



Joyful Sangha Facilitation Handbook

Plum Village Tradition



With each step, a gentle wind blows.
With each step, a flower blooms.

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Introduction

Our beloved Thầy has often emphasized that Sangha building is the most noble task of our time. Thầy has spent his life building and supporting monastic and lay Sanghas, showing us the way to build communities of practice.

Sangha facilitators offer loving service to the precious jewel of community by helping to create and hold a safe, loving space for sharing and practice. The forms of Sangha practice help support facilitators and the Sangha. We offer this small handbook of guidelines to support facilitators in their Sangha service. It also includes the essence of practices that should be covered in your orientation and introduction to new practitioners. We hope you find it helpful, and we welcome Sangha feedback.

As we prepare this current version, we are grateful for the Sangha's participation and support, and especially grateful to our beloved teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, for all he has taught us and transmitted to us.

*Sister Đăng Nghiêm & Leslie Rawls
Deer Park Monastery, 2020.*

Criteria for a Plum Village Sangha

These are criteria to qualify as a Sangha in Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village tradition:

- ☐ Practice is primarily inspired by the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, his teachings, and the practices developed in the Plum Village tradition.
- ☐ The Sangha sees the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh as their primary teacher and strives to implement his vision for practice, including his emphasis on the fourfold Sangha.
- ☐ The Sangha uses Plum Village practice forms to create an inclusive and welcoming space and to ensure the safety, security, and integrity of participants.
- ☐ The Sangha regularly practices and recites the Five Mindfulness Trainings together, and the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings if applicable, at least once a month.
- ☐ Sutra and book study focus primarily on writings by Thich Nhat Hanh, Plum Village monastics, and Plum Village lay Dharma Teachers.
- ☐ The Sangha practices stopping and mindful breathing with the bell and the telephone
- ☐ The Sangha practices walking meditation
- ☐ The Sangha practices Dharma sharing grounded in the Mindfulness Trainings and Plum Village teachings.
- ☐ The Sangha practices loving speech and deep listening
- ☐ In accordance with Plum Village tradition, The Sangha emphasizes the practice: "Go as a River. Go as Sangha."
- ☐ Core members meet regularly to openly discuss all matters and make decisions based on consensus or Sanghakarman procedure.
- ☐ Members take turn to organize and facilitate Sangha activities.
- ☐ Core members are encouraged to practice Beginning Anew monthly and Shining Light at least once a year.
- ☐ The Sangha utilizes Plum Village practices, including Beginning Anew, loving speech, and deep listening, to reconcile and resolve conflicts, however small.
- ☐ Sangha members are encouraged to attend Days of Mindfulness and retreats at Plum Village monasteries regularly in order to receive direct transmission from the monastics and to practice with the four-fold Sangha of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.

Note: Many Sanghas have established scholarship funds to help members attend events at monasteries or with lay Plum Village Dharma Teachers. The Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation can also help Sanghas bring monastics or lay Dharma teachers to their communities. (See <https://thichnhathanhfoundation.org> for grant applications and ways you can support the foundation.)

- Order of Interbeing members are required to recite the 14 Mindfulness Trainings every two weeks. Order members are also expected to organize, practice with, and support a local Sangha and to help sustain mindfulness training recitations, Days of Mindfulness, and mindfulness retreats. Order members must maintain a regular meditation practice and observe 60 days of mindfulness a year. OI aspirants should also observe similar requirements. (See <http://orderofinterbeing.org>.)

Notes

Mindful Manners and Appropriate Conduct

Facilitator's intentions

- ☐ Have the sincere intention to build the Sangha for the benefit of many people, not for personal prestige or power.
- ☐ Intend to hold the space for others to share. Recognize facilitating discussion is an opportunity to listen and appreciate the Sangha, not a teaching moment.
- ☐ Cultivate facilitation as Sangha practice. Whenever possible, have a different person be the bell master to support facilitation as Sangha practice.
- ☐ Support others in cultivating their skills as facilitators and bell masters.
- ☐ Genuinely appreciate the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
- ☐ Be diligent and sincere in your daily, personal mindfulness practice life: stop with the sound of the telephone and practice sitting/walking/eating meditation, etc.

Personal, regular practice

- ☐ Recite the precepts you have received (5 MT or 14 MT) regularly, at least once a month. The transmission is nullified if you do not recite your precepts for three months.
- ☐ Continue to study and deepen your understanding and practice of the mindfulness trainings.
- ☐ Cultivate mindful living as a way of life, not a "fad" or "current trending."
- ☐ Practice the Six Harmonies: sharing all benefits; sharing physical space; sharing the precepts; sharing ideas and views; making decisions through consensus; using deep listening and loving speech in resolving conflicts or arguments.

Service to the Sangha

- ☐ Be aware your practice of harmony, mindfulness trainings, and mindful manners are your greatest service to the Sangha. Others observe and learn directly from your example.
- ☐ Only lead when asked or assigned by the local members.
- ☐ Rotate leaders frequently.
- ☐ Welcome everyone. Be respectful and inclusive through awareness of differences in race, culture, age, sexual orientation, and physical capacity, etc.

- ☐ Except when asked to offer an orientation or presentation, be succinct with your sharing. Then yield the time for others to share. Do not dominate conversations or sharing.
- ☐ Always focus on bringing harmony to the Sangha and all parties.
- ☐ Facilitate sharing views and making Sangha decisions based on harmony of views, using Sanghakarman procedure to reach consensus.
- ☐ If a conflict arises, practice deep listening and not taking sides. Practice to avoid creating allies or triangles in the Sangha.
- ☐ If you are involved in a conflict, be aware you may wish for people to be on your side. Avoid creating division by asking Sangha members to take sides.
- ☐ Be careful not to be divisive or cause the Sangha to split.
- ☐ Do not use your facilitator position to gain or use power or influence.

Proper conduct

- ☐ Kindly address a monastic practitioner as “Brother” or “Sister” (“thầy” or “sư cô”) along with their monastic names. i.e. Brother Dharma Sun.
- ☐ Dress modestly and appropriately (long, loose pants or skirts that cover knees; shirts with sleeves, long enough to properly cover waistbands, a modest neckline, etc.).
- ☐ OI members are encouraged to wear your OI jackets when attending Sangha activities, especially when reciting the Mindfulness Trainings or facilitating Sangha activities. Remember you are representing the Plum Village tradition with your humility and sincere practice of the Five or the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings and mindful manners.
- ☐ Be aware of your body postures, how you are carrying yourself.
- ☐ Bow with palms joined into a lotus bud. Avoid bowing with one hand while holding a cup or something else with the other hand.
- ☐ Be humble and modest.
- ☐ Use skillful and appropriate language.
- ☐ Practice loving speech and deep listening with everyone.
- ☐ Practice beginning anew with yourself and with person(s) whom you've been unskillful with.
- ☐ Be stable; be reliable.

- ☐ Master inviting the bell in different situations (activity bell, Dharma sharing, sitting meditation, etc.).
- ☐ Avoid walking and talking at the same time.
- ☐ Only practice hugging meditation when the other person gives permission and feels comfortable with it. Recognize the possibility the other person may perceive a facilitator as someone in power; avoid asking for hugging meditation or other contact if this possibility exists.
- ☐ Practicing the Third Mindfulness Training (from the Five Mindfulness Trainings) is essential. Do not ask Sangha members for physical contact or dates. Do not flirt. Be aware of your sexual energy. Please protect the Sangha as a place for spiritual practice.
- ☐ Do not contact Sangha members for personal gains (asking for a favor, a date, etc.).
- ☐ Do not give outsiders information about Sangha members without the Sangha member's consent.
- ☐ Sexually inappropriate conduct in the Sangha must be addressed promptly. If the conduct may constitute a crime, local law enforcement should be contacted without delay. In some instances, failure to report may itself be a crime, such as when a child is at risk.¹

¹ Most North American jurisdictions require reporting of child abuse, even by persons normally exempted by confidentiality such as therapeutic, medical, and clerical professionals. All Sanghas practicing in the Plum Village tradition are expected to fully comply with local laws regarding child abuse reporting.

In addition, if a child is not involved, Sanghas and facilitators should remember sexual harassment of any kind may violate national and local law. If criminal conduct is involved and no child is involved, local Sangha members are encouraged to contact law enforcement if the person impacted by the conduct consents. Sangha facilitators are expected to do our best to keep our Sanghas and Sangha events free of sexual harassment.

The Plum Village Community and the North American Dharma Teachers Sangha is working to find ways to support Sanghas affected by sexual misconduct. Until a procedure is established, Sangha facilitators and Sanghas may find the Faith Trust Institute materials on raising awareness and responding to misconduct.
www.faithtrustinstitute.org

- ☐ If a Plum Village Dharma Teacher is involved in misconduct, Sanghas may find helpful the materials at <http://orderofinterbeing.org/2013/11/ethical-concerns-regarding-dharma-teachers/>.

Mindful manners in Meditation Hall or Dharma Hall

- ☐ Respect Noble Silence.
- ☐ Speak softly, calmly.
- ☐ Bow before using a Dharma instrument & use both hands to bring your full awareness to using the instrument. For example, use two hands to pick up the bell inviter.
- ☐ Use both hands to pick up cushions and mats. Please do not use your feet.
- ☐ Avoid lying down in the meditation hall except during Deep Relaxation session or when given permission in special cases. Always point your feet away from the altar.
- ☐ Avoid doing personal exercise or yoga in the meditation hall. If given permission, please enjoy movements at the back of the hall.
- ☐ In our monasteries, during mindfulness trainings recitation or transmission ceremonies, the monastics sit in order of ordination, then Order of Interbeing members in order of ordination, and then the rest of the Sangha. OI members who sit in chairs are an exceptions; their seats should be placed at the end of the row, away from the altar.
- ☐ In lay Sanghas, during mindfulness trainings recitation or transmission ceremonies, Order of Interbeing members are encouraged to sit in order of ordination, followed by other lay friends.

Notes

Orientation and Presentation

Mindful manners

- ☐ Offer orientation as an invitation to practice, not a strict set of rules. Encourage friends and newcomers to taste the Plum Village practice with ease and joy.
- ☐ Welcome everyone. Be sensitive to issues of culture, gender, race, or sexuality. Create a space and a heart open to all.
- ☐ Dress neatly and appropriately. Order of Interbeing members generally should wear their OI jackets during Sangha events. As you prepare to put on your jacket, stop and breathe. Be aware the jacket represents your teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. Be aware of your responsibility in wearing the jacket and Thay's trust in your capacity to serve the Sangha. Recognize the jacket is not a sign of authority but of service. Don your jacket with humility and gratitude.
- ☐ Arrive earlier than the Sangha so you can settle in.
- ☐ Be relaxed, calm, and peaceful.
- ☐ Smile.
- ☐ Make eye contact with the practitioners in the room.
- ☐ Be humble and respectful toward the listeners. If someone seems confused by your orientation or guidance, clarify your presentation and ask for questions.
- ☐ Be mindful of your gestures and movements — while sitting, standing, writing on the board, drinking water, etc. Avoid rocking the body.
- ☐ If needed, have ready audio and visual aids ready (whiteboard and markers, projector, etc.)

Speech

- ☐ Clear, steady, calm.
- ☐ Pleasant volume and tone. If using a microphone, position it such that your voice can be picked up clearly; do a sound check.
- ☐ Use language appropriate for the group.
- ☐ Positive, loving speech.
- ☐ Avoid fillers such as “uhm”, “ah,” “you know,” etc.; better to pause and breathe.
- ☐ Occasionally, pause to breathe or to ask for a sound of the bell for the Sangha to breathe.

Basic practices to cover in orientation

Especially with newcomers, consider not giving too much information at once. Unless there is one orientation talk for the full event, such as a retreat, help friends settle into the practice by guiding them with the basics of the practice they are about to start. For example, if the practice begins with sitting meditation, offer sitting guidance and instructions about the bell to start. When the Sangha stands for slow walking, offer walking meditation guidance.

Topics for orientation:

- ☐ Listening to the bell.
- ☐ Sitting meditation.
- ☐ Walking meditation.
- ☐ Eating meditation & dishwashing meditation.
- ☐ Working meditation.
- ☐ Noble Silence.
- ☐ Mindfully limit on electronic use.
- ☐ Toilet/shower/tooth brushing.
- ☐ Opening & closing the door meditation.
- ☐ Meditation hall etiquette.

Structuring an orientation talk

- ☐ Organize the presentation with a clear and logical mental outline.
- ☐ Develop and build on a given theme throughout the orientation or the presentation.
- ☐ Link the theme to the basic practices; how basic practices are essential in healing and transformation.
- ☐ Share the basic practices clearly and accurately.
- ☐ Offer concrete examples, moving stories, research and new findings related to benefits of practice.
- ☐ Share your personal experiences, stories, practice, and insights.
- ☐ Involve the audience (with reflections, questions, exercises, etc.)

- ☐ Be innovative and creative.
- ☐ Present new insights and perspectives.
- ☐ Be sincere, personable, and relatable.
- ☐ Be joyful and humorous.
- ☐ Offer a positive attitude and outlook
- ☐ Avoid using Buddhist or Plum Village terms that are too technical. Clearly define and explain teachings and practices.
- ☐ Offer the audience the opportunity to ask a few questions (optional)
- ☐ Stay within time limit.
- ☐ Offer a conclusion to wrap up the talk.

Notes

Inviting the Bell

The bell guides the Sangha through much of our time together — inviting us to sit, to stand, to bow, and so forth. However, the bell is much more than a signal. The sound of the bell can be heard as the voice of the Buddha calling us back to the present moment. The bell master, or “bellminder,” is the vehicle for this invitation.

Inviting the bell is a deep mindfulness practice. The bell master should be fully present inviting and listening to the bell. We don’t say striking or hitting the bell in our tradition; we say *inviting* the bell. This language reflects the importance of the bell as a friend who supports our practice. The bell of mindfulness invites the listener to come back to the here and now. When we hear the big bell, we stop what we are doing — talking, walking, whatever we are doing — and return to mindful breathing. For three full breaths, we simply listen to the bell, aware of each in-breath and each out-breath.

The bell master supports the Sangha’s mindfulness not only with proper timing and sequence of bells, but more importantly, with their own mindfulness while inviting and listening to the bell. The bell master is encouraged to arrive early in order to settle in and be fully present when inviting the bell.

Preparation

- ☐ If possible, it’s best to have two bells — a big bell and a handheld bell (khánh²) plus an inviter (stick to sound the bell) for each.
- ☐ If two bells are not available, use the larger end of the inviter to make bigger bell sounds and the small end to make a high-pitched tone.
- ☐ Cushions for the bells, in sizes matching the bell size.

Explanation

- ☐ Before picking up the inviter, take three mindful breaths and bow to the bell and inviter. Staying with mindful breathing, pick up the inviter, hold it upright with the handle on the ground, resting right hand atop left hand on top of the inviter. Prepare to invite the bell by reciting the inviting verse silently.

² Khánh is a special, handheld bell that offers a high-pitched tone, which signals the Sangha to stand up, bow, sit down, etc.

- Inviting verse/gatha (usually said silently before inviting the bell):

Body, speech, and mind in perfect oneness,
I send my heart along with the sound of the bell.
May the hearers awaken from forgetfulness
and transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

- For the medium or large bell, hold one hand in prayer over the heart. Before offering the full sound, wake the bell by once or twice gently tapping the inviter across the top and holding the inviter still to muffle the sound. Then, invite the full sound of the bell.
Lower the inviter and place it upright in front of you with the handle resting on the ground, hands resting on top of the inviter. If right-handed, place your right hand on top of your left; vice versa if left-handed. Rest, breathe, and listen to the bell for three breaths. (The bell master models listening to the bell.)
Three bells are offered to begin and end many events. After each bell, the bell master should return to the resting position, listening for three breaths. After listening to the third bell, the bell master may like to bow to the inviter and, using two hands, place it on the ground beside the bell.
- For the mini bell, gently tap on the rim of the bell to wake the bell. The wake-up bell should be clearly audible but not so loud it startles people. After the wake-up sound, breathe in, and as you breathe out, invite the full sound of the bell.
- For the wake-up bell, depending on situation, you may need to repeat the wake-up sound one or two more times (firmer and louder) to ensure that the majority in the room are aware the full sound is about to come.
- With each sound of the big bell, the Sangha is invited to stop all action, simply listen and breathe mindfully.
- The bell invites the Sangha to come into the present moment and practice mindful breathing for three full breaths. (One in-breath and one out-breath are counted as one full breath.)
- Verse for listening to the bell:

Listen. Listen. (*Breathing in.*)
This wonderful sound calls me back to my true
home. (*Breathing out*)

- A wake-up sound is nearly always invited before three sounds, two sounds, or one sound of the bell (during a session). Exceptions: there is no wake-up sound before the bell during or at the end of a chant or recitation or when the Sangha is already expecting the next bell. (More detail is below).

Bell sequences

1. Meditation:

Begin with one wake-up sound and three big bells with three breaths between each bell.

To end meditation and uncross and massage legs,
one wake-up and two big bells (close together).

If practicing indoor walking (slow walking meditation)

To invite standing and facing the Sangha after a few minutes of massaging,
one wake-up and one small bell.

To bow to the Sangha and turn to the left for walking,
one small bell.

To begin walking meditation,
one small bell.

Halfway through slow walking meditation or about a quarter turn from the seat
if walking in a small circle,
one wake-up and one small bell.

When everyone has reached their seats & joined palms
one wake-up and one small bell to bow to the Sangha and sit down if a
second meditation or Dharma sharing follows.

If no second period, everyone should turn to the altar after bowing to the
Sangha, then, the bell master invites one small bell to bow to the altar.

Alternatively, the bell master may invite three sounds of the bell for the
Sangha to touch the Earth three times before leaving the meditation hall:
one wake-up and one big bell, everyone touches the earth the first time.
one wake-up, everyone stands up
one big bell, everyone touches the earth the second time.
one wake-up, everyone stands up
two big bells, everyone touches the earth the third time.
one big bell, everyone stands up
one khánh, everyone bows and leaves.

2. Sharing, recitation, or ceremony:

Begin with one wake-up sound and three big bells with three breaths between each bell.

Bells may be invited during a ceremony or recitation as indicated in the *Chanting Book*.

During Dharma sharing, it may be helpful to invite the bell and pause for three breaths from time to time.

To end sharing period, recitation, or ceremony,
one wake-up and three big bells.

To uncross and massage legs,
one small bell*.

To invite standing and facing the Sangha after a few minutes of massaging,
one wake-up and one small bell.

After standing behind cushion,
one small bell to bow to the Sangha and
one small bell to bow to the altar.

*Small bell here is “Khánh,” or you can use the other end of the bell inviter to invite the bell to create a high-pitched sound.

Other bells

- Activity bell (outdoor)
- Big bell in the meditation hall
- Cloud bell (for morning and evening chants in the meditation hall)
- Great temple bell

Different bell sounds

1. Dharma talk, Dharma sharing, meeting, chanting, etc.: Occasionally wake up and invite one sound of the bell to support mindful breathing and true presence.

1----- (3 breaths)

2. Ending sitting meditation or silent period of a meal:

Wake-up and two sounds of the bell.

The two sounds of the bell are in fact one sound split into two for emphasis, so the space in between the two sounds is just about one in-breath. The second sound should be slightly louder than the first sound.

This bell signals the end of the sitting meditation session or the end of a meal's silent period. (Friends can then get up for seconds or to wash their dishes if they're ready).

1---2 (1 breath)

3. To begin and end any formal practices, including ceremonies, sitting meditation, Dharma sharing, meetings, etc.: Wake-up and three sounds of the bell with three breaths after each sound of the bell, so that the listeners — including the bell master — can enjoy breathing and relaxing.

1-----2-----3----- (9 breaths total)

-The three sounds ideally should be the same in volume, clear and powerful. They should not sound too weak or too harsh.

4. Seven sounds of the bell: the first 5 sounds serve as wake-up sounds (so we do not need to wake up the bell before inviting these 5 sounds.) The **4th and 5th** sounds are closer to each other, but they should not be too rushed. The **6th and 7th** sounds should be successively louder and slightly further in distance compared to the first 5 sounds.

- -Bell inside the meditation hall: to begin the morning/evening chant. The tempo is slower, more calming than the first seven sounds of the activity bell.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

- The great temple bell: to begin the chanting. The tempo is even slower than inside the meditation hall.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

5. Ten sounds of the bell: Invited 15 minutes before an activity begins. They are invited at a quicker tempo than in the meditation hall. The first seven sounds + three last sounds that are successively louder and more apart.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

6. Long round of the bell: Invited during morning/evening chants and at the end of the chanting with the great temple bell.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----1-----2-----3-----4

-Please note: The size of the bell helps determine the distance between the sounds of the bell. For example, with the great temple bell, the distance between the sounds would be much longer than with the meditation hall bell so the bell sounds have time to reverberate and not get choked off (causing the bell to break over time). With the mini bell, the distance between the sounds of the bell would be much shorter than with the meditation hall bell, because the smaller bell doesn't reverberate as much.

Notes

Facilitating Outdoor Walking Meditation

Preparation

- ☐ Practice songs. If possible, have song sheets available so the Sangha can enjoy singing together.
- ☐ A small bell (optional).
- ☐ Invite the Sangha to practice songs before introducing walking.
- ☐ If some friends have difficulty with the walking, consider offering a second meditative option, such as a shorter walk, walking on an easier path, another alternative suitable to best support practice.

Explanation to support walking practice

- ☐ Mindful breathing.
- ☐ Mindful steps.
- ☐ Relaxing the body; smiling.
- ☐ Elements of stopping and deep looking in walking meditation.
- ☐ Gathas for walking meditation, including:

The mind can go in a thousand
directions,
but on this beautiful path I walk in
peace.
With each step, a gentle wind blows.
With each step, a flower blooms.
- ☐ Awareness of Mother Earth, land ancestors, the scenery, and the ground beneath our steps.
- ☐ Walk behind the leader; flow with the pace set, allow comfortable space around you (not pressure person in front to walk faster or lag behind too far from main group).
- ☐ Walk in silence.
- ☐ Occasional stopping to stand still or sit down to enjoy the view and allow those with walking difficulties to rest.
- ☐ Inviting the small bell while standing still or sitting down (optional).

- ☐ Awareness of those who are in wheelchairs or who have difficulty with walking. Find ways to include them in walking meditation if possible, perhaps by offering a second, alternative method of moving meditation with awareness.
- ☐ 10 mindful movements (optional).

Facilitating Sitting Meditation

Preparation

- ☐ Set out mats and cushions.
Place chairs away from the altar or front of room, and not in front of friends sitting on cushions.
Move the seating with gratitude for its capacity to support the Sangha's practice.
- ☐ Place the bells where the bell master will sit.
- ☐ Khánh (optional; a kind of small bell with higher pitch, used to signal standing up, bowing, etc.). If not available, use opposite end of inviter to create higher pitch sound for distinction.
- ☐ *Blooming of A Lotus* (optional, for guided meditation)
- ☐ Suggesting friends to wear modest and comfortable, loose fitting clothes.

Explanation

- ☐ Meditation begins before the bell invites formal sitting (on the way going to the meditation hall or room, as one enters, as one sits down, even listening to meditation instruction.)
- ☐ Meditation can be described as a bird with two wings (stopping and deep looking).
 1. Stopping
- ☐ Gatha for sitting down:

Sitting here is like sitting under the Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself,
calm and at ease,
free from distraction.

Mindful breathing as soon as one sits down (first two exercises) and throughout the sitting.

Different sitting postures (full lotus, half lotus, chrysanthemum, or on a chair).

Avoid lying down during sitting meditation. Given special medical reasons, those who must lie down may do so in the back of the hall.

Body adjustment and awareness in the beginning and throughout. Remove glasses; close eyes gently or rest on the ground; spine upright and relaxed; chin relaxed, not pointing upward or downward; hands alongside body or on lap, etc. When needed, small adjustments may ease the body.

Mindful adjustment of sitting posture also helps lessen noise impact on the neighbors.
Gatha for adjusting posture:

Feelings come and go
like clouds in a windy sky.
Mindful breathing is my anchor.

2. Deep looking

Practice with key words given in guided meditation or offer a topic for meditative focus.

Mindful breathing as the anchor.

Awareness of posture and mindful adjustment.

Frequently asked meditation questions

- ☐ What to do when the mind wanders off?
Be happy you noticed the wandering and have a chance to return to mindful breathing and your body posture.
- ☐ What to do when strong emotions arise?
Recognize meditation can be a safe place to hold strong emotions. Return to mindful breathing and hold the emotion in awareness like a mother holding a baby.
If the emotion is simply overwhelming, return to breathing and let it pass. Sometimes it helps to follow the breath all the way into the belly and all the way back out.
- ☐ What to do when many thoughts arise?
Be happy you noticed the thoughts and have a chance to return to meditation.
Sometimes it helps to consciously say (silently) to persistent thoughts, "I know you're important. I will come back to you. Right now, I'm just going to sit quietly." If your mind can be anchored in your breathing and body, then you can look deeply into those thoughts to understand their meanings and implications. If your mind cannot be anchored in mindful breathing, then it's only thinking and aimless wandering, not meditation.
- ☐ What to do when one is drowsy/restless/distracted?
It can help to follow the breath at the nostrils when drowsy. If restless or distracting, it can help to follow the breath into the belly or watch the lungs expand and contract. You can also gently and quietly massage your face and hands to feel more awake and more anchored in your body.
- ☐ What to do when one cannot anchor the mind in the breathing?
Sometimes a stuffy nose or something else makes breathing difficult. In that case, one might focus on another part of the body, the beating heart, the feel of feet or legs on the floor, etc. Notice where the mind is drifting to and gently invite it to "come back."

- ☐ What to do when one cannot cope with the topic of the guided meditation?
Let it go. Simply return to each breath, and don't try to follow the meditation. Please share the difficulty with the facilitator afterward, either during Dharma sharing, in a private conversation, or perhaps by leaving a note in the bell. You may return to the topic at another time when you are more ready.
- ☐ What to do when one has no topic to look deeply into? Simply enjoy the first four of the 16 exercises of the Full Awareness of Breathing during the entire sitting session. You can also practice the Five remembrances; Metta meditation.
- ☐ When and how to practice the 16 exercises of the Full Awareness of Breathing?
Everyone can benefit from these exercises. Sometimes, breaking them into four practices per session can be useful, allowing time to penetrate each practice rather than rushing through. Thầy has offered many talks on practice with these exercises. The Sangha may benefit from enjoying these talks together.

Note that the first four exercises serve as the foundation for our sitting, enabling stopping and deep looking to be possible. Without awareness of our breathing and our body, the mind is lost in thoughts and feelings, and so it is not a meditation, regardless of how still and how long we sit.

Notes

Eating Meditation

Preparation

- Food
- Bell
- Five Contemplations

Explanation

- ☐ Elements of stopping and deep looking in eating meditation.
- ☐ Practicing the Five Contemplations while serving food and/or before eating.
- ☐ Awareness of the empty plate or bowl: "This plate now empty will soon be filled with precious food. I wish all beings will have enough to eat."
- ☐ Taking only enough food or a little less than normal.
- ☐ Bowing to friends as we sit down together and before we begin to eat.
- ☐ Awareness of the food and of the people surrounding as a practice throughout eating meditation.
- ☐ Observing the colors, textures, the kind of food on the plate or spoon.
- ☐ Awareness of where food has come from.
- ☐ Chew food until it becomes liquid at least 20-30 times. This aids digestion, helping the body absorb more nutrients. It allows us to be more nourished even while eating less.
- ☐ Place utensils down while chewing.
- ☐ Mindful chewing. Awareness of movements of jaw, tongue, swallowing.
- ☐ Mindful breathing/counting the number of chews.
- ☐ Eating food and not one's emotions, projects, and plans.
- ☐ Occasionally stop to appreciate the presence of those around us. Silent communication through facial expressions, eye contact, smiles.
- ☐ Stopping with the sound of the bell. (Bell master should give a clear wake-up before inviting meal bells.)

- ☐ Staying seated until two sounds of the bell about 15 minutes after the meal starts. The two sounds indicate friends may rise to get more food or wash their dishes.
- ☐ Giving thanks at the end of the meal and making the commitment to live for the benefits of all beings.
- ☐ Bowing to friends as we leave the table to wash our dishes.
- ☐ Washing our dishes in silence, with mindfulness and gratitude.

Five contemplations before eating

This food is a gift of the earth, the sky, numerous living beings, and much hard and loving work.

May we eat with mindfulness and gratitude so as to be worthy to receive this food.

May we recognize and transform unwholesome mental formations, especially our greed and learn to eat with moderation.

May we keep our compassion alive by eating in such a way that reduces the suffering of living beings, stops contributing to climate change, and heals and preserves our precious planet.

We accept this food so that we may nurture our brotherhood and sisterhood, build our Sangha, and nourish our ideal of serving all living beings.

Notes

Dharma Sharing

Preparation

- Mats & cushions, chairs
- A bell (small, medium, or large) + khánh (if possible)

Explanation

- ☐ Bells: Begin with a wake-up and three sounds of the bell, three breaths between each sound. Invite one wake-up and one bell occasionally during the session. End with three sounds of the bell.
- ☐ The facilitator introduces the sharing format and then opens the circle for sharing. Be succinct with your introduction and yield the time for others to share. Dharma sharing is not a time to give a teaching. Avoid sharing during the session except to encourage group members to share.
- ☐ Explain that Dharma sharing is an opportunity to look into our practice, not to teach or explore intellectual matters as in a college class.
- ☐ Elements of stopping and deep looking (individual and collective) in Dharma sharing.
- ☐ Acknowledge sharing as an opportunity for everyone to connect in a small group; to share about the Dharma talk just listened to, about our experiences, joys, difficulties, and practice-related questions.
- ☐ Practice of mindful breathing, deep listening, and loving speech.
- ☐ Practice of bowing in and bowing out mindfully.
- ☐ Teach participants to use the bell and pass it around so everyone has a chance to practice during the session (optional).
- ☐ Remind friends to offer their names for newcomers or forgetful friends.
- ☐ Confidentiality of the sharing.
- ☐ Everyone is encouraged to share, but people may pass if they are not yet comfortable with sharing.
- ☐ One person speaking at a time. No interruption. No back and forth conversation between two people. No crosstalk. If this takes place, the facilitator needs to invite one sound of the bell and remind everyone to honor the practice of deep listening and loving speech. Another participant can also request one sound of the bell.
- ☐ Addressing the sharing, the question to the circle, not to any individual.

- ☐ Remind friends that questions are an invitation for each of us to look deeply, not a request for answers or instruction.
- ☐ Pause before the next sharing to digest what was just shared, then let go/release in order to be open to receive the next sharing. A sound of the bell invited at the end of each sharing may deepen this practice of letting go & release.
- ☐ Time limit for each person, depending on the number of participants in the group (5-10 minutes).
- ☐ Allow others to share before one can share the second time.
- ☐ Tip: Passing around object (flower, pebble, etc.) as "talking stick" may encourage sharing from those not comfortable with public speaking/large group setting (optional).
- ☐ Tip: If more than one session in the week/retreat, then can also open sharing to "popcorn" style. But be cautious of one-on-one dialogues, of same people sharing often, not allowing enough silence in between sharing. Sometimes, if one or two people are sharing multiple times, the facilitator may need to interrupt, "I'm sorry to interrupt, but let's leave space to hear from those who have not shared yet." Something like that.
- ☐ Invite those who have not spoken to do so five or ten minutes before the end.
- ☐ At the end of the session, the facilitator skillfully and briefly concludes the sharing.

Notes

Informal Tea Meditation

Preparation

- Tea, cups, thermos or pitcher
- Cookies (optional)
- Flowers and decorations
- Bell
- Mats, cushions, chairs
- Incense (optional)
- Gatha for drinking tea
- Soft music (optional, towards the beginning).
- Song sheets (optional)

Explanation

- ☐ An opportunity to be with the Sangha, to drink tea together, and to practice generating happiness and joy.
- ☐ The practice of being truly present for oneself, the tea, and the community.
- ☐ Tea and cookies may be picked up at a serving table before sitting down or may be passed around while everyone is sitting. If the tray is passed around, the receiver should bow, take the tea or cookie, put it down on the ground or a napkin, take the tray, and then turn to offer it to the next person.
- ☐ Begin with a wake-up and three sounds of the bell with three breaths between each bell. The tea master may hold up their teacup and recite the gatha for drinking tea:

This cup of tea in my two hands
Mindfulness held perfectly.
My mind and body dwell
In the very here and now.

Then invite everyone to begin enjoying the tea and cookies in silence for five to ten minutes. After five or ten minutes, the bell master invites a wake-up and two sounds of the bell. The tea master then invites friends to begin sharing music, songs, poetry, comments, etc.

- ☐ End each sharing with one sound of the bell (optional).
- ☐ For more tea, join two palms. For more cookies, join two fists together. For more tea and cookies, join one palm with one fist.
- ☐ End the activity with a short sitting meditation (optional) and three sounds of the bell.

Sangha Meetings

Meditation before a Sangha meeting

Before a Sangha meeting, it may be useful to read the “Meditation Before a Sangha Meeting” from the Plum Village Chanting Book.

Dear Lord Buddha and Teachers over many generations:

We make the commitment to go through this meeting in a spirit of togetherness as we review all ideas and consolidate them to a harmonious understanding (consensus). We will use the methods of loving speech and deep listening in order to bring about the success of this meeting, as an offering to the Three Jewels. We will not hesitate to share our ideas and insights, but we will also not say anything when the feeling of irritation is present in us. We are resolutely determined not to allow tension to build up in this meeting. If any one of us senses the start of tension, we will stop immediately and practice Beginning Anew right away to re-establish the atmosphere of togetherness and harmony in the Sangha.

Sanghakarman procedure for decision making

Most decisions in Plum Village Sanghas should be made by the Sangha’s core community using the Sanghakarman — Sangha body — procedure. The facilitator of the gathering or meeting invites discussion about the topic concerned. If another Sangha member is more familiar with a topic, they can also introduce something on the agenda, and then the facilitator helps facilitate the discussion. Everyone is invited to share their opinions and ideas. The conversation is grounded in mindful speech and deep listening.

When discussion is complete, the facilitator announces the resulting proposal and asks if there is further discussion. When all discussion is complete, the facilitator formally asks, “If the Sangha agrees with this proposal, please remain silent for three breaths. If anyone has a different idea, please speak up now.” Some Sanghas ask the question three times to be certain the consensus is clear. After three silent breaths, the proposal has been accepted by Sangha consensus and the bell master invites one sound of the bell. The facilitator thanks the Sangha, brings up the next agenda item, and proceeds with discussion and decision making in the same way.

Once a decision is made based on consensus, all Sangha members are expected to help carry it out in the spirit of respect and harmony.

Beginning Anew Practice

Overview

Beginning Anew is sometimes viewed as a practice only for conflict resolution, but it has the capacity to build and strengthen our ties as a community of practice. When Sanghas practice Beginning Anew when no conflict is present, Sangha members become more open to sharing about difficulties as they arise. Sharing with small difficulties or hurt feelings also helps us to feel safe and trusting when using Beginning Anew to address more significant difficulties. Many lay Sanghas practice Beginning Anew regularly with core members, at least once a year.

Beginning Anew can be difficult or confusing for Sangha newcomers or visitors. Because lay Sanghas typically do not live together, we may lack the foundation for hearing another person's words about hurt or conflict as a loving offering.

Sangha members participating in Beginning Anew may prepare for the practice by engaging in Beginning Anew with themselves as a meditation for several days before the Sangha ceremony.

Four parts of Beginning Anew

(This section is excerpted from the "Conflict Resolution Guide from The Plum Village Lineage North American Dharma Teachers Sangha.")

1. Flower Watering

Flower Watering is an opportunity to tell another Sangha member something very specific that you enjoy or appreciate about him/ her. Very specific is an important phrase here. General or rambling is not effective.

2. Offering Regrets

Offering Regrets is an opportunity to tell a person or the Sangha as a group something specific you have concern about such as a way you may have hurt another person or the Sangha. Again, specific is important.

3. Sharing Suffering

What troubles your life at the moment? What feels like a heavy burden and you just want others to know? We will not ask you questions or play therapist. We will just listen and acknowledge. It is like tea ceremony sharing in that there is no verbal interaction. Just deep listening.

Do you have a difficulty, problem, or conflict with someone in the room? (Only explore difficulties with someone who is actually here now in this room.) This is also an

opportunity to address that person directly with the support of the Sangha to seek some resolution, or at least some open airing.

4. Conflict resolution

You can share how other(s) in the Sangha may help you with the present difficulty in yourself and/or in the Sangha, so that it can be alleviated, not watered and not repeated. It's also important that you share concrete practices you can do for yourself and the Sangha.

Ending Meditation

After all difficulties have been explored or the time for such exploration ends, the facilitator may say, "We have Begun Anew. May the spirit of Beginning Anew be with us always." A short (a few minutes) or full (twenty minute) sitting period follows. The ceremony ends with the traditional closing bells.

(For more about Beginning Anew and the full conflict resolution, see <http://orderofinterbeing.org/docs/Conflict-Guide.pdf>.)

Notes

Shining Light Practice

Shining Light is a practice of giving and receiving feedback about our practice, so we can see our strengths and weaknesses. Shining Light can be organized with just two people or a small group. Like Beginning Anew, Shining Light can be difficult in a lay community that does not live together or have a long period of practicing together. Newcomers or visitors to the Sangha may be perplexed if they are invited to participate. Participants in Shining Light must be prepared to offer and receive feedback with lovingkindness and compassion. It can be helpful to prepare by practicing Shining Light on ourselves during meditation.

Shining Light may begin with a letter requesting someone to shine light on our practice or may be scheduled by those involved. Each person shining light must be prepared to do so with great respect and love. The feedback should come from the heart.

The practice begins with self-shining light, and then each member in the circle will offer shining light, recognizing the positive qualities of the person who asked for the shining before sharing about certain aspects of the practice and the interaction that can be improved or transformed. Beginning this way helps the person recognize their own gifts. Beginning with positive qualities can also help the person shining the light to remember the things they love about the other person; it can water their intention to support the other's practice even when bringing attention to difficulties in their practice.

Regularly Shining the Light on each other's practice can help build a community of love, respect, and trust. It encourages us to deepen our practice and connects us more deeply as a Sangha.

Shining Light practice is also performed when someone is nominated to receive the 14 mindfulness trainings to become a core member of the Order of Interbeing or to receive lamp transmission to become a Dharma Teacher.

Notes

Touching the Earth

Touching the Earth practice is part of our Mindfulness Trainings recitation ceremonies as well as separate practices — the three and the five touchings of the Earth.

Preparation

- ☐ Touching the Earth is a prostration, a deep practice. However, it may not be comfortable for everyone. Be clear the physical touching is optional. Friends may prefer not to prostrate for physical reasons, emotional reasons, spiritual reasons, or other reasons. If physical prostrations are not right for a friend, they may choose to bow from the waist, stand with hand on heart, or simply stand and reflect. Ask them to kindly stand in the back or to the side, so others do not touch the earth behind them.

Explanation

- ☐ The prostration for Touching the Earth is similar to child's pose in yoga. For some friends, a wide-legged child's pose may be best — toes together, knees wide to allow head and chest to contact the floor. Lower the buttock as close to the heels as possible. As we enter the pose, we turn our palms up to remember the presence of our parents in us, to release a sense of a separate self, and to entrust ourselves to Mother Earth. When the bell invites us to stand again, we turn our palms down for support, knowing our parents stand with us too.
- ☐ Text for the three and five touchings can be found in the *Chanting Book*. The facilitator may recognize and offer modifications that suit the Sangha present at the time.
- ☐ Because the three and five touchings are powerful, friend may benefit from a five- or ten-minute sit afterward, to absorb the practice.

Notes

Ten Mindful Movements

From time to time, we need to move a bit more. Thầy introduced the ten mindful movements many years ago as a meditation in motion, beneficial and accessible for most people.

#1 Arm Raises

- Breathing in, raise your arms straight out in front of you to shoulder height.
- Breathing out slowly, lower your arms to your sides.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



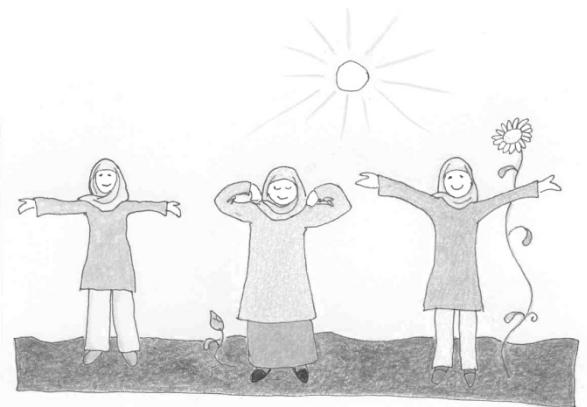
#2 Reaching the Sky

- Breathing in, reach your arms to the sky.
- Breathing out slowly, lower your arms to your sides.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



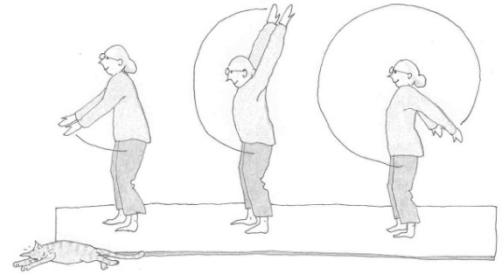
#3 Blooming Flower

- Start with your fingers touching your shoulders and your elbows pointed out sideways.
- Breathing in, open your arms out sideways and level.
- Breathing out slowly, fold your arms in and touch your shoulders again.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



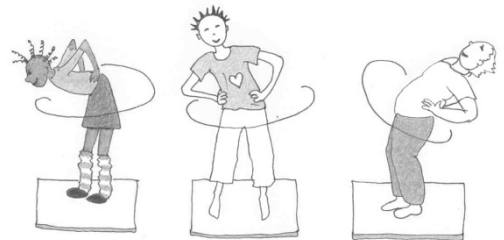
#4 Arm Circles

- Join your palms in front of you, arms out straight and down.
- Breathing in, raise your arms in a circle up above your head.
- Breathing out slowly, circle your arms behind you and then bring your hands back together in front of you.
- Reverse direction for the next in-breath and out-breath. This is counted as one complete cycle.
- Repeating three to five cycles.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



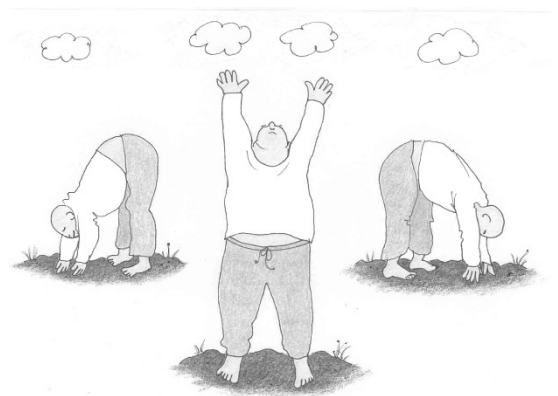
#5 Body Circles

- Put your hands on your waist with your elbows pointed sideways.
- Bend forward. Keep hips as still as possible.
- Breathing in, circle upper body to the left and back;
- Breathing out slowly, complete the circle to front.
- Continue like this for three to five circles.
- Reverse direction, repeating three to five circles the other way.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



#6 Body Stretch

- Start by bending over and touching the ground.
- Breathing in, reach your arms up to towards the sky.
- Breathing out slowly, reach down to touch the earth.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take one to three deep breaths.



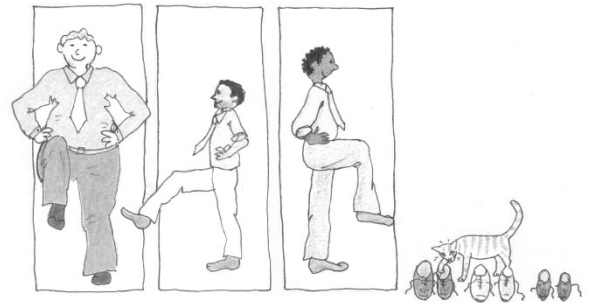
#7 Knee Bends

- Start with your hands on your waist, your heels together and your feet in a V.
- Breathing in, rise up on your toes.
- Staying on toes and keeping back straight, breathe out slowly, bend knees and go as low as comfortable.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take three deep breaths.



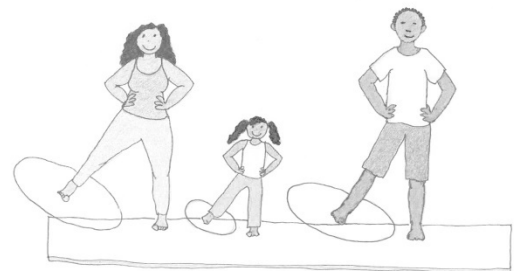
#8 Leg Stretch

- Hands on waist, shift weight to left foot.
- Breathing in, lift your left foot straight up with toes pointed down.
- Breathing out slowly, point foot out straight in front of you.
- Breathing in, draw foot up and in.
- Breathing out slowly, lower foot to ground.
- Repeat with right foot.
- Repeat the cycle with both feet three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take three deep breaths.



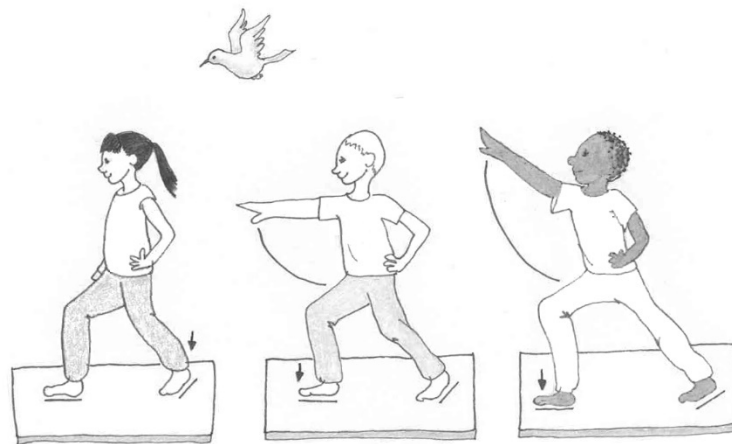
#9 Leg Circles

- Hands on waist.
- Breathing in, lift your left foot, point it straight out in front, begin to circle your leg to the left. Keep your gaze on the ground for balance.
- Breathe out continue to bring your foot around behind your body. Toe may briefly touch the ground for balance.
- Breathe in, begin to circle your foot back towards the front.
- Breathe out, finish circling your foot to the front. Stand firmly on two feet.
- Repeat with right foot.
- Repeat the cycle with both feet three to five times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and take three deep breaths.



#10 Side Lunge

- Turn left foot out at 90 degrees. Right hand on right waist. Left hand on left thigh.
- Breathing in, stretch left hand out and up to your left. Follow your hand with your gaze, until your left arm is parallel with your right leg.
- Breathing out slowly, sweep left hand back down to touch left knee.
- Repeat three to five more times.
- Return to your standing rest pose and pause for an in-breath, out-breath cycle.
- Switch to right foot and repeat.



Illustrations of the Ten Mindful Movements © by Wietske Vriesen, reprinted courtesy of Parallax Press.

Notes



To improve the accuracy and accessibility of this *Joyful Sangha Facilitation Handbook*, we appreciate your valuable feedback.

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