

Welcome to SnowFlower Sangha!

The Sangha is a Jewel

SnowFlower Sangha is a community of practitioners that come together to support one another in the practice of mindfulness in the spirit of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Buddhist monk, poet, and peace activist. (We often refer to him as Thây, pronounced like 'tie' which means 'teacher'.) We meet on Tuesday and Friday evenings. Tuesday gatherings are at Trinity United Methodist Church, 1123 Vilas Av in the upper level/Wesley Room from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Friday's are at the Friends' Meetinghouse in the sanctuary, 1704 Roberts Court from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

A sangha meeting includes sitting and walking meditation, a short presentation by the person leading (a different volunteer each time), group discussion, announcements, and closing. The leader welcomes and calls the community to attention by inviting the bell. After a brief introduction, people are often asked to introduce themselves by stating their first name. The leader then invites the bell three times to open the first 20 -25 minute round of sitting meditation. The bell is invited once at the end of the period. A short explanation of the walking meditation may be given if there are newcomers. After 10 -15 minutes of walking meditation, there is a second round of sitting.

After the meditation, the person leading opens the second part of the evening with a short talk, a guided meditation, a reading, poem, or other personal insights. This is followed by an opportunity to share thoughts or feelings related to practice. Sangha members bow before and after speaking. This enables the person to speak without interruption and facilitates deep listening. Group discussion is followed by announcements. We close by holding hands in a circle. A small bag is passed for voluntary contributions (usually a dollar or two) towards the rental fee for the space(s) we sit in.

Anyone who wishes to attend SnowFlower is welcome and while everyone is encouraged to participate in all aspects of sangha, there is no obligation to do so. For many who attend, mindfulness practice is their major spiritual affiliation. For some, sangha supports other religious or spiritual practices.

A sangha calendar is mailed (and emailed) out every other month. It can also be viewed on our web site (<http://snowflower.org>). The calendar includes the topics for the meetings for two months, the names of volunteer leaders, and information on activities and retreats. To be on the mailing or email list, simply talk to the leader of the meeting or email us at sanghalist (at) snowflower.org

For Friday sangha, six different people take the responsibility of putting together the Calendar for two months each. For the Tuesday sangha, the Calendar is via email or compiled after the session of sitting and walking meditation on the third Tuesday of the second month in the two-month calendar cycle.

Thây has said that it is difficult if not impossible to practice well without a Sangha. Teachers and teachings are important, but a community of friends who support our practice is 'the most essential ingredient. The main concern is to build a happy sangha - to take care of each person, his pain, her difficulties, his aspirations, her fears, his hopes, in order to make everyone comfortable and happy.'

We ask that every effort be made to arrive on time so that cushions and chairs can be arranged without disrupting others. If it is not possible to be on time or if it is necessary to leave early, please choose a place near the door where space is left open specifically for this purpose. Please treat the space in which we sit like a zendo or temple and enter the meditation hall in a spirit of mindfulness.

We are likewise invited to practice certain other "mindful manners", the phrase used by Thich Nhat Hanh in his book Stepping Into Freedom. Such as the bowing before and after speaking during group discussion, mentioned above. A few more examples are given here:

- ◆ Remember that meditating in a chair involves the same straight posture, both feet firmly planted on the floor, as meditating on a cushion does. Our sitting posture supports not only us, but others, as well. It helps us and others, to concentrate and to be fully present.
- ◆ Should you ever feel the need to lie down, please choose a spot away from the altar.
- ◆ If you are leading sangha and are not sure how to pronounce a Sanskrit word or the names of the Bodhisattvas, etc. we now have a pronunciation guide for some of the common Sanskrit terms used with the sangha materials.

As you wait for the formal sitting meditation to start, you might like to enjoy your breathing with the help of the following gatha or mindfulness verse:

Sitting here is like sitting under the Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself, entirely free from distraction.

The following two gathas can be used during meditation:

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.	In
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.	Out
Breathing in, I see myself as a flower.	Flower
Breathing out, I feel fresh.	Fresh
Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain.	Mountain
Breathing out, I feel solid.	Solid
Breathing in, I see myself as still water.	Water
Breathing out, I reflect things as they are.	Reflecting
Breathing in, I see myself as space.	Space
Breathing out, I feel free.	Free

Or:

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.	In
Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.	Out
Breathing in, I feel my breath becoming deep.	Deep
Breathing out, I feel my breath becoming slow.	Slow
Breathing in, I calm my body and my mind.	Calm
Breathing out, my body and my mind are at ease.	Ease
Breathing in, I smile.	Smile
Breathing out, I release all tension in my body and mind.	Release
Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.	Present moment
Breathing out, I know this is a wonderful moment.	Wonderful moment

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October 2004