

SnowFlower Sangha



Guidelines for Leaders

(February, 2019)

Offered with a bow of appreciation for your kind and diligent preparation of our time together. Please note that these guidelines pertain for the most part to Tuesday and Friday meetings in the Friends Meetinghouse. Sunday and Wednesday meetings do their own scheduling and meet in private homes.

Advance preparation

- Feel free to take home a bell the week before you lead.
- Review these guidelines and obtain contact information for your scheduler.
- Review/research topic; prepare and practice your dharma talk/presentation (feel free to discuss with scheduler, especially if the topic is new to you, or if you are new to leading).
- Please consider that each talk should include Buddhist teachings as well as one's own personal experience of them. Speaking one's own experience without relating it to the Dharma, or simply reciting teachings without personal grounding are generally not fitting for most weekly SnowFlower Sangha meetings. We seek to combine Understanding (the Dharma) with Love (speaking from the heart of personal experience).
- Be sure to leave enough time for discussion. Suggested format: Leaders end meditation period by 7:55; end talk by 8:10 or 8:15; end discussion period by 8:25.
- Send a reminder message to the listserv informing members of your topic a few days before you lead: snowflower@yahoogroups.org.
- Make copies of any handouts you wish to distribute relating to your dharma talk.
- Arrange to bring flowers for the altar.
- Note: If you need assistance with any of the leadership tasks—setup, greeting, reading, inviting the bell, etc. -- ask the scheduler or sangha members ahead of time or as they come in.

Opening the Friends Meetinghouse

- Please plan to arrive by 6:30 p.m. to set up the meditation hall (Meetinghouse Sanctuary).
- Turn on hallway lights, if needed. Acquaint yourself with the lights in the meditation hall. Switches for the overhead lights are to the right as you enter. Switches for the wall lights are on either side of the stage.
- Check the room temperature. In the winter, if the room seems too cold, you may turn up the heat by pressing the "up" arrow button on the thermostat. The system will automatically revert to "run" settings two hours later.

Setting up the meditation hall

- Gather the following from the closet to the right of the stage: Buddha and Bodhisattva statues; meditation cushions; tablecloths, candles, donation basket, photos of Thay, signs, bells.
- Roll out the library cart and place it opposite the main door to the meditation hall.
- Place (large) "Welcome to SnowFlower" sign on a chair in the hallway outside the door to the meditation hall.
- Place the "Scent-Free Zone" sign near the Welcome sign.
- Place "Meditation in Progress" sign on the back side of the right door (this door stays open until the start of the first sit).

- Entry table: Move the piano bench from the stage to just inside the entry door. Cover it with a cloth and place on it Kuan Yin, donation basket, and welcome documents. These may include Welcome to SF brochure, current newsletters, small photo of Thay, handouts relating to that evening. Most of these documents can be found in the money basket.
- Altar:
 - Altar is on floor between benches on the north/east wall. Just move it forward into place.
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 - Cover altar with a cloth and put the Buddha statue, flowers, candles, Thay photo on it.
 - Altar drawer has cloth and photos, song sheets, these guidelines, clock and small bell.
- Leader sitting space:
 - Set up your sitting space (chair or cushion) to one side of the altar with bells, clock, and any papers or books close by.
- Group Sitting Space:
 - Stack extra sitting cushions to the right of the entry door next to the second row of benches.
 - Make room for walking meditation by removing one row of chairs from each side.
 - Chairs may be arranged in semicircles or left in straight lines. Allow center space for six cushions.

Welcoming Practitioners

- As you sit in your leader space waiting for everyone to arrive, please be attentive to those entering the hall.
- Make eye contact with each person arriving, let a small smile blossom on your lips, as you bring your hands together and bow gently and warmly to each person entering the meditation hall.
 - Please do this for everyone entering, creating a warm, welcoming environment.

Opening the session

- At 7:00 p.m. wake the bell and invite the bell once. (Please refer to “Bell Basics” laminated card for specifics – in altar drawer.)
- Welcome everyone to SnowFlower Sangha. Invite everyone to introduce themselves by stating their first name (start with yourself). “I’m leading tonight” is an adequate way to introduce that you are the leader for the evening. When there are new people, however, it is appropriate to say more, for example, “I am the lay leader for tonight. We practice in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh who emphasized that practicing together is essential to maintaining a mindfulness practice. He encouraged that lay people can form sanghas to support our practice and build community. I have the honor of helping us create and hold the space of sangha tonight.”
- Invite newcomers or visitors to identify themselves as new or visiting if they feel comfortable doing so when it’s their turn to state their name.
 - If there are new people, look at them with a smile and warmly welcome them. Ensure that they know there are written materials on the entry table and let them know that you would be delighted to personally welcome them and speak with them afterward, should they desire it.
- Explain briefly the format of the evening (e.g., sit, walk, sit). Do so more elaborately (e.g., explaining Walking Meditation and bells) and in more detail if there are new people, less so if there are no new people.

- You may wish to mention the evening's topic and offer a pertinent reading or instruction.
- Request that the entry door be shut
- This is also the space when you're welcome to introduce a song before the sit should you desire to sing and share in singing meditation. Song sheets are in the alter drawer and you can sing one or two songs as a group.

First sit (approximately 20 – 25 minutes)

- Wake the bell and invite it three times, completing three breaths between each invitation.
- At the end of the sit, wake the bell and invite it once. Bow.

Walking meditation

- Explain Walking Meditation basics if needed. Ideally, this is done before the first sit, so there can be a seamless transition into the walking meditation.
- Wake the small bell and then invite it for the first time. Rise, put away cushions, and form a circle.
- When everyone is in the circle, invite the bell for a second time. Bow.
- Invite the bell a third time; turn left; begin walking.
- After 10 -- 15 minutes, invite the bell for the fourth time.
- When people are facing into the circle, invite the bell for the fifth time. Bow.
- Move slowly towards your seat, rearrange yourself and have the large bell at hand.

Second sit (approximately 20 – 25 minutes)

- Wake the bell and invite it three times, completing three breaths between each invitation.
- At the end of the sit, wake the bell and invite it once. Bow.

Dharma talk

- Present your talk, mindful to leave enough time for discussion (see details in Advance Preparation above).
- When you are finished, bow and introduce dharma sharing

Dharma sharing

- If there are new people, explain that we bow before we speak and after we're finished.
- Remind people that this is a space to speak from the heart on something related directly to the practice (or the dharma talk).
- Remind people that this is not a discussion with cross talk and we are trying to create a safe space where people can openly share from the heart without worrying about someone responding to them.
- You may wish to mention that silence is also a wonderful option.
- Open the floor for discussion with an invitation of the bell.
- At about 8:25, announce that there are just a few minutes left.
- Ask if there are any additional comments. A few minutes later, invite the bell once.

Closing comments and circle

- Sharing the Merit is offered before announcements. One version is printed out and in the alter drawer, while others can be found in the *Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book*, page 19, or in *Chanting from the Heart*, page 33.
- Ask if there are any announcements.

- After announcements explain the suggested \$2.00 donation and ask people to put it in the basket by the door as they leave.
 - If you wish, ask someone if they are willing to count and log the donations.
- Mention the listserv for newer people and note that if they wish to be added, follow the directions on back of the yellow pamphlet or the instructions on the homepage of the website.
- Invite new people to stay and meet Sangha members, and encourage Sangha members to stay and talk with them after the closing.
- Invite everyone to form a circle, hold hands, and, if they wish, offer names of those who may need support. Stay in circle for a few minutes allowing for names to be spoken. Initiate the arm-raising and bowing.

Rearranging and closing down the building

- Put the entry table documents back in the money basket. Collect and store extra handouts in use that evening.
- Return all supplies to their storage spots.
- Either you or a volunteer is to count the money and log the amount and number of attendees in the donation log (found in a black binder in the library cart). If Gloria is at the meeting, give her the money to deposit. If not, mail a check to Gloria for the amount collected and note the date of the gathering on the check for her reference.
- Make sure the Sanctuary is left clear and tidy. Close windows, turn off lights, and lock front door as you leave.
- Let Celeste know if you need altar supplies.

Tuesday only

- Tuesday leader is to make contact with the Friday leader beforehand about how the space should be left. If the Tuesday leader has been unable to contact the Friday leader, the Tuesday folks reset the space according to the Friends standard.

Friday only

- Place chairs back into straight rows and make sure that there are only two soft gray chairs per row. Four rows on either side of the room. Maximum seven chairs per row. Leave no aisle-wide space (just bare maneuvering space) between the bench at the stage and back row of chairs. See specifics on inside of closet door.

Sangha Cancellation Policy

- It is sangha policy not to cancel a scheduled sangha meeting. In case of illness or inclement weather, however, scheduler and leader will decide together what to do, and notify the listserv no later than 3:00 p.m.

Instructions for offering a guided meditation

- When leading a guided meditation, it is most important to remember that when people are meditating, they could be startled by sudden words. To avoid jolting anyone, the bell is gently used before words are spoken. Waking the bell, rather than inviting it with a full sound (by touching the rim of the bell firmly with the inviter and not moving the inviter away) does this. It muffles the sound. (For more information, consult Thây's book, *The Blooming of a Lotus*.)