

Funerals

Although Buddhism does not object to cultural practices, so long as they do not conflict with the teachings of the Buddha, it is felt that any practices which are not beneficial to the departed (e.g. the burning of joss-paper) should be eliminated. The performance of elaborate ceremonies which go on for days and weeks, should also be discouraged.

The rites attached to a Buddhist funeral should be simple, solemn, dignified and meaningful. Buddhist monks may be invited to the house of the deceased to chant sutras prior to a funeral. On the day of the funeral, the services of Buddhist Monks would again be called for to perform the requisite religious service at the home and at the cemetery. Simple floral tributes together with the burning of incense and candles would suffice as symbolic offerings.

Burial And Cremation

Should the deceased person be buried or cremated? Buddhism is flexible on this issue. The choice should be left to the "last wish" of the deceased or at the direction of the next-of-kin. In the modern concept, however, cremation, as a form of hygienic disposal of the body, should be encouraged, since usable land is becoming scarce. Some people insert valuable personal belongings of the deceased into the coffin hoping that the departed would benefit by it. It would be preferable to donate the useful personal belongings to the poor and needy or to some charitable institutions. Any help to the poor and needy is an act of merit.

Disposal Of Ashes

The question has often been asked as to what should be done to the ashes of a deceased person who has been cremated. There is no hard and fast rule as to its disposal. It could be kept in an urn and enshrined in a pagoda specially erected in a temple for such a purpose or it could be kept elsewhere at the sole discretion of the next-of-kin. In some cases, after a short religious service, the ashes are strewn into the sea or river.

Honouring The Dead

We should avoid flowers and wreaths worth a considerable amount being piled up on the grave, only to be cleared away as rubbish in the next day or two. To obviate such a waste, the memory of the deceased could be honoured by making donations, via the family of the deceased, to established religious or charitable institutions in the name of the deceased person.

Memorial Services

Conducting of memorial religious services in temples or at homes is another form of honouring a deceased person. This could be followed by another act of merit by the offering of alms to the Monks and to needy people. The holding of memorial services is normally made on the seventh day after the death of a person and again on the third month or the hundredth day of the occurrence. Thereafter it could be held on the anniversary of the date of death.

For those who could not afford it, a more praiseworthy form of merit would be to make donations to religious or charitable institutions in honour of a deceased person, or to publish religious books for distribution to enlighten the public on the sublime teachings of the Buddha.

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Day-To-Day Buddhist Practices

by

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Today, in many parts of the world, but particularly in Asian countries, various beliefs and practices are being carried out in the name of Buddhism. Many of these practices are far from the teachings of the Buddha and sometimes are even contradictory. Many people have neglected and forgotten the correct Buddhist way of life. Many are also under a misconception with regard to certain important aspects of this religion.

It is with the sole idea of removing these misconceptions and to enlighten the public that this leaflet has been printed.

This is an edited version. The original can be found at www.ksridhammananda.com
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The attraction of Buddhism

Buddhism as a religion or as a righteous way of life, is appreciated in many parts of the world. The simple reason for this is that the Buddha, the founder of this religion, was an enlightened and liberal-minded teacher. The Buddhist way of life is very simple. It is free from blind faith and dogmas. We know that Buddhism is a religion that leads us to a better life in this world and hereafter. It is our duty to explore, study, comprehend and put into practice what our religion has in store for us. Rites and rituals although accepted as an integral part of religion, do not by themselves, comprise religion. Spiritual development is the most important aspect of religion.

Understanding cultural practices

Some people use Buddhism only as a basis for discussing the metaphysical and philosophical aspects of the religion. They view with derision some Buddhist cultural practices even to the extent of condemning such practices. This is not a correct or healthy attitude to adopt towards religion. A religion without depth and one which has not penetrated into one's cultural practices would not last; it will only become dry philosophy and fade away after a time. Tolerance is the keyword in Buddhist teachings. If one is unable to accept certain cultural practices, one should, at least, tolerate such practices. Meanwhile, one should investigate the underlying significance and meaning of such practices .

The Triple Gem

Our gratitude and veneration goes to the Great Teacher, His Teachings and the Sangha. Thus we have the three objects of veneration and respect: the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*, which in common Buddhist parlance we term '*The Triple Gem*'. Attainment of spiritual development and the veneration of the Triple Gem, are means whereby we can lead a righteous way of life leading to peace and happiness. This should be the aim of every Buddhist. Whilst we aspire high, we should not forget or neglect our day-to-day accepted religious observance and practices

which remind us of our duty towards our religion. A summary of religious obligations and practices is presented below

Daily Observances

As Buddhists, it would be most appropriate for us to have either a Buddha image or a picture of the Buddha in our homes, not as an ornamental showpiece, but as an object of admiration and veneration. The serene figure of the Buddha, symbolising loving-kindness, purity, and perfection, could serve as a source of consolation and inspiration in helping us to overcome whatever difficulties, worries or misunderstanding that we only have to encounter in our day-to-day activities in a troubled world.

Life is full of pitfalls. Such pitfalls could be avoided if we remember to put into practice the noble teachings of our Great Teacher. It would be a most rewarding task if, whilst venerating our Lord Buddha, we could meditate for even a short while, by focussing our minds on the great and noble qualities of the Buddha so that we may perfect ourselves through his inspiration.

Make It A Daily Practice

As devotees we should make it a daily practice to pay homage to this Great Teacher. This could be done early in the morning or late in the evening, before retiring. Whilst doing so, it will be beneficial if efforts are made to recite some sutras. This is a noble Buddhist way of life. Parents should inculcate these worth-while and time-honoured religious practices amongst their children so that they can realise and appreciate their rich heritage. Buddhist parents are encouraged to send their children to attend Buddhist Sunday Schools or religious classes.

Visiting the Temple

Whilst Buddhists are also encouraged to perform their religious observance in their family shrine, they are reminded not to forget or neglect their community or group obligations towards their temple activities

where religious services are held regularly on Full-moon and New-moon days. A visit to a Temple and participating in the religious service would be considered an act of merit. The observance of the eight precepts by devotees during the celebration of the Full-moon or New-moon days would be most desirable and meritorious act.

Festivals

In celebrating family and social festivals, Buddhist are advised not to conduct themselves in such a way as to violate their Buddhist principles, such as the Five Precepts and the Noble Eight-fold Path. Buddhist moral code must be upheld. They should not allow themselves to be intoxicated or be carried away by any base form of amusement, but should conduct such festivities in a dignified manner commensurate with their position as cultured Buddhists. In celebrating social events, it is advisable for one not to forget the spiritual aspects of the celebration. A visit to a Temple to receive the blessings of the Triple Gem would be quite appropriate for any occasion.

House-warming

Occupying a new house or moving from one house to another is often followed by some form of celebration or merry-making. There is no objection to such a celebration. It is a Buddhist tradition for the family to invite monks to bless for the peace, prosperity and harmony of the household.

Blessing Of A Newborn Child

Parents of a newborn child are invited to bring the child, one month after its birth, to a Temple to receive the blessings of the Triple Gem. Offerings of flowers, incense, candles or fruits may be made at the shrine room of the Temple and the resident monks invited to recite sutras for the blessing of the child. If so desired, the advice of the monks may also be sought for a suitable Buddhist name to be given to the baby.

Marriage

It has been noticed that many Buddhists tend to forget their spiritual obligations in regards to this most important and auspicious occasion of their lives - their marriage. It is customary, in certain Buddhist countries, for engaged couples to invite the monks for a blessing service either in their homes or at a temple prior to the actual wedding. If so desired, the blessing service could even be performed after the wedding which normally takes place in the Registry of Marriages or at the homes of the parties concerned.

Simple offerings of flowers, incense and candles are all that are required for the simple blessing service to which parents of both parties with their relatives and friends could be invited to participate.

Sickness

In the unfortunate event of sickness befalling a person, it would be advisable, apart from resorting to normal medical treatment, to invite monks to perform religious blessing service tending towards the speedy recovery of the patient. Such blessings would tend to infuse a considerable spiritual and psychological influence on the patient, thus accelerating his recovery. In particular when the illness happens to be associated with the attitude of the patient's mind, a spiritual blessing service by a monk would be most helpful. The Buddha's advice: "Whenever you are physically sick, don't allow your mind also to be sick".

Traditions And Customs

The observance of traditions and customs need not necessarily be discarded whilst following the teachings of the Buddha. In fact the Buddha advised his followers to respect their own traditions and customs if they are meaningful, significant and harmless. On the other hand if such practice contradicts or violate the fundamental Buddhist principles, are harmful to others, or are likely to cause nuisance, then they should be discarded.