



Basic Guidelines for Buddhist Practice

If you are interested in developing a Buddhist practice, here are some basic guidelines to help you get started.

- 1. Reflect on your motivation.** First and foremost, reflect on your aspirations for starting a spiritual practice. Is your intention to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom? Are you motivated by the wish to promote happiness and reduce the suffering in your own life and the lives of other living beings? Or are you driven by selfishness, pride, or fame? Because your intentions are the source of your practice, it is important to make sure your intentions are clear and wholesome.
- 2. Make a commitment to the practice.** Consider making a genuine commitment to changing your patterns of thought, speech, and actions in ways that will create and support the conditions for your practice. It might seem obvious, but the stronger your commitment and sincerity, the greater the fruits and benefits of your practice will be.
- 3. Follow the 5 precepts.** In Buddhism, the mind and body are interconnected: bodily actions have an influence on the mind and thoughts in the mind generate action. By aligning the actions of body and mind, the precepts then become the foundation for developing mental stillness and clarity, which can then give rise to wisdom and insight. They are meant to support your personal growth and practice, as well as to develop happiness and benefit those around you. Buddhism teaches that the way to truly influence someone else is through your virtue and conduct. You can choose to commit to one, two, or all five of the precepts, as you are able. The precepts are as follows: (1) not killing, (2) not stealing, (3) not committing sexual misconduct, (4) not lying, and (5) not using intoxicants.
- 4. Live a simpler, healthier lifestyle.** After making a commitment to the practice and to the precepts, the next important step towards nourishing and building your practice is to live a more simple and healthier lifestyle. Some helpful changes to consider include adopting a healthy vegetarian diet, getting regular physical exercise, getting enough rest and sleep, and living a more peaceful life by minimizing unnecessary distractions.
- 5. Do some research.** Look into the various Buddhist teachings and practices so that you can find the approach that is right for you. Note that the "right" practice may not be the one you find easiest. Rather, the "right" practice addresses your suffering on a deeper level given your personality, affinities, and conditions. For example, meditation promotes concentration and mindfulness; bowing develops humility and counteracts pride; and so on. Commit yourself to a few practices that truly benefit you and stick with them.
- 6. Start practicing consistently.** The best way to build your practice is to set aside specific times to practice and do your best to stick to that schedule (It is often helpful to do this within a group). This is easier said than done, but practicing regularly is essential. We suggest practicing for 15 minutes a day right when you wake up or before you go to bed and then slowly increasing the time as you find yourself developing more clarity and insight.
- 7. Find a teacher and practice community.** Having a good teacher is like having a good doctor; they can see your afflictions and address them through instruction and guidance. However, when looking for a teacher, make sure at the very least, they abide by the five precepts and are not out for fame or profit. In Buddhism, we often look to the monastic Sangha as they have dedicated their lives to the Buddhist practice and have clear guidelines on how to interact with students. In addition, joining a community of fellow practitioners provides support, motivation, and advice. Being surrounded by good people naturally brings out your own wholesome qualities.
- 8. Study the Buddha's teachings regularly.** Deepen your understanding of the Buddhist teachings so as to inform and inspire your practice. Please refer to our reading list for places to start. However, Buddhism is an oral tradition and having a teacher and friends to study with is essential.
- 9. Do your best to keep learning and practicing.** Don't get discouraged or be too hard on yourself. The benefits of the practice don't come overnight or through shortcuts, but rather through confidence, consistency and sustained effort. If you keep it up, you will taste the "joy of the Dharma."