

Term Student Program

An Intensified Practice Period

The Term Student program is designed to provide to intensify practice and sangha connections for a specific period of time. Terms are approximately three months long, which mirrors a traditional period of practice during which monks trained together intensively during the rainy seasons.

Committing to a term provides a clear beginning and end to a period when Zen practice and involvement at Bright Way take a higher priority in your life. Because you are not making a long-term commitment, and because you are joining others in the term, the chances of following through on your intention to intensify practice can be greatly improved.

The Term Student program consists of three basic elements:

- Your own daily practice at home and/or work;
- Regular involvement at Bright Way;
- The special Term Student events.

These are tied together with a Vow of Practice. A Vow of Practice is something that can be done on your own, independent of the Term Student program. It often includes a theme, or statement of purpose. When we wish to intensify our practice, there is usually an underlying motivation that calls us to do this. It can be helpful to recognize and identify this purpose, and include it in the vow.

After the statement of purpose, include a description of your basic daily practice. This includes things like your daily zazen, any service you do, verses you incorporate in daily life, reading and study. Flexibility is encouraged, with a “bottom line” description, i.e. “I will try to do morning zazen five days a week, but will always do it at least two days a week.” The idea is to make a vow that will cause you to stretch, but is doable over the whole period of time.

Then list the weekly, monthly or other special events you plan to attend: things like Bright Way Zen practice on Sundays, Mondays or Tuesdays, attending Indra’s Net, participation at other sanghas, or any sesshin you will do. Out of all these events, the only ones that are required are the Term Student retreats, although the one-day retreat in the middle of the term is highly encouraged.

Term Student Opening Retreat

During the opening retreat each term, students summarize their vows during the term dedication ceremony and then place them on the altar. This ceremony is taken from the monastic term dedication ceremony in which monks agree to spend the term in training together. Sharing our vows at this time permits the group to witness each person’s commitment, and we also have the opportunity to share something of what it is that brings us together to practice.

One major purpose of the Term Student program is to create a venue in which a group of lay people can go through a practice period together. Because we are not a monastery, it can be difficult to meet each other in the intimate way that develops when people live in close proximity for an extended period of time. To help with this, much of the first retreat each term is spent connecting with each other.

In preparation for the Opening Retreat, people are asked to take the time to write out three personal outlines. You would start by looking back over your life and writing a **chronological outline** of your life events. Next, you would write a “**karmic outline**.” This is a list of events or circumstances that have marked you in some way, and have contributed in making you who you are. These can be specific things like alcoholic parents, or more general ones, like growing up in the country, or near a lake. Third, make a “**spiritual outline**.” This is, perhaps, not very different from the “karmic outline,” but we have found that what people have in mind when they take the time to look back on their lives causes different things to emerge. Think specifically about things that have formed your spiritual point of view. So please take the time to look back from these different perspectives.

What you write can be for your own use only, or you may give it to the teacher if you wish. This exercise is to prepare you to make a 10-15 minute presentation at the first retreat of the term. The idea is for each person to say something about who they are and what has brought them to this practice. After each person speaks, the others will ask questions.

Term Student Closing Retreat

The closing retreat will involve similar kinds of exercises, interactions and sharing in order to bring closure to the term and check back in with one another. We usually draw “mandalas” to represent our experience of the term (mandalas are pictures of a whole composed of many parts) and then present them to the group, and then take questions. At the end of the retreat we are released from our vows.

Deep and intimate Sangha connections are vitally important in helping us bring the Dharma to fruition in a real way. That is what we hope to accomplish in the Term Student program.

Requirements: This program is intended to help people deepen their practice once they have already been regularly involved with Bright Way for at least a few months. If you are interested, speak with Domyo in person or by email: info@brightwayzen.org.

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