we enjoyed tea, biscuits and swiss roll with Venerable Ari. We would like to thank the monks of the Vihara for their kindness, hospitality and generosity in welcoming us into their home and Mrs McDermott for organising the visit.

For us in Upper VI this was our final ever school visit and one that we will remember!