

Engaging with the Discourses of the Buddha

Reading the suttas is practice. As such, the benefits can be expected to evolve over time, to support development on the Buddha's path, and to sometimes manifest in unexpected ways. The approaches offered here are intended to support the growth of a living personal relationship with the discourses of the Buddha. Feel free to modify these approaches as you like and to develop your own.

1. Choose a sutta (or a passage) to be your best friend for the day (or for the week, month, etc.). Read and reflect first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Be attuned to how the experiences of the day are seen when viewed through the lens of this sutta. Consider making some notes tracking what you notice.
2. Try this thought experiment. Imagine that the mind is completely free of views. All of the opinions formed previously are snoozing in the back seat, leaving the driver without direction. Drawing on whatever portion of the discourses you wish, select five suttas to use as frames of reference for finding your way.
3. When you encounter a passage that makes your heart sing, or that leaves you especially intrigued or confounded, try committing the passage to memory. Experiment with writing the passage out by hand or with typing the passage. Notice any outcomes.
4. Tune-in to any suttas or passages which seem likely to be helpful in times of mental/emotional distress or disturbance? The next time you find yourself in the midst of an unpleasant mental state read one or more of these suttas or passages.
5. Be aware of any suttas or passages which seem especially conducive to meditation practice? Try reading one of these prior to meditation. (This reading is not for the purpose of reflecting on the content during meditation, but to help the mind move more easily into meditation practice.) Notice any experiences that occur.
6. Investigate to find suttas that speak to what is most alive for you currently. Once you have identified subjects of particular relevance, use the indexes in each collection of discourses to find other suttas addressing that subject.