

Mindfulness Days Retreat with Steven Hick

The retreat will follow a typical daily schedule that starts at 6:00 am and ends at 10:00 pm. The day is spent in silent practice comprising alternate periods of sitting and walking meditation. Three meals are served – breakfast, lunch and dinner. Comprehensive meditation instruction and talks are offered daily. In addition, individual or group interviews with Steven takes place at regular intervals.

Once your course begins, you will be asked to honour what is known as 'noble silence' – a quieting of the body and voice that helps cultivate a calm and peaceful retreat environment. This powerful tool greatly enhances the deepening of concentration and awareness. Your willingness to embrace the silence and simplicity helps everyone – it not only acts as a support for your own practice but is also a direct way of supporting your fellow retreatants.

Steven requests that you not engage in other forms of communication while on retreat. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of your stay and leave behind your laptops, iPods and other communication devices so that you can commit to your retreat wholeheartedly and reap the benefits of that commitment. Noble silence also encompasses avoiding reading, writing, keeping a journal, receiving mail, or otherwise keeping busy and distracted. By leaving at home the many activities and communications that worldly life entails, you offer yourself the gift of stillness.

Please provide a number for a family member or close friend to use in case of emergency. If you have fragile or dependant family members that you need to stay in contact with, please notify us so arrangements can be made.

Silence is broken at the end of the retreat, in time to allow you to talk and share your experience with other participants.

Please bring a sufficient supply of clothing to last the duration of your course. Clothing should be loose and comfortable – appropriate for indoor sitting meditation and walking outdoors. Also bring all necessary special foods and beverages (for any specific diets), plastic containers for special foods and your medicines, vitamins, supplements, etc. Please bring any meditation props you may need, such as cushions, mats, a meditation stool, a shawl or throw rug.

Please do not use scented hygiene products, cell phones, beeper watches, candles, incense or 'noisy', rustling clothing.

***Dana* The Practice of Generosity**

Dana is the practice of developing the qualities of generosity, kindness, and letting go. We develop these qualities because they make fertile ground for liberating wisdom to grow deep in our hearts. Often our

practice of generosity and kindness comes from our routine habitual tendencies, because it is the custom, through a feeling of guilt, or simply because it's the 'nice' thing to do. Taking the opportunity to make 'dana' a practice of awareness, brings it out of the realm of unconscious habit, and into the realm of wise attention. In this awareness practice of generosity, we begin to see how our lives can be elevated when we bring a conscious awareness around opportunities to be generous, to be kind, and to let go.

Because dana is a 'practice', with awareness and honesty we allow ourselves to experience how liberating and happiness-producing it feels to let go, and where it is painful because it is challenging to let go. We call dana a practice, and that implies that we are doing just that... practicing letting go. Which also implies that it is not easy to do sometimes. When we practice generosity, many supportive qualities of mind are being developed that lead us to ever-deepening happiness and freedom. We are cultivating loving kindness because we are caring for the welfare of others. We are cultivating compassion because we want to alleviate any suffering. We are cultivating the understanding of interconnectedness because we realize that we depend on the generosity and kindness of others, and they also depend upon ours. Most of all, we are cultivating non-attachment, the ability to let go, which is essential to understanding and experiencing freedom from suffering.

We must understand dana in terms of 'practice'. Dana is not a tip, nor is it in exchange for receiving the Teachings of the Buddha. It is a way in which we can express gratitude and practice our kindness, generosity and letting go with awareness. Dana is one of the Three Pillars of the Dharma. The other two are the cultivation of harmonious living (Sila), and the development of wisdom (Panna). During the time of the Buddha, and up to this time in Asian countries, the teachings begin with the cultivation of generosity, the first pillar of the dharma. But when the Teachings of the Buddha came to the West, the teaching of wisdom came first, without much emphasis on the two other foundational pillars (harmonious living and generosity). However, now many of us are beginning to see the importance of sharing the practice of dana and sila, otherwise those pillars will be a weak in our Western culture. It is important for all Three Pillars of the Dharma to support the continuation of the Teachings of the Buddha in the West in a strong and balanced way.

At the end of a retreat, there is an opportunity to practice dana towards those who have supported you in your practice. You may practice dana towards the teachers who have offered the teachings; towards the retreat center staff, or towards the organization that supported bringing these teachings to you. The offering of all these activities is a practice of dana.

**adapted from Cloud Mountain Retreat Centre*