

Disability & Chronic Illness Sangha Welcome Statement

The purpose of this group is to become a refuge where participants can share experiences and shine the light of *dhamma*—the Buddha’s teachings—on our lives. The intent is to reduce isolation while providing nourishment for our hearts and minds to open to their natural clarity and peace.

A Few Words on Accessibility: Our guiding teacher—Reya Stevens—invites us to see what happens when we view accessibility as a practice of love, interconnection, and liberation. Does this perspective change our relationship to the process of creating accessibility for ourselves or others? If so, how? With this inquiry in mind, here are a few practices that might be new to you that the group has adopted to increase our accessibility:

1. Early in the meeting, we each say our name out loud after our technical support person gives us the cue. For members who can’t see our names on screen, this helps them identify people by their voices. For all of us, it can be a sweet and simple way to bring ourselves into the meeting.
2. We use the chat function sparingly. When written messages are sent in chat, the electronic speech readers that blind and low vision people use read those messages out loud. When a chat message is sent while another member of the group is speaking, the simultaneous sounds of the member’s human voice and the speech reader’s electronic voice drown each other out. Each source of sound makes the other impossible to follow, so the listener misses out on both conversations. That’s why we mostly avoid using chat. When we do use it in limited ways, we pause and ask someone to read it out loud so that everyone can give it their full attention and chat becomes more accessible to all.
3. We have an online listserv where notices sometimes get sent from and discussions can arise between meetings. We would love you to be part of the conversation. You can sign up for the listserv later in the meeting when we put the sign-up link in the chat box. Or you can ask the CIMC office for help getting connected. And, if you didn’t catch something in this opening welcome statement, you’ll find a copy of it there on the listserv.
4. One aspect of creating a caring community is the quality of our participation. Towards this end, we invite people to speak and listen attentively, without doing other things online. We also ask what is said here to be kept confidential: It’s fine to talk about what you learned or experienced here, but please don’t use names or other identifying information.

Please understand that few (if any) of us have ever before tried to hold an accessible, cross-disability, dharma group in an online environment. We are a work in progress and your feedback and participation are invited. We probably won’t get everything right—especially when different needs and perspectives conflict—but we’ll do our best. If you have a suggestion, a question, or a concern—and definitely if something about our meetings is inaccessible to you!—please let us know. If it doesn’t feel right to speak up at our meetings, you can post something on the listserv, write to Reya, or write to the office.