

Zen Meditation



About the Lancaster Serene Reflection Buddhist Meditation Group

Meetings: Mondays 7.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, Lancaster
Contacts: Kate Shirra-Gibb - 01524 39918 or Paul Taylor - 01524 593621

Lancaster Serene Reflection Buddhist Meditation Group
Meetings on Mondays 7.30 - 9.45pm
Lancaster Friends Meeting House, next to railway station

People become interested in meditation for many reasons such as a need to find a deeper perspective on their lives, to come to terms with stress, or because of a personal crisis. However, it is not always easy to find the motivation to follow a consistent and stable meditation practice. The group provides a focus where we can meditate with others, draw encouragement and learn from them, and examine how Buddhist insights can help us practically in living a deeper perspective.

The following are typical questions that people coming to the group often ask:

What normally happens at group meetings ?

Our meetings provide a supportive environment where we can meditate together and also learn about Buddhism and Buddhist practice. The evening includes sitting and walking meditation, and also a reflection, talk or discussion on issues arising from people's practice and relevant Buddhist themes. Before or after meditation there is often a short recitation (in English translation) and an incense offering, in which our practice is dedicated for the benefit of all beings: it is fine for newcomers just to listen. There is also a cup of tea and the opportunity to say hello to members of the group.

What type of meditation do you practise ?

The Serene Reflection Meditation tradition (*Japanese: Soto Zen; Chinese: Ts'ao-Tung Ch'an*) emphasises the unity of meditation and finding the heart of compassion, love and wisdom in mindful daily living. It is the longest-lived extant Zen tradition and its form of meditation practice, translated as 'Serene Reflection Meditation'

(Japanese: 'shikan-taza' or 'Zazen'), is straightforward. Meditation is the foundation through which we can experience the deepest Truth directly for ourselves. In Serene Reflection Meditation, we learn to sit still with an open and alert mind, accepting thoughts and feelings that arise, without judging them. The practice enables a profound transformation to take place in us as we allow the innate compassion, love and wisdom within us to reveal and express itself in and through our varied and diverse lives.

Can anybody sit in the meditation positions you use, for example, if they are not particularly flexible or older?

Posture is important, but you won't be expected to sit cross-legged. Most people use either a chair or a meditation bench; some use a meditation cushion. What is important is that your body is well-balanced so that you can sit in an alert and relaxed way. For comfort we recommend loose-fitting clothing.

I just want to meditate. Do only Buddhists come to the group ?

No, many people come simply wanting to learn to meditate. Buddhism is not a proselytising religion, and it is common for people from other religious backgrounds or with no particular commitment to any faith to attend groups like ours. As long as you feel comfortable with the style of our meetings, you are very welcome to come.

What would I expect on my first visit ?

It helps if you can arrive by 7.25pm, about five minutes before the meeting starts. You don't need to give advance notice but, if you wish, you can ring one of our contacts below to confirm that the group is meeting that particular evening. Initial orientation and meditation instruction takes about half an hour, and then you'll join the group for sitting meditation, tea and the reflection, talk and discussion. We aim to finish around 9.30pm - 9.45pm.

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Who organises the group ?

Its regular members share the organising of the group. Your initial contact will be with one of our experienced members who give meditation instruction. Group members come from a variety of backgrounds including, for example, nursing, teaching, medicine, building, studying, therapy, home and family caring, and business.

What will it cost ?

In the spirit of Buddhism, people are invited to donate what they feel is appropriate. There is no set charge. We estimate that if group members as a whole give on average about £1.50 in the 'begging bowl' per meeting, this covers our costs, which include room hire. If your income is limited there is certainly no obligation.

Are you part of a wider organisation ?

The group was formed in 1980. It is one of about 30 similar groups associated with Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, a Zen Buddhist monastery and retreat centre situated in Northumberland (for further information, if you are interested, see <http://www.throssel.org.uk>, or ring 01434 345204). Male and female members of the monastic community there, visit the group regularly to give talks, and to lead meditation and practice days in Lancaster. They are also available on request to give private spiritual counselling.

Contacts - for further information ring

Kate Shirra-Gibb on Lancaster 39918, or

Paul Taylor on Lancaster 593621 (daytime)