

Appamada Wednesday Evening Program

We offer some more focused practice opportunities on Wednesday evenings. We incorporate a little bit of instruction and usually a short guided meditation, followed by waking meditation and a regular zazen period. We follow the Wednesday evening program with informal tea, a good chance to ask questions or discuss the program.

First Wednesday of the month: Lovingkindness (metta and Lojong practices)

Instruction: 15 min.

Guided meditation: 15 min.

Walking meditation: walking with lovingkindness

Silent meditation: 30 min

Service

Reading: Metta Sutta

Second Wednesday: Mind Training for focus and stability of mind

Concentration practice instruction: 15 min.

Guided concentration practice: 15 min.

Walking meditation: mindful concentration in motion

Concentration meditation: 30 min.

Service

Reading: Hsin Hsin Ming

Third Wednesday: Gaia meditation for the well-being of the earth and its inhabitants (Macy)

Instruction or introduction: 15 min.

Guided meditation: 15 min.

Walking meditation: walking on the earth

Silent meditation: 30 min.

Service

Reading: Self-Fulfilling Samadhi

Fourth Wednesday: Small group koan practice

Introduction of the koan: 15 min.

Meditation: 15 min.

Walking meditation with the koan

Small group koan work

Reading: Song of the Grass Hut

Fifth Wednesday: Zen and the body

Instruction or introduction: 15 min.

Guided meditation: 15 min.

Walking meditation: walking on the earth

Silent meditation: 30 min.

Service: Well-being service

Reading: Bodhisattva's Vow

Appamada Wednesday Evening Program Guidelines

Please bring this set of guidelines with you when leading the Wednesday program so that you will have it for reference.

Council members have done a great job leading the Wednesday evening program, and people have been enthusiastic about it. Now that we've had a month of practice with it, I think I am a little clearer about how we can support and refine this offering. I hope this will be helpful for our program leaders! It calls for a bit of structure:

- 15 min. 1. **Gathering.** Invite people to move their cushions and chairs closer so that they can hear.
2. **Welcome.** Take one complete breath. Don't rush, don't be anxious. Start by connecting with their experience and welcoming them to Appamada; for example:

It's the middle of the week and you've come here after a long day, maybe with a lot of traffic to deal with. Welcome to the Wednesday evening program at Appamada. This week's focus is <concentration practices>. Let's first say names and we will all begin to associate your names and faces that way.

3. **Introduction.** Speak at about 75% of normal conversation speed for the introduction. Speak from your own understanding and connection with the focus topic. You are using this introduction to create also a sense of shared experience and path. You could never exhaust each focus, simply because they are so rich and potentially useful. Begin with a bit of the traditional background on the focus topic. You might connect what you say with something happening in the world, with your own experience and practice, with observations you've made. You might refer to a quote or passage from something you've read. But this little introduction is coming from you, not an academic talk from research or sources. It is a teaching from your own heart, relating to this particular focus. You do need to know something about the topic as it has been traditionally taught. This means you will likely spend some time in reflection and study about the focus topic and your own relationship with it, and how you might offer others an experience *with* it, rather than just a lecture *about* it. That is valuable. If you somehow believe you don't have anything to say about a particular focus, please don't sign up for it.
4. **Meditation instruction.** At the end of the introduction, offer suggestions for meditation based on that focus. These instructions will likely vary. There is no fixed set of instructions for any week. Think about what practices support the focus for that week, and choose *one* to offer. This is one thing

you might do a bit of research or consulting with the teachers about, to see what practices have been developed in our tradition. Remind folks that you will do some guiding during the first meditation period, and that you will also do a bit of guiding at the start of walking meditation. They might then want to use the focus instructions as a guide during the second sitting period.

5. **Prepare for guided meditation.** Invite people to return their cushions and chairs to their original places, and get comfortable for the start of the meditation, facing the wall. Remind them: *Please remember that we never move cushions with our feet.* When the room is still, signal the timekeeper for the three bells to start the zazen period.
- 15 min. 6. **Guided meditation.** Speak slowly. Very slowly, gently, clearly, and calmly. Think of each phrase as dropping a pebble into a still lake. Wait for the ripples to subside before dropping another pebble. Allow more space between sentences as the meditation continues, allowing people to continue to drop into a deeper and deeper experience of relaxation and awareness. Don't give orders, invite possibilities: *You may remember a place you loved as a child, rather than think of a place you love.* Or: *You may notice the sounds around us as you settle into the quiet.* You want them to find their own connection with what you are saying, rather than telling them what to think, feel, or do. The speaking part of the guided meditation should last a maximum of 7 or 8 minutes, allowing people to rest in silence during the last half of the 15-minute period. Watch the time.
- 10 min. 7. **Walking meditation instruction.** At the start of walking meditation, give a little instruction about walking meditation as a continuation of their meditation practice, and invite people to walk holding the focus of that week. Do this every time. Example:

As we begin the transition into walking meditation, we will be carrying our meditation into a bit more activity. First stand with hands together like this, and wait for the clapper. At the first clapper, turn to your left and place your hands right at your solar plexus, making a fist with your left hand, with the thumb inside, and placing your right hand on top of it.

Space yourselves out evenly in the room, and try to maintain this even spacing as you walk. Wait for the clapper to begin the walking meditation. We begin with very small steps, about half the length of your foot. Then we will transition to faster walking at a normal pace and with more energy, at the next clapper. The final clapper will signal you to continue until you reach your seat and stop there. Wait for the bells.

You may use the restroom during walking meditation, once the walking begins.

<Focus of the week. Example for Gaia meditation> *As you begin to walk, please bring your awareness to your feet and your connection to the earth, the earth that supports you. Breathe the air that all living beings share. This is our habitat, our refuge, and our source of nourishment. Please walk with care and appreciation for this home.*

30 min. 8. **Second zazen period.** When people have returned to their seats, invite people to sit facing the center of the room. Relax and enjoy zazen. For service, hand out the chant and retrieve it afterwards.

For reference in the Lovingkindness meditation instructions.

You do not need to use these particular phrases, or in fact any phrases, in lovingkindness or compassion practice. You could introduce the lojong practice and a slogan (see Norman Fischer's book), or also invite people simply to bring their awareness to their heart space, then bring to mind someone who has shown them kindness, someone they cherish, and so on. You might use the terms *friendliness*, or *unconditional friendliness*, or *compassion* rather than *lovingkindness* if you prefer. However, if you are going to use the Appamada metta phrases, please use the correct ones. There are a lot of variations on metta phrases, and it's important to be clear about what we actually teach:

May this body be at ease;
May this heart be open;
May this mind be boundless;
May this being awaken.

May your body be at ease;
May your heart be open;
May your mind be boundless;
May you awaken.

May our bodies be at ease;
May our hearts be open;
May our minds be boundless;
May we awaken together.

May all bodies be at ease;
May all hearts be open;
May all minds be boundless;
May all beings awaken together.

Please remind folks that metta practice is not intended as a self-improvement project, to help us be more kind or loving or compassionate. It would be a mistake to set up some ideal that

you are striving to become. Instead, these practices connect us with our inherent compassion. The practice is simply recalling who you really are.