

Springs Mountain Sangha ~ The Open Source

Basic Forms

Seated Meditation

- Postures
 - Half lotus: one leg crossed over the top of the other
 - Burmese: legs folded flat on the ground, one in front of the other
 - Seiza: kneeling on the lower legs, sitting on an upturned cushion
 - Royal ease: one leg folded on the floor; the other leg upright and bent at the knee, foot flat on the floor; hands folded on the upraised knee
 - Using a chair
 - sit as straight as possible, away from the back of the chair
 - sit with feet flat on the ground; if they don't reach, put a cushion underneath the feet
- Hand positions
 - About 3 finger-widths below the navel, the hands are horizontal, palms upward, left over right, finger joints matching and thumbs just touching, creating an empty oval in the middle; OR
 - About 3 finger-widths below the navel, the hands are clasped one over the other, palms flat against the body, thumbs tucked inside
- Gaze
 - Eyes partially open & looking downward, about 3 feet in front of the cushion
 - Soft focus; don't stare
 - Remove eyeglasses; don't wear contacts, as the eyes will dry out
- Staying comfortable
 - Check that the back and neck are straight, shoulders and arms relaxed, jaw and hands unclenched, eyes in soft focus
 - Breathe into any area of discomfort, letting the attention follow the breath
 - Move discretely as necessary
 - Change positions from period to period; move to a chair
 - Don't skip walking and moving meditations
 - During walking meditation, leave the hall to stretch or do yoga
 - In extreme cases, take a break from sitting

Basic Meditation Practices

- Types
 - Breath counting: silently count 1 to 10 on the exhales; repeat the cycles; if the mind wanders, return to 1 and begin again
 - Watching the breath: focus one's attention there, coming back to the breath whenever the mind wanders
 - Mindfulness: Noting physical sensations, emotions, and/or thoughts as they arise, and then returning to the breath
 - Visualizations: such as lovingkindness or tonglen meditations
 - Just sitting: Sitting in still awareness, without any object of attention
 - Working with a koan or koan-style inquiry
- Guidance: Talk with the teacher or meditation instructor

Chanting

Hold books or put them on your cushion: please don't fold back or place on floor
Sing with your ears: listen and join in with heart; you'll hear both your voice and
your neighbors', and then all one voice
It's fine just to listen, too.
Raise hands, palms together, for dedications

Walking Meditation

- Basic Form
 - When the bell ends a meditation period, bow, turn and straighten cushions and stand up (slowly if your legs are asleep); stand in front of your cushion with your hands folded at the solar plexus
 - At the bell, bow, turn to the left, and begin walking
 - Walk close together at the pace set by the Timekeeper
 - Eyes are lowered, hands folded at the solar plexus

Entering and Leaving the Hall

- Entering the Hall
 - On coming through the door, pause to bow towards the altar and then walk to your seat
 - Bow to your cushion; turn 180° (in the direction of the altar), bow to the hall, and sit down, facing the center of the hall
- During walking meditation
 - Get into the walking line as usual; leave the line when you come to the door
 - When returning, stand just outside the hall, wait
 - When everyone bows, bow with them, return to your seat
- At the end of a meditation gathering
 - After everyone is standing, bow to the altar with everyone
 - Turn, bow all together facing inward
 - Straighten cushions, then turn and stand, hands folded at the solar plexus
 - When the inkin rings once, bow with hands in the same position and leave the hall
- There is no need to bow at the doorway when leaving the hall
- Rakusu wearers
 - First time in the hall each day: Kneel facing your cushion, take out your rakusu and either place it on your head or hold the pine twig to your forehead, say the rakusu verse silently with your palms together, put on the rakusu, and sit
 - Subsequent times: Sit in the usual way, take out your rakusu, touch the pine twig briefly to your forehead, and put it on

VERSE OF THE RAKUSU

This is the robe of freedom,
the bare field, the blessings.

I receive the Tathagata's
teaching,

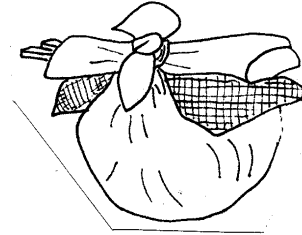
which wakes all beings

FORMAL MEAL PRACTICE

The formal meal practice is a way of extending our meditation into the meals during a retreat. It is a monastic tradition over a thousand years old, and most people who try it come to deeply appreciate its elegance and simplicity. You receive and eat your food, and then clean up afterwards, while remaining on your meditation cushion.

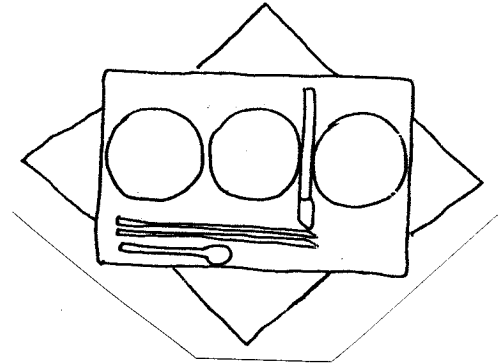
A formal bowl set includes three nesting bowls, chopsticks, a wooden or plastic spoon (no metal, please), a small rubber spatula for cleaning bowls, a dishcloth, a napkin, and a cloth to wrap everything in, which also serves as a placemat.

To assemble it, spread the placemat in a diamond shape. Place the three nested bowls in the center. Fold the top and bottom corners of the placemat over the bowls. Roll your utensils in the napkin and place it and the drying cloth on top of the bowls. Fold the two remaining corners of the placemat over the whole thing and tie like a kerchief.



Opening the bowl set

After the opening prayer, lay out your set so that it ends up looking something like this. First, spread the placemat in a diamond shape and then tuck the four corners underneath as shown. Put your napkin in your lap and the dishcloth in front of you.



Receiving food from the servers

During the first chant, the servers bring food in on trays and in pots. Any time a server is in front of you, bow until the server has moved on. Serve yourself from the tray and slide it down the line; hand your bowl to the server for food from the pots.

If there are condiments, use them and pass them down the line. Don't begin eating yet.

Making the food offering

During the offering chant, pick up a small piece of food (usually grain) and place it in the offering bowl as it comes to you. If you are the last to receive the bowl, hold it until the server takes it from you.

Eating

When the cantor indicates, begin eating. After awhile the servers will come in with seconds; if you want something from the pot, bow when the server reaches you. If you wish, serve yourself again from the tray and slide it along.

Cleaning the bowls with tea

When you've finished eating, you can begin cleaning your bowls by scraping them out with the rubber spatula and eating the food particles. When the servers bring in the tea, receive it as you would food from a pot. Wait until you've bowed to the server, and then begin cleaning your bowls and utensils with the tea and spatula. You can pour the tea from one bowl into another. When everything is clean, drink the tea, leaving an ounce or two in one bowl for the offering. Dry everything else with the dishcloth and put away.

Making the tea offering

During the offering chant, pour your remaining tea into the container when it reaches you. If you are the last to receive the container, hold it until the server takes it from you.

Packing up the bowl set

Dry your last bowl and pack up the bowl set. Remain in meditation posture until the service is ended. Stand up with everyone else, holding your bowl set in front of you, and bow. Put your set behind your cushions, tidy up your cushions, and stand up until the final bow signals the beginning of the break period.