

## **SnowFlower Sangha Retreat Frequently Asked Questions**

SnowFlower Sangha is a Buddhist group based in Madison, Wisconsin that practices in the tradition of the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. We have sponsored this retreat annually for the last 17 years. This is one of a series of retreats and Days of Mindfulness offered by similar sanghas, or Mindfulness communities, throughout the upper Midwest.

Following are some frequently-asked questions about this retreat.

### **I've never meditated before. Is it OK for me to attend the retreat?**

Absolutely. Thich Nhat Hanh teaches a simple form of sitting meditation in which we first center ourselves in our bodies, and then maintain our attention on the breath as we breathe in and out. When our mind wanders (as all minds do!), we gently, and without judgment, return our attention to our breath, a process we repeat over and over, as necessary. In this way, meditation is a practice that trains us to be present to what is true for us in each moment. Meditation sessions are 20-30 minutes long, spaced through the day. You can meditate on a cushion or bench (please bring your own) or on chairs (which are provided at the retreat center).

We also practice walking meditation as a group. Instructions for that simple practice will be provided at the retreat.

Besides meditating, another reason we retreat is to be together as a community. Being in community can bring us joy and is an element of the practice of "Engaged Buddhism" as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh. For both meditation and being in community, the primary "task" is to simply show up and be as fully present as possible.

### **I'm concerned that I won't know what to do.**

No worries. An orientation session is offered before the retreat begins, and we give instructions throughout the retreat for those who have not previously attended this kind of retreat.

### **Do I need to be a Buddhist or a member of SnowFlower Sangha to attend the retreat?**

No. Anybody who wants to practice Mindfulness or is curious about our form of Buddhism is warmly invited to attend. You also are warmly invited if you practice in another tradition. There is no expectation that you will become either a Buddhist or a member of SnowFlower Sangha.

### **Do I need to maintain silence for the entire retreat?**

The wonderful and rare stillness and relaxation that we often find in retreat is deepened by our practice of what is called Noble Silence. That is, we don't speak socially. We do that so that we can deepen our practice of mindfully stilling ourselves. However, you are encouraged to make eye contact and bow and smile to other retreatants. And there are times during the retreat in which we speak mindfully, such as group discussions and a tea ceremony, in which retreatants are invited to share poems, readings or songs. Of course, if you have an emergency or a question, you may certainly ask one of the retreat managers.

### **Are scholarships available?**

A limited number of scholarships are available for those in need. For more information, contact Karuna Namenwirth: [bnamenwirth@yahoo.com](mailto:bnamenwirth@yahoo.com).

### **Can I make phone calls or check my e-mail while I'm at the retreat?**

The invitation is to retreat from everyday life so that we can still ourselves, so we ask that you refrain from checking your e-mail, texting or making phone calls unless it is absolutely necessary. If it is necessary, we ask that you do this away from others out of respect to their retreat and Mindfulness practices.

### **What is the food like at the retreat?**

We provide tasty, vegetarian meals starting with a Friday night snack before the retreat begins and ending with lunch on Sunday. The food is prepared by a well-known Madison restaurant owner and, over the years, it has consistently received rave reviews from retreat attendees. We try to provide vegan options at every meal.

### **Can I have a single room?**

Unfortunately, no. The rooms and beds are comfortable and clean, but between 2 and 6 people share a room. We make every effort to keep couples together, but we can't guarantee that.

### **What should I bring to the retreat?**

The retreat center is in a beautiful natural area in southwestern Wisconsin with many hiking trails. In addition to warm, comfortable, loose-fitting clothes for indoors, also bring clothes and shoes that are appropriate for being outside and strolling through meadows and woods in late October in Wisconsin. Also, bring toiletries, bedding – beds are twin-sized – and towels.

Also, bring a cushion or bench if you use them for meditation. Chairs will be available if you prefer.

### **I registered, but something came up and I have to cancel. Can I get a refund?**

We are happy to provide full refunds up until the time when we have to confirm our food order. This is typically two weeks before the retreat. After this date we are usually able to provide partial refunds. See the current flyer for the date of this year's deadline.