

Still Water Mindfulness Practice Center Dharma Sharing Guidelines

Dharma sharing is an opportunity to benefit from each other's insights and experiences with the practice. By sharing our happiness and difficulties in the practice, we contribute to the collective insight and understanding of the community. Our intention is that our words nourish and be of benefit to ourselves and our community.

The following guidelines express our aspiration to cultivate an environment in which everyone feels welcome and safe, trust in one another can grow, and individuals are protected from harm. When done with right intention and compassion, Dharma sharing becomes a deep spiritual practice.

Dharma Sharing Guidelines in Few Words

[Note to facilitators: The guidelines are intentionally brief. Before presenting the guidelines, the facilitator may explain the purpose of Dharma sharing. Similarly, facilitators are encouraged to briefly expand on one or more of the guidelines in their own words in order to clarify the practice for the group or address issues that have come up in past gatherings of the community.]

- 1 Bow in and bow out.**
- 2 Speak from your heart and your own experience. Honor confidentiality.**
- 3 Practice compassionate speaking and listening. Address everyone present.**
- 4 You are invited to step up if you rarely talk and to step back if you tend to talk a lot. Try to be concise.**
- 5 Especially in a diverse community we try to remember that what we intend to say and how it is received (the impact) may differ.**
- 6 Support the facilitators in nurturing a welcoming and safe space for all.**

Dharma Sharing Guidelines in More Than a Few Words

(1) Bow in and bow out

When we would like to share, we bring our palms together in front of our heart and bow to the circle. Everyone in the circle acknowledges by bowing back. If a person does not wish to bow, they may express their desire to speak by using a different signal, such as raising their hand or placing their hand on their heart. In a Zoom meeting, we can unmute, bow or otherwise signal, and then begin speaking.

Saying our name as we begin is welcoming for newcomers and can refresh others' memory.

We let the group know when we are finished speaking by bowing out or using another signal. We try to remember to enjoy three breaths before the next person speaks to help us fully receive the last sharing.

(2) Speak from your heart and your own experience. Honor confidentiality.

We base our sharing on our own life and practice rather than on abstract ideas and theoretical topics, using "I" statements rather than "you" statements. We do not presume to speak for a whole group or express assumptions about the experience of others.

We endeavor to speak with what David Viafora calls "courageous authenticity," aware that our true presence is a gift to the community.

What we share is confidential. After the session, if we want to follow up with someone about what they said in the group, it's kind to first ask for their permission.

(3) Practice compassionate speaking and listening. Address everyone present.

When others are speaking, we listen deeply with our full attention and presence. We listen to understand, not to respond. If our mind begins to wander, to judge what is being said, or to rehearse what we want to say next, we come back to our body and breath and bring our attention again to the person who is sharing.

Deep listening is an opportunity to practice being present with what is happening inside and outside ourselves in the present moment. A strong emotion may arise as we listen to another person's sharing. We can acknowledge the emotion, hold it gently, and steady ourselves with conscious breathing. Calming ourselves contributes to a calm, receptive, and safe environment for everyone.

We speak to the entire circle so that everyone is included, and we avoid one-on-one conversations.

(4) You are invited to step up if you rarely talk and to step back if you tend to talk a lot. Try to be concise.

If we tend to speak often, we may "step back" to make space for others to share. If we tend to be silent, we may "step up" and bring ourselves into the circle.

We usually refrain from speaking a second time until everyone has had an opportunity to share. We are mindful of the length of our sharing so that there will be time for others to share.

(5) Especially in a diverse community we try to remember that what we intend to say and how it is received (the impact) may differ.

During Dharma sharing, a person may intend to say something positive and nourishing, but another person may not hear it that way. When a person in the community speaks up about how they were negatively impacted by something we said or did, we acknowledge that there was a harmful impact and we listen in order to learn and to relieve their suffering. Focusing on and defending our intent can be more harmful than the initial interaction.

In general, it is not helpful to publicly rate another person's sharing, either by praising or disparaging it. Lavishing praise on another person's sharing may cause discomfort, and disparaging it almost certainly will. We can refer briefly to an earlier sharing without judging it positively or negatively.

When referring to others, we do not assume their race, class, gender, sexuality, or ability. If we wish, we may share with the community the pronouns that reflect our gender, so that we can refer to people by their pronouns.

Usually we avoid giving advice, even if it is asked for. However, if someone asks for advice and a practice that we have worked with comes to mind, we can share our beneficial experience with the group.

(6) Support the facilitators in creating a welcoming and safe space for all.

The Dharma sharing facilitator's role is to nurture a welcoming and safe space for all, to encourage trust, and to protect individuals and the community from harm.

The facilitator tries to help the community "flow as a river." If something happens or is said that may disturb the peace and harmony of individuals in the community, the facilitator may intervene by inviting the bell and asking everyone to enjoy their breathing for a few minutes. After this pause, the facilitator may share what arose in them in response to what was said or done and invite others to compassionately share their experiences and reflections.

When a practitioner's words and actions do not appear to align with a Dharma sharing guideline, the facilitator may gently remind the community of the guideline.

When seeds of discomfort may have been watered during Dharma sharing, the facilitator may invite practitioners to see discomfort as an opportunity to practice deeply, increase understanding, and strengthen relationships.

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