

# Heart Awakening Retreat Guidelines

Even if you have previously attended a Hridaya retreat or any other silent meditation retreat, please read these guidelines carefully.

In order to create the right conditions that facilitate our access to deep inner states, mental peace, and aspiration, it is necessary that certain rules be followed for the duration of the retreat. The retreat atmosphere has been evaluated carefully as to how it can best support the attendees' spiritual efforts. The guidelines are part of this support.

## 1. Voluntary Restraint

A meditation retreat is an extraordinary situation (although meditation is actually perfectly normal). A group of people must live together in very simple conditions, while relating to each other in a completely new way. Here, we relate through the common experience of meditation, with all its pains and joys, discoveries and frustrations. During the retreat our lifestyle is built around a common purpose rather than the more selfish purposes promoted by the world today. To accomplish this in harmony, we must agree on certain conventions. The most important are mindful silence, giving way to others, sticking to the schedule, and following the instructions.

## 2. Mauna (observing noble silence)

Mauna is compulsory. The period of mauna will begin on the first morning, with the consecration of the retreat, and will end after the afternoon meditation session on the last full day.

Absolutely no talking by participants will be allowed!

For any necessities, please inform the Retreat leader - Radha in writing of administrative problems.

Much energy and ego goes into our speech. We often say things that don't need to be said, are silly, gossipy, or even harmful. This not only makes the world noisy, it makes our own mind noisy. If there is nobody to talk to we just chatter away to ourselves. In meditation, this can be an annoying hindrance. So we keep silent by not speaking or passing notes to each other during the retreat, in order to quiet our mind and maintain a quiet, peaceful environment for everyone. This can be difficult at times, but most people find it a powerful and wonderful experience. Even training ourselves to walk, move, and do things quietly leads to a calm and graceful experience.

It is also important not to judge or project opinions onto others. Developing self discipline and a compassionate understanding for all things is part of the training.

## 3. No use of any electronics or media

Retreat participants are asked not to use iPods, smartphones, or computers for the whole duration of the retreat. Thus, no listening to the news, music, checking email, phone calls, watching movies, etc.

No use of mobile phones is allowed during the retreat. Participants should make a firm commitment not to use the phone for conversations, text messages, or surfing the internet for the duration of the retreat. It can be on airplane mode if needed as an alarm clock.

#### 4. Reading

Reading is not allowed, not even of books of a spiritual nature. Through the retreat practice, we aim to focus inward as much as possible, and reading can lead us away from strong interiorization, diffusing our efforts and experience in the process.

Staying silent includes putting away books you've brought along or keeping them closed throughout the retreat. You will get plenty of information while you are in the retreat. Reading will be a distraction, possibly confusing you, possibly taking you away from the purpose of this retreat. You will have all the time you want to read when you leave. We also request that you stop writing, except for notes taken during talks and impressions of meditative experiences that you may record in your retreat journal after meditation sessions. Letter writing and creative writing will take the mind away from our purpose here.

#### 5. Sexual Abstinence

Sexual abstinence is mandatory.

This point is obviously non-enforceable (we cannot check you, of course), but is insisted upon to reinforce the atmosphere resembling solitude that we are attempting to create for participants.

#### 6. An Attitude of Solitude

It is recommended that you aim to cultivate a state of experience resembling solitude by agreeing not to: look at others, touch, hug, kiss, say hello (even nonverbally), smile at each other, etc. At times, this can feel alienating and lonely for people who are very sociable and miss such simple human contact, but it will drastically help your experience of interiorization. In addition, the opening of the soul will offer you the opportunity to communicate in a much subtler way, through the language of Love. Your friends will still love you at the end of the retreat, maybe even more...

#### 7. Clothing

Please bring modest and comfortable clothing, which will allow you to feel at home. No vanity is needed when there is no communication. The way in which both women and men dress should be in accordance with common sense. Additionally, please do not wear makeup or perfume. A retreat atmosphere is one in which people are in close proximity for long periods. Some people have sensitivities to fragrances or find strong odors intolerable and very distracting.

#### 8. Detox

No alcohol or smoking is allowed during this retreat. There is no coffee or caffeinated drinks served either. This is a period of complete detox, both for the body and mind. We understand that that might be challenging if there is an addiction, but the retreat facilitator is there to support you in the process of giving yourself a break from habitual behaviour.

## 9. Meditation Journal

It is recommended that participants record their meditative and daily experiences in a notebook. A retreat journal can help you not only to push through any challenging moments, but can serve to inspire you and provide a point of reference for your growth during the retreat period. A meditation notebook helps us to objectify our experiences and what we understand during meditation. It can bring inspiration to us even after the retreat. Reading it after the retreat is over can be a powerful support in daily life.

## 10. Following the Schedule

The schedule we follow is very moderate compared to some meditation retreats that start the day before dawn. The day includes approximately five to six hours of meditation, two hours of hatha yoga practice, and two hours of inspiring spiritual talks or Q&A.

Please agree to join all sessions and activities of the retreat. The retreat can not be taken on a "drop-in" basis, therefore attendance of all meditation sessions is compulsory.

The only exceptions will be made for:

- People who are sick and cannot attend sessions
- Any staff (cooks/ teachers) assisting with the retreat's organization.

## 11. Lateness

Everyone must be on time for all activities, as lateness is very disruptive. Please plan accordingly and do not sneak into the hall in the hopes that you will not disturb others if late.

## 12. Questions

This retreat experience aims to create an atmosphere resembling solitude as much as possible thus NO VERBAL communication is allowed at any times, including with the retreat staff.

However, you may ask questions related directly to the practice and your experiences at any time by sending your written questions to the teacher. The answers will be given during the evening Q&A session - or in a note if personal. On the last day of the retreat, after breaking silence, participants are also invited to share their experiences.

If you happen to have any logistic or practical issues or questions, you can address those to the teacher/ facilitator. Even if they are related to the food or directed to the kitchen staff or another retreat participant, they should be first given to the retreat facilitator to distribute further.

## 13. Food and Meals

Food may not be eaten in the meditation space or the rooms. However, sealed receptacles for water, tea, etc. (bottles, thermoses) are permitted, but they may be used strictly and only during break times.

Please, observe the meal times as food is placed on a table for participants to serve themselves. After meals, everyone is responsible for washing their own dishes.

#### 14. Karma Yoga

If you're willing to give us a hand during the retreat breaks, there will be such possibility. "Karma Yoga" means the yoga of selfless service and is a practice of helping out with no selfish purpose. Some of the chores might include vacuuming the meditation space, sweeping the floors or washing pots in the kitchen. The karma yoga help is completely voluntary and there is no obligation to take part in it.

#### 15. Warnings and Expulsion from the Retreat

Please be advised that certain actions constitute grounds for expulsion from the retreat. The following actions will constitute grounds for a warning:

- Absence from retreat sessions for no specific reason or without having that previously discussed and arranged with the retreat facilitator
- Being consistently late to a retreat session
- Talking, making other sounds, or being generally disruptive for the rest of the group
- Listening to music or news, sending text messages, or talking on the phone

We would like to emphasize that the retreat guidelines must be followed for the benefit of all participants. Before joining the retreat, carefully consider whether you truly accept the parameters of the retreat and its rules. No refunds will be given for those who choose to leave or are asked to leave.