



The Seattle Buddhist Center

WHAT IS A MITRA?

WHAT IS A MITRA?

Mitra is the Sanskrit word for “friend” and has a special significance for the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community. A mitra is a person who has made a commitment to Buddhist practice in the context of the Triratna Buddhist Community. Becoming a mitra is offered to anyone who has been practicing at any Triratna Center, when they feel ready and able to make the three declarations that characterize a mitra. It’s most significant aspect is the spiritual act of choosing to become a mitra, choosing to make a commitment to one’s spiritual life. It is at this point that a formal recognition is offered - a ceremony to mark this intention.

WHY BECOME A MITRA?

- It is an opportunity to privately and publicly express a clarity that you have in relation to your spiritual development.
- There are activities within the Triratna Community that are specifically offered for mitras. These include study classes that allow going deeper into Dharma practice and teachings, as well as Order /Mitra retreats and events, including events/retreats at any Triratna Center.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Becoming a mitra is not an institutional ritual that is expected of you. Many people practicing within Triratna never 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.

THE THREE DECLARATIONS

There are three 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.

- 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 strive to abstain from taking life.

I strive to abstain from taking the not given.

I strive to abstain from sexual misconduct.

I strive to abstain from untruthful speech.

I strive to abstain from taking intoxicants that cloud the mind.

- 3. I feel that the Triratna 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., and want to practice within this context.

THE CEREMONY

Mitra ceremonies occur at the Center or on a retreat. 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.

NEXT STEPS

If you are thinking about taking this step, talk to an Order Member and they will answer your questions and talk about next steps.