

TEN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

1) **Daily Meditation** – Sitting Meditation is a way of resting as “Being” in alert accepting awareness. Walking Meditation helps to prepare us for Sitting Meditation as well as to extend “Being” to the various “doings” of our human life in the Universe. Consistency is the key to meditation practice (*preferably at least 20 minutes twice a day, perhaps before breakfast and before dinner*). A good minimum goal is 3 times a week.

2) **Weekly Sangha** – Attend group meditation at least once a week. The minimum is once a month. This practice is one of the most important, because you will always be reminded of all the other practices if you practice this.

3) **Meditation Retreat & Nature** – Attend a meditation retreat sometime this month, this season, this year. It could be a weeklong retreat, or a weekend retreat, or even just a daylong retreat, but the minimum is a half-day retreat (*at least 3 or 4 hours*). And spend time regularly in Nature too (*preferably in silence*).

4) **Gratitude** – Practice reciting out loud for at least 3 minutes nonstop all that you feel grateful for, or all that is positive, or at least all that is not bad. If you do this every day alone or with a friend, you will notice a major shift in your energy. The minimum is to practice this once a week, preferably with a friend, taking turns.

5) **Dharma-reading & Journal-Writing** – Read good spiritual Dharma books. Immerse your mind in positive teachings. Also, buy a new journal and write in it every day or at least once a week. Express yourself on paper.

6) **Yoga / Qigong** – If you don't already practice Yoga or Qigong, then this is the best time to start. Take a gentle Yoga class or energizing Qigong class. There are several to choose from at the DALLAS MEDITATION CENTER and other places. You will be amazed at how much this supports your meditation practice and your spiritual growth.

7) **Healthier Diet** – Consciously cut back on your meat consumption. If eating meat, choose fish over other forms. Eliminate consumption of pork and beef. Eat more fresh vegetables. Perhaps take a vegetarian cooking class. Consider having at least one vegetarian meal per day, and maybe one day a week that is completely vegan.

8) **Blessing Prayer** – Practice “metta” (*loving-kindness*) meditation and prayer. Visualize blessing Light radiating from your Buddha Heart toward your family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, communities, and the world, as well as to Brother ChiSing and all the staff, instructors, members and visitors of AWAKENING HEART.

9) **"Dana" (Generosity) & "Seva" (Service)** – Consider making a donation of \$100 each month this year to ONE DHARMA. Or perhaps give a one-time gift of \$1,000. And serve through volunteer work here or elsewhere. Dana and Seva are at the very heart of our practice.

10) **Chanting Practice** – This is an ancient spiritual practice from Mahayana Buddhism, and millions of practitioners, both past and present, can testify to its power. I have adapted it for our modern Western lifestyle. Here is the practice:

Chant a mantra at least 10 times during 10 periods of the day (*or whenever you think of it*). The mantra I recommend is the mantra "OM NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHAYA" (*Gratitude to the Infinite Light of Awakening*). You can also chant a shorter version of this mantra by simply chanting "AMITABHA" or "NAMO AMITABHA." Other variations are "OM AMITABHA HRIH" or "OM AMIDEVA HRIH" (*Infinite Divine Love*). If you prefer Avalokiteshvara (Quan Yin) you may chant "OM MANI PADME HUM" (*Enlightened Wisdom Compassion Activating*), or you may chant the mantra of the Medicine Buddha of Healing, etc.

If you prefer affirmations in English, here are three examples: “I Am Safe, I Am Loved, I Am Free.”

Simply put, the practice is to chant a mantra at least 10 times during 10 periods of the day (*or whenever you think of it*):

1. Upon waking
2. Before breakfast
3. After breakfast
4. Before work
5. Before lunch
6. After lunch
7. After work
8. Before dinner
9. After dinner
10. Before bedtime



Dear Students of Enlightenment,

Continue to intensify your commitments to mindfulness, meditation and enlightened living. If you have slacked off a bit, just start over today, or start over this weekend, or start over on Sunday. Every week, just start over again. The ability to let go of the past without regret or judgment, and to begin anew again today, fresh and open, here and now, is POWERFUL and will serve you on your path to full enlightenment and Buddhahood. It does not matter how many times you fall. What matters is how many times you get up again and start over. This is the secret to inner strength. Failure is meant to be there to give us an opportunity to get up again, and therefore there is no such thing as failure ultimately, for ALL things, both the negative as well as the positive, serve to bring us to full spiritual maturity, to full enlightenment, to full Buddhahood. Once we set forth on the true Path of Enlightenment, there is no turning back, and all negativity is transformed into compost to become fertilizer for the garden of the flowers of enlightenment, wisdom, compassion, peace, joy, true power, and true beauty. That is why, ultimately, nothing in the Universe of our experience is ever really against us, but only FOR us. Only FOR our enlightenment, our maturity, our Buddhahood. Only FOR our wisdom and compassion. Only FOR us, not against us.

But until we truly and deeply enter into the Stream of the Path of True Enlightenment, all negativities are only seen as negative, all suffering only seems hopeless and meaningless, and we feel overwhelmed by the fears, uncertainties and tragedies of life. And yet, once we set forth toward the True Path, there will come a time attainable in this very lifetime when we will enter the first of four "gateless gates" of enlightenment, never to regress, only to move forward in "seven lifetimes or less" toward full enlightenment. All that is required are the Seven Practices to "enter the Stream." What are these Seven Practices? They are:

1. **Deeply taking refuge fully in the Buddha** (*our own potential for enlightenment as well as teachers more enlightened than ourselves and fully enlightened ones seen and unseen*)
2. **Deeply taking refuge fully in the Dharma** (*the teachings and the practices of enlightenment, including meditation and mindful living*)
3. **Deeply taking refuge fully in the Sangha** (*the spiritual community of all our sisters and brothers on the Path of Enlightenment with us*)
4. **Deeply practicing fully the Five Mindfulness Trainings** (*non-killing, non-stealing, non-harmful sex, non-lying, and non-intoxication*)
5. **Great Generosity** (*especially giving food to monks/nuns and supporting mindfulness centers*)
6. **Great Loving-kindness** (*including "metta" meditation*)
7. **And Great Devotion** [that is: Great Faith, Great Vows, Great Practice] (*one particularly powerful way to practice this is through AMITABHA Chanting*)

I believe with all my heart that if we deeply practice fully together for the next several months, that most of us will certainly realize this initial enlightenment, perhaps in just a few years! ☺

The time is NOW. No turning back. No more Maybes. We either say YES to the Path at this critical time in human history, or else our silent indecision will become our NO. There is only YES or NO now. "Maybe" is NO LONGER an option. And it is not enough that we say YES with just our mouth or with our surface mind. We must say YES with all parts and all aspects of ourselves, all Seven Chakras of our being, all the nooks and crannies and closets and shadows and voices of our multi-layered thoughts, beliefs, desires and will. Our entire body, our entire mind, our entire BEING must say YES. And that takes practice. That takes commitment. And that takes the support of the SANGHA, the Spiritual Community of Mindfulness Practitioners. You cannot do this alone. There is no room for "Lone Ranger" spirituality anymore. Our enlightenment must be COLLECTIVE or not at all. We practice WITH each other and FOR all beings. This is the only enlightenment that is real. Any other so-called enlightenment is incomplete at best and deluded at worst.

So, my dear mindful friends, please take refuge in the Buddha; for the Buddha takes refuge in you. Please take refuge in the Dharma; for the Dharma takes refuge in you. Please take refuge in the Sangha, for the Sangha takes refuge in you. Without the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, you will never be able to realize enlightenment on your own by yourself. And the other side of this truth is that, without you, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha can never be fully embodied and manifested here on Earth. To become real on Earth, They need you, just as much as you need Them.

*I believe in you.
So just do it.
Yes!*

ॐ अमिताभ सुखदं



NAMO AMITABHA,
Brother ChiSing