

# **Bank Holiday Retreat: A Glimpse of Eternity**

## **7 hours of spiritual devotion**

*“A day of mindfulness is a celebration of life.” Thich Nhat Hahn*

Experience “the art of living” as taught by Thich Nhat Hahn and S.N. Goenka. One day of semi-structured silence, to develop insight, and prepare our hearts and minds for worship.

*Our understanding of our own religious tradition may sometimes be enhanced by insights of other faiths. (Qfp 1.01)*

*Are you open to new light, from wherever source it may come? (Qfp 1.02.7)*

*It is bad when one thing becomes two.*

*One should not look for anything else in the Way of the Samurai.*

*It is the same for anything that is called a Way.*

*If one understands things in this manner,*

*One should be able to hear about all ways*

*And be more and more in accordance with one’s own.*

*Hagakure: In the Shadow of Leaves. Yamamoto Tsunetomo, 1716*

**Mon 28th August 2017 10am-5pm**  
**Friends Meeting House, Pakefield**

All friends are welcome to attend. Please bring a packed lunch.  
For more details please email [jim@otoole.me](mailto:jim@otoole.me) or text 07941 531009

This one day meditation and worship retreat is open to friends in Norfolk and Waveney, and will be held from 10.00-17.00 at Friends Meeting House, Pakefield Street, Lowestoft NR33 0JP.

All meditation teachings will be delivered via recorded audio. No meditation teacher will be present. No previous experience is necessary, however participants with trauma in their backgrounds are advised that deep meditation can expose repressed feelings and memories. We only have each other for pastoral support.

Every participant must agree to observe the five Buddhist precepts:  
No lying. No stealing. No killing. No intoxicants. No sexual misconduct.

We will observe Noble Silence\* from 10.30 to 15.30, except in case of emergency. During that period we will practice three meditation techniques together, in complete silence, including breaks.

Anapana, to calm our minds and deepen our awareness.  
Vipassana, to develop inner wisdom.  
Metta, to generate feelings of loving-kindness towards all beings.

Anapana led by Thich Nhat Hahn (b.1926 Vietnam). Author, Buddhist monk and peace activist. Nominated for 1967 Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King Jr. Founded Plum Village mindfulness community and retreat centre in the Dordogne, France, 1982.  
<https://plumvillage.org>

Vipassana and Metta led by S. N. Goenka (b.1924 Burma, d.2013 India). Gave an address, "Inner Peace For World Peace" to the U.N. Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, 2000. Founded an international network of Vipassana meditation centres, which offer ten day silent retreats, completely free of charge. Nearest centre for beginners is Herefordshire, [www.dipa.dhamma.org](http://www.dipa.dhamma.org) "Old students" who have completed a ten day course may attend shorter courses in Saxmundham, Suffolk, [www.sukhakari.dhamma.org](http://www.sukhakari.dhamma.org) Friends are advised that today's retreat represents around 5% of the length and depth of a Goenka 10-day retreat. Friends wishing to deepen their practice further are warmly recommended to apply.

Musical devotion.

*The fantastic style is especially suited to instruments. It is the most free and unrestrained method of composing, it is bound to nothing, neither to any words nor to a melodic subject, it was instituted to display genius and to teach the hidden design of harmony and the ingenious composition of harmonic phrases and fugues.*

*Athanasius Kircher, 1602-1680*

Church sonatas are usually performed by two players, separated in space.  
On this occasion, one player plays both parts, separated by time.  
From the moment the music begins, its end is inevitable.

## Programme

10.00-10.15 Arrive, drink tea and discuss logistics. Please arrive no later than 10.25.

10.25 Bell - affirm precepts and settle for meditation

10.30 Noble Silence\* begins. Meditation: Awareness of breathing (Anapana).  
Introduction by Thich Nhat Hahn

11.30 Break in silence, teas and coffee available

11.45 Bell - please settle for meditation

11.50 Meditation: Awareness of breathing and body sensations (Vipassana).  
Introduction by S. N. Goenka

12.50 Lunch in silence. Please be responsible for your own food requirements.  
Plates, cutlery, a microwave and a kettle are available to use.  
Please clear up mindfully, leaving unnecessary tasks until after Worship.

13.55 Bell - please settle for meditation

14.00 Meditation: Vipassana followed by Metta (loving kindness)  
Introduction and guidance by S. N. Goenka

15.00 Break in silence, teas and coffee available

15.15 Bell - please settle

15.20 Musical devotion: Sonata no.2 by Dario Castello (c.1590-c.1658)

15.30 Noble Silence ends, meeting for worship begins

16.30 Afterword, followed by tea and discussions.

17.00 End

\*Noble Silence applies 10.30-15.30 inside the building and within the Meeting House garden.  
*Noble Silence means silence of body, speech, and mind. Any form of communication with fellow participants, whether by gestures, sign language, written notes, etc., is prohibited.*

<https://www.dhamma.org/en/about/code>

*A period of deep silence is observed. This is very healing. We allow the silence and the calmness to penetrate our flesh and bones. We allow the energy of the Sangha (spiritual community) and its mindfulness to penetrate our body and mind. We walk slowly, aware of every step. We breathe deeply and enjoy the stillness and the freshness. Let us not talk to the person by our side; she or he needs our support, too. We need everyone to participate for the practice to be deep and joyful. Thank you for your joyful practice.*

Plum Village <https://plumvillage.org>

## **Meditation techniques**

### **Awareness of breathing (Anapana):**

Direct your attention to your breath. Notice where it is in your body. How does it change when certain thoughts arise? If you notice your mind has wandered, congratulate yourself. Bring your attention gently back to your breathing. In this way we cultivate our ability to sustain inward concentration.

### **Awareness of body sensations (Vipassana):**

If your mind is agitated, better to stick to awareness of breathing. If you feel calm and centered, begin to notice your body sensations. Start with a small area of your body, and pay attention to it for about a minute. What sensations are there? Notice how sensations arise and pass of their own accord. Do not react to pleasant sensations by craving more. Do not react to unpleasant sensations with aversion. Remain equanimous. Move your attention slowly around your body, knowing that every sensation shares the characteristic of impermanence.

Together with a moral code, observance of the five precepts, and a calm and focused mind (from Anapana meditation), practising Vipassana leads to the development of inner wisdom. See below for a fuller discussion of this by S. N. Goenka.

### **Loving Kindness (Metta).**

Having calmed our minds, and begun to develop inner wisdom, we now focus on a genuine wish to share the peace and happiness we have been cultivating. You may start with the people closest to you, or those for whom you are most grateful. Gradually extend this pool wider. Include their friends. Their families. Enemies. All humans. And finally, all living beings. You may find it helpful to repeat the following: "May all be peaceful. Joyful. Liberated. May all beings share my love. My joy. My happiness."

### **Meeting for Worship.**

Noble Silence ends for us to have a normal Meeting for Worship. Spoken ministry is welcome. We have been silent for over four hours. What impact, if any, does this preparation have on our experience of Worship?

*There is really nothing other than the thought that is right before you at this very moment. Life is just a concatenation of one thought-moment after another. If one truly realizes this, then there is nothing else to be in a hurry about, nothing else that one must seek. Living is just a matter of holding onto this thought-moment right here and now and getting on with it. But everyone seems to forget this, seeking and grasping for this and that as if there were something somewhere else but missing what is right there in front of their eyes. Actually, it takes many years of practice and experience before one becomes able to stay with this present moment without drifting away. However, if you attain that state of mind just once, even if you cannot hold onto it for very long, you will find that you have a different attitude toward life. For once you really understand that everything comes down to this one thought-moment right here and now, you will know that there are not many things you need to be concerned about. All that we know of as loyalty and integrity are present completely in this one thought-moment.*  
*Hagakure: In the Shadow of Leaves. Yamamoto Tsunetomo, 1716*

## **The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation**

The following text is based upon a talk given by S. N. Goenka in Berne, Switzerland. It can be found online at <https://www.dhamma.org/en-US/about/art>

Everyone seeks peace and harmony, because this is what we lack in our lives. From time to time we all experience agitation, irritation, disharmony. And when we suffer from these miseries, we don't keep them to ourselves; we often distribute them to others as well. Unhappiness permeates the atmosphere around someone who is miserable, and those who come in contact with such a person also become affected. Certainly this is not a skillful way to live.

We ought to live at peace with ourselves, and at peace with others. After all, human beings are social beings, having to live in society and deal with each other. But how are we to live peacefully? How are we to remain harmonious within, and maintain peace and harmony around us, so that others can also live peacefully and harmoniously?

In order to be relieved of our misery, we have to know the basic reason for it, the cause of the suffering. If we investigate the problem, it becomes clear that whenever we start generating any negativity or impurity in the mind, we are bound to become unhappy. A negativity in the mind, a mental defilement or impurity, cannot coexist with peace and harmony.

How do we start generating negativity? Again, by investigation, it becomes clear. We become unhappy when we find someone behaving in a way that we don't like, or when we find something happening which we don't like. Unwanted things happen and we create tension within. Wanted things do not happen, some obstacle comes in the way, and again we create tension within; we start tying knots within. And throughout life, unwanted things keep on happening, wanted things may or may not happen, and this process of reaction, of tying knots—Gordian knots—makes the entire mental and physical structure so tense, so full of

negativity, that life becomes miserable.

Now, one way to solve this problem is to arrange that nothing unwanted happens in life, that everything keeps on happening exactly as we desire. Either we must develop the power, or somebody else who will come to our aid must have the power, to see that unwanted things do not happen and that everything we want happens. But this is impossible. There is no one in the world whose desires are always fulfilled, in whose life everything happens according to his or her wishes, without anything unwanted happening. Things constantly occur that are contrary to our desires and wishes. So the question arises: how can we stop reacting blindly when confronted with things that we don't like? How can we stop creating tension and remain peaceful and harmonious?

In India, as well as in other countries, wise saintly persons of the past studied this problem—the problem of human suffering—and found a solution: if something unwanted happens and you start to react by generating anger, fear or any negativity, then, as soon as possible, you should divert your attention to something else. For example, get up, take a glass of water, start drinking—your anger won't multiply; on the other hand, it'll begin to subside. Or start counting: one, two, three, four. Or start repeating a word, or a phrase, or some mantra, perhaps the name of a god or saintly person towards whom you have devotion; the mind is diverted, and to some extent you'll be free of the negativity, free of the anger.

This solution was helpful; it worked. It still works. Responding like this, the mind feels free from agitation. However, the solution works only at the conscious level. In fact, by diverting the attention you push the negativity deep into the unconscious, and there you continue to generate and multiply the same defilement. On the surface there is a layer of peace and harmony, but in the depths of the mind there is a sleeping volcano of suppressed negativity which sooner or later may erupt in a violent explosion.

Other explorers of inner truth went still further in their search and, by experiencing the reality of mind and matter within themselves, recognized that diverting the attention is only running away from the problem. Escape is no solution; you have to face the problem. Whenever negativity arises in the mind, just observe it, face it. As soon as you start to observe a mental impurity, it begins to lose its strength and slowly withers away.

A good solution; it avoids both extremes—suppression and expression. Burying the negativity in the unconscious will not eradicate it, and allowing it to manifest as unwholesome physical or vocal actions will only create more problems. But if you just observe, then the defilement passes away and you are free of it.

This sounds wonderful, but is it really practical? It's not easy to face one's own impurities. When anger arises, it so quickly overwhelms us that we don't even notice. Then, overpowered by anger, we perform physical or vocal actions which harm ourselves and others. Later, when the anger has passed, we start crying and repenting, begging pardon from this or that person or

from God: “Oh, I made a mistake, please excuse me!” But the next time we are in a similar situation, we again react in the same way. This continual repenting doesn't help at all.

The difficulty is that we are not aware when negativity starts. It begins deep in the unconscious mind, and by the time it reaches the conscious level it has gained so much strength that it overwhelms us, and we cannot observe it.

Suppose that I employ a private secretary, so that whenever anger arises he says to me, “Look, anger is starting!” Since I cannot know when this anger will start, I'll need to hire three private secretaries for three shifts, around the clock! Let's say I can afford it, and anger begins to arise. At once my secretary tells me, “Oh look—anger has started!” The first thing I'll do is rebuke him: “You fool! You think you're paid to teach me?” I'm so overpowered by anger that good advice won't help.

Suppose wisdom does prevail and I don't scold him. Instead, I say, “Thank you very much. Now I must sit down and observe my anger.” Yet, is it possible? As soon as I close my eyes and try to observe anger, the object of the anger immediately comes into my mind—the person or incident which initiated the anger. Then I'm not observing the anger itself; I'm merely observing the external stimulus of that emotion. This will only serve to multiply the anger, and is therefore no solution. It is very difficult to observe any abstract negativity, abstract emotion, divorced from the external object which originally caused it to arise.

However, someone who reached the ultimate truth found a real solution. He discovered that whenever any impurity arises in the mind, physically two things start happening simultaneously. One is that the breath loses its normal rhythm. We start breathing harder whenever negativity comes into the mind. This is easy to observe. At a subtler level, a biochemical reaction starts in the body, resulting in some sensation. Every impurity will generate some sensation or the other within the body.

This presents a practical solution. An ordinary person cannot observe abstract defilements of the mind—abstract fear, anger or passion. But with proper training and practice it is very easy to observe respiration and body sensations, both of which are directly related to mental defilements.

Respiration and sensations will help in two ways. First, they will be like private secretaries. As soon as a negativity arises in the mind, the breath will lose its normality; it will start shouting, “Look, something has gone wrong!” And we cannot scold the breath; we have to accept the warning. Similarly, the sensations will tell us that something has gone wrong. Then, having been warned, we can start observing the respiration, start observing the sensations, and very quickly we find that the negativity passes away.

This mental-physical phenomenon is like a coin with two sides. On one side are the thoughts and emotions arising in the mind, on the other side are the respiration and sensations in the

body. Any thoughts or emotions, any mental impurities that arise manifest themselves in the breath and the sensations of that moment. Thus, by observing the respiration or the sensations, we are in fact observing mental impurities. Instead of running away from the problem, we are facing reality as it is. As a result, we discover that these impurities lose their strength; they no longer overpower us as they did in the past. If we persist, they eventually disappear altogether and we begin to live a peaceful and happy life, a life increasingly free of negativities.

In this way the technique of self-observation shows us reality in its two aspects, inner and outer. Previously we only looked outward, missing the inner truth. We always looked outside for the cause of our unhappiness; we always blamed and tried to change the reality outside. Being ignorant of the inner reality, we never understood that the cause of suffering lies within, in our own blind reactions toward pleasant and unpleasant sensations.

Now, with training, we can see the other side of the coin. We can be aware of our breathing and also of what is happening inside. Whatever it is, breath or sensation, we learn just to observe it without losing our mental balance. We stop reacting and multiplying our misery. Instead, we allow the defilements to manifest and pass away.

The more one practices this technique, the more quickly negativities will dissolve. Gradually the mind becomes free of defilements, becomes pure. A pure mind is always full of love—selfless love for all others, full of compassion for the failings and sufferings of others, full of joy at their success and happiness, full of equanimity in the face of any situation.

When one reaches this stage, the entire pattern of one's life changes. It is no longer possible to do anything vocally or physically which will disturb the peace and happiness of others. Instead, a balanced mind not only becomes peaceful, but the surrounding atmosphere also becomes permeated with peace and harmony, and this will start affecting others, helping others too.

By learning to remain balanced in the face of everything experienced inside, one develops detachment towards all that one encounters in external situations as well. However, this detachment is not escapism or indifference to the problems of the world. Those who regularly practice Vipassana become more sensitive to the sufferings of others, and do their utmost to relieve suffering in whatever way they can—not with any agitation, but with a mind full of love, compassion and equanimity. They learn holy indifference—how to be fully committed, fully involved in helping others, while at the same time maintaining balance of mind. In this way they remain peaceful and happy, while working for the peace and happiness of others.

This is what the Buddha taught: an art of living. He never established or taught any religion, any “ism”. He never instructed those who came to him to practice any rites or rituals, any empty formalities. Instead, he taught them just to observe nature as it is, by observing the reality inside. Out of ignorance we keep reacting in ways which harm ourselves and others. But when wisdom arises—the wisdom of observing reality as it is—this habit of reacting falls away. When we cease to react blindly, then we are capable of real action—action proceeding from a



balanced mind, a mind which sees and understands the truth. Such action can only be positive, creative, helpful to ourselves and to others.

What is necessary, then, is to “know thyself”—advice which every wise person has given. We must know ourselves, not just intellectually in the realm of ideas and theories, and not just emotionally or devotionally, simply accepting blindly what we have heard or read. Such knowledge is not enough. Rather, we must know reality experientially. We must experience directly the reality of this mental-physical phenomenon. This alone is what will help us be free of our suffering.

This direct experience of our own inner reality, this technique of self-observation, is what is called Vipassana meditation. In the language of India in the time of the Buddha, *passana* meant seeing in the ordinary way, with one's eyes open; but *vipassana* is observing things as they actually are, not just as they appear to be. Apparent truth has to be penetrated, until we reach the ultimate truth of the entire psycho-physical structure. When we experience this truth, then we learn to stop reacting blindly, to stop creating negativities—and naturally the old ones are gradually eradicated. We become liberated from misery and experience true happiness.

There are three steps to the training given in a meditation course. First, one must abstain from any action, physical or vocal, which disturbs the peace and harmony of others. One cannot work to liberate oneself from impurities of the mind while at the same time continuing to perform deeds of body and speech which only multiply them. Therefore, a code of morality is the essential first step of the practice. One undertakes not to kill, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct, not to tell lies, and not to use intoxicants. By abstaining from such actions, one allows the mind to quiet down sufficiently in order to proceed further.

The next step is to develop some mastery over this wild mind by training it to remain fixed on a single object, the breath. One tries to keep one's attention on the respiration for as long as possible. This is not a breathing exercise; one does not regulate the breath. Instead, one observes natural respiration as it is, as it comes in, as it goes out. In this way one further calms the mind so that it is no longer overpowered by intense negativities. At the same time, one is concentrating the mind, making it sharp and penetrating, capable of the work of insight.

These first two steps, living a moral life, and controlling the mind, are very necessary and beneficial in themselves, but they will lead to suppression of negativities unless one takes the third step: purifying the mind of defilements by developing insight into one's own nature. This is Vipassana: experiencing one's own reality by the systematic and dispassionate observation within oneself of the ever-changing mind-matter phenomenon manifesting itself as sensations. This is the culmination of the teaching of the Buddha: self-purification by self-observation.

It can be practiced by one and all. Everyone faces the problem of suffering. It is a universal malady which requires a universal remedy, not a sectarian one. When one suffers from anger, it's not Buddhist anger, Hindu anger, or Christian anger. Anger is anger. When one becomes

agitated as a result of this anger, this agitation is not Christian, or Jewish, or Muslim. The malady is universal. The remedy must also be universal.

Vipassana is such a remedy. No one will object to a code of living which respects the peace and harmony of others. No one will object to developing control over the mind. No one will object to developing insight into one's own nature, by which it is possible to free the mind of negativities. Vipassana is a universal path.

Observing reality as it is by observing the truth inside—this is knowing oneself directly and experientially. As one practices, one keeps freeing oneself from the misery of mental impurities. From the gross, external, apparent truth, one penetrates to the ultimate truth of mind and matter. Then one transcends that, and experiences a truth which is beyond mind and matter, beyond time and space, beyond the conditioned field of relativity: the truth of total liberation from all defilements, all impurities, all suffering. Whatever name one gives this ultimate truth is irrelevant; it is the final goal of everyone.

May you all experience this ultimate truth. May all people be free from misery. May they enjoy real peace, real harmony, real happiness.

MAY ALL BEINGS BE HAPPY

### **Qfp 26.12: Experience of God**

*So one approaches, by efforts which call for the deepest resources of one's being, to the condition of true silence; not just of sitting still, not just of not speaking, but of a wide awake, fully aware non-thinking. It is in this condition, found and held for a brief instant only, that I have experienced the existence of something other than 'myself'. The thinking me has vanished, and with it vanishes the sense of separation, of unique identity. One is not left naked and defenceless, as one is, for example, by the operations of the mind in self-analysis. One becomes instead aware, one is conscious of being a participant in the whole of existence, not limited to the body or the moment... It is in this condition that one understands the nature of the divine power, its essential identity with love, in the widest sense of that much misused word.*  
Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974