



Men's Winter Retreat 2016

About the Retreat

The Buddhist love meditations ('brahma vihāras') of metta, karuna, mudita and upekkha, are a rehearsal for real life, all those encounters with real human beings in the midst of their joys and sorrows. They culminate in upekkhā bhāvanā which is a contemplation of the human condition, how everyone is embodied within a flow of conditions and continually making the choices that create their future.

On the retreat we can get familiar with the whole range of emotions that human encounters stir up, from envy and resentment to anxiety, pity and gloom to craving, anger and possessiveness. All through, our ideal will be to access our innate humanity and respond from that level.

My own style of teaching is to introduce each of the brahma vihāras in a simplified three-stage form initially and then the longer version after we've had some practice. I also like to relate and combine them so that, for example, we positively rejoice in the strength and courage of someone who is able to respond really well to their suffering. The meditations start and finish with T.A.R.A: that Tender All-Receiving Awareness which forms the foundation of mindfulness, receptive awareness, that underlies all other meditations and is the basis of love itself.

Is there anything special I need to bring?

Bring whatever you need for comfortable meditation - loose clothes for example. And bring a full set of waterproofs and boots so you can roam about in the beautiful surroundings whatever the Scottish weather - often very cold and often wet at this time of year. So plenty of layers and thermal underwear would be a useful extra.

What can you expect from the programme?

The retreat day starts at 6.30am with a rising bell then a meditation at 7.00. There'll be up to six meditation sittings each day lasting about 40 minutes. Each day there'll also be one or two short explanatory talks and each evening will end with Buddhist devotional practice - puja or mantra.

There will be periods of silence on the retreat so we can attend more fully to immediate experience. Saturday night until Thursday afternoon will be without conversation except for teachings and 1:1 practice reviews. Then we leave on the next day, Friday.

The retreat runs across 25th December but we'll not be celebrating Christmas as such. However if you'd like to do some preparatory reading, 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens would be very relevant to our theme!

About the retreat team

Smritiratna has meditated regularly for over thirty years and led nearly 200 retreats including at least five on this theme. He will be teaching with the help of Vidyaraja and others so that retreatants can receive daily mentoring through 1:1 practice reviews.