

Code of Conduct for Dhamma Servers

Selfless Service

Selfless service is an essential part of the path of Dhamma, an important step in the direction of liberation. The practice of Vipassana gradually eradicates mental impurities until inner peace and happiness are attained. At first, this liberation from misery may be only partial, but still it brings a deep sense of gratitude for having been given the wonderful teaching of Dhamma. With these feelings of love and compassion, the wish naturally arises to help others come out of their misery. Serving on courses provides an opportunity to express this gratitude by helping people as they learn Dhamma, without expecting anything in return. In selflessly serving others we also serve ourselves by developing the ten parami and dissolving the habit of egotism.

Who is Qualified for Dhamma Service

Students who have successfully completed a ten-day Vipassana course with Goenkaji or one of his assistant teachers, and who have not practiced any other meditation technique since their last Vipassana course, may give Dhamma service. Servers are also encouraged to be trying to maintain their daily practice at home.

The Code of Discipline

Unless otherwise stated here, Dhamma servers should, as far as possible, follow the rules in the Code of Discipline for Meditation Courses. Those rules also apply to servers. In certain instances, however, relaxation of them is necessary and permitted.

The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are the foundation of the Code of Discipline:

- to abstain from killing any being,
- to abstain from stealing,
- to abstain from sexual misconduct (meaning, at the meditation center, to abstain from all sexual activity whatsoever),

- to abstain from wrong speech,

- to abstain from all intoxicants.

These Five Precepts are mandatory for everyone at the center and must be observed scrupulously at all times. It is expected that those serving are also seriously trying to maintain the Five Precepts in their daily lives.

Accepting Guidance

Dhamma servers should follow the instructions of the Teachers, the assistant teachers, and the center administration and management committees, being amenable to the advice and guidance of those who are elder in meditation or in service. Changing established practices or initiating projects without authorization or against the directions of those responsible will cause confusion, duplication of efforts and be a waste of time and material. Insisting on working independently of any direction is inconsistent with the spirit of cooperation and congeniality which pervades the Dhamma atmosphere. By following instructions servers learn to set aside personal preferences and prejudices and do what is needed for the good of the meditators and the efficient and harmonious running of courses and the center. Problems should be resolved openly and with humility. Positive suggestions are always welcome.

Relations with Meditators

In every situation Dhamma servers should defer to the welfare of the students who are sitting a course. Courses and centers are for meditators; they are the most important people, doing the most essential work. The job of a Dhamma server is simply to assist the meditators in whatever way possible. Students should therefore be given preference for accommodation and food. Unless they have pressing duties, Dhamma servers should not take their food until after the students have been served, and they should not sit with students in the dining hall. Dhamma servers should use the bathrooms for bathing and laundry at times other than the students, and they should go to bed only after the students have done so, in case a problem should arise at that time. For all other facilities as well, students must be given preference, and servers should avoid disturbing them as much as possible.

Dealing with Students

Only course managers should interact directly with the students--female managers with female students, male managers with male students. They need to be aware whether the students are following the discipline and timetable, and may have to speak with those who are not doing so. This task should always be done in a friendly and compassionate manner, with the volition of encouraging the meditators to overcome their difficulties. Words should be phrased mindfully, in a positive way--never harshly. If one is unable to do so, a co-worker should deal with the situation. Managers must always take care to inquire about rather than assume the cause of some apparent misconduct.

All Dhamma servers should be respectful and polite, and available to help when approached. It is usually helpful to ask the student's name. Servers should try to refer students to the proper person with a minimum of talking or distraction--either the assistant teacher or the course manager--depending on the nature of the problem. Dhamma servers should not attempt to answer students' questions pertaining to meditation, but should suggest that such questions be asked of the assistant teachers. Assistant teachers should be kept informed of any contact the management has with students. The private affairs of students should never be unnecessarily discussed with others serving in the kitchen or elsewhere.

Meditation Practice for Servers

Dhamma servers should serve conscientiously, without wasting time, giving full attention to their work; this is their training. At the same time, they must also maintain their meditation practice. Every server must meditate at least three hours daily; if possible, this should be during the group sittings at 8:00 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. In addition, every evening that an assistant teacher is present, there is a short meditation session for servers in the Dhamma hall at 9:00 p.m. These meditation periods are essential for the well-being of the Dhamma servers. Servers on a course should practice Vipassana, using Anapana when needed. Dhamma servers may change their positions during group sittings if they wish.

At all times Dhamma servers have a responsibility to observe themselves. They should try to be equanimous in all circumstances and aware of their mental volition. If unable to do so because of tiredness or any other reason, they should meditate or rest more, no matter how pressing their work seems. Servers should not imagine themselves to be indispensable. One can only give proper Dhamma service when there is peace and harmony within. If the base is not positive, the work that is done will not be truly beneficial. Servers

staying at the center for longer times must periodically sit a 10-day course, completely laying aside all work, and not expecting any special preference or privilege as a result of having given Dhamma service.

Meeting the Assistant Teachers

Servers should discuss any problems or difficulties with the Teachers or the assistant teachers. The proper time to raise questions about serving or general matters is after the 9:00 p.m. evening meditation session for servers. Private interviews can also be arranged. In the absence of assistant teachers, servers should bring questions or difficulties to the center management.

Separation of Men and Women

This separation is always in effect, both during and between courses. While absolute separation of the sexes is not practical for the servers due to the close working conditions, this situation should not be misunderstood as an opportunity for men and women to socialize beyond what is necessary to perform their Dhamma service. This rule is all the more important for couples.

Physical Contact

In order to maintain the pure meditative atmosphere and the introspective nature of the practice, and to set a good example for the students, all Dhamma servers must avoid any physical contact with meditators and other servers of either sex. Both during and between courses, this rule is always to be followed.

Noble Speech

The Noble Silence of the meditators should be respected by the Dhamma servers. They should try to be silent within the meditation compound and speak only when necessary. Even if students are not within earshot or there is no course in progress, it is important not to disturb the silence needlessly.

When speaking, servers must practice Right Speech, refraining from:

- speaking lies or anything less than the truth.
- harsh language or rude words. Someone practicing Dhamma

should always be polite and soft-spoken.

- slander or backbiting. There should be no criticism of others arising from one's own negative feelings. A problem should be brought to the attention of the person concerned or to the assistant teachers or center management.
- idle gossip, singing, whistling or humming.

Noble Speech is, without a doubt, much more difficult than silence. It is therefore a very important training for anyone following the path of Dhamma.

Personal Appearance

In the eyes of others, Dhamma servers are representatives of the Teaching and the center. For this reason, the appearance of the servers should always be neat and clean, and nothing should be worn which is tight, transparent, gaudy or revealing, or that might attract undue attention (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops). Jewelry should be kept to a minimum or not worn at all. This attitude of modesty prevails at all times.

Smoking

It is assumed that one who has accepted Dhamma is no longer involved in the use of intoxicants such as alcohol, hashish, marijuana, and so forth. The use of tobacco in any form is also totally forbidden, indoors or outdoors, either within or outside of the meditation compound. Neither should Dhamma servers leave the property to smoke.

Food

The center provides simple, wholesome, vegetarian meals, without subscribing to any particular food philosophy. The Dhamma servers, like all students, are expected to accept what is offered in a spirit of renunciation.

Because meals prepared and served at courses are completely vegetarian, food containing alcohol or liqueur, eggs or food containing eggs (some baked goods, mayonnaise, etc.), or cheese

with animal rennet, may not be brought to the center. In general, any food from outside should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Servers observe Five Precepts and may therefore have a meal in the evening if they wish. Fasting is not permitted.

Reading

Servers who would like to keep abreast of current events may read newspapers or news magazines, but only in the rest areas set aside for Dhamma servers and out of sight of the students. Anyone wishing to read more than the daily news is invited to choose books from those that appear on the recommended reading list or from the Dhamma library at the center. Novels or other books read for entertainment are not permitted.

Outside Contacts

Servers are not required to divorce themselves entirely from the outside world. While serving on a course, however, they should leave the site only on urgent business and with the permission of the assistant teachers. Telephone calls should be kept to a necessary minimum. Private visitors may come to the center only with the prior permission of the management.

Keeping the Center Clean

It is the duty of the Dhamma servers to help keep the center neat and clean. Besides the kitchen and dining hall, the residences, meditation hall, bathrooms, offices and other areas may need attention. Servers should also be prepared, if necessary, to do occasional chores unrelated to food preparation and cleaning.

Use of Center Property

Every student of Vipassana undertakes to abstain from taking what is not given. Dhamma servers must therefore be careful not to appropriate center property by taking anything for their quarters or personal use without first obtaining permission from the management.

Staying at the Center for Extended Periods

With the agreement of an assistant teacher, serious students may stay at the center for longer periods in order to become more established in the theory and practice of Dhamma. During this time they will be able to meditate on some courses and serve on others,

as decided in consultation with the teachers and management.

Dāna

The Code of Discipline for meditators states that there are no charges at courses or centers, either for the Teaching, or for board, lodging, or other facilities provided to students. This applies to Dhamma servers as well.

The teaching of pure Dhamma is always given freely. Food, accommodation and other facilities are offered as gifts made possible by the donations of students of the past. Dhamma servers should recognize this and give their service making best use of the gifts received, so that the donors may receive maximum benefit from their dana. Servers in turn can develop their own dana parami by giving donations according to their means, for the benefit of others. Courses and centers are able to operate only by the donations of grateful students.

No one may pay for him- or herself, either by giving money or in any other way. Every donation is for the benefit of others. Nor can Dhamma service be a form of payment for room and board. On the contrary, service is of benefit to the servers themselves, since it affords them further valuable Dhamma training. A course or center provides an opportunity to practice meditation and also to practice applying Dhamma by learning to serve and deal with others with compassion and humility.

Conclusion

Dhamma servers should serve following the guidance of the assistant teachers and management. They should do all they can to assist the meditators without disturbing them in any way. The conduct of the servers should inspire confidence in Dhamma in those who are doubtful and greater faith where it already exists. They should always bear in mind that the purpose of their service is to help others, and in so doing help themselves to grow in Dhamma.

If these rules present any difficulties for you, please seek clarification immediately from the assistant teachers or the management.

May your service help you to advance on the path of Dhamma, of liberation, of freedom from all suffering, of real happiness.