

Ways to Deepen Householder Practice

For Anyone Interested In Mindfulness,
Meditation, Insight, and Awakening

*Jobs. Finding time to meditate.
Relationships. Children. Housework.
Practice days at home. Difficult people. Sacred spaces. World
news. Leaky faucets. TV.
Rituals. Crying babies.
Relationship with a teacher. Cooking and eating.
Integrating study. Cultivating wholesome factors.*

A group project of
the third Community Dharma Leaders (CDL) program
sponsored by Spirit Rock Meditation Center

Introduction

Buddhism is a 2500 year-old tradition offering practical ways anyone can use to suffer less - and ultimately, to find an unshakeable calm happiness and a selflessly compassionate heart.

The historical Buddha, and most of the great teachers who have followed him, offered these methods freely both to individuals living as "householders" and to monks and nuns. The Buddha taught that complete enlightenment was possible for householders and monastics alike. It's wonderful news that ordinary activities such as going to work, raising a family, driving in traffic, paying bills, raking the leaves, etc. are not inherent barriers to complete freedom, joy, love, and inner peace.

Nonetheless, a householder's world is typically more fast-paced, stressful, and tempting than a monastery. That's why it's important to have practices woven into everyday life that support the mindfulness, non-clinging, good intentions, lovingkindness, and insight that help draw you down the path of liberation. And which also provide the simple benefits of stress relief, relaxation, clear-headedness, and opening the heart.

Therefore, we have gathered this collection of ways you could deepen your practice as a householder, as a group project within the third Community Dharma Leaders (CDL) program, sponsored by Spirit Rock Meditation Center (SRMC) and taught principally by James Baraz and Tara Brach, (Of course, we take responsibility for the ideas here, and SRMC has not endorsed them.)

This is an evolving document that will be expanded periodically, so we invite you to send your own ideas for inclusion (contact Rick Hanson at drh@mindspring.com or Jeanie Daskais at jeandaskais@earthlink.net). To keep the document brief, terms and practices are mentioned without elaboration, so if something is unfamiliar to you, you could ask a friend or a teacher what it means.

This collection is offered with heartfelt respect for individual circumstances, needs, and experience. In the words of the Buddha, please see for yourself. You can use or adapt any of the ideas below that you like, or none at all. In particular, the river of Buddhism is fed by three great streams - Theravadan (Vipassana), Tibetan, and Zen - and we stand mainly in the first of these, with great appreciation for the other two. If you practice in a different tradition, many of the suggestions below may still be useful for you, and we also invite you to send us your own ideas.

The practices we've listed fall into two broad categories: maintaining the thread of formal practice, and weaving mindfulness, compassion, and insight into daily life. Of course, each of these supports the other, and the ultimate goal is to bring a continuous

wakefulness and non-clinging to all activities, whether sitting on the cushion, doing the dishes, or helping a child with homework.

In the ancient tradition of giving the Buddha's teachings freely, this document is not copyrighted and may be used, copied, or distributed as a resource for individuals, classes, sitting groups, etc. And in the ancient tradition of generosity, contributions - "dana" - will be welcome, and these will be placed in a scholarship fund for future CDL participants; if you like, please send a check made out to SRMC and mail it to Rick Hanson, Ph.D., 25 Mitchell Blvd., Suite 3, San Rafael, CA, 94903.

Thanks and metta.

Perspectives

Good books or articles on householder practice:

- [At Home in the Muddy Water](#) - Ezra Bayda
- "Eightfold Path for the Householder" - Jack Kornfield (available online)

Integrating Formal Practice

Establishing Right Intention

Every morning, as soon as you think about it, say to yourself your fundamental aspiration related to practice, whatever is true for you. Perhaps: "May the blessings of my life be to the benefit of all beings." Or: "Liberation is my highest priority, my primary purpose, my most fundamental aspiration."

Aim high. While the Buddha taught ways to be happy in "one's present life," most of his teaching is an encouragement and a roadmap toward full enlightenment.

Be kind to yourself. Consider this saying: *"If you can sit quietly after difficult news, if in financial downturns you remain perfectly calm, if you can see your neighbors travel to fantastic places without a twinge of jealousy, if you can happily eat whatever is put on your plate and fall asleep after a day of running around without a drink or a pill, if you can always find contentment just where you are . . . you are probably a dog."*

Taking Refuge

Every morning, as soon as you think about it, re-take the three refuges (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).

Take the refuges before beginning each meal.

You could add refuges that are meaningful to you, such as taking refuge in God, in awareness, in emptiness, in compassion, or in practice.

Working with a Teacher

If it is possible, have a regular relationship with a teacher or a senior student. Routinely check-in or do a formal interview.

Meditation

Meditate every day, no matter what, even for a minute.

Set a fixed period for meditation each day (e.g., 45 minutes).

Do some lovingkindness practice daily, including for yourself.

Study

Read some dharma every day, even for just a minute.

Set a fixed time for study each day, and stick with it.

Ask a teacher to suggest specific readings.

Consider these on-line resources for dharma study:

- Access to Insight - <http://accesstoinsight.org>
- Dharma Web – www.dharmaweb.org
- A Buddhist Library – www.abuddhistlibrary.org

Listen to talks that can be downloaded from websites or ordered from Dharma Seed.

Join a regular study group. Possibilities include:

- Meet weekly, bimonthly, or monthly. Or perhaps for a day or whole weekend each quarter (perhaps arranging for a teacher for some or all of that time).
- Focus on the Paramitas (factors of enlightenment). You could use a central text (e.g., Sylvia Boorstein's *Pay Attention for Goodness Sake*) and/or listen to Jack Kornfield's downloadable short talks.
- Focus on a collection of suttas, such as the Majjhima Nikaya. (Excellent commentaries are available on-line or in books on many suttas, such as Sharda Rogell's book on the Majjhima Nikaya, *Pressing Out Pure Honey*.)

Consider taking one of the teachings and making it the foundation of your practice for a period of time (a day, a month, a year), such as the characteristic of impermanence, how feeling creates craving, the factors of enlightenment, etc. This can make the potentially dry lists that you study really come alive.

Classes

Do a one-day class every few months.

Take an email class in the dharma, such as James Baraz's *Awakening Joy* course.

Retreats

Go on retreat at least once a year.

Before Falling Asleep

Briefly reflect on the day as practice: How did it go?

Set an intention for your dreams (often saturated with self), such as: "May sleep be easy and selfless."

Out loud or in your mind, say a prayer or chant (such as the one often used after the last formal meditation of the evening on retreats at Spirit Rock).

Ritual Days

Observe the full, new and quarter moon days - the uposatha days, in the monastic tradition - in whatever way is appropriate for you. In Theravadan countries, many lay people observe the eight precepts on those days. Even if it isn't practical to refrain from ornamentation or entertainment or from eating after noon, the moon days provide an opportunity for heightened exploration of practice, simplicity and renunciation.

Chanting

Chanting is a gateway into Right Speech! We are blessed during this time and age that we have so much access to great chants. We can play them all day and all night if we wish.

While driving, working out, doing sitting meditation, etc., chanting can be really wonderful. This is something to play with. For example, chanting starts to change the way we talk with others and what is worth while talking about. While chanting see if you can practice metta by the vibration created from chanting and imagine spreading that in all directions.

Cultivating Specific Qualities

Choose one of the Brahmaviharas to develop in daily life over a specific period of time.

Using Daily Life as Grist for the Mill

It is especially helpful to use upsetting experiences.

From Pema Chodren: *"The Buddhist teachings are fabulous at simply working with what's happening as your path of awakening, rather than treating your life experiences as some kind of deviation from what is supposed to be happening. The more difficulties you have, in fact, the greater opportunity there is to let them transform you. The difficult things provoke all your irritations and bring your habitual patterns to the surface. And that becomes the moment of truth. You have the choice to launch into the lousy habitual patterns you already have, or to stay with the rawness and discomfort of the situation and let it transform you, on the spot."*

Focussing on Insight

In the sutta titled, "Insight Surpasses All," the Buddha offers increasingly amazing examples of the good that a person might do by taking various actions. Of the last three, culminating examples, the "bronze medal" goes for adopting the five precepts and taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This is surpassed by *"developing a mind of lovingkindness for even the time it takes to pull a cow's udder"*.

Finally, for the ultimate form of merit, the Buddha says: *"As great as all this might be, it would be even more fruitful still if one would develop the perception of impermanence just for the time it takes to snap one's fingers."*

Sila

Take the five basic precepts:

- No killing
- No stealing
- No lying
- No use of intoxicants
- No sexual misconduct

Fundamentally, reflect on harming and non-harming in regard to acts of body, thought, or speech.

Renounce some specific thing that causes you or others harm (e.g., driving aggressively, being critical).

Renounce one or more things that hook you on cycles of stimulation, such as coffee, TV, political blogs, or pornography.

Understand renunciation not as a painful taking something pleasurable away from oneself, but as a joyous way to increase one's happiness and contribution to others. Consider the Sanskrit term for renunciation: Brahmacharya, which means "in the company of the gods."

Sangha

Attend a regular sitting group. Or perhaps start one yourself.

Cultivate a relationship with a specific "dharma buddy," someone you routinely discuss practice with.

Affiliate with a major center, such as Insight Meditation Society (Barre, Massachusetts), Spirit Rock Meditation Center (Woodacre, California), Shambhala (Boulder, Colorado), San Francisco Zen Center, etc.

Look into bulletin boards on the internet that have discussion groups on dharma-related themes.

Consider bringing topics from the dharma - in low-key, appropriate ways - into your relationships with people who do not consider themselves dharma practitioners. For example, talking about the importance of intention in family relationships, and being increasingly mindful of what one's underlying purpose is during an interaction. Or simply using the term "clinging" more in dialogue with a friend. Or talking at work more about the results, the "fruits," of one action compared to another (i.e., discussing the law of karma in accessible, mainstream terms). This can create a wider sense of community for yourself.

During the Day

Using Daily Life as Grist for the Mill

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Investigations

Recall that investigation is one of the seven factors of enlightenment.

Keep being mindfully aware of the body, "sitting, walking, standing, and lying down." Cultivate awareness of specific parts/aspects of the body, such as your hands, feet, softness in the throat, openness of the chest, posture, etc.

A few minutes at a time - but renewed whenever you can think about it - try to remain mindful and embodied while thinking, speaking, or writing (including emails!).

Notice the feeling tone of your experience (one of the five aggregates) - i.e., pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral - 50 times a day for 3-6 months.

Routinely drop the question "Who am I?" or "Is joy available to me in this moment?" into your heart-mind.

Explore not presuming a categorical distinction/separation between your experience of the outer world and your experience of the inner world. It's just one big basket of aggregates.

Practices

Keep an intentional period of silence (e.g., an hour or two, or a morning) while working, or about the house.

Practice non-contending with physical objects (e.g., sticky drawers, can openers, car doors).

When standing in line (e.g., markets, Starbucks) do standing meditation.

If you have to rush, practice mindful rushing.

When the phone rings, imagine it's the temple bell and take a breath.

Take one or two mindful breaths when ending one thing and beginning another.

Driving

Driving is a great opportunity for sustained practice; just stay mindful of the other cars!

While driving, observe your breathing (perhaps aided by counting them up to 10 and then starting over), or perhaps chant.

Reflect on the precious fragility of all life and the inevitability of death. Sustain the intention to live - for the sake of yourself, those you love, and all beings - while accepting the possibility of death; denying or resisting the risks of living, so obvious while driving, is one reason driving can feel so stressful.

Practice strong mindfulness; notice the color of signs, trees, and all the many things around you when you drive.

One person wrote: "I like to call my car the Metta Mobile. Give your car a name and meaning and see if that helps change the way you think about driving."

So many of us seem to be addicted to rushing, to speed. See if there is a way that you can enjoy traveling at just the speed limit. Observe how your mind goes out there with greed WANTING to get somewhere; you can almost feel self speeding.

Relationships

Interdependence

Recall the "third characteristic" of existence: the interdependence of all things and the "emptiness" of any apparently individual thing. Reflect on this fact daily, particularly as it applies to relationships and the illusion of "self."

Inquire into the self-other distinction when with another person. Isn't that distinction - ultimately - completely arbitrary and full of suffering?

Generosity

Reflect on the fact that generosity was typically the first topic the Buddha taught to people starting in practice. It is absolutely fundamental to virtue, meditative depth, wisdom, and liberation.

Non-Harming

Take on the practice of non-contention with other people. Especially those with whom you tend to contend (e.g., partner, family members, political adversaries).

Focus on turning ill will to good will, and here are some ways:

- Be mindful of the priming, the preconditions for ill will. Try to defuse them early: get rest, have a meal, get support, talk things out, read the dharma, etc.
- Be careful about attributing intent to others. We are often just a bit player in their drama; they are not targeting us personally. Look for the good intentions in others beneath the action that made you feel mistreated. Look for the good in them.

- Put what happened in perspective. It's impermanent and empty of an inherent, fixed, solid nature. It's also part of a larger whole, most of which is fine.
- Practice generosity. Much ill will comes when we feel taken from, or not given to, or on the receiving end of another person's bad moment. Instead, let the person have what they took: their victory, their bit of money or time, etc. Give to them not giving to you. Let them have their bad moment. Think of it as an opportunity for dana on your part: the dana of forbearance, patience, the gift of no cause to fear you.
- Regard ill will as an affliction upon yourself. It hurts you more than anyone.
- Release the sense of self, that it was "I" or "me" who was affronted, wounded.
- " . . . ill will is suppressed by the first jhana based on lovingkindness and eradicated by the path of nonreturning." [Footnote 14, Chap 8, In the Words of the Buddha, Bhikkhu Bodhi]
- Cultivate positive emotion, like the happiness ("sukha") that is one of the five jhanic factors. Positive feelings calm the body, quiet the mind, buffer against the impact of stressful events, and foster supportive relationships -- which reduce ill will.
- Forgiveness. This doesn't mean changing your view that wrongs were done. But it does mean letting go of the emotional charge around feeling wronged. The greatest beneficiary of forgiveness is usually yourself.
- Resolve to meet mistreatment with lovingkindness. No matter what. The Buddha: *"Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handed saw, a person who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. You should train thus: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of lovingkindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with them, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill will.'* That is how you should train." The Simile of the Saw, Majjhima Nikaya.

Lovingkindness

As a general principle, take on lovingkindness (metta) practice as a significant element in your path to awakening.

To direct your intentions and open your heart, use the four classic phrases (or your own variations):

- May you be safe
- May you be healthy

- May you be happy
- May you live with ease

The types of people you can send metta to include: yourself, benefactors, family members, friends, neutral people, and difficult people (and sometimes an individual may fit more than one category).

Do "random acts of metta" in daily life by sending lovingkindness to strangers - even (or especially) angry or difficult or troubled people.

Time Together

Give time together as a gift, an expression of caring, a practice of restraining habits or craving for other activities (e.g., zoning out with TV, surfing the internet, doing housework).

Offer your attention itself as a generous gift.

Keep offering your attention past your natural inclination (e.g., normally you'd shift your gaze to a newspaper ad or the TV remote).

Sustain your attention to the other person's topic - rather than shifting to your own - as a mindful practice of equanimity and generosity.

Affection and Sexuality

Touch your partner mindfully. Perhaps take on the practice of using every touch - much like Thich Nhat Hanh's reminder to think of the phone ringing as the temple bell - as a reminder to be present and relational.

Try being with physical sensations without labels or stories. A mind unclouded with words. Breath awareness and body scanning in each moment.

Consider massage as a wonderful practice of mindfulness, perhaps with one of these elements:

- Listen to chanting or a dhamma talk together.
- Reflect on the nature of the body of yourself or your partner, in general or maybe with a structured meditation such as the 32 parts of the body reflection
- Imagine your partner as a baby, young, ill, and old; feel the impermanence of everything, and its fundamental emptiness, and let that knowing open your heart and your mind.
- Actively practice loving kindness.
- Watch your breath.

- In sum, while connecting with your partner, connect with your dhamma practice in any way that best suits you.

Explore maintaining an open heart while building up the charge, the excitement of sexual activity.

Reflect on any subtle (or gross) aspects of your sexuality that might harm yourself or your partner, such as fantasizing about other people, being perfunctory or false, using pornography, being demanding (or dismissive), etc. Consider taking up the practice of abandoning any aspect that you conclude is harmful.

Children

Childbirth

Go within the intensity of contractions as much as you can rather than do the more commonly prescribed visualizing.

Try to have full body awareness: rather than only feeling the pain of contractions, also feel the areas of the body that are not in pain. Maintain connection to that which is painful and hold it tenderly, with metta, and that which is not painful, holding it equally, doing equanimity practice with each single moment.

Infants and Toddlers

Practice walking meditation while soothing a colicky baby.

Try to be mindful of the ever-changing intentions and internal states of an infant or toddler who can't yet speak well, if at all. Even for just a minute or two. This is especially interesting when feeding or playing with the child.

With a very young child, each moment's experience is so fleeting: one moment smiling and the next one crying, one moment "singing" and the next one asleep. Practice presence without asking about the future, allowing this to be just as it is without any ability to know what the next moment will hold. Making space in your heart/mind for all that is this babe's experience and all that is your experience as nurturer. Being with the joy and sorrow of baby without holding on at all. Baby does not hold on and you do not need to, either.

General Parenting

Take as a personal precept never to speak or act in anger with your kids.

With somewhat older children, focus on a parami (e.g., Joy, Tranquility) each week as a family.

The methods of "nonviolent communication" (NVC) [see the book by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D.] are a beautiful practice to bring to parenting. Learn it well. Use it often.

Food

At each meal, take a minute to sense into the causes and conditions that led some part of your food to be on your plate. For example, consider the carrot and where it came from: the minerals and water that fed it, the farmer who planted it, the workers who picked it, the machinery that delivered it to the market, and the network of electricity and energy sources that fed the whole process; sense all that going into your body, sustaining you for a time, as you eat the carrot. Deepen your sense of interdependence and emptiness with each bite.

Consider the four elements - earth, wind, fire, and water - present in each meal, and how your own body is comprised of those elements, and like the ones on your plate, will ultimately disperse.

Eat slowly!

Only eat!

At each meal, move a small amount to the side or even on a separate dish and offer it to all beings. One can also do this with the scraps at the end, but many feel it is more meaningful to offer the food first. When offering the food one can think, "May all beings be free of hunger. May all beings be nourished. As I eat this food, may I use it for the cultivation of happiness on this planet."

Food comes in one end and then goes out the other, a vivid and daily illustration of impermanence and emptiness - and often, suffering. Every flush of the toilet is an opportunity - another temple bell - to reflect on this fact. And, paradoxically, to find and feel the happiness available in recognizing this endless process of release.

When going to the bathroom; we tend to think of our human byproducts as gross, but in truth they always become nourishment to some beings somewhere. For example, when monks in Southeast Asia use the bathroom, they commonly kneel. When we use the bathroom, how about thinking of this as a noble offering to other beings, wishing them happiness and nourishment.

One can also use this understanding of the transformations of food to help with craving, clinging, greed, etc. related to eating.

Housework

Pay attention to the body and to intention.

Feel into how everyday activities are an expression of caring for others. Sense your connection with them, your interdependence, as you push the broom or fold the laundry.

Explore accepting the moment of housework just as it is, without resisting it (a form of aversion - one of the Three Poisons). See if you can bring the wholehearted, peaceful, graciousness to it that you might bring to a similar activity while on retreat.

Jobs and Money

Practice right speech in the workplace.

Reflect on right livelihood and intention in your work.

Notice fear and greed in relationship to finances. Experiment with releasing each of these states of mind, and see what's left when they're gone: maybe just the facts - whatever they are - plus your own pure awareness.

World News

Notice body sensations arising in response to the news.

Reflect on the blessings in one's own life and the wish that all beings enjoy safety, health, happiness, peace and ease.

Reflect on the interdependence of all beings and the web through which our actions affect one another.

Cultivate metta for everyone in the news; notice contention.