

Valley Streams Zen Sangha
Fall Study Period 2018, October 1 – November 12

Our fall study period echoes the centuries-old tradition of Buddhist communities gathering for “winter rains” retreats. This is a time for deepening one’s study of the Buddha Way.

In a traditional Zen practice period you are in residence. Your days are regulated by a schedule of zazen, service, formal oryoki meals, and work around the temple grounds and kitchen. Simply following the schedule, you find yourself carried along in the stream of practice. You sit zazen, hear and study teachings, and meet with a teacher for dokusan or practice discussion. Your individual effort is reinforced by the collective effort of the sangha.

The Valley Streams study period replicates some aspects of a traditional practice period, but relies more on your individual motivation and effort. It requires faith and confidence to remember you are joining other Sangha members when you sit, study, and work.

Here is the commitment that Valley Streams’ study period participants make:

1. Participate in Study Period events: Lectures/discussions on Oct. 1, 8, and 15; November 12. One-day Sitting on November 3. Optionally, join the Thursday morning study group, which will also reading and discussing our study period “textbook:” Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara by Ben Connelly.
2. Set or re-set your home zazen practice. If you’re not sitting regularly at home, set a schedule for daily sitting, at least five days a week. How long you sit can be adjusted according to your work life or family obligations. The point is to regularize your sitting, to start building the momentum that brings the Dharma to life. Zen Master Dogen tells us (in Fukanzazengi) that zazen is the Dharma gate of joy and ease; only embracing the practice consistently will reveal the truth of this statement.
3. Read the book Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara, our study period theme. We will chant the Thirty Verses during the study period. Frequent reading of the verses may commit parts or all of them to memory. Lectures and discussion sessions during the study period will provide opportunities to check your understanding and study the text with others. Remember that all of Zen practice is about studying who you are, as you are, under the light of Buddha’s teachings. Such study and observation changes our reality.
4. Optionally, make an appointment to see guiding teacher Myo Lahey or Tanto Jim Hare. Meeting with a teacher or practice leader is an essential element of practice. The Perfection of Wisdom texts urge us to question the teaching and to test our understanding with others.
5. Finally, you can request a practice period buddy. We will match more and less experienced practitioners or match those who request each other as buddies. Buddies can choose the frequency of their meetings, which might be by phone or in person. Rarely do we get opportunities to meet each other like this.

A Practitioner’s Guide: Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara by Ben Connelly with a forward by Norman Fischer. Wisdom Publications 2016.