

Buddhist Rituals and Practices for Spiritual Caregiving

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Workshop description: In Buddhism there are a variety of daily rituals and practices, and special ones for marking major life transitions and time of vulnerability. This workshop provides an overview of these and emphasizes which are most useful in times of crisis. Participants will learn the ways in which meditation, mantra, prayer, taking refuge, vows, Buddhist imagery, chanting, and bowing, form an intimate part of religious life for the vast majority of devout Buddhist followers. Instruction on a number of Buddhist rituals and practices that can be performed by non-Buddhist chaplains will also be included.

Outcomes: at the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- 1 Articulate the multi-faceted context and purpose of Buddhist rituals and practices in times of crisis
- 2 Assess the ritual needs of Buddhist patients, clients, and families
- 3 Appropriately implement a variety of Buddhist rituals and practices

Definition & Context

A ritual may be defined here as an outward act performed regularly and consistently in a context that confers upon it a religious significance not immediately evident in the act itself. A composite unity consisting of a number of subordinate ritualistic acts may be called a ceremony.

Ceremonies and rituals, as external acts which complement inward contemplative exercises, are not alien to or incompatible with canonical Buddhism. To the contrary, they are an integral part of the living tradition of all schools of Buddhism.

Although there are different schools of Buddhism, throughout India, Japan, Tibet, China, and Southeast Asia, they all utilize a number of similar sacred rituals in the journey to self-enlightenment. Although meditation is typically one of the most well-known Buddhist rituals, mantras, mudras, prayer wheels, and pilgrimages are some of the other Ritualistic practices incorporated by traditional Buddhists.

In Buddhism, ritualistic practices can serve to generate wholesome states of mind, while certain other rituals collectively performed can serve as a means of strengthening the social solidarity among those who share the same spiritual ideals. However, there is no 'magic power' in Buddhist ritual, such as lighting a candle or bowing to an altar. If you perform a ritual no force outside yourself will come to your aid and give you enlightenment. Indeed, enlightenment is not a quality that can be possessed, so no one can give it to you.

The rituals and ceremonies of Buddhism vary from country to country, and from area to area within a country. In many Buddhist countries, the ritual calendar includes events that are celebrated in conjunction with other religions and/or national traditions. For example:

- the New Year is the biggest holiday of the year in many Asian countries, and activities last for a week or more.

- Traditions are followed, some specifically related to Buddhism, and others not, including a thorough housecleaning and settling of debts.
- Special foods are prepared, and some Buddhist temples will offer food to their constituents.
- In China it is customary for people to travel to visit their families for the holiday.
- On New Year's Eve in Japan, at midnight, Buddhist temples ring the temple bell 108 times; at the larger temples, huge crowds of people will attend this event.

In addition, while the many schools, sects, and traditions of Buddhism have diverse rituals, there are also diverse explanations for the rituals. You might be told that repeating a certain chant or offering flowers and incense gains you merit, for example. Whatever particular explanation you may be given for a particular ritual, however, the ultimate purpose of all Buddhist rituals is the realization of enlightenment.

Types

(i) Acts performed for the acquisition of merit (e.g., offerings made in the name of the Buddha) calculated to provide a basis for achieving Nibbana, release from the cycle of becoming (*samsara*); such acts of merit are, at the same time, expected to offer semi-temporal rewards of comfort and happiness here and in the heavenly worlds in future lives. These supplementary forms of religious activity have arisen out of a natural need to augment the more austere way followed by the world-renouncing disciples.

(ii) Acts directed towards securing worldly prosperity and averting calamities through disease and unseen forces of evil, e.g., *pirit* chanting, *bodhi-puja*, etc.

(iii) Those rituals that have been adopted from indigenous/folk religion. Hence these are mainly semi-religious in character like the Sri Lankan *tovil* ceremonies. They derive their power and authority primarily through the superhuman power of the Buddha and also through the hosts of spirits, who are, as it were, commanded by invoking the power of the Buddha or of the Three Refuges — the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha — as a whole.

Ritual Forms

Taking Refuge & Vows
Meditation
Chanting
Mantra
Prayer
Bowing

Personal & Group Worship
Almsgiving
Holy/special days
Altar offerings
Life passage: birth, marriage, etc.
Buddhist imagery & objects

WORDS OF DHARMA: **Sacred Utterances in for Buddhist Care & Ritual**

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HOMAGE (*Vandana*):

3 times: Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa

3 times: Homage to him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Enlightened One.

THE THREE REFUGES (*Ti-sarana*):

Buddham saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge to the Buddha

Dhammam saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge to the Dhamma

Sangham saranam gacchāmi

I go for refuge to the Sangha

Dutiyampi Buddham saranam gacchāmi

For a second time, I go for refuge to the Buddha

Dutiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchāmi

For a second time, I go for refuge to the Dhamma

Dutiyampi Sangham saranam gacchāmi

For a second time, I go for refuge to the Sangha

Tatiyampi Buddham saranam gacchāmi

For a third time, I go for refuge to the Buddha

Tatiyampi Dhammam saranam gacchāmi

For a third time, I go for refuge to the Dhamma

Tatiyampi Sangham saranam gacchāmi

For a third time, I go for refuge to the Sangha

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

I undertake the training precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

I undertake the training precept to refrain from taking things not given.

I undertake the training precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

I undertake the training precept to refrain from false speech.

I undertake the training precept to refrain from alcohol and drugs that lead to carelessness.

BLESSING

May there be every good blessing.

May the heavenly beings protect you.

Through the power of all the Buddhas,

May you always be well.

May there be every good blessing.

May the heavenly beings protect you.

Through the power of the Dharma,

May you always be well.

May there be every good blessing.

May the heavenly beings protect you.

Through the power of the Sangha,

May you always be well.

DISCOURSE ON LOVING-KINDNESS (*Metta Sutta*):

This is what should be done by those who are wise in goodness,

And who know the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,

Straightforward and gentle in speech.

Humble and not conceited,

Contented and easily satisfied.
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: In gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen, those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born, may all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

SHARING OF BLESSINGS:

Through the goodness that arises from my (your) practice,
May my spiritual teachers and guides of great virtue,
My mother, my father, and my relatives,
The Sun and the Moon, and all virtuous leaders of the world –
May the highest gods and evil forces;
Celestial beings, guardian spirits of the Earth and the Lord of Death;
May those who are friendly, indifferent or hostile;
May all beings receive the blessings of my life.
May they soon attain the threefold bliss and realize the Deathless.
Through the goodness that arises from my practice,
And through this act of sharing,
May all desires and attachments,
And all harmful states of mind
Quickly cease.
Until I realize Nibbana,
In every kind of birth, may I have an upright mind
With mindfulness and wisdom, austerity and vigor.
May the forces of delusion not take hold nor weaken my resolve.

The Buddha is my excellent refuge,
Unsurpassed is the protection of the Dhamma,
The Buddha is my noble Lord,
The Sangha is my supreme support.
Through the supreme power of all these,
May darkness and delusion be dispelled.

PROTECTION (*Paritta*)

By the power of all the Buddhas, the Arahants, and the Dharma
May I secure my (your/our) protection in every way.
May all misfortune be warded off,
May all ailments cease;
May no calamities befall me (you);
May I (you) live long in peace.
May all blessing be upon me (you).
May all devas protect me (you).
By the protective power of all
The Buddha may safety ever be mine (yours).
May those who are in misery
Be free from misery;
Let those who are in fear, agony or insecurity
Be free from fear, agony, and insecurity.
Let those who are in sorrow
Be free from sorrow.
May they all live in peace and safety.

DEDICATION OF MERIT:

May all beings – without limit, without end –
Have a share in the merit just now made,
And in whatever other merit I (you/we) have made.
If my mother, father, those who have been dear and kind to me,
Those I have seen or never seen,
Those how are neutral or hostile to me,
Know of this dedication of merit,
May they themselves rejoice.
And if they do not know,
May the devas inform them.
Through their rejoicing in my gift of merit,
May all beings always live happily,
Free from animosity.
May they attain the Serene State
And their radiant hopes be fulfilled.

MEAL REFLECTION:

With wise reflection I eat this food.
Not for play, not for intoxication,
Not for indulgence, not for beautification,
But only to maintain this body,
To stay alive and healthy,
To support the spiritual life.
Thus, I let go of unpleasant feelings

And do not stir up new ones.
Thereby the process of life goes on,
Blameless, at ease, and in peace.

MEAL BLESSING

As we make ready to eat this food
we remember with gratitude
the many people, tools, animals and plants,
air and water, sky and earth,
turned in the wheel of living and dying,
whose joyful exertion
provide our sustenance this day.
May we with the blessing of this food
join our hearts
to the one heart of the world
in awareness and love,
and may we together with everyone
realize the path of awakening,
and never stop making effort
for the benefit of others.

GENERAL/ALL OCCASION BLESSING

May there be every good blessing.
May the heavenly beings protect you.
Through the power of all the Buddhas,
May you always be well.

May there be every good blessing.
May the heavenly beings protect you.
Through the power of the Dharma,
May you always be well.

May there be every good blessing.
May the heavenly beings protect you.
Through the power of the Sangha,
May you always be well.

PRAYER OF SHANTIDEVA

May I be a protector to those without protection,
A leader for those who journey,
And a boat, a bridge, a passage
For those desiring the further shore.

May the pain of every living creature
Be completely cleared away.
May I be the doctor and the medicine
And may I be the nurse
For all sick beings in the world
Until everyone is healed.

Just like space
And the great elements such as earth,

May I always support the life
Of all the boundless creatures.

And until they pass away from pain
May I also be the source of life
For all the realms of varied beings
That reach unto the ends of space.