



Beginners Mind Sangha
Community of Mindful Living

Guide to Mindful Retreat

Guide to a Mindful Retreat



Beginners Mind Sangha
Community of Mindful Living

Retreat Information

Our Spring and Fall Retreats are led by Senior Dharma Teachers from across the country and abroad. Wednesday, Thursday & Friday evenings, a full day on Saturday, 2/3 day on Sunday.

Our retreats consist of sitting and walking meditation, dharma talks, group discussions, deep relaxation meditation and much more.

Our retreats also give our members and friends an opportunity to deepen their practice and understanding of the Buddha's wisdom, together as a community.

Retreat Essentials:

- Breakfast is to be eaten at home
- Bring a vegetarian lunch that does not need heating for Saturday & Sunday
- Please bring your own pads, cushions or benches, blankets
- Wear appropriate shoes for walking meditation
- Stories, songs, poems & retreat experiences may be shared at closing circle

Our website is www.beginnersmindsangha.org for more information



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Retreat Guidelines

Arrival and Registration:

The key to a mindfulness practice is to be fully alive, fully aware of our body, mind, and surroundings in the present moment. It is not necessary to wait until the orientation talk to begin. You can practice mindfulness even as you register, by doing everything with awareness. Unpacking, settling in, being mindful of each step and each breath. The practice of mindfulness is not solemn. Moving more slowly and calmly allows us to give more time and our full awareness to ourselves and to life. The practice itself is a great joy. A gentle smile helps us to relax.

Bell of Mindfulness:

Many times throughout the retreat, whether during Dharma talks, outdoor walking meditation, meals and so on – a bell master will invite the bell to sound. Upon hearing the bell please practice stopping whatever you are doing, stop talking, walking, eating, and even thinking and come back to your in breath and out breath for at least three full breaths. Silently reciting a gatha such as the one below can help us easily bring our mind and body back together, in the present moment.

Listen, listen (breathing in). This wonderful sound brings us back to our true home. (Breathing out)

Stopping is a wonderful practice. When we stop to listen to our surroundings, we learn to work or talk in a more attentive way. We become free and fully present, not being carried away by thoughts, feelings, or conversation. Breathing is a bridge that helps link body and mind. The more we practice awareness of our breathing throughout our daily activities, the more we benefit. In many ways, the retreat setting helps us train ourselves in this good habit. The bell of mindfulness is the voice of the Buddha calling us back to ourselves. We can recognize this voice in the chime of the bell or clock, someone walking mindfully, a bird singing, or any of the wonders of life. While returning to our breathing, we may like to smile and reply silently “Yes, I am here!”

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Bowing:

Bowing is a mindfulness practice. It is a way of removing our mental and emotional armor, along with other ego baggage we may be burdened with. When we bow we express gratitude for the historical Buddha as a teacher, gratitude for the teachings themselves, respect for our own capacity for awakening, and acknowledgement of the oneness of Being.

“To bow or not to bow is not the question. The important thing is to be mindful.” When we greet someone with a bow, we have the chance to be present with that person and with the nature of awake-ness, of Buddhahood, within us and within the other person. We do not bow just to be polite or diplomatic, but to recognize the miracle of being alive.” Thich Nhat Hanh

Dharma Talks:

When the rain falls on the earth, the soil knows how to absorb the water, making seeds sprout and flowers spring up. When the bird sings, a free-spirited person knows how to enjoy it and be relaxed. When a cup is full, it cannot receive even one more drop of water. We need to let our mind be empty, free of thoughts, ideas, and perceptions in order to listen to a Dharma talk. Comparing what we hear with something we had in mind or drawing “right” or “wrong” conclusions is a process of our mind that limits our capacity for listening. To agree or disagree with what is said does not help us learn anything new. We should not engage our intellect while listening. Sitting straight, in a solid and comfortable position, we allow the “Dharma rain” to fall and allow the soil of our consciousness to do its work. Taking notes or trying to memorize may limit our capacity to receive. The practice of mindful breathing is the sun shining, helping the fruit of understanding grow.

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Sitting Meditation:

With good cushion, blanket, meditation bench or chair we can sit with stability and comfort without having to move. A cushion or bench should be chosen so that your weight is balanced and supported on three points, your bottom and both knees. You should be relaxed while keeping your back straight.

During the retreat, our main practice will be mindful breathing. When breathing in, we know we are breathing in. When breathing out, we know we are breathing out. We can be aware of the state of our breathing, body, and mind in the present moment without judging or trying to change them.

Sitting meditation periods will be about 25 minutes. We want to keep the stillness of our position during meditation, but we also need to be responsive to any discomfort we feel. Change your position mindfully so as not to disturb our own meditation or that of others. Meditation should be pleasant . . . not a trial. Guided meditation exercises will be offered during some sitting sessions during the retreat to help broaden the scope of our meditation practice.

Slow Walking Meditation - Indoors:

After most periods of sitting meditation, we will practice slow walking meditation to exercise our legs and to practice mindfulness while moving. We walk together, clockwise, taking slow, deliberate steps in rhythm with our breathing. We are aware of our position in the circle and adjust our steps to keep the flow smooth. Each step is an act of peace and harmony.

Group Walking Meditation - Outdoors:

The Zen Master Lin Chi reportedly said that the miracle is not walking on water or burning coals, but walking on the earth. With each step we arrive in the here and now. We coordinate our steps and our breathing as we walk. We keep our breath natural, never forcing it; our lungs will tell us how many steps we want to take as we go up and down a hill. The following gatha can help us along the path:

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I have arrived (in breath),
I am home (out breath)
In the here (in breath),
And in the now (outbreath)
I am solid (in breath),
I am free (out breath)
In the ultimate (in breath),
I dwell (out breath)

We are aware of the contact of our feet with the earth. From time to time we may wish to stop and greet the flowers or the trees on the path, or look at the blue sky. We can only touch these wonders of life when we keep our appointment with life in the present moment. Walking mindfully together as a group is a very powerful experience. We benefit from the collective energy of mindfulness and the peace of the group. Walking meditation is practiced whenever we walk, wherever we are, when we need to move from one place to another, from another room to the meditation hall, to the dining hall, or bathroom.

Eating Together:

Eating a meal together is a meditative practice. We should try to offer our presence for every meal. As we serve our food we can already begin practicing. Serving ourselves, we realize that many elements, such as the rain, sunshine, earth, air and love, have all come together to form this wonderful meal. In fact, through this food we see that the entire universe is supporting our existence.

We are aware of the whole Sangha as we serve ourselves, and we should take an amount of food that is good for us. Before eating, the bell will be invited for three sounds, and we can enjoy breathing in and out while practicing the five contemplations.

Eating in silence, the food becomes real with our mindfulness, and we are fully aware of its nourishment. In order to deepen our practice of mindful eating and support the peaceful atmosphere, we remain seated during this silent period.

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On finishing our meal, we take a few moments to notice that we have finished, our bowl is now empty, and our hunger is satisfied. Gratitude fills us as we realize how fortunate we are to have had this nourishing food to eat, supporting us on the path of love and understanding.

Dharma Discussions:

Dharma discussions are opportunities for us to learn from each other's experiences of the practice. It is beneficial if we share concrete experience related to our successes or difficulties in the practice. While listening to others share, we maintain awareness of our breath and feelings, without judging or reacting to what is said. To agree or disagree may not be necessary since we want to practice listening. We listen in a deep way to better understand the other person and ourselves and to hear what is said and left unsaid.

Noble Silence:

Silence is the ground of the retreat. It allows the practice of conscious breathing to become deep and effective. Like still water that reflects things as they are, the calming silence helps us to see things more clearly and to communicate better. Notepads and pencils will be provided for communication. If we must speak, we will do so discreetly and away from others to help preserve the silent atmosphere. The silence need not be oppressive. Although we do not speak, we can still acknowledge the presence of each other with a smile and a bow.

Noble silence, "the silence that heals", should be maintained throughout the retreat with the exception of Dharma discussions. Between each activity of the day we should walk mindfully in silence and at the end of the day we should continue to maintain silence. This practice is important because it holds the energy of mindfulness and allows transformation to take place at the base of our consciousness while we sleep.

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The Benefits of Silence

Silence is the state of the soul. When you are silent from identifying with your thoughts, mind, emotions and even your body, in deep silence you can be in-tune with your soul. Despite the outer "sounds of the world" also known as distractions, there are also distractions within you in different forms such as, negative thoughts, stress, anxiety, feelings that overwhelm you, emotions that have not been dealt with, feeling haunted by past mistakes, failures, etc. and they keep you from knowing and connecting to your true self. Silence gives you the opportunity to be in an introspective state, to go beyond the inner and outer distractions, and simply be in-tune with your soul. When your inner and outer worlds are silent, you feel true peace and freedom. While in silence, you will be able to tune out the world and enter your inner world -that world which has long needed your attention, love and care. A silent retreat is a perfect way to relax, let go, and feel peace with an intense spiritual experience.

Thich Nhat Hanh was once asked: Could you tell us about the benefits of silence and how we could bring that home with us from this retreat?

Our teacher replied:

Many of us have realized in the last few days that silence can be enjoyable. We realize that there are many things that we do not have to say, and that then we can reserve the time and energy to do other things that can help us to look more deeply into ourselves and things around us. If you are pushed by your habit energy to say something, don't say it. Instead, take a notebook and write it down. A day or two later, read what you wrote, and you might find out that it would have been an awful thing to say. So slowly you become master of yourself, and you know what to say and what not to say.

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I remember one time I proposed to a sister that she practice silence. She was an elder nun and she had a few negative seeds in her that prevented her from being happy. She was just a little bit too hard on the other sisters. I proposed to her that she was a very talented person, very skillful in many things, and she could make many people happy if only she knew how to be silent and to say only things that needed to be said.

I proposed to her that she use only three sentences for three months. She could repeat these three sentences as many times as she wanted (laughter) and I told her that if she practiced that for a week, she would feel happiness right away. The first sentence was, "Dear sister, is there anything I can do to help you?" (laughter) The second sentence was, "Did you like what I did to help you?" The third was, "Would you have any suggestion that I can do it better?" (laughter) If she could say that, she would make many people happy and the happiness would go back to herself very quickly.

In the family we can practice silence. We can ask the other members of the family to agree that we will practice silence for three days or for a week. It is very beneficial. There will be a transformation after the period of practicing silence.

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Our Favorite Songs

In Out

In, out

Deep, Slow

Calm, East

Slow, Release

Present Moment

Wonderful Moment

I Have Arrived

I have arrived

I am home

In the here and in the now

I am solid

I am free

I am solid

I am free

In the ultimate I dwell, In the ultimate I dwell

Breathing In

Breathing in, breathing out

Breathing in, breathing out

I am blooming, as a flower

I am fresh, as the dew

I am solid, as a mountain

I am firm, as the earth

I am free

Breathing in, breathing out

Breathing in, breathing out

I am water, reflecting what is real, what is true

And I feel, there is space, deep inside of me

I am free

I am free

I am free

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Taking Refuge

Breathing in, I go back to the island within myself
There are beautiful trees within the island
There are clear streams of water
There are birds, sunshine and fresh air
Breathing out, I feel safe
I enjoy going back to my island

No Coming, No Going

No coming, no going
No after, no before
I hold you close to me

I release you to be so free
Because I am in you, and you are in me
Because I am in you, and you are in me

Gentle With Myself

I will be gentle with myself
I will love myself
I am a child of the universe
Being born each moment

I Feel Happy

Whenever I wake up, I feel happy
I think of my eyes, I feel happy
I think of my health, I feel happy
Because I have learned to look deeply

Whenever I walk, I feel happy
Whenever I sit, I feel happy
Whenever I rest, I feel happy
Because I have learned to look deeply

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Dear Friends

Dear Friends, dear friends
Let me tell you how I feel
You have to given me such treasures
I love you so

And When I Rise

And when I rise
Let me rise
Like a bird
Joyfully

And when I fall
Let me fall
Like a leaf
Gracefully
Without regret

.

Standing Like a Tree

Standing like a tree
With my roots dug down
My branches, wide and open

Come down the rain
Come down the sun
Come down the fruit of the heart
That is open to be
(repeat)

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Keep Breathing

Keep breathing

It's the most important part

You breathe when you sit

And when you walk

And when you sit, sit

And when you walk, walk

Keep breathing

It's the most important part

It's all in the rhythm

It's all in the rhythm

It's all in the rhythm of the heart

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The Five Mindfulness Trainings

plumvillage.org

The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world. To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

Reverence For Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

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True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

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True Love

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

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Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

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Nourishment and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriments, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.

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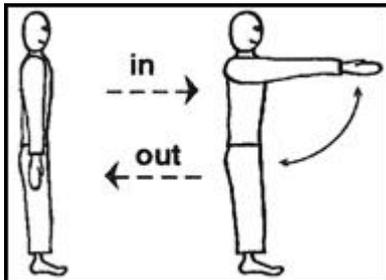


1.7 Mindful Movements

Mindful Movements are a series of ten physical exercises introduced into the practice by Thây several years ago. They are often conducted by the community as a group but can be practiced on one's own. Typically, the mindful movements will take place outside in a circle after a walking meditation or sometimes indoors during a dharma talk in order to stretch the

Each movement should be carried out three times before proceeding to the next. Body movements should be flowing and graceful and not too rapid. Each movement is coordinated to be in harmony with our breathing. The mindful movements give us a chance to exercise. They allow us to practice sensitivity and awareness to our body, our breathing, and the interconnectedness between our body, our breathing and our mind.

The diagrams and text below give a brief description of each movement:

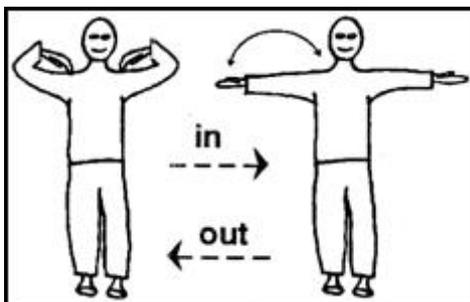
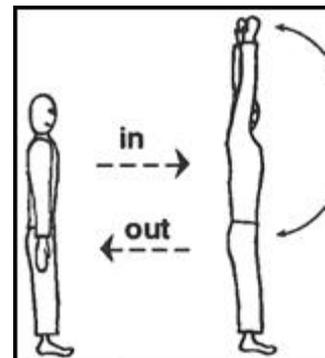


Mindful Movement 1

Stand upright with feet slightly apart facing forward. On the in- breath raise both arms so that they are horizontal, hands loose and palms facing downward. On the out-breath lower both arms to your side.

Mindful Movement 2

Start as in Movement 1 with palms facing inwards. On the in-breath raise hands above the head keeping the arms straight to make a semi- circle in front of the body. Stretch the body without the feet leaving the ground. On the out-breath reverse the movement, lowering the arms and returning the hands to rest on each side.



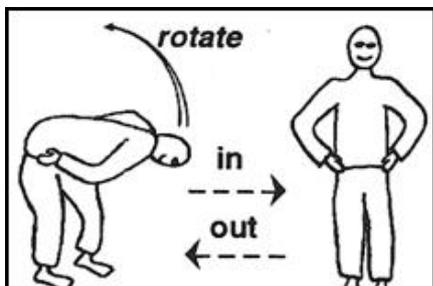
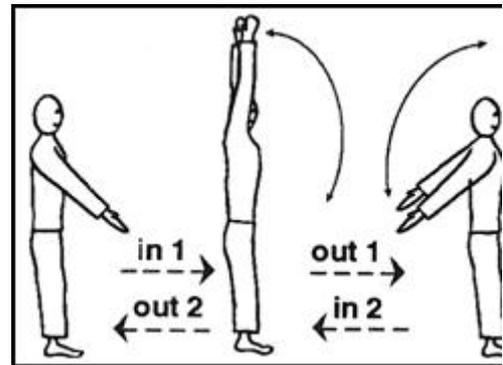
Mindful Movement 3

Start with feet slightly apart and arms bent at the elbow and fingertips touching the top of each shoulder. The arms are in the same plane as the body. On the in-breath stretch both arms so that the arms are fully outstretched, palms upward. On the out-breath return the arms again to the start position.



Mindful Movement 4

Start with arms and eyes facing forward. Palms should be together at waist level in front of the body. On the first in-breath lift the arms (keeping them straight). The hands stay together at eye level. Keeping the movement continuous, take the arms up and out over the shoulders (hands are now separated) and on the first out-breath bring them down behind the body (thus making a big circle with each hand). With the second in-breath reverse the movement bringing the hands above the head and then on the second out-breath bring hands down to the start position.



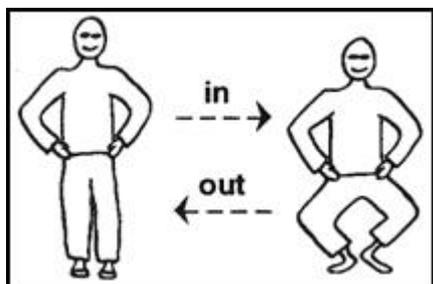
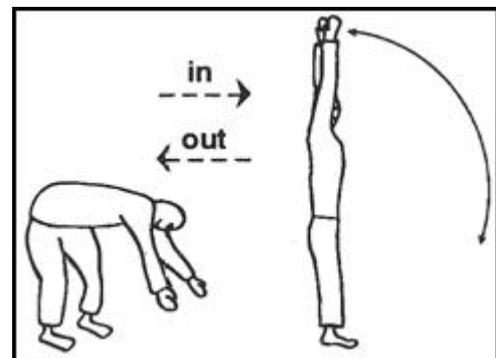
Mindful Movement 5

Stand with feet slightly apart and hands resting on the hips. Start by leaning forward with head at waist level, legs straight. With the first in-breath rotate the body clockwise

pivoting around the waist. The head should describe a wide circle and after the in-breath the body is leaning backwards and upright. On the out-breath reverse the movement taking the head back to its starting position in front of the body. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement but rotating the body anti-clockwise.

Mindful Movement 6

Start by leaning forward allowing the arms to hang downwards. With the first in-breath lift up the body from the waist, taking the hands in a wide semi-circle so that the arms stretch upwards. Stretch the whole body. On the out-breath reverse the movement returning the body to its starting position, leaning forward arms loosely downwards.



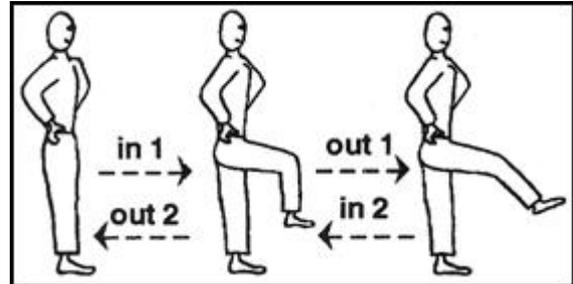
Mindful Movement 7

Stand with hands resting on hips and feet together at the ankles, slightly apart at the toes. On the in-breath stand on tiptoe and then, with back kept straight and hands on hips, bend at the knees taking the torso down towards the ground. Ankles should stay together. With the out-breath straighten the legs and return to the original position.



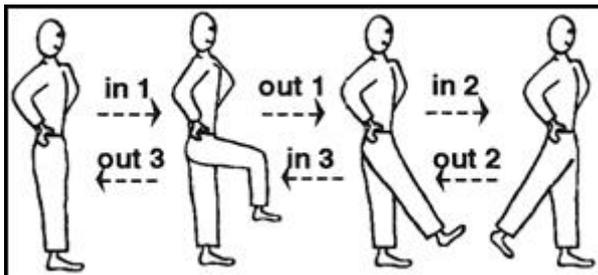
Mindful Movement 8

Stand upright with hands on hips, feet together on the ground. With the first in-breath raise the right leg so the knee is just below the level of your waist, the lower leg hanging downwards. With the first out-breath extend the lower half of the leg so the leg is almost straight. With the second in-breath describe a semi-circle with the right foot pivoting around the



ankle and bring the lower leg down to its position after the first in-breath. With the second out-breath return the leg to its start position beside the body. After completing this cycle three times with the right leg, repeat three times with the left leg.

Mindful Movement 9



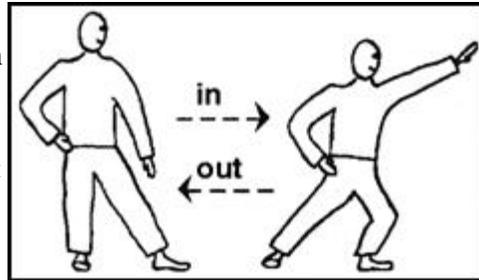
Stand upright with hands on hips, feet together on the ground. With the first in-breath bend the right leg and then with the out-breath straighten and extend the leg out in front of the body with the foot just above the ground. With the second in-breath swing the foot around the body to the side, keeping the leg straight and describing as wide a circle as possible so that the foot ends up behind the body with the toe touching the ground. With the second out-breath reverse this movement so the foot returns to its position extended in front of the body. With the third in-breath bend the leg so the foot is below the knee and with the third out-breath return the foot to its start position. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement with the left leg.



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Mindful Movement 10

Stand upright with your feet a good step away from each other. The left foot should point forward and the right foot point at right angles to this, pointing outwards to the side. The left hand should be on the left hip and right arm should be pointed down the right leg with fingers extended. Your face should be looking sideways in the same direction as the right foot. With the in-breath bend the right leg and



raise the right arm, stretching and extending it to just above shoulder level. This should produce a stretch along the left side of the body. With the out-breath reverse the movement returning to the start position. After repeating this cycle three times repeat the movement on the other side of the body (ie bending the left leg).

After completing the Mindful Movements, we stand with palms together in the shape of a lotus, and bow to the rest of the community.



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Beginner's Mind Sangha Spring Retreat Evaluation Form

Thank you for taking part in the retreat! We hope that you found it to be educational, relaxing, and most of all we hope that it deepened your practice. In order for us to plan future retreats, we need your input- that means critical comments; so don't be afraid to say if there was anything that you didn't like. Please respond to any or all of the following questions that relate to your experience at this retreat and place it in the bell before you leave.

Name (optional) _____

What did you enjoy the most about the retreat?

What did you enjoy the least about the retreat?

Did this retreat help you to develop your practice of mindfulness?

Did this retreat provide you the space to look deeper into yourself?

Did the food served meet your needs?

Did you find the teacher and organizers of the retreat easy to approach?

Were the activities offered too numerous or not enough?

What would you like to see as part of a future retreat?

Do you look forward to attending another retreat with Beginner's Mind Sangha?

Any final comments or suggestions?

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Post Office Box 7311

Boise, Idaho 83707

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