



# Dorje Ling Dharma Centre

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## BUDDHISM AND MEDITATION

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### What is Buddhism?

While Buddhism sometimes looks a bit like a “religion,” it is best considered as a collection of practices designed to assist people to “wake up” – that is, to live totally without confusion about how things are.

The images of Buddha and the deities that you see on the artwork around you are not gods or idols. Rather, they represent aspects of awakened nature that we aspire to cultivate, such as compassion, loving kindness, healing, etc.

The implication of “awakening” is that we spend much of our lives functioning in a kind of sleep, reacting to the events and circumstances of our lives in a highly conditioned, programmed, or habitual way. It is not that there is anything particularly wrong with that (unless we come from particularly dysfunctional families). However, wandering through life on “autopilot” does tend to lead to problems, since life is always changing, and inevitably comes with its highs and lows – and since it is always changing and never perfect, even though we would like it to be a certain way, we end up somewhat (or very!) dissatisfied with our lives.

Buddhism proposes that although pain is an inevitable part of life, through the cultivation of “buddha-like” qualities, we discover that “suffering” is optional.

### Where did Buddhism come from?

The word “Buddhist” comes from the ancient Sanskrit word *budh*, meaning, awake. That is how the great teacher Siddhartha Gautama described his own state after his momentous “awakening” in Bodh Gaya, India, about 2500 years ago.

This man who came to be known as the Buddha (“Awakened One”) was born a pampered prince. After his awakening to the true nature of being, he assumed a simple life and spent fifty years teaching in the spiritual marketplace of his time. His teachings were very clear yet profound and practical, and enabled many to emulate his example and “wake up” to a more clear-sighted and fulfilling existence.

Buddha took on students, who faithfully transmitted his teachings and continued to illuminate them through their own experiences and insights. As the teachings spread, practitioners (both monastic and lay) continued to refine and develop what was useful, leading to different forms of practice such as Zen in Japan, Pure Land in China, Theravadin in Southeast Asia, and Vajrayana in Tibet (the tradition you see here at Dorje Ling) – each with its own particular emphasis, rituals, and cultural traditions.

The 1960s saw many Westerners journeying to Asia where they connected with Buddhist culture and practice, and then brought their findings back to the West. At the same time, many great Asian teachers came here to teach and to establish learning centres.

### Buddhism Today

The ancient teachings of Buddha are very much alive in this day and age. Around the world as the pace of life and technology quickens and we are called to face massive challenges, Buddhist techniques and spiritual practices are useful as never before. Science, counselling, neurology, and human psychology are being re-examined in accordance with Buddhist theory and practice. In Vancouver alone there are now well over 60 dharma (“teaching”) centres, with new centres and “sanghas” (communities) springing up day by day.

*See over for [What is Buddhist Meditation?](#) ►*

## What is Buddhist Meditation?

The practice of Buddhism is basically a three-part program: understanding, balanced behaviour, and meditation. So while Buddhism is often associated with meditation, that is just one third of the whole process. But the three parts do work to strengthen each other. Meditation trains the mind, that we may cultivate understanding and act more consciously in the world.

While each of the various cultural forms of meditation is somewhat different, there are always two aspects: *shamatha* (tranquility, or calm abiding) and *vippasana* (clear seeing, or insight.) Without the willingness, know-how, and capacity to calm one's mind, it is not possible to generate much insight. So, meditation practice usually begins there, with the development of active attention that leads to **mindfulness**, or the ability to simply rest the mind on whatever is in front of it, in full awareness, without adding any extra thoughts or emotions to the experience. And that, indeed, is basically what meditation is: the practice of resting the mind on an object and bringing it back when it when it has fallen off.

It sounds easy, but you may find that bringing your chattering “monkey mind” to rest is much more challenging than you might imagine. It is a discipline and as with any new skill, you must be patient and forgiving with yourself, and just keep on trying. Over time and with practice, meditation cultivates a strong and balanced mind which is not easily unseated by the momentary ups and downs of everyday experience.

## How can I meditate?

You do not need any special training or knowledge or accessories in order to meditate. Try it!

- Sit in a balanced way, on a cushion on the floor or on a chair
- If you like, use a clock or a timer – start with five or ten minutes, and see how it goes.
- Rest your attention on the breath. Try focusing on the sensations at the opening of the nostrils, as your breath flows in and out. Do not try to change your breathing pattern in any way; just notice it.
- When you realizes that something else is going on (e.g. thinking about dinner or remembering an experience), simply return and rest with what is already there: the breath.
- If you are distracted by a sound, and itch, a tingle, an emotion, don't get annoyed – acknowledge it and return once again to the breath.

It's that simple (and that difficult, at first).

Practicing this method over and over finally leads to the result of being fully present with your experience, able to respond precisely to what arises, open yourself to what is, serve the needs of the world, and receive the results of your actions. The need for struggle and escape will gradually dissolves with the understanding that there is no separation between yourself and this miraculous world.

## Some resources to get you started

The library at Dorje Ling is a treasure trove of Buddhist (and other) works – feel free to peruse, or to find a cozy spot to read.

Here are a few classic “beginners” books you might like to check out:

*Wake Up To Your Life*, Ken McLeod, 2001

*Buddhism Without Beliefs*, Stephen Batchelor, 1997

*What Makes Youn (Not) A Buddhist*, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche 2007

*Joyful Wisdom*, Yonger Mingyur Rinpoche, 2009

*Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, 1973

*Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, Suzuki Roshi 1970

And one great website:

[www.unfetteredmind.org](http://www.unfetteredmind.org)