

Open Practice on Retreat

INQUIRY

What is my intention for this period of practice?

What is my state right now?

Wholesome Factors (bojjhaṅga)	Unwholesome Factors (nīvaraṇa)
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Mindfulness/Focus

Sense Desire/Grasping/Lust

Investigation of States

Aversion/Fear/Hatred

Energy

Sloth & Torpor (too ↓ energy)

Joy/rapture

Restlessness & Worry (too ↑ energy)

Tranquillity

Doubt

Concentration

Equanimity

Wise Effort = increasing wholesome states & decreasing unwholesome.

Discernment = the wisdom that knows wholesome from unwholesome.

How might I increase or invoke wholesome states right now?

How might I decrease or prevent unwholesome states right now?

4 PRIMARY PRACTICES: **SITTING, WALKING, EXPLORING, RESTING**

If energy is balanced enough to settle & focus, **SIT** in meditation.

To balance energy & relieve discomfort, do **WALKING** meditation.

To deepen & integrate experience, **EXPLORE** nature, inner & outer.

When depletion prevents skillful practice in any other form, **REST**.

Am I suffering or in pain in this moment? Am I at ease?

What could I see more clearly in this moment? What could I turn toward?

SITTING

Sit in a posture that embodies steadiness & ease.

Orient to the environment through your senses, starting with the visual.

Relax the body toward stillness. Relax the mind.

Direct your attention to the breath.

Breathe in a way that is comfortable.

Connect with the breath as a whole body experience.

Lengthen/deepen the breath as needed to connect with the whole body.

As the body settles, relax into natural breathing, letting go of effort.

Allow the sense of the body & breath to merge, soften, expand.

Connect & sustain attention through each breath.

As the mind settles, body & breath may become more pleasurable.

Allow pleasure to deepen & spread. Fall in love with aliveness & stillness.

Thoughts & feelings will arise & pass in the background.

If a distracting thought or emotion is strong & persistent, turn toward it.

Feel the sensation/energy it carries.

Breathe & relax around activation.

As activation settles, return attention to your breath,

or open eyes & orient to the physical space you're in.

Cultivation of insight (vipassanā): Recognize sensations, qualities, & states as they arise & pass: unsatisfying, impermanent, & impersonal.

Sit with discomfort to deeply understand it, not to survive it. When you feel the impulse to end the sitting, listen closely to discern your state & motivation, then end when you choose. Transition slowly, staying bright.

WALKING

Find a walking path between 20-30 feet long, level & unobstructed.

Stand at the end of the path, coming into standing meditation.

Feel your feet on the ground, central column long, eyes steady.

Stand as long as feels good. Gaze can be wide, narrowed, or eyes closed.

When you feel the impulse to begin walking, begin at a slow normal pace.

As you walk, track movement & sensations through the lower body.

As focus and calm deepen, you may choose to slow your pace.

When walking more slowly, track subtle sensations just in the feet.

2 STYLES OF WALKING MEDITATION

Mental Noting: Think “lifting, moving, placing...” with each foot.

With Breath: Continue tracking breath as you walk.

You can sync your breath to your steps, or not, as you choose.

When you reach the end of the path, pause, then turn around.

Again wait in standing meditation for the impulse to begin walking again.

As in sitting, when you feel the impulse to end walking meditation, listen closely to discern your state & motivation, then end when you choose.

Transition slowly, staying bright.

Walking meditation is a training in embodiment through continuity of mindful awareness and focus in slow movement. It supports continuity of attention through all waking hours, and matures into states of stable mental clarity that sustain through physical activity.

EXPLORING

Exploration could be going for a hike in nature, writing or making art in a process-oriented way, or moving the body. Exploration should be active. (Reading is unadvised because of its tendency to amplify discursive thought. Excessive journaling and art-making can do the same. Use discernment.) When you feel an impulse to take a period of time for exploration, listen closely to discern your state & motivation, and if wholesome, maintain continuity of awareness as you begin the activity.

Exploration can be skillful when energy feels unable to move or shift in formal sitting or walking practice. It can mobilize energy for deeper sitting & walking, bring inspiration for continued practice, and nourish the heart through contact with beauty. Exploration is not skillful when it stirs up thought, disrupts continuity, or increases distraction, avoidance, or denial. Exploration on retreat should not be for entertainment.

Maintain embodied presence through whatever activity you're choosing. If your activity is discursive (writing), keep it short, and return to wordless practice soon, always attending to your embodied state.

RESTING

Rest should be self-explanatory, but so often isn't.

Get as comfortable as possible: warm, fed, & sheltered.

Either set an alarm so you don't miss the next thing you want to be at, or let go of any schedule agenda and just rest.

A deeply rested bodymind is good earth for the seeds of liberation to grow in. Don't be afraid or ashamed to rest. There is enough time.