

## **Solitary Zen Retreat**

### **Guide to being a Hermit (in and outside of the city)**

This is a basic guideline for those who wishes to undertake in intensive solitary Zen retreat. These are not hard and fast rules but a compilation of my own experience and those in which I read and researched over the years.

#### **1. PURPOSE**

Why do a solitary retreat when we can do retreat with others and get the same benefits?

You don't get the same benefits doing a solitary retreat vs. a group retreat. Group retreat in someways provide a false sense of security and also is directed a certain way according to the goal of the guiding teacher. The methods might benefit some people but not everyone. Solitary retreat is directed solely for one person, in which any method which works for the single person is utilized. It is directed towards the progress of one single individual. Thus the benefits is many folds greater than group retreat.

Another benefit of solitary retreat is that under intensive solitary retreat, the practitioner's false sense of security is removed. There is no one around to give you the false sense of security, you are left to face all the fears and illusions that your mind can come up with. You are left to have nothing to experiment on except your own mind. All distractions of society is removed.

Most often, the purpose of a solitary Zen retreat is to deepen understanding of Buddha teachings through meditation and to get direct insights into one's mental inner workings without distractions. It is like a controlled laboratory experiment where all other elements of distractions is removed.

No one had gained deep awakening without embarking on a solitary retreat. The Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed etc... all the great sages of history had embarked on a solitary retreat in a cave or forest somewhere to deepen their understanding and insights.

## **2. Who can benefit from solitary Zen retreat?**

Traditionally, these retreats were not recommended for beginners or non-monastic. It is because that traditionally the Dharma were usually not taught in-depth to householders and literatures about Zen were not common outside of monasteries. Today, the practice of meditation and the writings of the dharma is very common and accessible, but the right understanding of the Dharma is required before embarking in solitary retreat. Do not go into solitary Zen Practice or Retreat without a teacher! At least you have good knowledge of advance course and sutta understanding before embarking on this journey. If you haven't received the right teachings from a teacher on the advanced Zen Topics, don't go into a solitary retreat.

If you have never heard of the word "Kundalini, Tummo Fire, Spiritual Emergency... etc.." and came across someone who knows about them well. Do not do a solitary retreat.

## **3. Elements required for a solitary retreat.**

- a. A guiding teacher who you can get in-touch with.
- b. Basic Food & Water
- c. A place away from all distractions
- d. No tv, no internet, no telephone, no technologies.
- e. Right understanding of the Dharma
- f. Some experiential understanding of meditation

## **4. How long to do a solitary retreat?**

Depending on the person, the scheduled time can be one month, three months, a year to several year. Or even with more resolve, indefinitely until true awakening is found.

## **5. What happens during a solitary retreat?**

You will experience for the first few days, stirring of thoughts, feelings and lots of agitation, questionings of why you're even doing it. This is the habitual patterns coming up and resisting peace. Like a glass of water muddied with sediments and doesn't want to settle. Learn to observe these happenings and provide no resistance to them. After a few days, these conditionings will subside.

## **6. How do I gauge my progress?**

You can try to keep regular contact with your teacher for questions or dharma combat or directions. You will likely experience progress in ways you won't expect, the best way to go about is not to expect anything and let the progress show itself. You can't miss it!

## **7. When will I know when to leave my retreat?**

For those with a vow of long term retreat, when the time comes, you will know when to leave it. The Bodhidharma was sitting in retreat for 9 years before the time came for him to leave it. Be patient!