

Guidelines for Dharma Sharing

These Guidelines are intended to assure a safer space and support communication that is open, compassionate, and healing.

1. *Practice loving mindful non-violent speech that water our positive seeds.* We attempt to speak from our heart, with words that nourish us and those in our circle. Dharma Sharing spaces attempt to offer a safer space by all of us being mindful that our words can cause harm, whether intentional or not. We may feel intimidated to speak with kind and loving speech in our everyday lives; in our circle we have the opportunity to practice loving and compassionate speech knowing that we will not be labeled as ‘weird’ or ‘naïve’. This is a practice that is supported by the circle of friends, all attempting to heal through our action of thought and speech.
2. *Practice deep listening.* We know that by simply listening deeply to what is being shared, focusing our full attention to the person speaking, we are already offering healing. This collective attention to the person sharing through deep listening offers an energy of attention, awareness, and good intention. We try not to go off into our own stories, that may be similar or different by noticing how our mind might wander. We breathe in and out, let that thought go, and come back to the present moment by offering the person sharing our full attention.
3. *All that is shared in the circle, stays in the circle.* This practice assures us that everything shared in the circle remains confidential and we can trust our emotions and deep thoughts with the circle. After Dharma Sharing, if we want to talk with someone about what they said in the group, we can ask permission to continue the conversation. We are also aware that the person may choose not to do so, and we can respect and honor their needs.
4. *We speak from our experience and avoid theoretical discussions.* We are encouraged to share from our own experiences. We share from our own knowledge and understanding and avoid using theory. Our sharing about our past week(s) brings our daily life into the circle and how we are practicing in small and large ways. We share about our challenges and our successes and what we come to understand as we notice the moments of stopping and observing our thoughts, speech, and actions. This helps our friends in their practice. We can share about something we read at the beginning of the Dharma Sharing or heard during the Dharma Talk and how this impacts us.

5. *Indicate our intention to speak and when we have finished speaking by bowing.* In order for the circle to hold space for us, not interrupt, and know when we are finished sharing it is helpful to indicate when we are about to speak and when we are finished. We can do this by bowing into the circle (we join our palms together) and bow. When we bow, we are signaling to others that we would like to share. The circle of friends (Sangha, community) can bow back to us acknowledging that they are ready to listen deeply. When we are finished, we let the Sangha know by bowing again. We can also indicate our intention to share by placing our hand over our heart, lightly touching the floor, or raising our hand.

6. *We don't cross talk. Share with the whole circle.* We do not engage in cross-talk because this results in others in the circle feeling not included. Whatever we share is for the benefit of all those present. If we ask a question, we place it into the circle and if something shared previously touched something in us and we choose to share about this from our own experience, we share into the circle.

7. *Practice taking two to three mindful breaths between each sharing.* We can take mindful breaths in between each sharing to allow the previous sharing to sink into our heart and consciousness; or be released. Breathing into between sharings may be especially helpful if we heard something that may have touched something in us, stirring excitement, sadness, pain, joy, impatience. We can notice that these emotions have come up and let our breath sooth and take good care of them. In this way when we share, we are sharing from an awareness of our emotion and not reacting from our emotion.

8. *Allow each person an opportunity to speak before speaking a second time.* Stepping back if we have spoken and stepping up if we have not allow everyone an opportunity to share our practice with each other. In this way, we learn from each other. We can notice how many people are in the circle and gauge our time in speaking so that everyone would have an opportunity to speak if they choose.