

Facilitating Dharma Sharing

Provide an overview to the sangha regarding Dharma sharing. Try to include the following points but speak in your own words rather than treat this as a script. It is more valuable for all to hear your own perspective on Dharma Sharing.

- Dharma sharing is an opportunity for each of us to share our personal practice. We can share what has been a challenge, what has worked well or we can ask a question to the group to get guidance in our practice.
- When we would like to share just place your hands together in front of you to form a lotus. Our two hands coming together signify our mind and body being unified. It also signifies the Buddha nature in me bowing to the Buddha nature in you. Bow to the group to ask permission to share. The group will form their hands and bow back to give you permission to share.
- We should speak from our heart. Focus on what we are experiencing with the practice. It's not a time to talk about a theory or an article or book we've recently read.
- Share your first-person experience with the practice – using “I” statements rather than “you” or “we”.
- Take your time to share your full thought - but try to be considerate of the time by making sure that there is enough time for everyone to share. Say what you want to say with a mind toward conciseness if there are many that need to share. This will allow all a chance to share.
- When you are done sharing, form your hands and bow to the group. The group will form their hands and bow back to thank you for your sharing.
- It is wonderful if the group can breathe 3 times before the next sharing.
- Dharma sharing is equally about deep sharing and deep listening.
- Practice Deep Listening by being fully present for the person that is sharing. Focus on understanding them rather than on constructing your own thoughts or preparing your own sharing.
- If moved by what someone has shared then in your sharing you can share your own personal experience on the subject. It is better to share your own experience that to try to give advice to someone else.
- Share to the group as a whole rather than directing your sharing at one person.
- If you have already shared once please let others share before you volunteer to share again.
- Since we practice deep sharing from the heart we do not always know what we will say. We speak freely to the group and may not want to be reminded of what we said or discuss it further afterwards. To support each other in this practice please let what is said here remain here. If you want to share about “your experience” at Dharma sharing with another that is fine, but please practice confidentiality.

Dharma Sharing Guidelines - Some helpful words for facilitators

from New Sangha Handbook (USA)

Excerpt from How to Enjoy Your Stay in Plum Village: A Guide to the Practices & Activities

- By the monks and nuns of Plum Village

Dharma sharing is an opportunity to benefit from each others' insights and experience of the practice. It is a special time for us to share our experiences, our joys, our difficulties and our questions relating to the practice of mindfulness. By practicing deep listening while others are speaking, we help create a calm and receptive environment. By learning to speak out about our happiness and our difficulties in the practice, we contribute to the collective insight and understanding of the Sangha.

Please base our sharing on our own experience of the practice rather than about abstract ideas and theoretical topics. We may realize that many of us share similar difficulties and aspirations. Sitting, listening and sharing together, we recognize our true connection to one another.

Please remember that whatever is shared during the Dharma sharing time is confidential. If a friend shares about a difficulty he or she is facing, respect that he or she may or may not wish to talk about this individually outside of the Dharma sharing time.

Excerpt from Stepping Into Freedom: An Introduction to Buddhist Monastic Training

- By Thich Nhat Hanh

During Dharma sharings, practice deep listening in order to understand and learn from others' viewpoints or insights. If you have something to contribute to the discussion that will help others in their practice, share it, but do not speak just to show off your knowledge or challenge someone else's point of view. Do not browbeat others to show that you are more intelligent than they are.

The aim of a Dharma sharing is to learn collectively from everyone's insights and experience. If you are having difficulty with some aspect of practice, ask for help. If someone offers a helpful comment, join your palms in gratitude.

When you are facilitator, if the group is small and includes some newcomers, allow time for everyone to introduce himself or herself. Then make some brief introductory remarks. If the discussion becomes theoretical, bring everyone back to the discussion topic. When necessary, gently remind people to base their comments on their experience of the practice. Invite those who have not shared to do so if they wish. From time to time, the group's bell master should invite the bell of mindfulness. This will raise the quality of the Dharma sharing. Before concluding, thank all the participants.

Further notes:

The facilitator can encourage everyone to take a sufficient amount of time that he or she needs to share. But the facilitator should also remind the group to be aware of others' desire to share as well. When time is limited, and there is a large group, advise individuals not to share more than once, except when everyone has already had an opportunity to speak.

Sometimes it can be nice to close dharma sharing with a practice song, and then end with three sounds of the bell. The facilitator may like to invite the group to bow to each other, in gratitude for their support in the practice.

From USA Dharma Teacher Council (US Tour reminders)