Facilitating Guided Meditation

AOR 5100

Prerequisite Courses

Developmental Reflections for AOR Instructors (AOR5000)

Prerequisite Reading

None

Course Guidelines

This work requires direct supervision by a reviewer and Instructor appointed by the Superintendent. The brother working on this course is therefore expected to establish and maintain frequent communication in order to coordinate supervision opportunities.

Introduction

Facilitating guided meditations is an important role for Instructors, and it may be performed for either groups or individuals. This role carries significant responsibility, and so it should never be taken lightly. For example, one never knows when something that seems simple or routine to oneself can be profoundly deep and groundbreaking for someone else. When acting in this role, it is expected that you faithfully execute your duty to ensure such experiences are ethical and effective. Regarding ethics, you should be mindful of the principles to which you committed in the Code of Ethics for AOR Instructors. To be as effective as possible, you should conscientiously learn, develop, and hone all the skills necessary to safely and successfully guide others through potentially powerful inner experiences.

Part 1 – Learning the Eight Steps

There is a natural progression of steps involved in guiding an individual or group through a meditation. Contemplate each of the steps below, reflecting on how you may have experienced them when being guided in meditation by someone else. Consider the relevance of each to (a) the ethics and (b) the effectiveness of facilitating inner experiences for others. These steps are written for working with groups, but are easily adapted to assisting an individual.

1. Consider Your Audience
   How experienced in meditation are the persons you are serving? What kinds of meditation are/aren't familiar to your audience? How much time do they have? Does anyone need to leave earlier than others? How will these factors affect your work?
2. Prepare the Space
   Is there enough room? Are the accommodations adequately comfortable with regard to things like seating, temperature, and individual space? What can be done to manage distractions like noise or intrusions? Will you need a clock visible to help you with timing? Will you need time

and materials, such as incense and a candle, to ritually prepare the space? Will music be included at any time?

3. Welcome Participants
   Thank everyone for coming and politely state that it's time to focus on meditation. Ask for cell phones to be completely silenced, and set an example by letting others see you doing so. Ask if you are speaking loudly enough for everyone to clearly hear you.
4. Provide Introductions as Needed
   Unless you are certain everyone knows you, tell them your name, your connection with the AOR, and that you'll be facilitating the meditation for this session. Consider whether or not it would be helpful and time-efficient to welcome participants to introduce themselves.
5. Explain What to Expect
   Briefly describe the purpose and phases of the meditation. How detailed do you want to be about the specific operations? Could more detail or less detail enhance the experience? Consider informing participants of any connection the meditation may have with specific elements of their Masonic experience, such as particular degrees, themes, or symbols. With beginners, provide some instruction on how to respond to distractions, whether external, such as latecomers entering the room, or internal, such as thoughts going off on tangents. You might also wish to address the "no thoughts" myth, and offer basic instruction on good meditation posture. Consider stating that closing eyes is recommended but not required, and that gazing blankly at some fixed point is an option.
6. Narrate Meditation Through Four Phases (See the attached scripts as examples.)
   a. Relaxing and Centering
      Consider inviting them to begin by silently invoking the aid of Deity. This is good Masonic practice and can be reassuring to those who have concerns about the possibility of meditation being spiritually dangerous. With a group of experienced practitioners, you might invite them to guide themselves through this phase, and then allow a suitable period of silence.
   b. Proceeding Through Specific Operations
      It is preferable to narrate the specific operations from memory, but a script may be used if necessary. If a script is used, you should have carefully read through it and practiced it aloud enough times that you can proceed smoothly with good diction. Also, with a paper copy of a script, be careful to turn pages as quietly as possible.
   c. Reconnecting with the Present
      With most meditations it is wise to guide participants into re-grounding with focusing on the breath and awareness of the five senses. In some cases, less attention is given to this phase in order to remain in or closer to a certain state of consciousness.
   d. Ending the Meditation
      State that the meditation has ended. Prompt participants to open their eyes and move and stretch their limbs.
7. Facilitate Reflection with Five Skills
   a. Welcoming Sharing

Advise participants that they are welcome to offer anything they wish about their own experiences of the meditation, such as new insights, puzzling, unusual, or problematic moments, and questions. Ask everyone to remain mindful that there are others in the room who may need space and time to speak, and that this time is also an opportunity for deep listening. Advise participants that it is best to share one's own experiences or questions rather than comment on the experiences of others. Offer words of encouragement and thanks when people speak, especially on the first occurrence. With groups where participants are hesitant to share, consider offering an explanation of the practical benefits of having to translate our experiences into language. You may wish to set an example by briefly disclosing some of your own experience with the meditation.

b. Active Listening

Listen to understand, which means not distracting yourself with thoughts about what you might say when someone stops talking. Be cautious about assuming what someone means or needs. Consider restating the speaker's points/questions in your own words to confirm you understood. Ask questions to gain clarity. Point out similarities among things different participants have said, which builds the sense of belonging and congruence in the group.

c. Scanning the Group

Avoid focusing too much attention on the person speaking. Use both your direct line of sight and your peripheral vision to be aware of other individuals in the group. Watch for non-verbal cues, such as raising hands, nodding or shaking heads, cocked heads, or changes in facial expressions. Allow it to be obvious that you are trying to be mindful of everyone.

d. Managing the Flow

As you scan the group, follow up on cues that someone might have something to say, especially with those who haven't yet spoken. If one or a few participants seem to be dominating the conversation, respond to the cues of less outspoken individuals by directly inviting them to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Be mindful that participants can be fully engaged with the group's reflections even though they are silent and seem detached, and may benefit by not being disturbed. If someone declines to speak when asked, honor that choice.

e. Being Careful with Advice

Avoid giving unrequested advice. Your role is not to be a guru, spiritual advisor, therapist, or life coach. Know that the best response to requests for feedback or advice is often to put such questions back to the participants, asking how they might respond if such were asked of them. On simple matters of technique, you may be able to easily offer helpful tips. You may also be able to recommend specific methods for specific purposes, but don't prescribe. Avoid issuing judgments about others' practices or experiences. Be quick to acknowledge your lack of knowledge or experience with any practice, system, or tradition. If you offer an opinion, then clearly state it as such. Make it a point to welcome the input of someone in the group whom you trust to be more informed on any point of discussion. In addition to exercising these cautions with

yourself, you should also be mindful of and responsive to advice-giving behaviors of others in the group. Intervene and redirect as necessary.

8. Wrap up and Close
   Announce that it's time to end the session. Restate some of the more common or poignant reflections. Inform them about the next time and location for meditation or other AOR activities. Let them know if you will be available to anyone who wants a more personal discussion about contemplative practice or the AOR. Thank everyone for their participation.

Objectives:

- Commit to memory all underlined portions of the eight steps, four phases, and five skills, by number/letter in the given order, and correctly recite them to your reviewer without any assistance.
- Document at least 120 minutes of discussion with your reviewer about the relevance of these steps, phases, and skills to (a) the ethics and (b) the effectiveness of guided meditations.

Part 2 – Learning Voice Skills

Your voice can have significant effects on the experiences of participants in a guided meditation. Carefully consider each of the following skills, including reflection on how you may have experienced them while being guided in meditation by someone else, whether in person or in a recording. Experiment and practice with these skills, making audio recordings with the attached scripts in order to evaluate your performance.

1. Tone
   The tone of your voice is expressed in two primary ways:
   a. Volume
      The loudness of your voice should be sufficient to clearly reach everyone in the room, but consider the probability that some participants will not hear as well as others. As noted above, it is wise to ask participants if they can hear you well enough. Be mindful of your volume as you proceed through the meditation, ensuring that you maintain it in order for all participants to receive each part of your instructions.
   b. Inflection
      As you narrate through the four phases of meditation, participants will naturally sense and respond to the emotional energies expressed through your voice. In order to express such energies, you must call upon your own relevant feelings. Therefore, prior to the meditation you should consider what feelings will be most conducive to intentions of each phase. Keep in mind that it is not necessary to exaggerate your feelings, in part because in a meditative state your participants are likely to be more sensitive to them.
      i. *Relaxing and centering* benefits from a calm, peaceful, soothing quality.
      ii. *Proceeding through specific operations* may require various energies. Would any of the operations benefit from communicating the feelings naturally associated

with experiences such as awe, wonder, hopefulness, happiness, puzzlement, resoluteness, etc?

iii. *Reconnecting with the present* can be aided by a gently assertive tone.

iv. *Ending the meditation* with an attitude of positivity and a sense of accomplishment helps set the stage for reflection.

2. Diction

   This skill is about speaking clearly, using good enunciation with appropriate words that are properly pronounced. Regarding word choice, try to use terminology that will be familiar to all participants. Avoid the use of metaphysical lingo or jargon. For example, unless you know everyone present understands the word *chakra*, use something more descriptive like *energy center*, or simply draw attention to the physical location in a fitting way. With pronunciation, consider the importance of sounding out each syllable rather than blending or slurring them. Strive to moderate any accent or dialectical differences that may habitually be present for you. When following a script, be sure you are familiar with every word.

3. Pacing

   As a general rule, it is best to proceed with all narration at a pace that is slow and steady. Doing so helps in two ways: (a) it establishes a rhythm that helps participants be more attentive to your words and tone; (b) it enables you to use better diction.

4. Repetition

   Repeated use of the same words and phrases can assist participants with focusing in the processes you actually intend to facilitate. It also leaves mental space for them to be more aware of what is occurring within them. Using different words with similar meanings, or stating things in different ways tends to make people think more about your words, stimulating analytical processes in search of possible implications. This natural reaction can distract participants from smoothly following along in the processes you actually mean to facilitate. But repetition combined with effective pacing has melodic effects that, much like those of music or poetry, naturally induce the desired states of consciousness. In some cases, such as in discursive meditations, you may intend for participants to be more analytical about the words being used, and might therefore speak with more spontaneity and variety.

Objectives:

- Document at least 120 minutes of practicing these skills by recording without interruption, listening to, and critiquing yourself narrating each of the attached scripts.
- Demonstrate and refine your skills by narrating each script for your reviewer to his satisfaction. This may be done electronically, but cannot be a recording.

Part 3 – Supervised Practice

This part of the course requires you to perform actual facilitation of guided meditations for a group, under the direct supervision of a recognized Instructor. In both cases, the group must actually be physically present, but the Instructor may be present electronically. If your reviewer is not a recognized

Instructor, then before proceeding with this part you must inform the Superintendent of your need for one.

Objectives:

- Demonstrate and refine your skills to an Instructor's satisfaction by facilitating at least two scripted meditations through all eight steps.
- Demonstrate and refine your skills to an Instructor's satisfaction by facilitating at least two unscripted meditations through all eight steps.

Part 4 – Reflective Writing

Reflect upon your experiences with Parts 1-3. In at least 2000 words, summarize your experience, noting how it was personally meaningful to you in one or more of the following areas:

- understanding of self;
- relationships with others;
- experience and appreciation of Freemasonry; and
- relationship with the Divine.