

THE MOUNTAIN HERMITAGE
Listening, Contemplation, and Meditation:
A Four Noble Truths Study Retreat
November 5-11, 2011
San Geronimo Lodge, Taos, New Mexico, USA.

PRACTICE GUIDELINES

The Mountain Hermitage offers a uniquely supportive space of solitude and silence for qualified individuals who wish to undertake longer periods of intensive meditation practice. The foundation practice at *The Mountain Hermitage* is Vipassana, which may at times be supplemented by other concentration or awareness practices. Meditation instruction for the **Four Noble Truths Study Retreat** will be in the style of *Mahasi Sayadaw*.

EXPECTATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

- Adherence to the ethical guidelines of the Five Precepts (see below).
- A commitment to use all activities of the day as opportunities for practice
- Maintaining silence by refraining from verbal and written communication, except as is prescribed by this retreat
- Sustained and continuous practice
- A commitment to being fully at *The Mountain Hermitage*, with no outside activities
- Completion of a daily work meditation
- Participation in individual and group practice interviews

ETHICAL GUIDELINES:

We ask that you abide by the five traditional Buddhist precepts for lay practitioners while at *The Mountain Hermitage*:

1. I undertake the training to refrain from harming living creatures. I undertake the training to practice compassionate action.
2. I undertake the training to refrain from taking that which is not given. I undertake the training to practice contentment.

3. I undertake the training to refrain from sexual activity. I undertake the training to practice responsibility in all my relationships.
4. I undertake the training to refrain from harmful speech. I undertake the training to practice noble silence.
5. I undertake the training to refrain from the use of intoxicants. I undertake the training to wisely care for my body and my mind.

NOBLE SILENCE:

After registration and orientation you will enter the silent space of the intensive retreat environment. The buildings and grounds are in silence at all times, apart from staff working and living areas.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD:

The experience of being at *The Mountain Hermitage* is a rare opportunity for silence and solitude. In support of this, all personal and business obligations should be taken care of prior to arrival, so that communication with the outside world can be kept to an absolute minimum. We ask that retreatants refrain from the use of telephones, cell phones, computers, and from sending or receiving e-mail or text messages. However, exceptional circumstances may arise when communication is necessary. In this case, contact the Retreat Manager. Even in those times, please remember that wise restraint is an integral part of practice.

WORK MEDITATION

As part of your intensive retreat practice, you will be asked to engage in mindful work practice. The work will consist of one hour a day at tasks such as helping in meal preparation, washing dishes, vacuuming, cleaning bathroom facilities, sweeping outside walkways and porches, etc. This work meditation, a form of service, is also vital: it enables us to maintain relatively low retreat fees, and it allows you the opportunity to practice mindfulness in daily activities.

DAILY SCHEDULE

The retreat schedule will consist of meditation instruction (in the style of *Mahasi Sayadaw*), silent sitting and walking, two lectures a day, and occasional group discussion. There will be three nutritious vegetarian meals served each day.

DANA

DANA, an ancient Pali word meaning *generosity, giving, or gift*, is central to the 2,600-year-old tradition of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha have been offered freely since the time of the Buddha. There was and is no way to put a price on the teachings of the truth - they are valuable beyond any fee one could set.

The early teachers received no payment for their instruction. In Buddhist countries, traditionally, it has always been understood that the lay community, through their voluntary generosity (their *dana*), provide physical support - the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and medicine - for the monks and nuns. In turn they were/are offered guidance and teachings in their own practice by this monastic sangha. This practice of *dana* has been a very significant pillar in keeping the dhamma (teachings) alive. The generosity of the laity towards the practical support of the monastic community since ancient times, is what has kept the dharma spreading through the world.

Western teachers have continued this tradition of offering the teachings freely. In our culture, where no real training exists in living generously, it is a new practice for us in both offering and receiving the Dhamma.

Dana is not only a practical matter; it also plays a crucial role in the spiritual life of a dhamma practitioner. Generosity is the first of the ten *paramis*, or qualities of character, to be perfected in spiritual life. The very act of giving is of immeasurable benefit to the giver, for it opens the heart, lessens self-absorption, and serves the well-being of others.

The Mountain Hermitage fees for this retreat only cover basic expenses and operating costs. The teachers offer the Buddha Dhamma without any set fee, and depend on the generosity of students for the support of their daily life needs. Giving to the teacher, from the heart, whatever feels appropriate, is the

practice of Dana. It will also be possible to offer dana to the retreat staff – the retreat/housekeeping manager and the cook.

HOW TO MAKE AN OFFERING: At the end of the retreat, dana envelopes will be provided. Please clearly designate on the outside of the envelope who your dana is to be directed to. All dana checks should be made out to *The Mountain Hermitage* with a clearly written designation on the check who the dana is for. *The Mountain Hermitage* is 501(c)(3) tax-deductible charitable organization. All dana checks made out to *The Mountain Hermitage* are tax deductible. You are welcome to mail dana for teachers, *Hermitage* staff, and *The Mountain Hermitage* itself anytime.

MEDICAL ISSUES:

All participants must be mentally stable and physically able to care for themselves. Everyone must have health insurance or be able to cover his/her own expenses in case of illness or medical emergencies. Any special needs must be discussed with *The Mountain Hermitage* Office Manager and the Retreat Manager and agreed to in advance. Given the length of stay, and the possibility of a participant becoming ill, we recommend that retreatants come prepared to treat a variety of non-urgent common illnesses. Should medical needs or emergencies arise, the Retreat Manager will offer assistance.