

Being Without Self Guidelines

(Updated February 2019)

Introduction

We practice together to clearly realize our deepest longing. This is the one great matter of life and death. We do this for ourselves, for each other, and for all beings. This is what we are here for.

If you have not already, establish a wholesome lifestyle & regular practice. Patiently and wholeheartedly devote yourself to retreat, then take care not to return to delusive & destructive patterns in daily life.

Blind obedience is a hindrance to genuine practice. Do not idealize, or demonize, anyone. Instead, respect retreat organizers & all participants, and faithfully follow the guidance that is given. Let us all work together in this wonderful endeavor.

Upcoming retreats will focus on clearly realizing—and resolving, once and for all—the one great matter, and how to move forward from there. Then consider guiding others. In the meantime, humbly cooperate & quietly support each other. With this in mind, the following guidelines are offered.

Retreat & Dharma Talks

1. Dharma Talks, and any brief questions or responses that follow, are for realizing & resolving the one great matter of life & death that lies underfoot. This is not a matter of endlessly inquiring into problems one by one, but of arriving at the very root of our deepest longing. To keep on task, please consider: “Is my comment directly related to retreat practice, to the one great matter of life and death?” If not, leave it until after retreat.
2. Noble silence is a foundation of retreat. If you have a question feel free to speak, but make your concern as precise as possible. Noble speech should not loosen the silence; it should tighten it. Pause before speaking, and do so humbly & sincerely. Silently putting palms together in *gasshou*, signifying acceptance & agreement, is often a sufficient response.
3. Comments should not be the result of discursive thinking, judging, or comparing. Such comments tend to generate more discursive thoughts and take us away from the practice. If you find yourself doing such things, remain silent and return to the fundamental practice.
4. Retreat is not the time to give your impressions, agree with, or argue. Nor is retreat the time to *discuss* your life or even your practice; it is the time to manifest it and humbly receive guidance.
5. We are all beyond compare, beyond measure. Let us use our time well and strive to be worthy. We are blessed to have this precious opportunity!

RETREAT GUIDELINES

Maintain your practice in everything you do.

- The retreat is in silence. No unnecessary talking. If you need to communicate something, please speak out of sight and out of earshot of others or write it down.
- Be at your seat in the Meditation Hall (*Zendo*) a few minutes before the sitting period begins. Do not skip sitting periods during the day. Late-night sitting (*yaza*) is optional but strongly recommended, health allowing. Feeling ill & must be absent from a sitting period? Let the retreat organizer or *Zendo* leader (*jikijitsu*) know.
- Place your shoes neatly outside the entrance of the *Zendo*. Keep your sitting place neat & in order with only what you need for zazen. Don't wear a watch in the *Zendo*.
- Bow when entering the *Zendo* & when taking your seat. **When walking in the *Zendo*, place your hands over your chest.** Bow also after getting up from your seat in the *Zendo*, and when leaving the *Zendo*. Exception: Do not bow at the door when leaving or entering the *Zendo* as a group for meals or for walking meditation (*kinhin*).
- **The *Zendo* is available 24 hours a day for sitting zazen.** Feel free to do stretching & exercises during breaks, but do so outside of the *Zendo*. The *Zendo* is for zazen. Practicing together as a group, it is recommended to join in the meals and *kinhin*. However, if you prefer continuing your zazen in the *Zendo*, feel free.
- **No unnecessary moving during the zazen periods.** Noble stillness is a valuable practice, both for yourself and for others. If zazen is too painful, don't give up! Feel free to use a bench, a chair, or stand still on your cushion during zazen. If you need help with sitting posture, see the *jikijitsu* or *keisaku* (see below) during breaks.
- *Kinhin* is a vital part of practice; do it with the same mind that you sit. When you rise from zazen, feel the ground under your feet, then simply follow the foot of the person in front of you. Use the restroom during breaks between sitting periods as well as during the first few minutes of *kinhin*. During *kinhin*, quickly bow out of the *kinhin* line when near the door, then return to your place in line. No need to bow at the door when leaving and entering.
- For venues where the "Compassion Stick" (*keisaku*) is used: the *keisaku* will only be used when you ask. Place palms together (*gasshou*) when the *keisaku* comes by. The *keisaku* may gently correct your posture; allow them to do so. When returning from one-on-one, if the *keisaku* is being used, wait at the entrance of the *Zendo* until you are noticed so as not to disturb them.
- On the final night, there is no *yaza*. The *Zendo* is closed, and participants are encouraged to get a good night's sleep.
- **This is a Zen Buddhist retreat; give yourself to the practice. No email, Internet, cell phone, reading, writing, journaling, or drawing.** If you smoke, this is a fine time to quit.

ONE-ON-ONE GUIDELINES

This is to clarify things and resolve doubts. It is not psychological counselling, but a precious opportunity to get to the very bottom of yourself with another. Free and open to mutually discover truth, this is the original spirit of Zen Buddhist practice.

Keep your concern or response brief and to the point. No need to “tell your story.” One-on-one is not for *discussing* practice; it is for *realizing and revealing* where you actually are. If clarification is necessary, questions can be asked. Make best use of this precious opportunity.

There are 4 types of one-on-one:

1. **For all:** During zazen, Jeff will get up from his seat, announce “one-on-one in order” then go to the one-on-one room. After a moment, the first person to his left will rise and go for one-on-one. When that person returns and *gasshou* (palms together) at his seat, the next person will also *gasshou*, then go. During *kinhin* (walking meditation) and other breaks, there is no one-on-one; after zazen begins again, the next person in line continues. If you don’t feel you are ready, go anyway. You will see why.
2. **By request:** If you feel the need, you may request one-on-one anytime Jeff is present during zazen. Quietly rise from your seat, *gasshou* in front of Jeff, he will *gasshou* to you, then follow him.
3. **With another:** If you feel the need, you may ask anyone to join you in the one-on-one room with Jeff. During zazen, quietly rise from your seat, go to the person and *gasshou* to them. They will *gasshou*, then rise and go with you to the one-on-one room if Jeff is already there. If Jeff is sitting zazen in the *Zendo*, both *gasshou* in front of him, he will *gasshou* to you, then follow him.
4. **By Jeff:** Jeff may initiate one-on-one with you by rising from his seat during zazen, then he will *gasshou* in front of you; *gasshou* to him, then follow.

When one-on-one has ended, Jeff will remain in the one-on-one room for a few minutes so that anyone who feels the need can go as soon as the last person returns and *gasshou* at their seat.

In the one-on-one room it is only necessary to *gasshou* when you are ready to begin, and again at the end of the one-on-one. It is not necessary to bow.

PostScript

Wonderful to see more and more Dharma friends maturing together: getting firmly settled in sustained practice and confirming it in our bones, seeing through our delusions and letting them go once and for all, then moving on from there.

During retreats, a natural part of this maturing process is brief Dharma Talks by others and one-on-one with others, both with Jeff present. The brief Dharma Talks have been inspiring and to the point, although the following discussions sometimes wandered from the practice-oriented theme. One-on-one with others has rarely been used so far, but it worked well when it was used. We are learning as we go. The point is that these opportunities now exist when Jeff is present, so that we can all mature together, with and for each other. This is the true Mahayana spirit.

Jeff will try his best to attend upcoming retreats. If he cannot, by all means please do attend! – Both for yourself and for others. In that case, experienced individuals will give practical talks of about 10 - 15 minutes on themes such as dealing with hindrances (pain, sleepiness, wandering mind, etc.) There will be no one-on-one, but the practical talks will be followed by about 15 minutes of group inquiry: practice-oriented clarification by and for all, with a moderator and moments of silence before speaking up. In this way, all can mature and learn together, without the need for a leader.

Everyone is welcome to join in these activities and to help them run smoothly. We are very fortunate to have many individuals humbly committed to daily practice, sitting on their own and with others, regularly attending retreats, and coming for periods of sustained practice at the hermitage in Kyoto. This is the backbone of our Being-without-self *Sangha*.

Retreat participants are expected to attend from beginning to end. This is for everyone's benefit. Retreats are a group practice with a strong sense of unity and support by and for all. If you may have to arrive late or leave early, clearly state this when registering and we will consider your request.

Retreats are open to all. If you introduce someone, however, please be responsible for them and prepare them. If you have frank feedback, suggestions, suggested themes for the practical talks, or can assist organizing and running retreats, please let Jeff know.
