



*Finding  
a Community*



*Lama Lekshe*

## *Why seek a Spiritual Community?*

People seek spiritual communities for various reasons, as they offer numerous benefits that can enhance one's spiritual journey and overall well-being. Some reasons why someone might want to join a spiritual community include:

### 1. **Support and Encouragement**

Buddhist communities provide a supportive environment where you can find encouragement, comfort, and guidance during challenging times. Members often share similar values and beliefs, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity.

### 2. **Personal Growth and Development**

Being part of a Buddhist community can facilitate personal growth and development. Through teachings, discussions, and shared experiences, you can gain insights, expand their understanding of spirituality, and develop their character and virtues.

### 3. **Connection with Others**

Buddhist communities offer opportunities for meaningful connections and friendships with like-minded individuals. They provide a sense of community where people can share their joys, struggles, and spiritual journeys,

fostering deeper relationships and a sense of belonging.

### 4. **Practical Support and Resources**

Many Buddhist communities offer practical support and resources to their members, such as counseling, mentoring, educational programs, and social services. These resources can help you navigate life's challenges and discover or pursue your spiritual goals.

### 5. **Service and Outreach**

Buddhist communities often engage in service and outreach activities to support their members and the broader community. Participating in service projects, volunteering, and giving back can provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment, as well as opportunities to make a positive impact on the world.

### 6. **Spiritual Practice and Rituals**

Buddhist communities provide spaces for you to engage in spiritual practices, rituals, and ceremonies that deepen your connection to the transcendent and nurture your spiritual growth.

### 7. **Learning and Education**

Buddhist communities offer opportunities for learning and education through teachings, workshops, seminars, and study

groups. You can deepen their understanding of Buddhist principles, scriptures, and traditions, enriching your spiritual journey.

#### 8. **Guidance and Mentorship**

Buddhist communities often have leaders, teachers, or mentors who can provide guidance, wisdom, and support to individuals on their spiritual path. These mentors can offer insights, accountability, and encouragement as you navigate your spiritual journey.

#### 9. **Sense of Meaning and Purpose**

Being part of a community can provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life. By connecting with something greater than yourself and participating in a community dedicated to spiritual growth and service, you can find fulfillment and satisfaction.

#### 10. **Healing and Transformation**

Spiritual communities can be spaces of healing and transformation, where individuals find acceptance and renewal. Through the power of community, and spiritual practices, you can experience healing on emotional, mental, and spiritual levels.

Overall, the best spiritual communities offer a supportive, nurturing, and

transformative environment where individuals can grow spiritually, connect with others, and find meaning and purpose in their lives.

### *Choosing a Buddhist Community*

Choosing a Buddhist community involves careful discernment to ensure that it aligns with your spiritual beliefs, values, and aspirations. Here are steps you can take in this process:

#### 1. **Research Buddhist Traditions**

Familiarize yourself with the different Buddhist traditions, such as Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, as well as specific schools or lineages within each tradition. Understand their teachings, practices, and approaches to spiritual development.

#### 2. **Identify Your Spiritual Needs**

Reflect on your spiritual needs, goals, and preferences. Consider what you're seeking in a Buddhist community, whether it's meditation instruction, study of Buddhist teachings, opportunities for service, or a sense of community and connection.

#### 3. **Research Buddhist Communities**

Research Buddhist communities in your area or online that align with your interests and

preferences. Explore their websites, read about their mission, values, and programs, and gather information about their teachers, leaders, and lineage.

4. **Attend Services or Events**

Attend services, meditation sessions, or events hosted by different Buddhist communities to experience their atmosphere, teachings, and practices firsthand. Pay attention to how you feel during these experiences and whether you resonate with the community.

5. **Engage with Community Members**

Interact with members of the Buddhist communities you're interested in to learn more about their experiences and perspectives. Ask questions, share your interests, and listen to others' stories to gauge whether you feel a connection with the community.

6. **Assess Community Dynamics**

Observe the dynamics and culture within each Buddhist community. Consider factors such as inclusivity, diversity, friendliness, and opportunities for participation and engagement.

7. **Evaluate Teaching and Practice**

Assess the teachings and

practices of each Buddhist community. Consider whether they align with your understanding of Buddhist principles, ethics, and practices. Look for a community that emphasizes authenticity, compassion, and wisdom.

8. **Seek Guidance**

Seek guidance from experienced practitioners, teachers, or mentors who can offer insights and advice based on their own experiences with Buddhist communities. Listen to their perspectives and consider their recommendations as you make your decision.

9. **Find out How Accessible the Lama and Teachers Are**

If you hope to get individual guidance or support from the center's Lama, find out how accessible they are. Do they have an appointment calendar? How is it accessed? Do you need to be a member of the center to have an appointment?

10. **Trust Your Intuition**

Pay attention to your intuition and inner guidance as you discern which Buddhist community feels right for you. Trust that you will be led to the community where you can best deepen your spiritual practice and find support on your path.

## 11. Commitment

Once you've found a Buddhist community that resonates with you, consider making a commitment to participate actively and contribute to its growth and well-being. Building strong connections and investing in relationships within the community can enhance your spiritual journey and sense of belonging.

Take your time. There's no rush. But as it is in all communities, you get from the community what you contribute to the community.

It's also a good idea to look closely at the senior members of the community. Do they embody the kind of life and actions you aspire to? While any individual may not be an example of what it is like to be steeped in the community and tradition's practice, a broader look at long-time members will give you a feel.

By following these steps and engaging in discernment, you can find a Buddhist community that supports your spiritual growth, connects you with like-minded practitioners, and provides opportunities for deepening your understanding and practice of Buddhism. It's not just a search for a good community—it's the search for a community that matches your needs.

## *What Questions Should I ask When Considering a Community?*

When considering joining a Buddhist community, it's essential to ask thoughtful questions to gain a better understanding of the community's teachings, practices, culture, and values. Here are some important questions to ask:

### 1. **What Buddhist tradition or lineage does the community follow?**

Understanding the tradition or lineage can provide insights into the community's teachings, practices, and approach to Buddhism.

### 2. **Who are the teachers or leaders of the community?**

Learning about the teachers or leaders can help you assess their qualifications, experience, and reputation within the Buddhist community.

### 3. **What are the main teachings and practices of this community?**

Understanding the core teachings and practices can give you an idea of what to expect and whether they resonate with your spiritual path.

### 4. **What opportunities are available for meditation practice?**

Inquiring about meditation practices and opportunities for meditation retreats or sessions can help you assess the community's emphasis on meditation, which is a central practice in Buddhism.

5. **Does the community offer study groups or classes on Buddhist teachings?**

Knowing whether the community provides opportunities for studying Buddhist texts, teachings, and philosophy can help you deepen your understanding of Buddhism.

6. **What is the community's approach to ethics and morality?**

Asking about the community's ethical principles and values can help you determine whether they align with your own moral framework.

7. **How does the community engage with social and environmental issues?**

Inquiring about the community's involvement in social justice, environmental activism, and community service can provide insights into its commitment to compassionate action. While a Buddhist community need not have programming in these areas due to lack of teaching expertise or some other reason, the

community should generally be supportive of community members' learning the knowledge, skills and information to live a life that is responsive to current issues in justice.

8. **What is the community's stance on diversity and inclusivity?**

Asking about the community's approach to diversity, inclusivity, and welcoming people from different backgrounds can help you assess its openness and acceptance.

9. **How does the community handle conflicts or disagreements?**

Understanding how the community addresses conflicts and maintains harmony can give you an idea of its culture and values regarding interpersonal relationships.

10. **What opportunities are available for community involvement and participation?**

Inquiring about opportunities for volunteering, participating in community events, or contributing to the community's activities can help you assess your potential role within the community.

**11. What is the community's organizational structure and decision-making process?**

Learning about the community's governance structure and decision-making process can provide insights into its transparency, accountability, and democratic principles.

**12. Are there any financial obligations or membership fees?**

Asking about financial obligations, membership fees, or donation expectations can help you understand the community's financial sustainability and your potential financial commitment.

By asking these questions and engaging in open dialogue with the community's leaders and members, you can make a more informed decision about whether the Buddhist community is the right fit for you and your spiritual journey.

*What are the Signs of a Wholesome Buddhist Community?*

A wholesome Buddhist community embodies the principles and values of Buddhism, fostering an environment conducive to spiritual growth, compassion, and wisdom. Here are some signs of a wholesome Buddhist community:

**1. Emphasis on Ethics**

A wholesome Buddhist community places a strong emphasis on ethical conduct, adhering to principles such as non-harming (ahimsa), honesty, integrity, and compassion towards all beings. This includes the ethics of leaders at every level in the tradition. Community leaders should be open to examination if they exhibit breaches of ethics to which the members of the community are held.

**2. Commitment to Practice**

Members of a wholesome Buddhist community are dedicated to their spiritual practice, which typically includes meditation, mindfulness, and cultivating wholesome qualities such as loving-kindness and equanimity.

**3. Inclusivity and Diversity**

A wholesome Buddhist community welcomes individuals from diverse backgrounds and

respects differences in culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. It values inclusivity and promotes a sense of belonging for all members.

4. **Spiritual Guidance and Support**

The community provides spiritual guidance and support to its members through teachings, mentorship, counseling, and opportunities for spiritual growth and development.

5. **Compassionate Action**

Members of a wholesome Buddhist community are engaged in compassionate action, seeking to alleviate suffering and promote well-being in the world through acts of kindness, generosity, and service.

6. **Harmonious Relationships**

The community fosters harmonious relationships among its members, promoting open communication, mutual respect, and skillful conflict resolution. It cultivates an atmosphere of kindness, forgiveness, and understanding.

7. **Transparency and Accountability**

The community operates with transparency and accountability in its decision-making processes,

governance structure, and use of resources. It values honesty, integrity, and responsible stewardship.

8. **Cultivation of Wisdom**

Members of a wholesome Buddhist community are dedicated to the cultivation of wisdom, seeking to understand the nature of reality, the causes of suffering, and the path to liberation. They engage in study, contemplation, and inquiry to deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings.

9. **Sense of Community and Support**

The community provides a sense of community and support to its members, offering opportunities for friendship, connection, and shared spiritual practice. It fosters a supportive and nurturing environment where individuals can feel seen, heard, and valued.

Overall, a wholesome Buddhist community embodies the core values and teachings of Buddhism, fostering an environment of compassion, wisdom, and spiritual growth for its members and the broader community.

*What Questions Could I ask Current Members of a Community if I am Considering Joining?*

When considering joining a Buddhist community, it's important to ask questions that will help you gain a deeper understanding of the community's culture, practices, values, and dynamics. Here are some questions you could ask members of a Buddhist community:

1. **What initially attracted you to this Buddhist community?**

Understanding why current members joined the community can provide insights into its appeal and what others have found beneficial.

2. **What aspects of the community do you find most meaningful or valuable?**

Learning about the experiences and perspectives of current members can give you a sense of what the community offers and how it has impacted their lives?

3. **How would you describe the community's atmosphere and culture?**

Asking about the community's atmosphere and culture can help you gauge whether it aligns with your preferences and values.

4. **What types of practices or activities does the community engage in?**

Inquiring about the community's practices and activities can give

you an idea of what to expect in terms of meditation, study groups, retreats, and other spiritual activities.

5. **How does the community support members in their spiritual growth and practice?**

Learning about the support systems and resources available to members can help you assess whether the community provides the guidance and encouragement you're seeking.

6. **What opportunities are there for volunteering or contributing to the community?**

Asking about opportunities for involvement can help you determine how you might contribute to the community's well-being and connect with other members.

7. **How does the community handle conflicts or disagreements?**

Inquiring about the community's approach to conflict resolution and maintaining harmony can give you insights into its communication and relational dynamics.

8. **What role do teachers or leaders play in the community, and how are they chosen?**

9. Understanding the role of teachers or leaders and their selection process can provide insights into the community's governance structure and leadership dynamics.

10. **How does the community engage with social and environmental issues?**

Asking about the community's involvement in social justice, environmental activism, and community service can help you assess its commitment to compassionate action.

11. **What is the process for becoming a member of the community?**

Inquiring about the membership process can help you understand the community's expectations, requirements, and commitments for joining.

12. **How does the community foster inclusivity and diversity?**

Learning about the community's approach to inclusivity and diversity can help you assess whether it welcomes individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives.

13. **What challenges or difficulties have you encountered in the**

**community, and how were they addressed?**

Asking about challenges and how they were addressed can provide insights into the community's resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities.

By asking these questions and engaging in dialogue with members of the Buddhist community, you can gain a clearer understanding of its culture, practices, and values, and determine whether it is the right fit for you.

*What are Signs of Concern in a Possibly Unhealthy Community?*

While most Buddhist communities offer enriching experiences and opportunities for spiritual growth, it's essential to be aware of potential signs of concern that may indicate an unhealthy community. Here are some possible signs to watch for:

1. **Authoritarian Leadership**

An unhealthy Buddhist community may have leaders who exert excessive control, manipulation, or authoritarianism over members. They may discourage questioning or dissent and demand unquestioning obedience.

2. **Lack of Transparency**

Transparency is vital in a healthy

community, but if there's a lack of transparency regarding decision-making processes, finances, or other important matters, it could be a red flag.

**3. Cult-like Behaviors**

Beware of communities that exhibit cult-like behaviors, such as isolation from outside influences, manipulation of members' thoughts or behaviors, and the deification of leaders.

**4. Excessive Focus on Fundraising**

While donations are common in Buddhist communities to support activities and facilities, an unhealthy emphasis on fundraising to the detriment of spiritual practice and community well-being may indicate financial exploitation.

**5. Exploitative Practices** Unhealthy communities may exploit their members financially, emotionally, or sexually. Look out for signs of coercion, manipulation, or abuse of power.

**6. Lack of Boundaries**

Healthy boundaries are essential in any community. If there's a lack of respect for personal boundaries or if members are pressured to divulge personal information, it could be a sign of an unhealthy dynamic.

**7. Rigid Ideology**

A healthy Buddhist community encourages inquiry, critical thinking, and open-mindedness. Freedom from fixed opinions was part of the Buddha's doctrine.

Conversely, an unhealthy community may promote rigid adherence to a particular ideology or belief system, discouraging exploration or questioning. This would indicate that the community possibly is not teaching genuine Buddhism.

**8. Discrimination or Exclusion** A healthy Buddhist community values inclusivity and diversity, welcoming individuals from all backgrounds. If there's evidence of discrimination, prejudice, or exclusion based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors, it's a cause for concern.

**9. Gossip or Slander**

Unhealthy communities may engage in gossip, slander, or negative gossip about members or outsiders. This behavior fosters a toxic atmosphere and undermines trust and community cohesion.

**10. Crisis of Faith or Burnout**

If members frequently experience crises of faith, burnout, or emotional distress without

adequate support or resources, it may indicate underlying issues within the community.

#### 11. **Lack of Respect for Consent**

Healthy communities respect individuals' autonomy and consent. If there's evidence of boundary violations, coercion, or manipulation in personal interactions, it's a warning sign.

#### 12. **Suppressing Individuality**

Unhealthy communities may discourage individuality, creativity, or independent thinking, promoting conformity instead. This stifles personal growth and undermines the diversity of perspectives within the community.

It's essential to trust your intuition and seek support if you have concerns about a Buddhist community. If you encounter any of these signs, consider discussing your observations with trusted friends, mentors, or advisors, and explore alternative communities that prioritize the well-being and spiritual growth of their members.

### *Here are Some Questions You Could Ask the Primary Teacher in a Buddhist Community*

When engaging with the primary teacher at a Buddhist community, it's

important to ask thoughtful questions that can help you gain a deeper understanding of their teachings, qualifications, approach to practice, and the community itself. Here are some questions you may consider asking:

#### 1. **What is your background and training in Buddhism?**

Understanding the teacher's training, lineage, and experience can provide insights into their qualifications and approach to teaching.

#### 2. **What inspired you to become a Buddhist teacher?**

Learning about the teacher's motivations and inspirations can give you a sense of their personal journey and commitment to Buddhism.

#### 3. **What is your teaching style and approach to practice?**

Inquiring about the teacher's teaching style, methods, and approach to practice can help you determine whether it resonates with your learning style and spiritual goals.

#### 4. **What are the main teachings or traditions you emphasize in your teachings?**

Understanding the primary teachings or traditions emphasized by the teacher can give you insights into the focus and orientation of their teachings.

5. **How do you support students in their spiritual practice and growth?**

Asking about the teacher's approach to supporting students' spiritual practice and growth can help you assess their commitment to guiding and nurturing their students.

6. **What role do ethics and morality play in your teachings?**

Inquiring about the teacher's approach to ethics and morality can help you understand their values and principles as a Buddhist teacher.

7. **How do you address questions or doubts from students?**

Understanding how the teacher responds to questions, doubts, and challenges from students can give you insights into their openness, humility, and willingness to engage in dialogue.

8. **What opportunities are there for students to deepen their practice outside of regular teachings?**

Inquiring about opportunities for retreats, workshops, study groups, or other activities can help you assess the breadth and depth of the teacher's offerings.

9. **How do you foster a sense of community and support among students?**

Asking about the teacher's approach to building community and support networks among students can help you understand the interpersonal dynamics within the community.

10. **What are your thoughts on the role of Buddhism in addressing social and environmental issues?**

Inquiring about the teacher's perspectives on engaged Buddhism and the role of Buddhist practitioners in addressing social and environmental challenges can provide insights into their broader worldview and values.

11. **How do you handle conflicts or disagreements within the community?**

Understanding the teacher's approach to conflict resolution and maintaining harmony within the community can give you insights into their leadership style and communication skills.

12. **How do you ensure the safety and well-being of students in the community?**

Asking about the teacher's commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for

students can help you assess their ethics and responsibility as a teacher.

By asking these questions and engaging in dialogue with the primary teacher, you can gain a clearer understanding of their teachings, values, and approach to practice, and determine whether the Buddhist community is the right fit for you.

### *Once I have decided to Join a Spiritual Community How do I Integrate Myself as a Member?*

Once you've decided to participate in a spiritual community, integrating yourself into the community involves actively engaging with its members, participating in activities, and contributing to the community's well-being. Here are some steps you can take to integrate yourself into the community:

#### 1. **Attend Regular Gatherings**

Make an effort to attend regular gatherings, such as services, meditation sessions, study groups, or social events. This allows you to meet other members and become familiar with the community's practices and culture.

#### 2. **Introduce Yourself**

Take the initiative to introduce yourself to other members and

leaders of the community. Share a bit about yourself, your interests, and your reasons for joining the community.

#### 3. **Participate Actively**

Get involved in community activities and projects that interest you. Offer to volunteer, join committees, or contribute your skills and talents to support the community's initiatives.

#### 4. **Build Relationships**

Take time to get to know other members of the community on a personal level. Strike up conversations, ask questions, and listen attentively to others' stories and experiences. Building meaningful relationships fosters a sense of connection and belonging within the community.

#### 5. **Seek Mentorship or Guidance**

If the community offers mentorship or guidance programs, consider seeking out a mentor or spiritual advisor who can provide support and guidance as you deepen your involvement in the community.

#### 6. **Attend Community Events**

Make an effort to attend community events and celebrations, such as retreats, festivals, or special ceremonies. These events provide opportunities for bonding, celebration, and spiritual growth.

7. **Participate in Study and Practice Groups**

Join study groups, meditation circles, or other practice-oriented groups within the community. Engaging in shared spiritual practices and discussions can deepen your understanding of the community's teachings and foster connections with other members.

8. **Contribute Positively**

Look for ways to contribute positively to the community's atmosphere and activities. Offer encouragement, support, and kindness to others, and be willing to lend a helping hand whenever needed.

9. **Respect Community Norms and Boundaries**

Familiarize yourself with the community's norms, values, and boundaries, and strive to respect them in your interactions with others. Cultivating a culture of mutual respect and understanding enhances harmony within the community.

10. **Stay Open and Flexible**

Be open to new experiences, perspectives, and opportunities for growth within the community. Stay flexible and adaptable as you navigate your journey within the

community, and be willing to learn from others along the way.

By actively engaging with the community, building relationships, and contributing positively to its activities and atmosphere, you can integrate yourself into the spiritual community and cultivate a sense of belonging and connection with fellow members.

*We Hope you Find Your Community!*

We hope you find a community that works for you. It's our feeling that the right community will be a home for you and your practice, in times of ease and times of difficulty.

You'll have an easier time finding a community if you don't expect perfection. All human communities have flaws and helping a community shape itself is part of your practice of engaged Buddhism.

It's also important to remember that all communities of human beings change over time, and your needs may change, as well.

If at some point your community no longer seems like a good fit, work to change it or feel free to find a new dharma home.

A practice community is a precious resource. Support and appreciate yours!

