



The Practice Period

Three times per year, New Dharma Community sets aside 27 days for deep internal practice collectively supported within the community, known as Practice Periods.

While not everyone is able to go live in a monastic setting on a full-time basis, we can find greater alignment in our lives by setting a clear intention to engage our practice with intensity for a set period of time, inviting the deepened commitment, spiritual rigor, and yes, sacrifice, that we associate with long retreats and monasteries. Practice Periods are designed to help accomplish that right here in the midst of our urban lives...where it matters, where it is most useful.

In this email, you will find answers to key questions, guidelines and a schedule overview. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the Practice Leader at:

practice@transformativechange.org

Regardless of whether you choose to participate formally or not, we request of everyone who enters through the Center gates, please respect, support and join us in this deep practice.

Q: What are Practice Periods?

Practice Periods are an adaptation of the traditional 100-day Ango (peaceful dwelling) of the Zen tradition. Since the days of Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha, periods of time were set aside during the rainy season for more structured, intense practice. Monks would come together to practice and study and take shelter from the rain. From there, they would disperse and travel throughout the country spreading the Dharma. Later, in China and Japan, that tradition became two periods of “peaceful dwelling” each year during which monastic training provided a strong container.

New Dharma Community's peaceful dwelling is distributed over 3 seasonal 27-day periods, Spring, Fall & Winter. (Our annual sesshin is held just before Summer.) The Practice Period provides a context and support that allows you to clarify, strengthen and deepen your inner awareness practice. Elements of Practice Period include:

1. **Rigorous practice environment conducive to reflection**
2. **Significantly increased practice opportunities & instruction**
3. **Strong container of community support**

Q: What can I generally expect at the Center during the Practice Period?

1. **Social Silence:** an atmosphere of reflection is maintained. See below for more.
2. **Teachings:** Weekly Dharma talks & frequent instruction by the guiding teacher
3. **Increased Sitting:** midday, Tuesday evening and Saturday practice sessions added
4. **Morning Yoga:** Friendly Warrior series (self-led, instruction sheets provided)
5. **Cleanse Week:** Individuals participate in any one of a number of different cleanses with group support & check-ins.
6. **Interview:** Increased opportunities for Face-to-face meetings w/ teacher
7. **Study:** Focus on a particular reading/topic at the intersection of spirit & social change

Q: What are specific expectations of my participating in the Practice Period ?

WAKE UP!

During Practice Period, you commit to intensifying reflective and contemplative practice and attention on three levels, which when brought together form a holistic relationship to our life and creates the conditions for transformation:

1. **inner:** personal development focus, sitting/body practices
2. **interpersonal:** relationships & community participation
3. **global/social:** examination of our personal impact on the world we live in

To seal your commitment, you fill out an Intention Agreement that allows you to consider areas of your life to deepen. The Intention Agreement calls for:

Daily Practice: Increase in sitting meditation, both at home and at the Center (if local)

Personal Challenge: something in your life you wish to address using the **Four Actions Practice** (these will be reviewed at the Opening Ceremony)

Behavior Shift: releasing an unwanted, unproductive behavior

Community Engagement: participation in supporting Social Action Circle projects

Footprint Reduction: commitment to bring attention to & reduce ecological footprint

Training Path Petitioners: Petitioning members undertake 27-day Challenge

Petitioning to enter a training path occurs up to a month before Practice Period begins. For more information about entering the Training Path gate, contact the Practice Leader.

Learn more here: <http://www.newdharma.com/faqman/index.php?op=cat&c=2>

Formal Training: Those currently on a training path receive Practice Period Projects.

Q: How can I participate in the Practice Period?

You can participate informally, choosing Personal Practice or formally, as a Participant.

With formal participation, your Practice Period Intention Agreement is witnessed and signed by the Guiding Teacher, your intentions can be reviewed with a mentor student, there are increased opportunities for interviews, and you receive individual support from the Teacher.

Practice Period Participants also commit to keeping a daily practice journal and to two Practice Period Group meetings. Participants should expect to engage the full Practice Period, making only essential adjustments as absolutely necessary for one's life.

Please remember that sacrificing "business as usual" is not only likely, but an essential component of deep practice towards transformation.

A Certificate is issued for those that meet the Practice Period expectations.

Q: How is Social Silence held during Practice Period?

By minimizing the conversation needed to be in community, we carry our sitting practice into our lives. Once we enter through the Center gate, Social Silence is held in the Main House, Practice Hall and on the grounds of the Center. Center business that requires conversation may take place in the office. ALL personal conversations can take place outside the Center's facilities (beyond the gate please) and very quietly if on Center grounds. Rather than whispering, you are welcome to pass a note, leave a message on the office bulletin board or send email. Social Silence will be lifted for public events, Thursday Sangha Dinners, and after 11am on Fridays. Social Silence resumes again Monday mornings.

***** Social Silence is lifted for parties & events as appropriate, of course! *****

Q: What general schedule changes are there during the Practice Period?

During the Practice Period the Center increases the number of formal sitting periods by adding additional sits to our regular weekly schedule: weekday middays (1:00pm-1:25pm); Tuesday evenings (6:30pm-7:30pm) weekday nights (9:30pm-9:40pm); Wednesday evenings (6:30pm-7:00pm before study group); and Saturday mornings: (8:00am-9:00am).

Practice Period Schedule

Seva (Selfless Service to prepare the space): Sunday, August 30, 1:00pm - 4:00pm

Opening Ceremony: Tuesday, September 1, 6:30pm - 8:00pm

- Intention Agreements witnessed and beheld by community
- all formal participants and petitioners may offer incense

urbanRETREAT: Friday, September 4 - Sunday, September 6

Cleanse Week: begins Tuesday, September 8

Participant Check-in: Sunday, September 6, 12:00pm - 1:00pm

Sunday, September 20, 12:00pm - 1:00pm

Closing Ceremony: Sunday, September 27, 9am

WEEKDAY PRACTICE

Mondays Center remains closed: day off

Tuesday-Friday

5:40 Wake-up! bell

6:00 Yoga Sadhana

6:45 Tea & Change

7:00 Meditation & Morning Service

8:00 Practice Hall Cleaning (*soji*)

8:20 Breakfast

8:45 Personal

10:00 Work

1:00 Midday Meditation

1:30 Lunch

2:30 Work

6:30 Evening Meditation

7:20 Talk or Council (*Thursdays only*)

8:00 Dinner (*Thursdays w/ Community*)

8:15 Social Silence lifted (*Thursdays only*)

9:30 Closing Meditation

10:00 lights out

WEEKEND PRACTICE**Saturday**

8:00-9:00 Morning Meditation

Sunday

9:00a Meditation & Morning Service

10:00a fearless Yoga Instruction (1.5 hr)

Take advantage, take a seat and have a fruitful practice period!

Palms Together. May you lead the life of a warrior.

Jai Mitra!

Perfecting Perfection: Practice Period Intention Agreement
Fall 2009, September 1 - 27

Giving: Selfless Service

I will deepen my engagement with the community and the world through the cultivation of selfless service. My **letting go** practice is to give this amount of time _____ to the following project: _____.

Ethics: Reducing Harm

I will bring my life into greater alignment with my purpose and values through the cultivation of self-responsibility and integrity. My **harm reduction** practice is to bring needed attention to this one of the Five Warrior Trainings [non-harming, truthfulness, continence, non-stealing, non-attachment] and to reduce my footprint on the earth by _____.

Patience: Reclaiming Relationship

I will strengthen my mind and heart to find creative responses to life's challenges through the cultivation of spaciousness and curiosity. My **equanimity** practice is to re-examine the following difficult relationship or situation and find greater balance: _____.

Effort: Choosing Life Every Day

I will shift the way I show up through the cultivation of consistency and sustained intention. My **fearlessness** practice is to change the following behavior by applying myself daily: _____.

Meditation: Sitting & Sadhana

I will develop mental stability and self-awareness through the cultivation of sustained attention. My **dynamic stillness** practice is to increase my sitting meditation/sadhana by _____ including practicing with the sangha at these extra times/days _____.

Wisdom: Waking Up

I will root each and every thought, word and action of these perfect intentions in transcendent understanding through the cultivation of deep insight. My **skillfulness** practice is to dissolve all ideas of who is doing practice, who practice is done for and practice that is done.

Personal Challenge

My own intention for this Practice Period is _____.

Name: _____

Witnessed:

Date: _____

Rev. angel kyodo williams, Mahamitra
Spiritual Director and Guiding Teacher
on this _____ day of September, 2009