

DHARMAMIND : Guidance for Running the Group

Our Meditation and Devotional Practices (the Form)

Āloka offered his teachings freely and openly, leaving over 250 hours of Dharma talks as well as five books and various interviews. “The form” was never explicitly documented but instead was actively lived through example and teachings. Although DM’s form is unique, it is firmly rooted in the wisdom of Zen Masters, cultivated through centuries of practice and honed by Āloka’s personal journey. It offers a very special framework that allows us to recognise our habits and discover our True Nature.

The Retreat Leader

Āloka saw the Retreat Leader as a pivotal person at day and residential retreats, expected to take the lead and command authority. They are a role model to whom we all defer, recognising that they too are human and may also make mistakes. They are key to maintaining the form:

- Keeps the retreat to the timetable.
- Leads all sitting and walking meditation sessions.
- Endeavours to maintain a retreat environment conducive to practice.
- Uses appropriate prompts to alert the Sangha to lapses in form and to maintain silence.
- Works with Support Team to resolve any issues.
- Involves the Group Leader as required.

A Retreat Leader is selected on an annual basis, primarily by the Group Leader, however, experienced DMers are encouraged to put themselves forward if they would like to be considered for the role. It is a magnificent opportunity for practice, to work with our self-consciousness, challenge our habits and conditioning, and grow our understanding of the form and the Dharma.

Guidelines for Practice

We offer the following guidelines to those attending day and residential retreats:

- We watch others and learn by example, supporting the Sangha by letting go of our individuality and creating a common, united form.
- Silence is a fundamental part of the form. Our retreats are held in silence, challenging us to drop our normal busyness and social interactions, and practice looking inwards.
- We support each other to maintain the form for the benefit of all, with wisdom and compassion.

Running Retreats

If we have enough volunteers who can offer regular help, we can create a Support Team. This team is put together by the Group Leader. Volunteers are asked to commit to 12 months if they feel able. Ideally some will remain longer for stability and continuity.

These roles are a fabulous way to practice the Dharma, an opportunity to take the teachings into activity and daily life, whilst working alongside like-minded people who support and encourage us to learn and grow. Conflict may also arise but this too is seen as practice and an opportunity to cultivate our wholesome responses and altruistic nature.

The list of activities naturally group into roles, and roles can be combined (subject to the financial rules in the Constitution). A sample structure is given below but ultimately it depends what volunteers come forward.

Retreat Manager

- Arranges and delivers the annual schedule of monthly Saturdays and residential retreats.
- Maintains relationships with Retreat Centres and makes all retreat reservations.
- Issue comms to DM via various media (email, website, Facebook) to announce retreats.
- Works primarily with Bookings Manager, Logistics, Cook and IT Manager.

Bookings Manager

- Maintains booking information for people attending residential retreats.
- Manages database of DMers wishing to attend, and records their relevant information.
- Works primarily with Retreat Manager, Accounts Manager and Cook.

Account Manager

- Maintains annual financial records for DM.

- Oversees all account activity and any member expense payments.
- Works primarily with Retreat Manager and Bookings Manager.

Logistics

- Arranges delivery of all required equipment to retreats.
- Maintains log of equipment and locations.
- Works primarily with Retreat Manager and Bookings Manager.

Cook

- Arranges and prepares meals at residential retreats.
- Organises food order, delivery and all preparations.
- Works primarily with Retreat Manager and Bookings Manager.

IT Manager

- Co-ordinates and delivers all IT infrastructure.
- Maintains relevant subscriptions and updates systems as required.
- Works primarily with Retreat Manager.