

How do I Practice as a Lay Person?

The Buddha's teaching encompasses a wide variety of tools to put into practice a systemic movement toward the wholesome and away from the unwholesome while ultimately moving towards unshakable freedom and extinguishing.

These are really two different pieces of the path. However, without the establishing of a wholesome basis, ultimate freedom is not possible. Without ultimate freedom, the wholesome basis is always subject to falling apart and reverting to the unwholesome.

General Recommendations

What defines a lay disciple of the Awakened One is going for refuge in the Awakened One, going. (SN 55.37)

Beyond that the Buddha encouraged lay followers to follow the five precepts:

1. To refrain from killing any living being
2. To refrain from taking what is not given
3. To refrain from wrong sexual behavior
4. To refrain from lying
5. To refrain from alcohol, liquor, and things that cause distraction or intoxication

Generosity and morality should be as integrated as possible into one's daily life and moment-to-moment intentions. If one can always be moving through the world with the intentions of wishing well, kindness, friendship, compassion, harmlessness, then one will be creating that wholesome basis all through the day, whether one is at work or at home. With others or by oneself.

Finally, he encouraged lay people to develop awareness of the arising and passing away nature of things as much as possible.

Observance Day Recommendations

To move further towards more subtle forms of wholesomeness, the Buddha recommended for lay people to dedicate the full moons, new moons, and eighth days to cleaning the dirtiness from one's psyche. (AN 3.70)

If one has the opportunity to seek out monastics and hear their teachings this is an extremely valuable opportunity to create boundless rewards. However, even if one isn't able to be around monastics, one is still encouraged to cultivate the wholesome and observe the eight precepts.

On these days, as a means for cultivating a wholesome sense of contentment, the Buddha encouraged people to reflect on the Awakened One, the Quality, and the Order, reflect on morality, and reflect on deities and the belief, morality, learning, going without, and awareness that allowed them to be born in those forms. From those recollections one generates a sense of contentment. The sense of contentment offers one a basis from which to abandon the dirtiness, clean the dirtiness from the psyche.

Beyond that, he encouraged following the eight precepts for the day:

1. To refrain from killing any living being
2. To refrain from taking what is not given
3. To refrain from sexual activity

4. To refrain from lying
5. To refrain from alcohol, liquor, and things that cause distraction or intoxication
6. To refrain from eating outside the right time (before dawn and after midday)
7. To refrain from dancing, singing, playing music, entertainment, wearing garlands, perfumes, makeup, adornment, and beautification
8. To refrain from using high and luxurious bedding.

In this way, one is living one's life for that day in a way similar to the way that worthy ones live their whole lives.

Also, on these days, one has the opportunity to develop more completely the continuity of "the awareness of arising and passing away, penetrating, noble, correct, and leading to end of pain." (SN 55.37)