

Dear Kripalu Center,

I have registered for an upcoming yoga retreat. If you could forward along the following information to the instructor and the other retreat participants it would be a great service to everyone involved.

Fellow yogis: because I have signed up for this retreat, you might make certain assumptions about me. Before those assumptions lead to any actions that could create an uncomfortable friction between us, let me tell you a little about myself and shed a little light on how the retreat might be better for all of us.

**I am not nice.**

I am rigid and neurotic. I have a touch of OCD, a lot of personal space issues and I am a germophobe. I am aware of all this and it is part of the reason I do yoga. But don't confuse my yoga practice with some spiritual quest. I'm just trying to survive and yoga seems to help.

**I am not friendly.**

I'm not nasty or mean. I am just not *nice* in the way you might expect because I will be there - in the Berkshire mountains, in a former Jesuit monastery, lying on the floor and chanting OM.

I am not un-friendly or discourteous, I am just not overly friendly and I will not go out of my way to be so. I'm efficient with my friendliness. I dole it out on a need-to-show basis.

**I don't hug.**

And when I say I don't hug I mean it. It's not just some hard edge I come to the retreat with and it will melt away, softened by the love, kindness and support of my fellow yogis. I don't hug strangers, period. I hardly hug friends or relatives – even in times of crisis – but I definitely don't hug strangers. And sweaty people.

If at some point during this retreat, the instructor decides we are going to a) join hands in a circle, b) do partner work that involves any more bodily contact than smiling at the person across from us, or c) have someone else use our yoga mat, I will pretend I have to go to the bathroom and come back when the activity is over. And I will take my mat with me.

If for some reason I end up touching someone; if for example, I don't pull my hand away quickly enough when someone tries to shake my hand and introduce himself, I will have to immediately disinfect my hands with a hand sanitizer gel. That will likely make us both uncomfortable so please avoid this sort of greeting. Bowing seems appropriate given the circumstances and is certainly more hygienic.

How about we institute a no touching rule for the retreat?

It's nothing personal. It's not some statement about your personal hygiene; it's just that unnecessary bodily contact with strangers makes me gag and wretch, and coincidentally also increases the likelihood of the spread of germs.

If someone uses my yoga mat I will have to wash it before I can use it again. And as you may have guessed by now, I can't use a public mat – one of those mats in the back of the room that have been touched by the moist body parts of countless strangers. The same goes for all other yoga props. I will bring a set of props to the retreat. These props are mine and solely for my use. They will be labeled as such to avoid confusion.

**I don't "share" and neither should you.**

If at any point in the retreat we have a sharing circle, I will not share. I will make something up that seems appropriate, but I will not share anything personal about myself. I suggest you do the same.

If you see me in the hallway or dining room and decide to strike up a conversation, please do not attempt to share. I beg you. Please don't tell me about tragic personal illness, recent deaths of loved ones or your messy divorce. It's not that I don't care, it's just that I'm not qualified to counsel you on any of those things and I think they should only be shared with trained professionals or late night radio call-in shows.

**Okay, I don't care.**

I don't.

I mean, I "care", but I don't care enough to know what to say. Let's just get it out of the way right now: I hope you feel better, I am sad for your loss and I'm sure he was a bastard, but I don't need to know the intimate details of your personal situation. It will make me uncomfortable. I am likely to say something inappropriate (see above about lack of training) and it will be misconstrued as not being compassionate.

It may make you feel better, but your comfort at the expense of my comfort is not a good trade-off.

**I'm not compassionate.**

I don't really *get* compassion. I don't understand it. I am hoping more yoga will help me with this, but I assure you the list of things I need to work on is long and compassion toward your problems is pretty low on the list.

Let's keep things friendly, but in a surface sort of way. However, if in casual conversation you tell me that you are there to "talk to the animals," "learn coyote medicine" or have your aura photographed, I am going to mock you. I will probably nod, smile and feign interest (as I slowly inch away from you). I will probably not mock you to your face, but inside I'm writing an essay about you and in the essay you're a New Age kook.

I told you it would be better not to share.

**Don't tell me how much you love the food.**

I hate the food and I'm not going to pretend I like it. It's not so much the vegetarian, macrobiotic/vegan nature of the food that bothers me. That all seems well-intentioned, but it's the lack of *food* in my food that gets to me. I think the food is bland and repetitive and limited, especially if you don't eat tofu, which I don't.

Also, I think the coffee they sell in the lobby is just pandering to the weak. (Clearly, I don't drink coffee.) If I have to eat rice, beans, salad and kale soup three times a day for the entire length of the retreat, then you should butch up and live without your cup of Joe for a few of days.

See: let's not talk about the food.

Yoga seems like a perfectly safe topic of conversation. That, of course, is the thing we all have in common. But, if you use the words "guru" or "spiritual leader," I will again, mock you. I'm sure we have all reached some sort of state of bliss after a really good yoga class, but I don't need to know the details of your inner journey. Let's just stick to the postures.

Speaking of the postures: if you sweat profusely (and don't pretend it's a surprise when it happens) it would be best if you didn't position yourself so that I am downwind of your down dog.

Oh, and just to clarify, bathing is not optional. If you have come to the retreat to free yourself of all vestiges of the material world including deodorant please don't put your mat next to mine.

If you met me under any other circumstance, where there were clear physical boundaries and strict personal hygiene rules, you would probably like me. You might even think I'm

funny, but you would not know any personal details about me and you would never touch me, unless you were falling to the ground and I was the only thing between you and physical peril. Even then, you would perhaps end up on the floor.

And we would never, ever sweat together.

I hope this information helps set the stage for a great retreat. I'm really looking forward to meeting all of you.

Well, not really, but that's okay.

Namaste.