

# **BECOMING BUDDHIST**

## **Beginning Your New Life**

**In the 21st century, Buddhism has become the fastest growing "religion" in the West. Many people have begun reading books about Buddhism, practicing Zen meditation, and applying Buddhist ethics at work and in human relationships. You may one day decide to formally become a follower of the enlightenment (Buddha) path of understanding, compassion, mindfulness and peace.**

### **1. Basics**

**If you would like to make Buddhism your way of life, there are some things to consider: First, become familiar with the basic tenants of Buddhism such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-Fold Path, the Five Precepts, karma. The Buddha never asked his disciples to believe something because he said so. He reiterated that each person needed to prove it true for oneself.**

### **2. Understanding**

**In Buddhism, understanding is the most important thing. All good things take time. Do not impulsively rush into Buddhism, because it is "cool". Ask questions, meditate, study with a teacher (master). Then make your decision. The Buddha was not interested in having a large number of disciples. He was concerned that people should follow his teachings as a result of careful investigation, consideration of the facts and personal experience.**

### **3. How to become Buddhist**

**Join a Buddhist sangha (a temple or group), support them, be supported by them and continue to learn more about the Buddha. Read about the teachings, apply them in your life, attend meditation and retreats, open your heart and mind to the working of compassion. Then, when you are ready, you can formally become a Buddhist by taking the Precepts. However, taking the Precepts is not a requirement to be a Buddhist. The Precepts are more of a commitment, a strengthening of the Dharma within you. It is likened somewhat to confirmation in Christianity.**

#### **4. The Five Precepts**

- I practice the training of love, I refrain from killing.**
- I practice the training of generosity, I refrain from stealing.**
- I practice the training of contentment, I refrain from sexual misconduct.**
- I practice the training of mindful speech, I refrain from harmful speech.**
- I practice the training of mindful consumption; I refrain from intoxicants, harmful substances and food if they harm myself, society and the environment.**

#### **5. The Meaning of Taking Refuge**

**Taking refuge means accepting the Three Jewels as safe shelters of stability, truth, and peace in an insecure, ignorant and suffering world. The seeker accepts the Three Jewels as the essential path to transcend suffering and to realize Zen as entrusting to a life of highest spiritual values.**

**It is not just an intellectual acceptance of the Buddhist teachings, but a total reorientation and realization of one's life and its aim. This means totally embodying (becoming one with) the Three Jewels or Refuges, The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and thus overcoming dualism, the source of all suffering.**

**To take refuge in the Buddha is to take refuge in the living source of understanding, realization and compassion, symbolized as the Buddha and his historical human manifestation as Gautama Siddhartha Shakyamuni. One sees this historical Buddha as the greatest teacher and the embodiment of our true human potential. To take refuge in the Dharma is to take refuge in reality-as-it-is, the ocean of oneness, Buddha's teachings and the path of understanding, realization and compassion. To take refuge in the Sangha is to take refuge in the community that practices according to the Buddhist path and strives to manifest and embody enlightenment here on earth.**

**The Three Jewels are present in every quarter of the universe as well as in our hearts, in every person and in all other species inhabiting every galaxy. By dedicating ourselves to learn, practice and embody the Three Jewels, you will have the proven vehicle to nourish the ability to love and understand within yourself.**

#### **6. The Bodhisattva Vows**

**These vows are a living promise that we reaffirm every day, not just once in a lifetime. Therefore, Buddhists strive to recite them regularly and practice them always:**

**Sentient Beings are numberless,  
I vow to save them all.**

**Sufferings are inexhaustible,  
I vow to end them all.  
The Dharma is boundless,  
I vow to learn it all.  
The Buddha Way is unsurpassable,  
I vow to embody it.**

## **7. A Path Open to All**

**For 2,500 years, Buddhism has been a peaceful, proven path for millions of practitioners. This is its beauty. It is completely available to all walks of life, all religions and cultures. Your true nature always remains within you. It is moving, seeking and working to liberate you from suffering, regardless of your cultural upbringing, beliefs or ideologies.**