

Thirty Days of Nembutsu

Welcome to thirty days of nembutsu. We are pleased that you have taken this opportunity to try something new - something which has the potential to affect deep change.

Why practice nembutsu?

In this course we're offering you a taste of a Buddhist practice called nembutsu because we want to pass on the wonderful benefits we've received through practicing it ourselves. We trust that over the coming days you will feel increasingly connected to all that is wholesome and nourishing in the Universe.

If you are currently suffering, confused or grieving, the nembutsu can bring clarity and consolation. You will feel increasingly calm, accepting, grateful and joyful and, like us, you will begin to feel more patient and loving towards yourself and towards others.

Nembutsu is less known in the West than meditation, despite being the primary practice of millions of Pure Land Buddhists in China, Japan and across the world. It became popular in 12th Century Japan as a Buddhist practice that was suitable for all - rich and poor, saints and sinners. It is especially suitable for those who feel something is missing from their lives but who are too busy to invest in long periods of spiritual practice or study.

What is the nembutsu?

Nembutsu means mindfulness of Buddha. Pure Land Buddhists do this by chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha.

Amitabha is the Buddha of Infinite Light – this Buddha embodies infinite compassion and wisdom, and they accept us just as we are. We usually use the Japanese words, 'Namo Amida Bu'. The phrase can be translated as 'little me, calling out to Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light'.

This is our way of taking refuge, and of bringing ourselves into relationship with something other than our small minds – something completely good. As well as the Japanese form, we also chant in other languages such as Chinese (Namo Omite Fo) or Sanskrit (Namo Amitabha).

Is the nembutsu for me?

Nembutsu is a practice for everyone. Pure Land Buddhists trust that we are already connected to the Buddha or to ineffable reality, and the nembutsu helps us to remember this.

You may have questions or feel sceptical about whether the practice will make any difference to your life. We suggest that you notice any questions that arise and put them to one side for now.

Some people feel self-conscious when they first begin to chant. We find that if you persist, it will soon begin to feel more natural.

In our experience, simply doing the practice can answer many of your questions. To try it out, you will need to put aside five or ten minutes a day for thirty days. The nembutsu brings many benefits, so have a go and find out for yourself.

Preparing to practice nembutsu

- ❖ Listen to [a few recorded nembutsu chants](#) and decide whether you'd like to practice the recitation (spoken) or the chanting (with a tune).
- ❖ Decide when you're going to do your daily practice. It can be helpful to do it at the same time every day, such as first thing in the morning or in your lunch break.
- ❖ Decide where you're going to chant.
- ❖ Decide whether you will chant alone, or chant along with Kasper and Satya on the recording each day.
- ❖ If you can't find a place to chant out loud, simply say or chant the nembutsu in your head as you sit in silence.

How to practice nembutsu

- ❖ Sit comfortably and close your eyes if you want to. Chant for a minimum of five minutes, once a day. Some people like to imagine themselves being soaked in compassionate light as they chant.
- ❖ You may want to have a short period of silence before and/or after you chant.
- ❖ Some people like to light a candle before they start chanting or sit near an image or statue of the Buddha.
- ❖ If you feel you want to chant twice a day or for longer periods then do go ahead.
- ❖ If you can't find a place where you can chant out loud every day, chant in your head. Chanting outside can be especially rich and powerful.
- ❖ If you forget a day, that's okay – just say 'Namo Amida Bu' and start again the next day.

Connecting with others

The [Bright Earth Buddhist Temple](#) offers practice twice a week in person in Malvern, the UK or on Zoom and you are welcome to join us. Email hello@brightearth.org you'd like to know if there are any Pure Land groups near where you live.

Further exploration

If you find benefits from your nembutsu practice, you can read more about Pure Land Buddhism at the Bright Earth website. The best books to start with are the 2nd edition of 'Just As You Are: Buddhism for Foolish Beings' by Kaspa Thompson and Satya Robyn, and 'Coming Home: Refuge in Pureland Buddhism' by Satya Robyn.

Making a donation

If you benefit from this course, you can make an optional donation of £10 or whatever you decide whether more or less to our charitable body, [Amida Trust](#), [here](#). This money will be used to run the temple in Malvern and to support other Buddhist projects around the world.

Just As You Are

Amitabha Buddha sees that we are all 'bomby' – foolish beings of wayward passion - and accepts us just as we are. As you continue to practice the nembutsu we hope that you will have an experience of being unconditionally accepted, just as we have. As Amitabha accepts us just as we are, it also becomes easier for us to accept and feel tender-hearted towards those around us.

Do feel free to get in touch with the temple stewards (who are responsible for running the temple) at hello@brightearth.org, or Kasper or Satya (who wrote this course) at kasper@brightearth.org or satya@brightearth.org. We'd love to know how you get on.

Enjoy your practice.

Namo Amida Bu.

Glossary

There are lots of new terms to learn when you first start to practice nembutsu. These terms will eventually become as familiar as words like ‘meditation’ and ‘zen’ but, until then, here’s a glossary you can refer to as you read the emails or material online.

Amida Buddha – the Buddha of Infinite Light (Japanese form).

Amitabha – the Sanskrit word for Amida Buddha, which we use in some of our chants.

Buddha – often used to refer to Shakyamuni Buddha, who lived in India in 500 B.C.E, but also used to refer to any fully enlightened beings including Amida Buddha.

Dharma – the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Honen – Honen Shonin was a Buddhist sage from 12th Century Japan who started Jodo Shu, the first independent Pure Land school of Buddhism.

Namo Amida Bu – this is how we usually say the nembutsu. It is an Anglicised version of the Japanese nembutsu, Namu Amida Butsu.

Nembutsu – literally ‘mindfulness of the Buddha’. A Buddhist practice where we recite the name of Amitabha Buddha.

Practice – any spiritual exercise which is designed to bring us into relationship with the Buddha can be called practice. Meditation is a form of practice, and so is nembutsu.

Pure Land Buddhism – the name given to the school of Buddhism where the central practice is nembutsu. Pure Land Buddhism became a distinct school of Buddhism in 12th Century Japan, although its roots go back to the time of Shakyamuni Buddha in India (around 500 B.C.E.).

Refuge – taking refuge is at the heart of all Buddhism. It is suggested that we take refuge in the three jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, rather than in the things we usually take refuge in (money, status, possessions, receiving praise etc.) which are all impermanent. Here at Bright Earth we also take refuge in the Earth.

Sangha – the community of Buddhists who practice together.

Shinran Shonin – an important disciple of Honen. Shinran founded Jodo Shin Shu, the largest school of Pureland Buddhism in Japan.