

Vipassana Meditation Retreat Guidelines



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 and compassion 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. 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. Try 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 for the notes needed to make 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, retreat procedures, can be communicated in writing and posted on the bulletin board, (emergencies are of course an exception).

KARMA YOGA

Karma yoga (your job) 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 incorrect speech.
5. I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

MEDITATION HALL PROTOCOL AND ETIQUETTE

- Except for emergencies, retreatants should not enter or leave the hall while a sitting is taking place. If you arrive late, please do not enter the hall and thus disturb others.
- Please do not bring any food or drinks (other than water) into the hall.
- Maintaining an orderly environment can be helpful in developing an internal quietness.
- 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 check with one of the teachers.
- Scents: Do not wear any perfumes or other scented products — many people have allergies.

The Five Hindrances

HINDRANCE	ANTIDOTE
1. Sensual Desire	Reflect on the impermanence of the object desired.
2. Hatred, Ill will	Metta -if necessary picture the person suffering, or as a child.
3. Sloth & torpor	Bring light into body/mind, open eyes, stand, brisk walk, reflect on rare opportunity to be born human and have this chance to practice Dhamma.
4. Restlessness & worry	Slow the breath, keep bringing mindfulness to the breath.
5. Skeptical doubt	Investigate the dhamma- the three characteristics of existence.

FIVE WAYS FOR THE REMOVAL OF DISTRACTING THOUGHT

1. **Substitute:** reflect on a different object, which is connected with skill... Like an experienced carpenter or carpenter's apprentice, striking hard at, pushing out, and getting rid of a coarse peg with a fine one, should the bhikkhu in order to get rid of the adventitious object, reflect on a different object which is connected with skill.
2. **Reflect:** ponder on the disadvantages of unskilful thoughts thus: Truly these thoughts of mine are unskilful, blameworthy, and productive of misery.
3. **Ignore:** endeavour to be without attention and reflection as regards them.
4. **Remove the cause:** one should reflect on the removal of the *source* of those unskilful thoughts.
5. **Suppress:** If evil, unskilful thoughts continue to arise in spite of reflection on the removal of a source of unskilful thoughts, one should with clenched teeth and the tongue pressing on the palate, restrain, and subdue the (evil) mind by the (good) mind. (*Suppression used as a last resort so one does not act out one's anger/hatred*)

INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the interviews is to provide encouragement and offer individual guidance. The following is adapted from the guidelines given by Sayadaw U Pandita.

The Three Aspects of Noting Mind/Body Phenomena are:

- a) **Notice** as soon as the object arises.
- b) **Note** it.
- c) **Observe** its characteristics (impermanent, unsatisfactory, non-self)

Keep a written record of some of the highlights of the sitting and walking meditations you want to report to the teacher. Writing down your experiences will sharpen the **Noticing, Noting and Observing**.

In the Interview Room:

- Please 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 complete honesty. Do not try to impress the teacher.
- Describe the primary object of meditation and your experiences of noting, noticing and observing. Then begin your description of the **secondary objects**. These are the body sensations, feelings and thoughts:
 - a) **Body Sensations:** pain, itch, cold, hot, pressure etc.
 - b) **Feelings:** pleasant, unpleasant and neutral
 - c) **Thoughts:** ideas, planning, remembering

Relate the following information for each object described:

1. The arising of the object (example--"pain arose in my knee").
2. What you did, how you noted it--"I noted it as "pain."
3. What did you observe? --"I observed stabbing pain."
4. What happened to the object? --"The stabbing changed to hard pain."
5. What did you do next? --"I noted it as "hard pain."
6. What did you observe next? --"I observed slow pulsating hardness."
7. What did you do next? --"I went back to note the primary object"

NB: When reporting thoughts such as ideas, opinions, memories, planning, imagining, reflecting, speculating, judging, do not report the content but how you labeled it. For example, either use a general label such as "thinking" or a

more specific label such as “planning,” “remembering,” “reflecting,” etc. Then report what happened after you noted it. When reporting on feelings do not report how you felt about it, just label which one it is. For example: “anger,” “sadness,” “fear,” “guilt,” etc. Then report what happened after you noted it. Seeing into the impermanence of phenomena leads to insight.

Notice when the mind wanders to one of the sense doors. For example note: “seeing, seeing” “hearing, hearing” “smelling, smelling” “tasting, tasting” “touching, touching” “thinking, thinking” and then return to the primary object of meditation.

An Example of Correct Reporting:

“I noted the rising as rising and I observed tension and heaviness. I then noted the falling as falling and I observed the falling was not clear. My mind then wandered, I noted wandering, and the thoughts subsided. I returned to noting the rising and falling. A pain then arose, I noted pain and then it increased in intensity and began to throb, I noted throbbing, it lessened and finally disappeared.

- This is not a mantra or recitation practice. Simply making repeated noting without fully directing the awareness on the experience will not result in any progress whatsoever.
- Keep your interviews short and to the point.
- 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. One should not give beyond one’s 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, others need to develop it.

Chant on the Khandhas

*Reflection on the khandhas
through the eye of
the three characteristics of existence*

This body is annicca
Sensations are annicca
Perceptions are annicca
Mental formations are annicca
These consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose,
Tongue, body, mind,
These are all annicca

This body is only dukkha
Sensations are only dukkha
Perceptions are only dukkha
Mental formations are only dukkha
These consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose,
Tongue, body, mind,
These are only dukkha

This body is anatta
Sensations are anatta
Perceptions are anatta
Mental formations are anatta
These consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose,
Tongue, body, mind,
These are all anatta.

There are other recollections which one can make and which help one to appreciate the state of a human being. People tend to be in denial about decay, disease and death while greatly attached to sentient beings and insentient objects. Some people try also to ignore moral responsibility for their actions. The recollections below bring these subjects into the light and make us face them squarely. Therefore, the Buddha has said we should reflect daily upon these five recollections.

I am of the nature to age.
I have not gone beyond aging.
I am of the nature to sicken.
I have not gone beyond sickness.
I am of the nature to die.
I have not gone beyond dying.

All that is mine,
beloved and pleasing,
will become otherwise,
will become separated from me

I am the owner of my kamma,
Heir to my kamma,
Born of my kamma,
Related to my kamma,
Abide supported by my kamma.
Whatever kamma I shall do,
for good or for ill,
of that I will be the heir.
Thus we should frequently recollect.

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Directory: C:\www\html\philipvstarkman\springrainsangha\retreat
s\retreatguidelines
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\Mark\Application
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot
Title: VIPASSANA RETREAT GUIDELINES
Subject:
Author: Matya Kotlier
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 5/4/2008 8:29 PM
Change Number: 2
Last Saved On: 5/4/2008 8:29 PM
Last Saved By: mf
Total Editing Time: 2 Minutes
Last Printed On: 5/7/2008 8:57 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 9
Number of Words: 7,785 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 44,375 (approx.)