



Peace in Our Hearts Mindfulness Practice Circle

Guidelines for the Practice of Dharma Sharing

1. Practice deep listening and loving, mindful speech

Topics emanate from our life and practice. It is best to avoid discussions that are theoretical rather than experiential. Our deepest aspiration is to listen deeply and speak lovingly and mindfully.

Even though we have the intention to listen deeply, our mind will wander. Perhaps we are agreeing, disagreeing, feeling agitated, wanting to respond, or drifting. If we are mindful of our thoughts and inner dialog, we can choose to come back to being present with the person speaking. You may use this as training to become more attentive listeners for family and friends.

Our speech, like our listening, is the fruit of our practice, a response from within. It is good for the atmosphere of the Dharma sharing when participants take three breaths before speaking, to allow time for the previous person's speaking to be fully received. Speaking from the heart about topics that emanate from our life and practice involves speaking with awareness in a way that could be of benefit to others as well as ourselves; speaking with kindness, in a voice that is clear and loud enough for everyone to hear, including those with some hearing loss; connecting with others by making eye contact; perhaps smiling from time to time. We all benefit from hearing each other's insights and direct experience of the practice.

2. Bowing

Before speaking we may wish to make a flower bud with our hands and bow. When we bow or put our hand on our heart or use a signal, we are comfortable with, we are signaling that we would like to share. The Sangha bows back, acknowledging that we are ready to listen deeply. When we are finished, we let the Sangha know by bowing/signaling again. Knowing that we will not be interrupted creates a safe and harmonious environment.

3. Saying our name, each time, before we speak

This practice fosters a sense of inclusion for newcomers as well as aiding those of us who might have some difficulty remembering names. We do this in our Sangha even when there seems to be only “regulars” present.

4. Avoid giving advice, even if it is asked for

In general, it is helpful to always use the word “I” instead of the word “you”. Speaking from our own experience eliminates the opportunity to give advice. If someone asks for advice and a practice that we have worked with comes to mind it is fine to share our experience.

5. All that arises is confidential

“What is said here stays here.” Confidentiality secures the safety of the group and helps avoid gossip. Also, after the Dharma Sharing time, if we want to talk with someone about what they said in the group, we first ask if it is okay. Sometimes a person does not want to talk more about what they said, and this is a respectful way to honor that.

6. Refrain from speaking a second time

We don’t speak again until it appears that everyone who wants to speak has spoken. This ensures that everyone can speak and provides a space where we can benefit from all our Sangha wisdom. We are encouraged to speak mindfully, “not too much and not too little” for the number of participants. Near the end of the time the facilitator may offer an opportunity for those who have not spoken to do so if they wish and may address any unanswered questions.

7. Share with the whole circle

Whatever we share is for the benefit of all those present. We do not engage in crosstalk with another participant. If we ask a question, we ask the whole group and if we answer a question we speak to the whole group and not just the person who asked. If we ask a question, we should not expect an answer straight away. Another topic may be addressed first and only when someone feels ready will the question be addressed. However, if towards the end of the sharing, the question has not been addressed the facilitator may do so to the best of his/her ability.