



Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center

Ajahn Kumāro Bhikkhu, Resident Monastic
122 Arlington Street, Unit B, Asheville, NC 28801
Elisha Buhler's telephone #: (910) 922-1549
website: mittameditation.com
email: mittameditation@gmail.com

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Save Yourself

No one will save you; you must save yourself. The Buddha shows the way, liberation cannot be performed for you by a Buddha, teacher, deity, or another person.

The mind's disciplined practice of the Buddha-Dhamma is indispensable for freedom from suffering.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddhārakkhita

160. One truly is the protector of oneself; who else could the protector be? With oneself fully controlled, one gains a mastery that is hard to gain.

No other can accomplish your own mind's purification or awakening.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddhārakkhita

165. By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.

The Buddha's role is teacher and guide, not savior in the sense of doing the liberating work for you.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddhārakkhita

276. You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only point the way. Those meditative ones who tread the path are released from the bonds of Māra.

To save yourself does not mean to rely on the ego. The refuge is one's own practice grounded in Dhamma.

The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya translated by Maurice O'C. Walshe

16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Great Passing

...
2.26. 'Therefore, Ānanda, you should live as islands³⁹⁵ unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a monk live as an island unto himself, . . . with no other refuge? Here, Ānanda, a monk abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, clearly aware, mindful and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world, and likewise with regard to feelings, mind and mind-objects. That, Ānanda, is how a monk lives as an island unto himself, . . . with no other refuge. And those who now in my time or afterwards live thus, they will become the highest,³⁹⁶ if they are desirous of learning.'

Notes:

395 Dīpa = Skt. dvīpa 'island' rather than Skt. dīpa 'lamp'. But we do not really know whether the Buddha pronounced the two words alike or not! In the absence of such knowledge, it is perhaps best not to be too dogmatic about the meaning. In any case, it is just 'oneself' that one has to have as one's 'island' (or lamp), not some 'great self' which the Buddha did not teach (cf. n.363, end).

396 Tamatagge. The meaning of this is rather obscure, to say the least. It seems to mean something like 'the highest', even if scholars cannot agree as to how this meaning is reached. See the long note (28) in LDB.

You are your own refuge.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita

379. By oneself one must censure oneself and scrutinize oneself. The self-guarded and mindful monk will always live in happiness.

380. One is one's own protector, one is one's own refuge. Therefore, one should control oneself, even as a trader controls a noble steed.

The Buddha is teacher, not savior. The Buddha does not save you. The Buddha teaches you how to become liberated. Buddha shows the path, Dhamma is the path, and you must walk the path. This is consistent with the presentation of the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya atthaṅgika magga): understanding, practice, cultivation, abandoning, and realization have to occur through one's own direct experience.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita

276. You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only point the way. Those meditative ones who tread the path are released from the bonds of Māra.

There is one potential misunderstanding worth avoiding. There is wisdom in taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. Dhammapada 188–192 below discusses people who seek refuge in mountains, forests, trees, etc., and then identifies refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha as the supreme refuge because it leads to understanding the Four Noble Truths (ariya catusacca). Take refuge in the Buddha as teacher, in the Dhamma as the path, and in the Saṅgha as those who embody and support the path, while still having to practice yourself. See the Newsletters starting with February 2023 and ending with May 2023 for discussions on the Four Noble Truths.

Dhammapada translated by Acharya Buddharakkhita

188. Driven only by fear, do men go for refuge to many places — to hills, woods, groves, trees and shrines.

189. Such, indeed, is no safe refuge; such is not the refuge supreme. Not by resorting to such a refuge is one released from all suffering.

190–191. He who has gone for refuge to the Buddha, the Teaching and his Order, penetrates with transcendental wisdom the Four Noble Truths — suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering.¹⁶

192. This indeed is the safe refuge, this the refuge supreme. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering.

Note 16. The Order: both the monastic Order (bhikkhu sangha) and the Order of Noble Ones (ariya sangha) who have reached the four supramundane stages.

The expression: “No one will save you; you must save yourself” is a statement about personal responsibility for liberation. The Buddha can teach, encourage, point out delusion, and provide a path. But no one else can remove your greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha) for you.

Stop waiting for something outside yourself to save you, notice the tendency to think:

- “Someone will eventually make me happy.”
- “My circumstances need to change before I can be peaceful.”
- “My teacher will give me awakening.”
- “If I find the right relationship, place, spiritual community, or philosophy, I will finally be free.”
- “Something extraordinary will happen and solve my suffering.”

Instead, look directly at what is happening in your own mind now.

- If there is craving, see craving.
- If there is fear, see fear.
- If there is anger, see anger.
- If there is attachment, see attachment.

That seeing is the beginning of taking responsibility.

Stop blaming circumstances for your inner suffering. This does not mean that circumstances don't matter; poverty, illness, abuse, loneliness, political conditions, and other external circumstances can cause genuine suffering. But a useful question is: What is my mind doing with what is happening?

For example, someone criticizes you. The first unpleasant feeling may arise automatically. But then the mind can add:

- "How dare he say that."
- "He always treats me this way."
- "People don't respect me."
- "I have to get even."

Now there is suffering built upon the original unpleasant experience. The practical application is to catch the process earlier: contact → feeling → craving/aversion → clinging → suffering. Instead of automatically following it, you observe it and disrupt the link after feeling. See the July 2023 Newsletter for a discussion on Dependent Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*).

Take responsibility for your own practice.

This is precisely the point of Dhammapada verse 276 above "You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only point the way."

- You can have an excellent teacher and still not practice.
- You can read the entire Pāli Canon and remain bound by craving.
- You can live in a monastery and remain angry.
- You can understand not-self (*anattā*) intellectually and still cling to "me" and "mine."

What are you actually doing with the Dhamma? Are you:

- Practicing mindfulness (*sati*)?
- Developing meditation (*samādhi*)?
- Observing impermanence (*anicca*)?
- Recognizing craving (*taṇhā*)?
- Abandoning unwholesome states (*akusala manoviññāna*)?
- Cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*)?
- Developing dispassion (*virāga*)?
- Examining the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandhā*)?
- Letting go (*cāga*)?

The teaching becomes real only through practice.

Don't make devotion to the Buddha into a substitute for practice. The Buddha can show you the path but cannot walk it for you. A teacher can say: "Here is the cause of suffering. Here is how to investigate it." But the teacher cannot experience your suffering and release it from your mind. The Buddha's role is teacher (*satthā*) rather than savior.

- Buddha teaches.
- Dhamma provides the way.
- You are responsible for the practice.
- Wisdom develops through seeing directly.
- Liberation occurs through letting go.

Learn to become your own refuge.

The teaching of Mahāparinibbāna Sutta #16 in the Digha Nikaya above is relevant. It doesn't mean: "My ego is my refuge." It means "Don't abandon your own capacity for direct investigation and practice." When you're disturbed, instead of immediately looking outside yourself for someone to fix the disturbance, turn inward:

- What is happening?
- What am I feeling?
- What am I wanting?
- What am I resisting?
- What am I identifying with?

- Can I observe this without feeding it?

This process is taking refuge in the Dhamma.

“Save yourself” ultimately means letting go of yourself. This is perhaps the most profound aspect of the teaching. At first, “save yourself” sounds like: I must make myself better. But practice eventually questions the “I” that supposedly needs to be perfected.

- You begin with: “I am suffering.” Then: “There is suffering.”
- You begin with: “I am angry.” Then: “Anger has arisen.”
- You begin with: “I need to get rid of this.” Then: “Craving and aversion are arising and passing according to conditions.”

The practice moves from self-improvement toward seeing the conditioned nature of experience. This is why “saving yourself” should not be confused with strengthening the ego. Ultimately, it means freeing the mind from clinging.

Apply the teaching moment by moment. Suppose someone insults you. The ordinary response is: “He hurt me.” The practical Dhamma response is:

1. Hearing has occurred.
2. Unpleasant feeling has arisen.
3. Aversion has arisen.
4. The mind wants to defend itself.
5. Thoughts are proliferating.
6. I recognize this.
7. I don't have to follow it.
8. The feeling changes.
9. The thought changes.
10. The experience passes.

That is “saving yourself” in an immediate, practical sense. Nobody else has to come and rescue you from anger. You see it. You understand it. You don't feed it. You let it cease.

The teaching also applies to meditation. During meditation, suppose restlessness arises. The untrained response might be: “I can't meditate today.” Or: “Something is wrong with me.” Or: “I need someone to make this go away.” Instead:

- “Restlessness is present.”
- Observe its bodily and mental characteristics.
- Notice the desire for it to disappear.
- Notice the resistance.
- Notice that it is conditioned.
- Notice that it changes.

This is the Buddha's path in miniature: know the defilements → understand the defilements → abandon the defilements → cultivate wholesome qualities → realize liberation.

No one can do your seeing for you. No one can do your letting go for you. No one can remove your clinging for you. No one can realize Nibbāna for you. The Buddha can point directly to the way, but you must walk it.

There is an important paradox: The more completely you take responsibility for your own liberation, the less you find a permanent “self” that needs to be liberated. The practical task begins with personal responsibility, but the wisdom that develops through practice reveals that what we ordinarily call “self” is itself conditioned and not something to cling to. So the movement is:

- “I must save myself.”
- “I must practice.”
- “I must understand suffering and its cause.”
- “I must let go.”
- “There is nothing here to cling to.”

Announcements

- Please help advertise Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center by providing a review at www.google.com/maps.

Activities of the Meditation Center

- Group sitting meditation practice for one hour is held Monday through Friday at 6:30 a.m. and every day at 5:30 p.m. After meditation, Ajahn Kumāro is available to answer questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com on the days and time you would like to participate.
- Group sitting meditation practice for two hours is held every Saturday and Sunday at 6:30 a.m.
- The days of the full moon, new moon, and the two half moons are called in Pali: The Uposatha, and is a Buddhist day of observance. A lunar calendar is available at <https://cal.forestsangha.org>. Ajahn Kumāro will perform the ceremony of giving the five precepts on the full and new moon days after the 5:30 p.m. meditation. You may elect to keep the precepts as long as you see fit (one night, a week, a lifetime, etc.).
- Meditation Workshop is held on the first Sunday of each month between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. The workshop will provide instruction and practice for sitting and walking meditation. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the Dhamma. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- A recording of a Dhamma Talk from an experienced Thai Forest Teacher will be played on the third Sunday of each month. Sitting meditation starts at 4:30 p.m. and the Dhamma Talk will be played afterwards. Please sign up on Meet-Up or send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com if you are planning to participate.
- Every Saturday at 4:15 p.m. the Meditation Center will be cleaned. Please join us in maintaining a clean space for practicing and discussing the Dhamma.
- There is a library at the Meditation Center. You may browse for books to borrow at 5:00 p.m. and check out the books for three weeks.
- Everyday at 8:40AM Ajahn Kumāro leaves for alms-round in order to give residents of Asheville the opportunity to earn merit by practicing generosity of giving food and placing it into the alms bowl. Ajahn does not accept or handle money. Ajahn usually arrives at the Whole Foods Market, 70 Merrimon Ave., just before 9:00 a.m. and stands in front of the store for alms.
- Ajahn is available at other times during the day to meet with individuals or groups when requested.
- For more additional information, please send an email to mittameditation@gmail.com. We also have a presence on Facebook and Meet-Up social media.

Request for Support

The Meditation Center is in need of support in order to accomplish its mission and vision. The support may take various forms. You will support the Meditation Center by:

- Being present at the Meditation Center for group meditation.
- Giving alms during alms-round.
- Bringing to the Meditation Center items that are listed on the support page of the website www.mittameditation.com.
- Volunteering your skills, energy, and time at the Meditation Center.
- Informing your family and friends about the Meditation Center and encouraging them to participate in the activities.
- Donating financial contributions for the Meditation Center's expenses. Kalyāṇa-Mitta Meditation Center is recognized as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS under section 501(c)(3). Donations are deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. Financial contributions may be made on the

support page of the website www.mittameditation.com, and additional means for making financial donations may be discussed with Elisha Buhler at (910) 922-1549.