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<https://github.com/deobald/dhamma-handbook>

# Practical Dhamma Handbook

## Reflective Civility for Oneself

### Raison D'être

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This is a living document, to be read by the present author. The intent herein is to clearly document “my” behavioural intentions, adjacent and parallel to meditation, so that “I” (the author) may regularly reflect on them. This document is in no way intended to preach to other Old Students. Readers are actively encouraged to re-author this document as the advice within may not apply to their language, economy, or culture.

The intent of these recommendations is twofold. First, to improve the environmental experience for one's co-meditators. Second, to continuously refine meditation centres as beacons of progress in the material world.

# Cleanliness

## **Brush Teeth**

Twice a day, morning and evening or morning and after lunch. Brush with a soft toothbrush, scrub the tongue with a second toothbrush (as to avoid polluting the toothbrush intended for teeth) or tongue cleaner, floss, and rinse/gargle with mouthwash or salt water.

## **Provide Soap**

The centre you are visiting may not have enough soap. Centres in India, in particular, do not provide soap in common toilets or common urinals. There are usually a minimum of two sinks per common toilet/urinal area. Bring four (4) or more bars of soap. Soap may also be available for sale at the office but try to bring soap from outside to avoid depleting supplies.

## **Remove Waste**

As a meditator, you are permitted to remove litter near the dhamma hall, the pagoda, the dining hall, common bathing area, common toilet area, residences, or paths. Do not search for litter; keep your eyes downcast and only remove litter which other meditators with eyes downcast will see.

As a server (particularly before and after a course), you must remove all litter from the entire campus and speak to those not in Noble Silence if you see them littering.

## **Wash Dishes**

Wash dishes very thoroughly, using minimal water. Wash hands before washing dishes, if possible. Quickly rinse utensils then turn off the tap, scrub with soap with water not running, then again rinse under water. Dry dishes completely if dish towels are provided.

# Efficiency

## **“Not One Grain of Rice”**

This phrase is not figurative. Other than necessary organic waste (seeds, pits, inedible fruit skins), never waste any food. If bread is provided with a meal, save one piece to wipe your plate clean of liquids so it may be eaten. Ensure fruits are eaten to completion: skins and seeds should have no edible flesh remaining on them.

## **“Shoes Out”**

In Japanese centres, one will notice that shoes and boots are lined up neatly — facing outward — outside any building or placed neatly in racks. Do this.

In addition, however, there is a deeper principle at work here. One must straighten one’s shoes anyway when preparing to wear them again. If they are straightened in advance, the work is taken care of early. Another example of this is to keep documents, CDs, and DVDs neatly organized. If a binder of DVDs is kept straight with label text horizontal, the next person to use the DVDs will have an easier time.

# Appearance

## **Wear Simple Clothes**

“Vaccha, not one, not one hundred, not two hundred, not three hundred, not four hundred, not five hundred. There are many more lay disciples of mine, **wearing white clothes** leading the holy life.”

This description from the Pali Canon may be taken literally. Wear all white in the local dress. Clothing with words, symbols, and colour will distract other meditators.

## **Arrange Your Seat**

After every sitting, straighten your seat. Align it with the adjacent seats, if necessary. Smooth the fabric of the seat and the cushion. Neatly fold blankets and additional clothing you wish to leave on the seat.

## **Attend to Visible Hair**

Men should shave or trim beards regularly to keep a neat appearance. On longer courses, one may want to trim the hair of the head, which will require bringing shears to the course.

# Sound

## **Lift Chairs**

When straightening your chair in the dining hall, do not drag it. This produces a sound. Lift it and gently place it completely under the table. Similarly, straighten chairs of anyone who has neglected to do so before leaving the dining hall.

## **Chew Silently**

In addition to observing internal sensations while chewing, be sure to chew food as silently as possible. Keep the mouth closed.

Chew one handful or utensil full of food at a time; do not rush. Do not slurp.

## **Walk Silently**

Particularly around the dhamma hall and pagoda, walk as silently as possible. Do not stomp or drag your feet. This also applies to residences during open meditation periods.

Walk quietly whether it is a meditation period or not but take extra care when others are meditating.

## **Close Doors Quietly**

If a door is known to squeak or slam, attend to it carefully when opening and closing.

## **Do Not Shout**

When a course is not in session, never shout. Try to avoid speaking loudly or raising your voice. Do not talk over another person.

# Serving

## **Read the “Dhamma Server Guidelines”**

Adhere to the guidelines provided by the centre. These very clearly outline the expectations of your duties and how they will help the meditators. Clarify any questions or doubts you have with the teacher.

## **Clean Group Areas**

When serving, ensure the dhamma hall, pagoda, paths, common toilets, and dining hall are clean whenever they are visited. If there is not time to clean something, write a note to yourself to return to it when there is spare time.

## **Clean Your Residence**

As a server, you are setting an example. New students, in particular, will watch you carefully and may not understand how you are spending your time. Ensure your own residence is always as clean as you would keep it if you were attending the course as a meditator.

## **Provide Soap**

Particularly when serving a course, bring extra soap from outside for the common sink/toilet/urinal areas. Basic hygiene is a must.

## **First Aid**

Know basic first aid. Familiarize yourself with the staff, teachers, and servers who are doctors or medical professionals in case their help is required in an emergency.

## **Remain Invisible**

Though difficult, try not to be noticed by the meditators in any circumstance other than still meditation postures and as someone present to maintain Noble Silence in all spaces on the campus.

Paradoxically, ensure you are visible and available if any student requires assistance. Your presence should be known only to those who are specifically looking for your help.

## Centres

Provide these services directly, wherever and whenever possible. Particularly endeavour to volunteer your specific skills: electrical/plumbing, electronics, software, painting, gardening, design, architecture, acoustics, etc. Also make these recommendations to centre management indirectly.

Rather than verbal feedback, which is easy to forget, provide this section (“Centres”) to the teacher when asked for feedback at the end of serving a course. Document new ideas twice during the service of any course: Once for your own purposes so you may amend this document. Second, amend this document in pen before providing it to the teacher.

### **Eliminate Smoke**

Speak to a local Ecologically-oriented organization, such as the Nature Conservation Foundation (<http://ncf-india.org/>) capable of discussing the importance of two things with neighbours of the centre: tree cover and burning. Centres are usually in rural areas near farms and plantations, which require the private maintenance of tree cover for sufficient forest. Crop burning and the burning of leaves/garbage is prevalent in manual-labour farming and should be stopped.

Motives here are twofold: the environmental impact of activities near the centre should continuously reduce. As mentioned previously, the centre should act as a beacon of progressive attitudes and behaviours toward our physical world. Secondly, meditators and volunteers confined to an enclosed area can develop serious health issues. Existing issues like asthma will be exacerbated.

### **Provide Soap**

Soap should be provided at *all* sinks. Basic hygiene prevents a multitude of diseases. The anus and the genitals are outlets of waste products from the body. Students and volunteers should be encouraged to wash their hands thoroughly at every available opportunity. Men, in particular,



are often in the habit of rinsing hands without soap (or skipping the sink altogether!) after touching their genitals and providing soap is passive encouragement toward hygienic behaviour.

### **Segregate Waste**

Thankfully, ample dustbins are provided at all centres. Waste should be segregated as granularly as possible. At a minimum, segregate organic, recyclable, and reject waste. Karnataka State has mandated such 3-way segregation and provides excellent, easy-to-read guidelines in many languages: <http://www.2bin1bag.in/pamphlets>

Further segregate paper, plastic, metal, and glass whenever possible. In climates with monkeys, racoons, and other intelligent mammals who take interest in human waste, provide animal-proof dustbins whenever possible.

### **Dispose of Waste Properly**

At some centres, garbage has been seen burnt on the course site. This is extremely wasteful and poisons the environment for all creatures there. **Never burn garbage.**

If some waste needs to be burnt for safety reasons, such as medical and sanitary waste, provide these to the local waste management authority so they may be properly incinerated at a dedicated facility.

### **Use Progressive Energy Sources**

Avoid fossil fuels and wood. Prefer electricity as it provides a better abstraction for energy transmission and conversion.

Donate solar panels, wind generators, and Lithium-Ion battery installations to your local centre. Centres should be encouraged to investigate these technologies. Excess electricity should be provided back to the local power grid.

Where solar and wind are unavailable due to space or cloud cover, encourage the centre to purchase “green” electricity from the local power company: power from renewable sources.

## **Resuse Waste Water**

Dhamma Pith at Ranoda Village (Ahmedabad) has an **excellent** waste water management system which can be studied and duplicated. At Dhamma Pith, all sewage, R.O. waste water, and grey water is piped into local pits where it is purified and reused for the gardens. This system is entirely off-grid and does not require the use of septic tanks.

## **Learn First Aid / CPR**

Long-time volunteers, servers, and staff should all be trained in first aid by the centre, if possible or sent to first aid courses elsewhere.

## **Understand that “Design is Everything”**

Provide your own skills in this regard. From well-made software to beautiful gardens, it is imperative that each centre continually refines its design.

Signage is an obvious example. The signs in Dhamma Adicca, in Japan, are beautifully designed.

Architects, gardeners, designers, software engineers, plumbers, etc. can all participate in this philosophy. Centres can remain unassuming and without grandeur, yet beautiful.

## **Design Flawless Signage**

“Flawless” here refers to form and function. Signs should be clearly translated, unambiguous, and unobtrusive to meditators. And yet, the signs should be a pleasure to observe, balanced in colour, typeface, size, and spacing.

Form is also about content. Dhamma Thali contains a very helpful sign in the main dhamma hall which simply says “Please do not crack knuckles”. This is very helpful.

The following pamphlets from Dhamma Adicca and a kitchen sign from Dhamma Pith provide vivid examples.



	पुरुष	महिला
जुना साधक	०७	०६
नवा साधक	२२	२३
कुल साधक	२९	२९
धम्म सेवक	०४	०३
आचार्य	०१	०१
पाई टाईम साधक	०३	००
कुर्भयारी	०३	०५
कुल संख्या	४०	३८

### **Wash One's Own Dishes**

Though some centres may have the facility or resources available to provide dish-washing services to meditators, they should try to avoid it wherever it is possible to construct a sink for students.

### **Provide HEPA Filters**

HEPA filters are commonplace throughout the world as a way to ensure indoor air is clean and safe. Until humanity eliminates the burning of substances for energy and transportation, such filters remain necessary. These may be provided as part of the central ventilation system of a building or individually as stand-alone units.

Where air pollution is at a maximum, in India and East Asia, HEPA filters may be provided at the very least to students and volunteers with asthma and other breathing disorders.

### **Provide for Staff and Contractors**

One day, it would be ideal for all paid staff and contractors participating in work at any centre to also be serious meditators. However, until then, we must recognize that centres are global and therefore must meet global constraints. For now, poverty remains a reality. Within one's own organization, however, it is entirely possible to eliminate. This applies to any organization: businesses, non-profits, academia, and meditation centres.

Meditation is not always an easily accessible activity. For those working long days every day of the week, it is not possible to make time to meditate twice a day, much less attend a 10-day course.

Staff at centres may include: kitchen staff, cleaning staff, gardeners, plumbers, electricians, architects, construction workers, and the like. Their needs should be met and time constraints loosened so that they feel financially secure and comfortable enough to learn & practice meditation, if they so desire. Do not pay staff according to the "market" but according to their needs — these are not always congruous. Ensure staff have ample transportation, healthcare facilities, dental facilities, insurance, and other requirements for their basic well-being.

Children of staff and contractors — especially construction workers — should be provided with daytime care and education. Babies may be sent to a creche. Children must be sent to school. Though a meditation centre is a warm, comfortable environment for children in general, a construction site should not be their daily home nor should they ever miss any part of their education. If the finances of the centre are so restricted as to prevent this possibility, look for Old Students and government services which may fill the gaps. A child's care and education is absolutely essential and no longer optional, even in the poorest areas of the world.

Staff and contractors themselves should be provided basic education, where necessary and possible. Cleanliness and hygiene, literacy in the local language, basic financial management, and mathematics can be taught or provided as adult courses.

When contractors are dismissed from working at the centre, see to it that help provided to them has continuity by connecting them to non-profits and/or government programs which may help them continue to grow and learn. This will be easier if they have become meditators and return to the centre regularly.

# Reflection

## Only Reflect

Though mentioned at the beginning of this document it should be reiterated: This document is in no way for others. **Reflection can only be on one's own behaviour.** The reader/author should be very cautious not to judge another meditator or server by these measures.

## Do Not Use This Document Externally

Set an example where possible but otherwise toward others one must practice only tolerance, equanimity, and Metta. This is the most important point.