

# *How to Practice Buddhism?*

What does it mean to practice Buddhism? It entails learning the methods of how to become a Buddha. The scope encompasses Dharmas both in the Liberation Way of the Arhat and the Buddhahood Way taught by Buddha during the second and third turning wheel of the Dharma.

How do you “practice” Buddhism? For most people who come across Buddhism for the first time, it involves reading related books or listening to preaching from some Dharma teachers, but this way of “cultivation” is likely to end up providing superficial knowledge of Buddhism in a leisurely manner. In addition, lacking proper direction and guidance concerning the various stages and processes involved in Buddhist cultivation, one would rely on one’s acquired knowledge and personal experiences. Sometimes, one might even reckon that one has already broken through with the contemplation of Buddhism, but in fact, one is merely spinning his own wheels in the vast ocean of Buddhism.

The following are fundamental criteria and principles about practicing Buddhism:

1. Buddhism will never violate ethical or moral principles of this world.
2. Being charitable is not the only connotation of Buddhism as there are countless dharmas to be learned.

3. One should not be enthralled with and follow a renowned master with blind faith but must validate his preaching against sutras of the Three Vehicles.

4. The most crucial step for any novice is to stay away from scriptures of Lamaism (Tantrism), since their teachings have misappropriated Buddhist terms for their own purposes. The content of Lamaism is completely different to the tenets and correct principles taught by Buddha Shakyamuni.

Grasping the profundity of Buddhist doctrines requires more than sole reliance on self-learning, since one will often adhere to and become entrapped within the literal meanings of Buddhist texts. The best way of learning is to participate in a cultivation class to gain in-depth knowledge of and the full picture about Buddhism. Therefore, selecting the right cultivation center is vital to all practitioners. An unsound teacher in a wrong cultivation center increases the possibility of learning erroneous unorthodox doctrines. Not only will one waste his time and efforts, he will also be farther away from correct Dharma.

So how do you select a cultivation center? It must be a Buddhist center with pure, solemn and simple ambiance, and without any odd statues on display, such as embracing male and female “buddha statues”. The value of a cultivation center is not judged by whether the building looks majestic or magnificent with extensive landscaping, but rather it is assessed by the Dharmas that the center has to offer.

Secondly, teachers that preach in the center – the enlightened mentors – must uphold the precepts in a pure manner. Teachings of the tenets must match with sutras of the Three Vehicles and must include the true reality of Mahayana doctrines. It should also transmit prajñā wisdom to help practitioners towards enlightenment. The choice of enlightened mentors must be based on the wisdom of the mentors; in another word, it must depend on the doctrine and not the person. Both of the aforementioned benchmarks are vital in assisting practitioners on how to screen out wrong centers and join the correct center.

There are many ways to learn Buddhism but to avoid taking the wrong path, one must abide by the premise of the eight consciousnesses theory. One must personally realize the inherently countless and boundless virtues of the eighth consciousness – tathāgatagarbha – in order to attain Buddhahood. If, on the contrary, one does not accept the existence of the eighth consciousness, one certainly will not attain the countless and boundless virtues of tathāgatagarbha. In that case, one will not be able to achieve Buddhahood. All the other numerous so-called “buddha dharma” methods cannot help the practitioner achieve Buddhahood and cannot be called Buddhism.