

## **Retreat Guidelines:**

***Many of these guidelines are technically relevant only if you are in the Dirt Zendo, but even if you are participating in the Cloud Zendo you might appreciate the spirit of the forms and incorporate some of them into your home practice.***

These retreat guidelines are to help us move together smoothly during this time of focused effort. They form a simple and reliable container for practice, within which we can relax – we can let go of the judging and decision-making that is necessary in other areas of our lives. We can allow the mind to rest. If you can simply accept the forms and guidelines for this short time, the retreat itself will support you: your life will be a potent mix of zazen, mindful activity, discipline, nourishment, rest, challenge and affirmation. The ritual of retreat reminds us that ultimately we lack for nothing.

## **Silence**

First, this is a silent retreat. It is an opportunity to leave our regular demanding work and lives behind and immerse ourselves in silence. There are many different ways to practice silence: We remain silent inside, keeping the mind quiet for our own benefit. We keep silence outside by not talking or making eye contact: it is important that we keep these types of silence for the benefit of those around us.

Please allow silence to be the rule at all times of the day, including meal cleanup, work periods and breaks. Before speaking, consider carefully whether it is necessary. Write notes instead of talking whenever it is reasonable to do so. Ideally, turn your cell phone off and do not check it until after the retreat unless it is an emergency. This is not only to give yourself a break, but also to be able to watch your mind when you do not have access to your usual activities and distractions.

## **Schedule**

Second, the main form of practice during this retreat is keeping the schedule and moving together in harmony as a community. Please attend everything on the schedule as long as you are within the “container” of retreat. In the Zendo, you will be notified of the end of a work or rest period by the clanging of a large hand bell; you will be called to the next event with a rhythmic ring-down on a temple bell. Let go of worrying about clock time as much as possible, perhaps even removing your watch; just be guided by the temple instruments and be mindful of group movement. Please be on time when we gather for activities; at the beginning of activities other than zazen, chanting or meals, stand in a circle in the zendo to await instructions.

Watching how you react to the schedule can be very helpful, and when you are able to surrender to it, you may find your mind and heart become very still. Just do your best to

follow along and know that someone will instruct you if any correction is necessary. Whether in work, rest, or eating, apply the same diligence you apply to zazen.

## **In the Zendo**

In the zendo, ideally wear full-length pants or a full-length skirt, and avoid wearing tank tops or clothing with words or pictures on it. Before entering the Zendo, remove shoes, slippers and hats unless you have a health issue that requires you wear them. Be sure to remove and turn off anything that might beep or vibrate, like watches, cell phones or pagers. Leave water bottles and other personal items outside the Zendo.

When entering the Zendo for formal practice (that is, when a ring-down on a temple bell has called you there), bow as you enter the room. It is not necessary to bow as you leave, as that can create a traffic jam.

When walking to your seat for zazen, do not walk on the teacher's bowing mat in front of the altar. When you arrive at your seat (the side closest to the center of the room), bow once toward your seat, turn around, bow once to the sangha, and sit down.

When the person right beside you or directly across from you bows to their seat, a nice way to acknowledge their practice is to gassho (place hands palm to palm) in greeting. However, once the zazen period has officially begun, please do not bow in response to anyone.

When walking in the zendo, keep hands clasped together in front of your chest in a position called shashu (thumb inside left hand, right hand cupped over the left). It is a nice mindfulness practice to keep your hands in shashu whenever you are not using them throughout the retreat.

Once a period of zazen has started, please try to stay as still as possible. The quiet of the mind is in part dependent on the quiet of the body. However, feel free to adjust your position as necessary to prevent pain or injury. Plan your adjustment carefully so that there is one complete change of position rather than a lot of small adjustments. You are welcome to stand up at your seat for part or all of a meditation period in order to relieve discomfort or drowsiness, but again try to stay still while you do so.

When you need to use the restroom during zazen periods, kinhin is the time to do so. If you need to use the restroom, the time to leave the zendo is after the third strike of the inkin (hand bell), once walking has started. After using the restroom, quietly re-enter the kinhin line where you were before.

Please keep your zazen area neat; the cleanliness of the sitting area is meant to be a reflection of a clean and clear state of mind. You may use any equipment you need, including a chair. However, straighten your seat every time you leave, except for when you get up for kinhin. (Kinhin is a continuation of formal meditation, so you are not

officially leaving the zendo at this time.) When you do leave the zendo, put sitting equipment on top of your zabuton, along with neatly folded blankets or personal items.

Chant Books will be passed out before chanting service and collected afterwards. Treat these books with the same reverence you hold for the teachings; hold them in both hands while chanting, or sitting on your cushion or neatly under your chair if you are not using them.

Someone will be in charge of zendo temperature, and will try to keep it at a temperature conducive for Zazen. Please do not open or close doors or change heat settings.

## **Meals**

Meals will be eaten at tables using our formal oryoki ritual. Oryoki sets (three bowls wrapped in a cloth, with utensils) will be provided. Instruction will be given during the meal as necessary, and feel free to watch other people who are more familiar with the process. The most important thing is that you get some food in you!

## **Hygiene**

Personal hygiene is important with everyone spending time so close together. Please wash your hands after using the toilet, and after sneezing or coughing. If you cough or sneeze please turn your head and direct your cough into the crook of your arm rather than your hands.

## **Breaks**

During breaks, feel free to explore the walking path across the parking lot and the trails around the wetland. Also feel free to rest or read Buddhist material in the zendo (or elsewhere) at these times. Our space is limited so the zendo has to serve many different purposes; outside of formal zendo events like zazen or chanting, you can enter the room, move and sit more informally.