



becoming more involved with the
San Francisco Buddhist Center
and the
Triratna Buddhist Community
(Updated Feb 2011)

The Triratna Buddhist Community is open to all those who wish to practice Buddhism within its community. After coming to classes and other events for a while you may find you want to take your commitment further, making a particular connection with the Triratna Buddhist Community and developing friendships with Order members.

One way you can do this is by becoming a Mitra. 'Mitra' is a Sanskrit word meaning 'friend'. In this context, a Mitra is someone who is actively involved in Triratna Buddhist Community activities, and intends to continue practicing the Dharma in this community.

We currently have a 'core sangha' of 13 Order Members and 35 Mitras at the San Francisco Buddhist Center. If you would like to know more please read the information inside and talk to us.

WHAT IS A MITRA?

A Mitra is a person who has made a commitment to Buddhist practice in the context of the Triratna Buddhist Community. This is an opportunity offered to anyone who has been practicing at any Triratna Buddhist Center and feels ready and able to make the declarations that characterize a Mitra. Its most significant aspect is choosing to make a commitment to your spiritual life. It is at this point that the Triratna Buddhist Community offers a formal recognition - a ceremony to mark this intention.

WHY BECOME A MITRA?

- First, it is an opportunity to express and mark a certain clarity that you have in relation to your spiritual development.
- Second, there are activities within the Triratna Buddhist Community that are specifically designed for mitras. There are Mitra Study classes, Retreats for Mitras and Order Members, and other special events at Triratna Buddhist centers throughout the world that you are eligible to attend. The San Francisco Buddhist Center has an annual Rainy Season Retreat throughout January, where we close to the general public in order to give Mitras and Order Members a chance to go deeper with their own study and meditation practice.
- Finally, some people who become Mitras decide later that they are interested in pursuing becoming an Order Member. As a Mitra you naturally begin to get more of a sense of the Order because you have greater contact with Order Members at the center. So it is usually as Mitras that people later request to be ordained.
This is by no means expected and there is absolutely no pressure.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Becoming a Mitra is not an institutional ritual that is expected of you. Many people practice within the Triratna Buddhist Community without ever choosing to become a Mitra. You will be as welcome and taken as seriously as a Buddhist practitioner, whether you choose to become a Mitra or not.

It is up to you. Personal responsibility is central to Buddhism. The Buddha said about his teachings, "Don't believe what I am saying; come and see for yourself, based on your own experience." The three declarations are guidelines to assist someone in deciding if they want to do this. They are not requirements or criteria that you must prove. You are free to make this choice, to decide where you are personally in relation to the declarations, and to decide if you want to become a Mitra within the Triratna Buddhist Community.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE READY TO BECOME A MITRA?

There are 3 declarations that you make when you become a Mitra. A declaration means "to make clear". So in making these declarations, you are making clear to yourself and others where you stand at the present time in relation to your spiritual life.

The Three Declarations:

1. **I am a Buddhist or at least I feel a strong resonance with Buddhist teachings and practices.** Buddhist principles seem coherent to you and the philosophy of Buddhism appeals to you; you like the atmosphere of the center and you enjoy the practices and the people and want to practice more. You don't have to make Buddhism the center of your life, or make a lifelong commitment. You make a provisional commitment to a Buddhist way of life through becoming a mitra.
2. **I am trying to practice the five precepts:**
You are aware of them, reflect on their meaning and application in your life, agree that this is an ethical standard that makes sense to you. You want to try to live in this way.

The Five Precepts:

- I undertake to abstain from taking life.
- I undertake to abstain from taking the not given.
- I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct.
- I undertake to abstain from untruthful speech.
- I undertake to abstain from taking intoxicants that cloud the mind.

3. **I feel that the Triratna Buddhist Community is the spiritual context within which I want to practice.**
You feel comfortable with the people, the practices, the approach to practice, the interpretation of the dharma, etc. You feel the need for spiritual friends and you want to practice with them.

THE CEREMONY

Mitra ceremonies occur at our centers or at a retreat, in the context of a puja. It is a very simple ceremony that consists of each person making three offerings to the shrine in silence. The three offerings are: a flower that symbolizes impermanence as well as beauty; a candle that symbolizes clarity and the light of the dharma; and a stick of incense that symbolizes the fragrance and ever-changing nature of the spiritual life.

If you are thinking about taking this step, talk to a Mitra convenor or another Order Member and they will answer your questions and instruct you on how to proceed.

Below are the Order Members
at the SAN FRANCISCO BUDDHIST CENTER
who will be happy to talk with about becoming a Mitra:

MITRA CONVENORS:
Shantinayaka
Padmatara

OTHER ORDER MEMBERS:
Karunadevi
Viradhamma
Viveka
Suvarnaprabha
Danamaya
Acarasiddhi
Karunadakini
Dhivajri
Nanasiri
Singhashri
Pasadini

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