

TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM

1. *Establishing the Conditions for Safety* [Ethical Guidelines]
Our practice and our work in the world begin with an ethical commitment to help, and not to harm, ourselves and others, establishing a “container” of safety for ourselves and those around us, near and far. We bring this intention not just to our face-to-face interactions, but also to our participation in relationships, groups, communities, and larger ecological, economic, political, and social systems.
2. *Mindfulness in Action*
Open, mindful awareness is the fundamental nature of our being. How can we cultivate this presence in our actions in any domain, and cut through tendencies to be distracted, to be caught in fixed views and habitual patterns of thought, body, and emotion?
3. *Clarifying Motivation, Setting Intention*
Our actions can be dedicated to the benefit and awakening of all beings. Keeping this intention in mind helps our actions to go beyond mere “do-gooding,” fighting so-called oppression, or just “getting things done,” and into the realm of dharma practice.
4. *Opening to Pain and Suffering, Opening to Compassion*
In our meditation practice, we learn to be present in the face of suffering, working through our reactivity, denial, avoidance, and fears, and exploring and transforming the roots of suffering. We bring this skill outward, not turning away from the suffering and injustice that we find in our families, communities, work, society, and world. Our action comes increasingly out of our compassion.
5. *By Taking Care of Myself, I Take Care of the World*
Like the parent who uses the mask in an airplane emergency first, before helping the child, we need to attend to our long-range well-being. We need to attend to the signs of burnout or resentment. Cultivating our own awakening and joy, we may truly be of use, and naturally seek the well-being of others.
6. *Not Knowing, But Keep Going*
Our work is to remain open to what is unknown, mysterious, and confusing, and to avoid easy answers and habitual views. Maybe we’re wrong or incomplete. We cultivate the ability to listen openly, to hold the multiple questions and perspectives that arise, and to be present with whatever is coming up.
7. *Interbeing and Co-Responsibility*
We look at our tendencies to separate “us” and “them,” and “inner” and “outer.” We see in ourselves the same structures of greed, hatred, and delusion that we seek to change. We realize that there is ultimately no “other” to fight against, although some bear greater responsibility for suffering.
8. *Transforming Anger*: Anger is a powerful and often confusing energy that can lead either to hatred, blaming, and harming of ourselves and others, or, when transformed, to compassionate action. Since anger often arises when there is an ethical breach, a violation of personal boundaries, or injustice, a spiritually mature response to these kinds of situations often has as its center work with anger.
9. *Acting from Equanimity*
Can we bring equanimity—the state of even-mindedness and balance—to all our actions, balancing acceptance and understanding of the present moment and its causes and conditions with compassion and the intention to respond to suffering?
10. *Committed Action, Non-attachment to Outcome*
In our practice, we learn of the roots of suffering in compulsive attachment to objects, experiences, ways of doing things, views, and outcomes. Yet non-attachment does not mean complacency, passivity, separation from life, lack of commitment, or non-doing. We have to act. Action that comes from clear seeing and an open heart can be deeply committed, yet without attachment to the outcome.

Developed by Donald Rothberg and Diana Winston (2001 – 2004, modified version, September 2006)