

Albuquerque Karma Thegsum Chöling

Brief Guide to Buddhism

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This guide is for visitors of KTC and new students of Tibetan Buddhism. It provides a brief, general description of the core philosophy and main principals of Buddhism.

Buddhism encourages:

- taking charge of one's own life and mental state, through active spiritual practice
- virtuous and wholesome attitudes and behavior
- personal morality, discipline, and ethics
- respect for all beings (including animals) and other spiritual traditions
- self-liberation through accumulation of experience and skill, using the Buddha's methods

About Buddhism:

The religion /philosophy known as Buddhism began with Gautama Buddha (c. 563 BCE - 483 BCE; over 2500 years ago). Known as Buddha Dharma, or simply **Dharma**, it is a spiritual path that has helped countless practitioners over the millennia, and remains relevant today. Yet, for those raised on theistic (god centric) religions such as Christianity, and those educated in western science, the principles, beliefs, and methods of Dharma (such as meditation) may seem strange or implausible. Many find the teachings difficult to comprehend, but all who practice sincerely and correctly can attain realization.

The Buddha taught that the cause of suffering is fixation on the self ("ego clinging"), leading to mental confusion, negative emotions, harmful habits, and negative karma. Because all beings have **Buddha nature**, they have the power to overcome self fixation, and therefore liberate themselves from suffering. The fundamental beliefs of Buddhism are:

- **Buddha nature** the innate potential to attain enlightenment; all sentient beings have this
- **Karma** law of cause and effect; influenced by mental, verbal, and physical activity
- **Rebirth (reincarnation)** the stream of conscious states, from one life to the next, driven by karma
- **Samsara** cycle of birth & death among the six realms (conscious states) of existence
- **Universal suffering** all beings want lasting happiness, but experience suffering due to their actions
- **Impermanence** mental and physical things are a source of attachment, but do not last

Buddhists believe that all phenomena we experience are projections of our mind, as influenced by our karma. In other words, Buddhists do not believe that the world was created by a god, or that one must be saved by a supreme being. For Buddhists, complete, permanent salvation from suffering, and from the cycle of rebirth, is achievable by personally overcoming aggression, attachment, and ignorance about the true nature of phenomena.

Buddhists believe in the continuity of the mind and karma from one lifetime to another. But they do not believe in a human soul -- an unchanging essence or permanent self. All phenomena we experience, including our own body, are constantly changing and interdependent (such as from child to adult); any perceived inherent essence is illusory.

Buddhists use **meditation** to establish a calm, clear mind, and spiritual practices to gain control over their emotions and mental state. Tantric Buddhists, including most Tibetan sects, also use **sadhana practices**, powerful methods that reveal one's Buddha nature, and cause loving-kindness and compassion for others to arise spontaneously.

Definitions for items in bold are provided on the fourth page of this guide.

Principal Methods used in *Tibetan* Buddhism

- **meditation** calming meditation (*shamata*) and insight meditation (*vipassanā*)
- **liturgical practices** **sadhana** practices that expose one's Buddha nature and awaken innate wisdom
- **mind training** *Lojang*: techniques for weakening negative habits & strengthening positive habits
- **virtuous living** reducing attachment and selfishness, adopting positive ways in life and work

Principal Teachings of the Buddha

Four Noble Truths*

* see definitions page, below

1. truth of suffering
2. truth of origin of suffering
3. truth of cessation
4. truth of the path
5. -
6. -
7. -
8. -

Noble Eightfold Path (developing virtue)

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Right view | believing that actions have consequences |
| Right intention | resolving to lessen attachment to people and objects |
| Right speech | giving up lies, gossip, harsh words, and divisive speech |
| Right action | no killing, stealing, harming others, or inappropriate sex |
| Right livelihood | employment that does not kill or harm other beings |
| Right effort | self discipline to maintain right view and right action |
| Right mindfulness | maintaining awareness of one's thoughts, words, deeds |
| Right concentration | developing a deep, stable meditative absorption |

Becoming a Buddhist

Learning about Buddhism and choosing a Sangha

- Self-Study of Buddhist philosophy (see book list and web links, below; Wikipedia is a good source)
- Compare different Buddhist lineages (Kagyū, Gelug, Nyingma, Sakya; Zen; Chan; Theravāden, etc)
- Attend teachings by Lamas; talk with advanced practitioners
- Receive meditation instruction and try it for at least a few months
- Attend public **sadhana** practices (pujas)
- If possible, visit several sanghas (Buddhist temples, churches) in your area
- Talk to sangha members; get to know the sangha; if there is a resident **Lama**, ask to meet him/her

Taking refuge:

Those who have chosen Buddhism as their spiritual path can take part in a **formal refuge ceremony**. The purpose of taking refuge is to officially become part of an authentic Buddhist lineage, and thus gain the support of its teachers (Lamas) and other practitioners. Taking refuge strengthens one's practice and accomplishments immeasurably. Prior to taking refuge, it is recommended to:

- Carefully select a Buddhist lineage and sangha that is right for you
- Discuss taking refuge with an authentic Lama of that lineage / sangha

After taking refuge in Tibetan Buddhism

- Acquire a mala (string of beads) for use in mantra recitation
- Attend teachings and establish a regular **meditation*** practice (i.e. at home)
- Attend group **sadhana*** practices
- Learn about and study sadhanas that you practice
- Study and practice **mind training** (*Lojong*).*
- Receive empowerments for one or more of the **sadhana** practices of your refuge lineage (see next page).

* see definitions page, below

Meditate

The Buddha taught that meditation is essential for spiritual development. According to the Venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, the ultimate purpose of meditation is to rid oneself of negative emotions:

“In order to pacify these main three conflicting emotions [attachment, anger, ignorance] (of which there are many branches), one must first learn to develop the calm abiding nature or concentration through sitting meditation. Having pacified the conflicting emotions with this foundation of stillness of mind (shamata), one then applies vipasyana, which totally uproots the three conflicting emotions, freeing one from the cause of the ten unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind. Otherwise, if one does not address this problem at the very root, it is very hard to avoid unwholesome actions, because the root is still very firmly there.”

Receive Empowerments (Abhisheka)

An empowerment represents a form of initiation into a specific Buddhist practice. It involves the transmission of the blessing, permission, and instructions from a Lama to a student, in a special ceremony (i.e. given in person). Authentic transmission represents an unbroken line of empowerment, given from person to person, beginning with the historical Buddha and continuing up to one's Lama.

Prior to Taking Empowerments	After receiving Empowerments
Self-study on the concept of Lineage Transmission Study the vows and conditions of Abhisheka Study the particular empowerment that is being offered	Practice with experienced sangha members Study the sadhana for the empowerment Develop a regular home sadhana practice

Those interested in receiving a specific empowerment should speak to one of the senior students at KTC. We can arrange for a KTD Lama to confer empowerments for any of the principal practices we perform (refuge required).

Albuquerque KTC

Albuquerque KTC was established in 1982, and is an affiliate of **Karma Triyana Dharmachakra monastery (KTD)**, in Woodstock, NY. We follow the **Karma Kagyu** lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Our highest spiritual leader is **His Holiness, the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje**, and our principal Lama is the **very venerable Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche**, abbot of KTD. We regularly support visits from the Lamas of KTD, to provide teachings, answer student questions, and confer empowerments.

You can learn about our center's lineage, practices, events, and monthly schedule at our website:

www.abqktc.org

KTC Events Notices Email List

To hear about upcoming Lama visits and other events at KTC, send a request to join the **notices list**, to:

info@abqktc.org

Joining Albuquerque KTC

Membership dues support both our local activities and the ongoing work of the Karma Kagyu lineage in America. The Karmapa has said that a direct spiritual connection exists between himself and KTC members. If you would like such a connection, please consider joining the Albuquerque KTC.

There are several types of membership available:

For Individuals

- Local KTC Member only: \$15 per month.
- Joint Member of KTC and KTD: \$33 per month.

For Families

- Joint Family Membership with KTC and KTD: \$49 per month.

Members get discounts to events, and can check out materials from our library. Joint KTC-KTD memberships also include discounts at the many teachings held at KTD, and discounts on books and other items at the KTD bookstore, Namse Bangdzo, which also maintains an [online store](#).

If you're interested in becoming a member, please contact us at 505-343-0692 or info@abqktc.org, or come to one of our regular practices.

Resources and Materials for New Members

- KTC Buddhist Library (members can check out books)
- Namse Bangdzo Bookstore at KTD ([online store](#))
- Tashi Prayer booklet
- Mahamudra Lineage Prayer booklet
- Teachings on main sadhana practices (Chenrezig, Green Tara, Medicine Buddha)
- Other teachings by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Thrangu Rinpoche, Tai Situ Rinpoche, and His Holiness

Karma Triyana Dharmachakra

For information about our parent organization:

www.kagyu.org

The Karmapa and the Karma Kagyu Lineage

The following website contains useful information about **His Holiness, the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje** (our spiritual leader), and the **Karma Kagyu Lineage** (our lineage):

kagyuoffice.org

Definitions of Buddhist Terms

Sources: [Dharma Paths](#), by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche (Snow Lion publications); [wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org) <http://en.wikipedia.org>

Bodhicitta The altruistic attitude of loving-kindness and compassion toward all beings. Also, the aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva A Mahayana practitioner or enlightened being who works for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Buddha (the historical Buddha)

A fully enlightened being. The historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (aka Shakyamuni Buddha; ca. 563 to 483 BCE), lived in India and founded the philosophy of Buddhism, which follows the *middle-way*, a path of moderation away from the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, and extreme philosophies (i.e. solipsism & eternalism).

Buddha Nature The innate potential to attain enlightenment, which all sentient beings possess.

Dharma (Buddha Dharma) The teachings of the Buddha. Traditionally, it is said there are 84,000 Dharma teachings.

Enlightenment (Buddhahood)

Complete awakening of the mind. The gradual removal of all negative qualities and attainment of all positive qualities. Enlightenment is attained by following the path of Buddha Dharma. Traditionally, 10 stages (bhumi) are recognized for the path to enlightenment. Buddhahood is the ultimate, or 10th (sometimes called 11th) stage.

Four Noble Truths The first teaching of the Buddha, composed of:

1. The truth of suffering: all beings experience many forms of suffering
2. The truth of the origin of suffering: suffering arises from self fixation (ego clinging) and associated causes
3. The truth of cessation of suffering: it is possible to overcome the causes of suffering
4. The truth of the path: the Buddhist practices and stages that lead to the end of suffering

Mahayana Buddhism

The “great vehicle” of the Buddhist path. The vehicle of Bodhisattvas, concerned with developing loving-kindness and compassion (*Bodhicitta*) toward limitless sentient beings, and realizing the emptiness and interdependence of the self and all phenomena (called “dependent arising”, in which mind and phenomena are inseparable).

Meditation

A variety of techniques taught by the Buddha, designed to bring calm and serenity to the mind, develop insight into the nature of the mind and reality, develop skill in mental concentration, and control over thoughts, emotions, and feelings. One result of meditation is *mindfulness*, the ability to be maintain awareness of one’s mental state.

Mind Training (Lojong)

The practice of replacing negative thoughts, habits, and tendencies with their positive opposites. The goal is to refine and purify one’s motivations and attitudes. This is accomplished by employing a set of 59 helper aphorisms, or slogans, which one uses as reminders of what to do in specific situations of daily life. Examples include: “Be grateful to everyone”, “Don’t wallow in self-pity”, and “Don’t expect applause”.

Noble Eight-Fold Path

A principal teaching of the Buddha, that describes a set of eight moral precepts and practices, which underlie the ethical conduct necessary for the attainment of enlightenment.

Puja A ritual ceremony, involving expressions of honor and devotion to the sources of refuge (the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). Typically involves meditation and recitation or chanting of a liturgy (sadhana).

Sadhana A structured liturgical text used in Vajrayana practices. Typically involve offerings, visualizations, prayers, mantras, and silent meditation. During group practice, sadhanas are recited as part of a puja.

Sangha Generally, an organized group of Buddhist practitioners, usually led by an ordained monk or Lama. Can also refer more specifically to the Lamas (teachers) and enlightened beings who guide and support practitioners.

Tantra Practices used in Buddhism and Hinduism designed to cut negative emotion and reveal Buddha nature. Despite iconography, the use of sex (karmamudra) is extremely rare, and restricted to advanced practices.

Vajrayana Also called *Tantrayana* and *Mantrayana*; the Buddhist teachings on yogic practices that form the path of much of Tibetan Buddhism. Such practices are intended to accelerate the attainment of enlightenment. Tantric practices typically involve complex, symbolic imagery, and mantra recitation. They require empowerment, support, and guidance of an authentic Lama to be effective. Within the Kagyu tradition, physical tantric practices, such as the Six Yogas of Naropa, are included as advanced methods.

General Book List

The following books are recommended for learning about Buddhist philosophy, precepts, and methods.

Title	Author
Excellent at the Beginning	Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche
Dharma Paths	Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche
Heart of the Buddha	Chogyam Trungpa
Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness	Chogyam Trungpa
Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism	Chogyam Trungpa
Heart of the Buddha's Teaching	Thich Nhat Hanh
How to practice the way to a meaningful life	The Dalai Lama

Web Sites

Wikipedia:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_Buddhism

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karmapa>

Other Sites:

H.H. the Karmapa and main Kagyu office: kagyuoffice.org

H.H. the Dalai Lama: <https://www.dalailama.com/>

Meditation: <https://dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?f=40&t=633>

Seven Points of Mind Training (Chögyam Trungpa): <http://www.placeofdreams.org/slogans/contents.php>