



## **Theravada Buddhist Society of America**

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### **TBSA Retreat Orientation**

**By Sarah Marks**

**Revised by Hla Min**

We wish to welcome you to this TBSA retreat which will be conducted by the resident *Sayadaws* of *Dhammananda Vihara*. We will be outlining some of the procedures at our retreats. Please bear in mind that these guidelines are designed to make your retreat as beneficial as possible. Some of these guidelines seem very restrictive, but they are designed so that your meditation may give you the best possible results.

We strive to eliminate as many distractions as possible. One key distraction is noise. The center we have come is very peaceful, tranquil, and serene. To penetrate deeply into ourselves and see things as they really are we need silence. Practically speaking that means there should be no talking unless a real emergency arises. We hope all of you try to keep Noble Silence. There should never ever be a need to talk in the meditation hall. Therefore cell phones and beepers should remain outside of the meditation hall. Outside if one must talk, keep such sound very low and equally important, very brief. The same applies to written communication. Written communication, like talking, is distractive both to the writer and the recipient. Communication should be with retreat staff only.

Also be sensitive to the sound of objects. We are a community of people and must contribute to one another's silence. In the dining area be watchful with dishes. In other places be gentle with the doors. Avoid unnecessary movement in the hall. If you feel you will have difficulty sitting, place yourself close to the door so that you may exit with a minimum of sound.

Another suggestion is that we have to slow down. Actions done rapidly tend to add to the agitation of the surroundings and more importantly to take away from the depth of your practice. Slowing down can add to the silence internally.

One should keep one's eyes downcast. Seeing others' faces particularly can be very distracting. Again this should help your concentration.

Be careful with regard to medicine. Your mind will sharpen considerably. The effect of medicine may be experienced quite differently under these circumstances. Try to avoid medication as much as possible.

There are some things with regard to etiquette that you should know. It is considered offensive in the East to point soles of the feet at a Buddha image or a monk. Try to be mindful of this in the meditation hall. It is also prohibited for monks to have any physical contact with women. So it is best for ladies to keep a respectful distance from monks. And it is good to do the same for fellow meditators as proximity tends to be distracting.

To minimize the need for you to ask questions, we will explain in detail how the retreat operates. Hopefully this will enable you to participate without confusion.

The day begins with a Morning Service and Chanting at 4:45 a.m. Make sure you wake up early in order to participate.

Breakfast is at 6:00 a.m. and lunch with mindfulness is at 11:00 a.m. The food is being provided free by sponsors. Please take a particular place setting in the dining hall and sit there at each meal. All meditators will wash their own dishes and return them to the table. The utensils are being provided by TBSA. Juice is provided at 5.00 p.m. Try to eat and drink at these times only. This will contribute greatly to the continuity of your retreat. No eating after the noon hour allows more time for intensive walking and sitting meditations.

In connection with eating, there is a need for people to help prepare meals and to clean the dining and dishes afterwards. Please sign up for these duties, but do so with generosity toward your patience. There is much merit in serving a community of meditators and it also makes the retreat run smoothly which is beneficial for everyone.

There is also a need for someone to ring the bell before sittings each day. Also remember to sign up for an interview with the resident Sayadaws. The interviews are to help you progress in the meditation. No special attention is involved except mindfulness.

In order to minimize blockage to the septic system, only bathroom tissues can be put in the toilet and other papers should be put in the garbage can.

Vipassana means “to see things clearly as they truly are” and “to see things in many ways”. By maintaining Noble Silence and by following the guidelines presented here, may you progress in your meditation.