



One Earth Sangha

The Shambhala Sit Spot

Practice Guide

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We would like to encourage the practice of sitting outdoors. In our Buddhist tradition, the Buddha practiced meditation in the forests and jungles as a wandering mendicant, and attained enlightenment sitting under a tree. The practice of sitting alone in nature is a very human practice found in many cultures around the world. It does not replace our meditation practice in a meditation room, but complements and extends our practice into the natural world.

Sitting indoors is a very protected situation, which helps bring stability to a wild and scattered mind and allows our mind to settle deeply. Our meditation room is relatively quiet and protected, and it is a powerful place to sit alone or in a group. We can close the door and not be interrupted by visitors. We can control the temperature to be comfortable. We are sheltered from rain, snow, and wind. We can decorate our space with supporting pictures of our teachers, symbols, offerings, and the like. A meditation room is a human-centered environment of our own creation.

Once we have some stability in our sitting practice, we can leave the shelter of our meditation room and begin to practice outside. Being indoors most of the time, we could become isolated from the spontaneous and unpredictable elements, weather, animals, insects, birds, and all the other beings and energies in our world. Outside, we enter into a vast world without boundaries. This is a warrior's practice of meeting the world directly. We are immersed in the elements and fresh air. There are no doors or windows or ceiling over our head. We are out in the open.

At first, we might feel vulnerable and exposed, even anxious, and our mind can become windy and distracted. Therefore, we should place more emphasis on raising our gaze and including our sense perceptions. Our gaze is soft and panoramic, and we pay more attention to peripheral awareness and the total field of vision. Our hearing extends out in all directions, sensitive to the many sounds that occur, whether it be the sound of traffic or



the sound of a river. We smell the earth, and feel the temperature, humidity, and wind. It's said that there is no bad weather, just bad clothing; as long as we dress appropriately, we can relax and enjoy sitting outside, even in the rain or on a cold winter day.

It is best to find a "sit spot" where we will sit each time. It is a special place for us to sit alone at first, and then with others. Our sit spot should be very close to where we live, no more than a five-minute walk. It could be as close as our back yard, or we could walk to a nearby park. The most important thing is that it is close, easily accessible, has some privacy and protection, and therefore feels safe and good to sit there. It does not need to be an ideal woodsy, wild place. It just needs to be outdoors. If we live in a high rise apartment, we could sit outside on our porch or at the very least, sit where we can look out an open window.

Our practice outside could be 15 minutes to an hour. Regularity is the key, at least a few times a week, so that we get to know our area, and our area gets to know us. We are not alone outside, as all the creatures who live in that place are very aware of us. Much of the power of having a sit spot is deepening our sense of place. We observe the lay of the land more closely, learn where our water comes from and where it goes, experience the subtle changes of the seasons, and meet the local plants and animals. We wake up to where we are, joining the earth, sky, and all beings in our heart.

Being Together

After we experiment with the sit spot alone, we can invite two or three friends, family, or colleagues to join us. We engage the same practice—in silence—but with others. After the allotted time in silence, we could then briefly check in about what we felt and witnessed. Notice the subtle differences about being outside alone, and being outside together. This may reveal something about community, and the interrelationship between the human and the natural world.