

WELCOME

VIPASSANA RETREAT GUIDELINES

The following guidelines, if followed closely, will help you maximize your retreat experience.

Vipassana (Insight Meditation) is a moment-to-moment focused investigation of all psychophysical phenomena. Observing experience from a place of non-attachment allows one to relate to life with less fear and clinging. Seeing into the impermanence of all phenomena helps us cultivate equanimity in regards to pain and pleasure, gain and loss, and other life challenges. As insight deepens, wisdom, compassion and equanimity arise.

SCHEDULE

The schedule has been developed to help you derive the most from the retreat. This framework works well for beginners as well as experienced meditators. If for any reason you are unable to follow the schedule, please notify one of the teachers. Remember, the effectiveness of your practice is directly proportional to the sustained, uninterrupted, moment-to-moment attention to all activities, thoughts and feelings.

SILENCE

With the exception of the interviews, the retreat is held in complete silence. As best you can, try to keep your eyes down at all times, i.e., when walking, eating and during all other activities. This will, understandably, be difficult for some since it is contrary to our usual, inquisitive, assessing or judgmental mind. Do your best. The exceptional benefits are well worth the effort. Try to avoid eye contact and restrict all other forms of communication. The concentration that develops becomes the foundation for insight.

Please abstain from reading and writing except if you wish to make notes for your reports during the interviews (see “INTERVIEWS” below).

Also, to aid in maintaining the silence:

- Turn off beepers and alarms on digital watches.

- All essential questions regarding housekeeping and retreat procedures can be communicated in writing to the retreat manager and posted on the bulletin board, (emergencies are of course an exception).

WORK PERIOD

The work period enables us to keep costs as low as possible. It is also an important part of mindfulness practice, one that helps us integrate our sitting practice into our daily life. Keeping costs at a minimum allows Spring Rain Sangha to provide scholarships for those otherwise unable to attend retreats. Please try to perform your task mindfully with an open heart.

PRECEPTS

Everyone on retreat is expected to adhere to the following five Precepts. An explanation of the importance and profundity of each one is beyond the scope of this orientation. However, please realize that these five precepts are the foundation upon which all spiritual practice stands.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

1. I undertake the precept to refrain from causing harm to living beings.
2. I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.
3. I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct. (There is no sexual activity while on retreat.)
4. I undertake the precept to refrain from harmful speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

MEDITATION HALL

- Except for emergencies or your interview, retreatants should not enter or leave the hall during a sitting.
- Do not bring any food or drinks into the hall.
- Please keep your sitting area neat.
- If it is necessary to move during a sitting period please do so slowly and silently. Do not lie down in the hall. If you have a medical condition that requires you to do so, check with one of the teachers.
- Scents: Do not wear any perfumes or other scented products — many people have allergies.

MEDITATION AND INTERVIEWS

One way of working on the practice is as follows.

- **Notice** as soon as you become aware of a mental or physical object arising.
- **Note** it.
- **Observe** its characteristics (impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self)

If you find it helpful for interviews, keep a written record of you want to report to the teacher.

The purpose of the interviews is to provide encouragement and offer individual guidance.

- Begin by stating what your practice is (e.g., rise and fall of the abdomen). Be precise, brief and clear in your presentation.
- The effectiveness of the interview depends upon your being as clear and open as possible about your experience.
- Describe some of the highs or lows of the sitting and walking meditation.
- Simply making repeated noting without fully directing the awareness to the experience will not result in any progress.
- If a determined and sustained effort is made as instructed, insights will inevitably be experienced.

LEAVING THE RETREAT EARLY

All aspects of the retreat are essential beginning with the application process and ending with the closing circle on the last day. How we participate in a retreat is a reflection of how we live our life. Retreats offer us the opportunity to develop sincerity and courage, and help us cultivate equanimity.

Unless prior arrangement for an early departure has been made do not leave the retreat early. It is important to have a reentry orientation (post retreat instruction). If you feel you absolutely need to leave the retreat it is essential that you meet with a teacher to clarify your thoughts and feelings necessitating the early departure.

DANA

Dana is a Pali word meaning “offering”. Ideally, dana is the natural expression of a loving, open and generous heart.

The teachers of Spring Rain Sangha follow the time honored practice of offering the Buddha’s teachings without cost to students. This venerable tradition predates the Buddha, reaching back to the Vedic understanding that the teachings are so precious that no price can be set on them. Still today, in countries of their origin, one never comes to a teacher empty handed. Offerings are often made in the form of food, flowers, incense, shawls or money. The student’s generosity helps to perpetuate the dhamma. This generosity supports the teacher and provides an opportunity for the student to express gratitude for the teachings.

How much to give? This is often asked. Give according to your means. It is the expression of gratitude that is important.

What to give? Obviously here in the West a monetary offering is the most convenient.

How to give? This is a very important part of the “Perfection of Giving.” The offering is anonymous for reasons that are apparent. Dana is an occasion where one can observe “greed,” “pride,” “arrogance,” “selflessness,” “generosity” or any other mental state that arises in the process. It also provides us with an opportunity to develop gracefulness when making an offering. For some gracefulness while giving, comes naturally and brings much happiness.