

Living Buddhism

Buddhism is like good healthy food. It has to be tasted, eaten, fully enjoyed and digested. Only that way, we can really benefit from it. For maximum benefit, it is best self-prepared and taken fresh.

Avoid the canned import: they lack nutrients that locals need. Avoid the fast food version: they are badly unbalanced. Avoid the beautifully labelled large containers which are really empty. Avoid those foods peddled by suave well-dressed executives with easy promises: they are the same as fast-food but cost exorbitantly more.

Buddhism is a DIY (do-it-yourself) kit that anyone can use with proper initial instructions. But first we must know how to read, and to read properly. This is what keeping to the precepts is about: we try our best to act and speak in a way helpful to us and others, and to simplify our lives.

An uncluttered life is a good preparation for uncluttering the mind. Keeping to the precepts simplifies our lives so that we easily and effectively engage ourselves in mental cultivation or meditation. This is not about hours of seat-warming, but about quality time that we spend with our selves.

Buddhist meditation is knowing our own minds so that we know ourselves better. The more patient and non-judgemental we are with what goes on in our minds, the closer we are to knowing our selves. Simply watch the breath in a relaxed but sustained manner (we are, after all, admiring a life-long loyal friend). Whenever the mind wanders off, patiently bring it back to the breath: it's like training your pet.

As we each befriend our mind, it returns the compliment. It listens more to us. One amazing thing we will notice is that much of those thoughts that crowd our minds are really unnecessary, even unreal. They mostly come from the past, and should remain there.

An uncluttered life (being healthy in body, action and speech) and an uncluttered mind (letting go of the past and turning the corner when you come to it) is an excellent way to cultivate great insight to further self-understanding. This is the miracle of the present moment.

The inner peace we gain through the breath meditation allows us to look deep into the present moment where our mind really is. The closer we look, the more we see of our true nature and personality. We can see that deep in our peaceful hearts there is so much good. It is because we have been looking outside of ourselves too much and looking at others too often, that we forget how happy we really are deep inside.

One very important advice to becoming truly happy: avoid negative talk of sin, guilt and bad karma (they only cause trouble). We are all we've got, and if we do not forgive ourselves, no one will. Then, we should learn to love ourselves and accept ourselves unconditionally: "I forgive myself. I'm OK; I'm well and happy."

Meditation helps us to realize that we are capable of change: that it we can change our minds; that we need to change our minds. And if we change our minds for the better, we also help to change the people around us and our ambience.

When bad things happen, we begin to understand that there is no one to be blamed. Not God, nor karma, nor bad luck, nor the boss, nor the other person, definitely not us. Things happen when the conditions are right (or wrong): it takes a lot of conditions to come together for it to happen, and we are only one of the conditions. So we should not take all the blame.

The cultivated mind and happy heart allow us to see all such conditions in a helpful way, so that we really know what has gone wrong. A scientist would not curse his experiments if he fails to find an answer. He would look out for patterns of behaviour and events that conduce to such problems and avoid them, and work on those conditions that allow him to move on in a positive way.

Our sufferings and inabilities are not punishment for things we have done in the past. They are telling us that some parts of our lives are still not yet strengthened, and some skills that we still need to learn. When our head is clear and our heart cool, we will know just what to do.

The next time you think you cannot solve your problem, try observing a toddler who is learning to walk. He or she stands, tries to take a step, falls flat, stands again, falls again, and so on. But the toddler never gives up, and he or she is now able to walk very well. That toddler was you!

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