

Guide to a Mindfulness Retreat

Mindfulness is the capacity we all share to be aware of what is going on in and around us in the present moment in order to cultivate understanding and compassion and transform suffering in our lives.

Arrival: Please practice mindfulness as you arrive. The beautiful drive to the retreat center can help you become quiet and peaceful in preparation for the retreat. You may like to enjoy the drive in silence. You can help establish the collective energy by checking in and finding your sleeping quarters with mindfulness of each breath and step. Once you get used to moving slowly and quietly, you may find that practicing mindfulness is a great joy. Remember to smile!

Clothing: Please wear comfortable, loose fitting clothing. Layers are often helpful as the room temperature may not be under our control.

Bell of Mindfulness: Throughout the retreat, a bell of mindfulness will be invited to sound. When you hear the bell, please stop whatever you are doing and enjoy the pleasure of breathing in and out three times mindfully. You may like to say this gatha (poem) silently:

Listen, Listen [breathing in] This Wonderful Sound brings me back to my true self [breathing out].

The sound of the bell may be regarded as the voice of the Buddha or other sacred power such as the Cosmos, Jesus, Mother Earth - calling us back to our true selves. The sound of the bell is an invitation to stop our thinking and talking and to go back to ourselves, our breath and our smile. Other sounds can also bring us back to our true nature, such as the sound of the wind, a bird or even a baby crying.

The *outdoor bell* signals that the next event is about to begin, e.g., meditation, a Dharma talk or a meal. After stopping to listen and breathe in and out three times, walk slowly to the appointed place.

Silence of our body, speech and mind is the foundation of the retreat. This is especially important in common areas, e.g., the meditation hall, bedrooms, bathrooms or the dining hall. If you need to speak, please do so away from others in order to best support the energy of the retreat. Conduct your bodily actions such as brushing your teeth or setting up your cushion, with gentleness, care and compassion. When

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thoughts take you away from the present moment, simply return to your breath. Practicing in this way allows us to contact others on a level that can bring peace, joy, understanding and compassion.

Silence also pertains to **electronic devices and social media**. We highly suggest you consider taking a technology holiday. If you cannot, please limit your use as much as possible and do so away from others.

Noble silence, “the silence that heals”, is the period from evening meditation until after lunch the next day. Noble silence allows the practice of mindful breathing to become deep and most effective. At the end of the last activity of each day, please walk slowly and silently back to your room, prepare for bed mindfully and enjoy a good night’s sleep. Remain silent from this time until after lunch the next day. Simply follow your breathing and shine the light of awareness on every act and every step.

Sitting Meditation: There are many kinds of meditation practice. We will practice mindfulness of breathing at this retreat. Following our breath as it flows in and out unites our body and mind. All too often, we lose our mind in thoughts about the past, or worries about the future. When this happens, our mind is in one place and our body in another. Our breath is an anchor that can return us to the present moment. It is the only moment to truly live. The past is gone and the future has not come. Mindfulness of breathing allows us to enjoy life in the here and now.

Whether you sit in a chair, on a cushion, or on a bench, try to find a comfortable posture. You are invited to keep your back straight, with normal spinal curves. This allows the air to enter and leave your lungs freely. Rest your hands gently on your lap or your thighs. Find a neutral position for your head with the chin not tucked in or sticking up. Inhale through your nostrils and notice where your trunk expands. Exhale and watch it relax. Your breathing should be gentle and inaudible. You don’t have to try to breathe. Let your body breathe you. As you inhale, you may like to say to yourself “in”. As your exhale, you may like to silently say “out”.

We will sit for 20 - 30 minute periods. If you become uncomfortable, please feel free to mindfully adjust your posture. Sitting meditation

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can bring joy and happiness! If you need to adjust your posture, you may like to recite this gatha:

"Breathing in, I will move my legs. Breathing out, I am moving them now. Breathing in, I have done it. Breathing out, I enjoy my breathing."

Indoor Walking Meditation: After sitting meditation, we may practice slow walking meditation in order to exercise our legs and to practice mindfulness of movement. We walk together in a clockwise direction, taking one step with each breath. As you breathe in, take your first step with your left foot, and silently say "in". As you breathe out, step with your right foot and silent say "out". Remain aware of the connection between your breath and your steps. Also be aware of the space between you and the next person. Please adjust the length of your steps if this space becomes larger or shorter. Walking with a wider stance can help if balance is an issue.

Outdoor Group Walking Meditation: Walking meditation is a way to take mindfulness practice into our daily life. We walk together at a retreat, we walk a little slower than usual, although faster than in the meditation hall. Please let the leader set the pace and do not walk ahead of the leader. Try to coordinate your steps with your breathing. Notice how many steps it takes for each in-breath and out-breath. Sometimes your breath is three steps long, and sometimes it is four. Sometimes the in-breath and the out-breath are different lengths. Do whatever your lungs tell you.

As we walk, we offer our feelings of peace and serenity to the Earth and each other. The purpose of this meditation is just to walk, without destination, being fully present, aware of our breathing and our walking. From time to time, the leader may invite the sound of a bell. When you hear it, stop and enjoy your breathing. Occasionally, you may want to stop to enjoy a leaf, flower or cloud. As you look, continue to follow your breathing so as not to get caught up in thinking. Walking in meditation with no need to arrive anywhere is a great joy!

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Silent Meals and Mindful Eating: Taking our meals in silence helps us truly taste the food and enjoy the presence of friends sitting near us. Silent meals can bring a lot of happiness, peace and insight.

- The practice of mindful eating begins as we wait in the serving line. We invite you to enjoy your mindful breath, body and steps.
- Before serving yourself, recognize your empty plate. Not everyone has the opportunity to fill their plate three times daily. Please take only enough food to meet your needs. You can always go back for seconds.
- Please fill one table at a time. Stand until the table is full, recite the Five Contemplations (copies are at each table), bow to each other in gratitude and then be seated.
- Please eat slowly; calling each bite by its true name and chewing each mouthful until it is liquid, some say 30 times. The food we eat gives us the opportunity to see the connection between the universe and ourselves. Every morsel contains in it the life of the entire Earth and the Sun. We can see the meaning and the value of our own life through every small taste of food. How precious each bite is! Eating in silence creates a space in which to cultivate our appreciation of the Universe in each bite.
- When you are finished, please stand, bow to your friends and return your tray to the wash area.

Dharma Talk: Our teacher will offer Dharma talks throughout the retreat to help us deepen our mindfulness practice. Please do your best to sit quietly, follow your breathing and listen. If you need to move or stretch, please do so slowly and mindfully. When listening to the Dharma talk, enjoy your breathing and allow the teachings to penetrate you like Dharma rain on a dry sponge--some drops will sink in, others will bounce off. You will receive the teachings you are ready to receive.

Mindful Movements and Yoga may be offered each day as an antidote to more sedentary activities. No experience is necessary.

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Bowing: Bowing is a deep form of communication that can say so much. A bow may mean hello, thank you, or excuse me. It is also a way of honoring the Buddha nature in each of us. You may wish to recite this gatha when you bow:

A lotus for you, a Buddha to be!

Prostrating: In our rituals, you may wish to prostrate, bowing deeply and touching the floor or the earth. Prostration is a way of surrendering to the stream of life. If you do not wish to prostrate, you can touch the ground with your hand, bring your hands together like a tulip and bow, or simply breathe in and out.

Smiling: We practice to nourish our joy, so smile. A smile can change the course of the world.

Schedule: A schedule of daily activities will be posted.

Working Meditation: All participants are assigned to a family. Each family performs certain tasks during the retreat such as inviting the wake-up or meal bells, arranging the meditation hall, serving meals or washing tea cups. Working meditation helps us to cultivate moment-to-moment awareness in our daily lives.

Dana—Gift of Generosity: Our Dharma teachers follow a long tradition of offering the Buddha's teachings without charge, as these teachings are priceless. As part of this tradition those receiving the teachings support the teacher. Please consider making a donation.

Returning Home: Here are some suggestions to help you continue to enjoy the benefits of mindfulness practice after the retreat:

- *Set up a breathing room or area in your home.* A cushion or chair, and something that brings you back to the present moment such as a flower, a beautiful stone or warm shawl is all you need. Your breathing room is a refuge of mindfulness where you and your housemates can go when you feel agitated. You may like to practice mindful breathing there before you leave the house for the day or before bed.

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- *Practice with others.* iamhome.org lists practice communities around the nation and the world. If a practice community does not yet exist near you, consider asking a friend to support you in the practice of mindfulness. You could practice mindful breathing, walking, read the Five Mindfulness Trainings or enjoy tea or a mindful meal together.
- *Find ways to practice mindful breathing throughout your day.* Breathing in and out with two to three rings on the telephone, enjoying a cup of tea on break with awareness and mindful walking to and from your car are just a few ways to practice mindfulness during your day. You may enjoy the book Peace is Every Step which offers more ways to cultivate mindfulness in your daily life.
- Visit MindfulnessKC.org
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 - Explore the Practice Resources page