

Self-Course FAQs

Now that Vipassana centers around the world have closed because of the coronavirus pandemic, many students are interested in sitting a self-course at home or in another non-center location. The following document was developed with input from Teachers around the world. It will be reviewed later in 2020.

What is a “self-course”?

A self-course is a Vipassana meditation course that you sit on your own, without any guidance or with minimal guidance from an assistant teacher.

Am I qualified to sit a self-course? Do I need to get permission?

In principle, anyone who has successfully completed a 10-day Vipassana course as taught by S.N. Goenka can decide to do a self-course. It's a good idea to discuss your plans with an assistant teacher, who can help with any questions you may have. Contact your local center to be put in touch with an assistant teacher.

How many days is a self-course?

You can sit a full 10 days, starting on the evening of Day 0 and finishing on the morning of Day 11. You can also choose to sit for a shorter period, maybe one, two or three days; this would be a good way to get used to sitting a self-course. Don't attempt to sit longer than 10 days on your own.

Where can I sit a self-course?

Usually, people sit a self-course in their home or the home of a fellow Vipassana meditator. Do not try sitting a course at a place used for a different spiritual practice.

If I am not sitting at a center, what sort of place is suitable for a self-course?

Ideally, the place would be able to function as a kind of temporary “mini meditation center” for the days of your self-course, with all the facilities provided at a real center. That is, it would be private, quiet and self-contained, with space for you to sleep, meditate, bathe, eat and/or prepare meals, and perhaps exercise. If this is not practical, try at least to arrange a separate room where you can sit without being disturbed.

The course area should be free of distractions. It should not contain any religious objects. Turn off and put away electronic devices that you won't need. If you are using an electronic device as an alarm clock or for playing recordings, set it in airplane mode, disconnect from Wi-Fi and disable notifications. Put away reading matter in a place where it won't attract your attention.

Do not go out of the course area from the beginning to the end of the course. Do not communicate with the outside world until after you finish the course.

Can two or more people sit a self-course together?

Certainly, but as far as possible it's best for them to have separate accommodation.

What about meals?

A friend or family member may offer to cook for you, or you can arrange for meals to be delivered. Otherwise, you can do your own cooking. But keep food preparation simple, and make sure it doesn't interfere with meditation hours. Meals must be vegetarian without eggs. Have all the necessary ingredients on hand at the start of the course, or else have someone bring the groceries you need.

Is any guidance available to me in a self-course?

Some centers may give you the name of an assistant teacher to be contacted if you have questions or difficulties during your self-course. More usually, self-course students work on their own.

How do I prepare myself for sitting a self-course?

Go through the [Code of Conduct](#) and make sure you are familiar with it. This is your handbook for the course.

Make sure you have any recordings you will want to play during the course (see following question), as well as a device on which to play them.

From the start of the course until after you start practicing Metta, you'll be observing Noble Silence. That includes not checking your phone for messages. Inform friends and family that you'll be unavailable during this time, but arrange a way for them to contact you in case of an emergency.

What recordings can I listen to during a self-course?

You can play the following recordings:

- Goenkaji's early-morning chanting
- group sittings
- the 10-day discourses

If you wish, you can also play Goenkaji's dohas during the breakfast, lunch and tea breaks.

You can download the recordings before the course starts from www.discourses.dhamma.org. Contact a center near you for the username and password.

You can also download the material from the Dhamma.org Mobile App for iOS and Android. Go to the www.dhamma.org home page for links to download the mobile app.

Any other recordings with teaching instructions are for use only in a course led by an assistant teacher.

What's the day-by-day program in a self-course?

Before you start, make a strong determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*) to complete the self-course, following the precepts and the timetable.

On the first evening, repeat the opening formalities (see page 5):

- Take refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.
- Take Eight Precepts. If you have a health issue, you can relax the Sixth Precept and have something light to eat at 5:00 p.m. and/or 9:00 p.m.
- Surrender to the Buddha and your present teacher. [Note: In the absence of a teacher, the Dhamma is the teacher.]
- Request to be taught Anapana meditation so that you can experience the peace of *nibbāna* within yourself.

Then start practicing Anapana.

Continue with Anapana for the first third of your course and then switch over to Vipassana. This will be on the afternoon of Day 4 if you are sitting 10 days. If your course is shorter, adjust the timing as appropriate.

Devote at least an hour to the first sitting of Vipassana. Start by making a request to be taught Vipassana meditation so that you can experience the peace of *nibbāna* within yourself. Practice Anapana for a little while and then switch to Vipassana.

After you start Vipassana, the three one-hour group sittings each day are sittings of strong determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*). That is, you try to meditate as seriously as you can without changing your position. If it becomes too uncomfortable, move as little as possible while trying to keep your focus, and then continue meditating without any sense of defeat. Don't try *adhiṭṭhāna* sittings at other times, and don't try them if they might worsen a physical weakness or injury. Outside the one-hour group sittings, work in whatever way is comfortable for you) and change position or take a short break when you need to.

From 9:00 a.m. on Day 10, start practicing Metta. If your course is shorter than 10 days, start Metta earlier. Afterwards, allow yourself to relax a little in preparation for going back to ordinary life. Once you start practicing Metta, you can talk with people at the course site. Do not communicate with the outside world until after you finish the course.

At the end, share your merits with all beings.

What's the daily timetable in a self-course?

Follow the same timetable as in a regular 10-day course:

4:00 a.m.	Morning wake-up
4:30–6:30 a.m.	Individual meditation
6:30–8:00 a.m.	Breakfast break
8:00–9:00 a.m.	One-hour meditation (group sitting)
9:00–11:00 a.m.	Individual meditation
11:00–12:00 noon	Lunch break
12:00–1:00 p.m.	Rest
1:00–2:30 p.m.	Individual meditation
2:30–3:30 p.m.	One-hour meditation (group sitting)
3:30–5:00 p.m.	Individual meditation
5:00–6:00 p.m.	Tea break
6:00–7:00 p.m.	One-hour meditation (group sitting)
7:00–8:15 p.m.	Evening discourse
8:15–9:00 p.m.	Individual meditation
9:00 p.m.	Take rest

If I do a 10-day self-course, can I count it as one of the courses required for me to qualify for a Satipatthana course or a long course?

Unfortunately, no. You can only count courses that were conducted by an assistant teacher.

What if I still have questions about sitting a self-course?

Contact a center where you recently sat or an assistant teacher who knows you.

Course opening formalities

Tisaraṇa-gamaṇaṃ

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

Aṭṭhaṅga-sīla

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Abrahmacariyā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Musā-vādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Surā-meraya-majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Vikālabhojanā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Nacca-gīta-vādita-visūkadassanā-mālā-gandha-vilepana-dhāraṇa-maṇḍana-vibhūsanāṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Uccāsayana-mahāsayanā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.

Pariccajāmi

Imāhaṃ bhante attabhāvaṃ jīvitam bhagavato pariccajāmi.

Imāhaṃ bhante attabhāvaṃ jīvitam ācariyassa pariccajāmi.

Kammaṭṭhānā

Nibbānassa sacchikaraṇatthāya me bhante ānāpāna kammaṭṭhānāṃ dehi.

Vipassana Day formality

Kammaṭṭhānā

Nibbānassa sacchikaraṇatthāya me bhante vipassanā kammaṭṭhānāṃ dehi.

Going for Triple Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dhamma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

The Eight Precepts

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from killing living creatures.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from taking what is not given.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from sexual activity.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from wrong speech.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from intoxicants, which are the causes of heedlessness.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from eating at the wrong time.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from dancing, singing, music and worldly entertainments; [wearing] garlands, perfumes, cosmetics; jewelry and other bodily adornments.

I undertake the rule of training to abstain from using high or luxurious beds.

The Surrender

Sir, I surrender myself completely to the Buddha [for proper guidance and protection].

Sir, I surrender myself completely to the teacher [for proper guidance and protection].

The Request of Dhamma

For the sake of witnessing *nibbāna*, Sir, grant me the meditation object of Anapana.

The Request of Dhamma

For the sake of witnessing *nibbāna*, Sir, grant me the meditation object of Vipassana.