

# Meditation in the Escalante Canyons

A backpacking retreat in the Escalante Canyons in Utah

RETREAT TEACHER – Susie Harrington

October 17-23, 2010

## THE RETREAT

**Meditating in the Desert:** This trip provides a unique opportunity to explore the power of a silent meditation retreat while immersed in the beauty and wildness of Southern Utah. We will participate in an age-old tradition of going into the wilderness as a support for spiritual practice and inquiry. Immersed in nature, we will use meditation practices to increase our receptivity to interconnectedness, and to the preciousness and beauty that surround us. Through our enhanced openness and quiet, we have the opportunity to explore deeply the truth of our own nature. We will be in a supportive community as we explore this inner and outer journey.

**Spiritual Awakening:** This retreat will offer a variety of sitting, paddling and walking meditation practices, and an opportunity for deeper exploration through group process work and individual meditation instruction. This is a Buddhist meditation retreat with the leader bringing her own experiences to the practice. This trip will be held in Noble Silence and requires a commitment by participants to this practice. Keeping noble silence for seven days in the wilderness is in itself a powerful practice.

**On this retreat,** the leaders will emphasize nature as our teacher, providing us with a special opportunity to open to the Dharma. The peace that comes from spending time in the desert will provide a natural support for cultivating tranquility and joy in our hearts and clarity in our meditation. Sitting in the beauty of the canyon country gives us ready access to rapture, that quality of delighted interest and awe, and one of the seven factors of enlightenment. In many retreats, we're asked not to look around. In this retreat, we'll be encouraged to look around a lot and to delight in what we see.

## PRECEPTS

We will undertake to follow the five traditional lay precepts of non-harming during our time together, forming a reliable basis for mutual trust in our little community:

1. To refrain from killing and from other actions that harm oneself or others.
2. To refrain from stealing, from taking anything that is not freely given.
3. To refrain from sexual activity during the retreat.
4. To refrain from lying and from harsh, abusive or damaging speech.
5. To refrain from consuming alcohol, illegal drugs, or other intoxicants.

## **DANA AND RETREAT COST**

The Buddha asked that the teaching of the dharma be offered freely, without charge, since it is of infinite value, and beyond any price that could be put on it. The tradition of 'Dana', or mutual giving, has supported Buddhist cultures for 2500 years. In Asia, the monks and nuns offer the teaching, and the lay people support the monastery and fill the monks' begging bowls each morning as they walk through the village on alms rounds. It is a beautiful exchange, in which the hearts of both giver and receiver are opened in joy and gratitude, and love flows between them.

In accordance with that tradition, in the spirit of generosity, Susie is offering her teachings, time, and service. The \$325-\$225 fee covers only the retreat costs: food, group gear, and other incidental expenses. At the end of the retreat there will be an opportunity for participants to practice generosity by offering financial support to Susie in appreciation. This will support Susie in her continued teaching of the dharma. Please know that your contribution allows these retreats to continue, and without ongoing support, the teachers would not be able to offer extraordinary retreats of this sort.

## **TRIP OUTLINE**

The trip will take place in the spectacular Escalante Canyon region of south-central Utah. On the first morning we will caravan from Escalante to the trailhead. We will leave our cars at the trailhead, and begin our hike in the morning, backpacking for two days into our base camp, where we will stay for three days. We will retrace our steps to the trailhead the last two days.

## **BEGINNING AND ENDING**

The trip will officially begin and end at the trailhead. Participants will need to arrive in Escalante, Utah in time for a 4pm pre-trip orientation meeting on October 16th. Directions to the meeting place will be sent later. We will leave early the next morning, October 17, for the trailhead. We will hike back out to the trailhead early afternoon, October 23. You will be responsible for your own dinner and lodging on the evening of October 16. Please eat breakfast before we meet on the first morning. Lunch on the last day will be included:

There are motels and B&B's in Escalante. You may wish to reserve a place for before or after the trip. Camping is usually available on public lands around Escalante and at the state park just outside of town. To assist with sharing travel and lodging, we will send you a request for travel information as we near the trip date.

## **TRAVEL BY AIR**

There is no public transportation to Escalante. If you are flying from another part of the country, the best way to get there is to fly to either Salt Lake City or Las Vegas and rent a car to drive to Escalante. It is a 5-6 hour trip from either airport.

## **THE RETREAT**

The first two days and the last two will be traveling days; the middle three days we will settle in a base camp, with the opportunities for day hikes.

Days will begin with meditation, then breakfast, and then further instruction, walking meditation, sitting meditation, and qi gong. Afternoons and evenings we will have time in camp for walking and sitting meditation, dharma teachings and check-in circles.

Sits will mostly be 30 minutes, though some may be longer. There is flexibility regarding attendance at teaching and meditation sessions; however, attendance at sessions that address safety and plans of the group or which involve group cohesion are required.

There will be some opportunities to explore the area around camp. Retreatants will each have a daily work duty to help the flow of the trip, and to provide service to all. Most duties will be cooking or camp related.

Near the end of trip, there will be an opportunity to spend one day and one or two nights camping and practicing in solo retreat. This is a favored aspect of the retreat: for some the greatest pleasure is being far away and alone, and for others camping alone but with the proximity of others is preferred. Distance and the amount of solitude are up to each individual.

## **WEATHER**

October is change-of-season time, and we could have weather that ranges from warm to chilly. Days will most likely be warm and nights cold. Rain is definitely possible. You will need to be prepared for a variety of weather, so please pay close attention to the equipment list.

## **EXPERIENCE AND EQUIPMENT**

You will be carrying a full backpack, including your own camping gear plus a share of food and group gear. You must be fit enough to carry a 35 to 45 pound load over rough terrain. Backpacking places different demands on muscles and joints than running, cycling or other sports. Hiking while carrying a loaded backpack is the best preparation.

You need not have previous backpacking experience; however, previous camping experience is helpful. You do need to be healthy and have sufficient fitness and agility to carry the full backpack for up to five miles per day.

It is helpful to bring whatever will allow you to sit in meditation (an inflatable zafu, a stack of stuff sacks, etc.) A Thermarest or Crazy Creek chair for eating, talking circles etc. (or for sitting practice) is highly recommended.

## **MEALS**

Our breakfast, lunch and dinner menu is vegetarian and simple. Please tell us in advance of any dietary restrictions. Tea will be provided but if you have personal preferences, we ask that you bring your own hot and cold drink mixes (tea, coffee, Gatorade, etc.). Dried fruit, fresh fruit, and nuts will be provided, but if you would like special snacks, you may bring them. Food, stoves, and cooking equipment are provided; you need to bring your own cup, bowl, and eating utensils. Cooking, cleanup, and other camp duties are shared.

## **WATER**

We will camp each day by a water source. Please bring your own water purification method, either a filter or water treatment tablets. These can be obtained at outdoor stores.

## **SAFETY**

Safety needs to be a primary concern for each of us, since what happens to anyone affects the whole group. Being conscious with every step is the best protection from injuries.

## **TEACHER**

**Susie Harrington** has been meditating since 1989, and been engaged in Insight Meditation practice since 1995. She has completed Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Dedicated Practitioners Program and Community Dharma Leader program. Her primary teachers are Guy Armstrong, Jack Kornfield, and Tsoknyi Rinpoche. She is also influenced by Adyashanti and her collaborative work with Tory Capron. She is a graduate of the Professional Hakomi Therapy training – a mindfulness and body-based psychotherapy modality. She lives and teaches in Moab. She has been an outdoor professional for over 30 years, including years as a river guide, mountaineering guide, and backcountry ranger for the National Park Service.

## TO APPLY

### REGISTRATION

The total fee for the trip is \$325-\$225. The sliding fee reflects a minimum cost--made possible by the donations of contributors to Sky Mind--while the higher cost represents full cost of the trip plus some support to Sky Mind. Any fee above the minimum is tax deductible.

A \$100 deposit and completed registration forms will reserve you a place up to 30 days before the trip. (You may also choose to pay the full fee, and the cancellation policy remains the same.) If you apply within 30 days before the start date, please remit full payment. Reservations are confirmed on a first-come, first-served basis. Please fill out a separate form for each person. If the retreat is full, you'll be placed on a wait list. If that happens, don't be disheartened, as there will probably be cancellations. No payment (other than the required deposit) is necessary for those on the wait list.

### PAYMENT

Full payment is due September 17. If it is not received on time, the reservation may be canceled and the deposit forfeited. If you cancel after making your reservation, your \$100 deposit will be forfeited. If you cancel prior to September 17, the required deposit will be forfeited (and any remainder returned to you). If you cancel after September 17, the \$100 deposit will be forfeited and the remainder returned to you provided we can fill your spot. If we cannot fill your spot, we will only be able to refund a small portion of your fee, dependent on meeting our group expenses.

You will receive a full refund if you cancel from the wait list, or are still on the wait list when the retreat starts.

### PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION

You'll be sent a confirmation notice by email, and you will receive a list of suggested clothing and equipment. Further information, such as a map and detailed directions on when and where to meet and how to get there, will be sent with your confirmation.

### TRIP INSURANCE

You may wish to purchase trip insurance, available at any travel agency. It will protect your investment in non-refundable airline tickets if you have to cancel or if the retreat is canceled due to circumstances beyond our control. Most policies also cover medical evacuation costs in case of injury--a good deal for backcountry travelers, since a backcountry medevac almost always involves the use of an expensive helicopter, which you would otherwise be responsible for.

### OBLIGATIONS OF RETREAT APPLICANTS

This is a non-profit trip sponsored by Sky Mind Retreats. We will all be responsible for our own safety and the safety of the group and for doing the work that is part of a wilderness trip. For this reason, please consider your physical condition. You will need to be able to take care of yourself, as well as be helpful to the group on a day-to-day basis. Because of the remoteness, in consideration of the other retreatants, we ask that you be in good health and strong enough for four days of backpacking. Please evaluate your circumstances, and call or email if you are unsure of the appropriateness of this trip for you. You are expected to carefully review all information furnished, understanding that this is a meditation retreat rather than a recreational outing, requiring a commitment to noble silence and practice. Also, we ask that you understand as thoroughly as possible the physical and mental demands of the trip and the risks to be encountered and that you properly equip yourself for the backcountry. Part of our practice will be to mindfully commit to non-harming, so that our impact on the environment is minimal and the rights and privacy of other retreatants are respected.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Please feel free to contact [Quilley Powers](mailto:Quilley Powers) at [skymindretreats.org](http://skymindretreats.org)