

Preparing for Retreat at Home

Retreat practice, whether online or in person, allows one to participate in a structure and form that supports one's own deepening and exploration of their meditation practice. And while individual experiences are quite varied, home retreat does allow us to deeply integrate our practice into our living space and homes.

The following are guidelines to support you in creating conditions that can support your online home retreat practice. Consider printing out this document and the retreat schedule prior to the retreat.

Preparation

We suggest that you think about your plan for the days of our retreat. We will be building a community of practice together and invite you to consider what that might look like for you.

It might be helpful in advance to plan to simplify your activities as much as you can and/ or set boundaries around what you will and will not engage with during the retreat. Consider what might be skilful ways for you to create continuity over the retreat (on and off Zoom) and settle more deeply into the practice. And again, these are simply suggestions for ways to support one's practice and experience- utilize what's doable and helpful, according to your particular needs and circumstances.

Setting up your formal practice space:

- **Stationary/Sitting Practice:** If possible, find an area that's relatively quiet and free of distractions for your formal practice periods and when you are on Zoom. It can be helpful to close the door and turn off your phone and device notifications. For some, placing a Buddha, a candle, flowers or a poem in this space can be supportive. Also, a clean, simple background can be supportive to you and fellow practitioners as it creates an environment that is visually clear of distractions. If you choose to use a virtual Zoom background, please choose one that is simple and not distracting to others.

- **Movement Practice:** Consider where you will practice during the movement periods that will be supportive.
- **Electronic Media:**
 - We will be using the Zoom video-conferencing and a landing webpage which will be on the Insight Meditation Society website. To support yourself and the group we ask that you close all programs except Zoom and turn off all of the notifications on your devices.
 - If you have a weak network signal, try turning off your WiFi on the devices you're not using, so all your bandwidth can go to Zoom at that time.
 - You might set up away messages on your email and phone, giving yourself the space to take some time off from being connected to your device.
 - If you need to be contacted in case of emergency, you might put your phone on "Do Not Disturb" and let others know to call you twice if there is an emergency.
 - Last and most importantly; Be kind to yourself! Do your best to set yourself up for being present with us, knowing that we are in unusual times, and things happen.

Meals

- If possible, do all of your food shopping before the retreat begins.
- Keep the meals simple, perhaps pre-preparing some food that can be reheated (as needed) and eaten throughout the retreat.
- Consider writing a meal plan so you do not have to decide what to prepare for each meal.
- Include food preparation and clean up as a part of practice in which you bring mindfulness to all of your activities.

Practicing with others in the home

It can be very supportive to give yourself the time to be in silence on this retreat. Have a conversation about this with others. Here are some things you might want to cover:

With those who are not on retreat with you:

- Post your retreat schedule and let others know what to expect, including times that you won't be available and what amount of speaking they should expect from you.
- Acknowledge that it may feel awkward and strange at first, but a rhythm can develop that can work for everyone.
- If necessary, you might want to discuss a specific time of the day to connect verbally so that the communication is contained. And limit conversation to functional speech and minimize casual conversation.
- If possible, ask for support in having a quieter overall living space. Ask people to use earbuds or headphones or at least keep the volume low in a separate room. If it is not possible to get support for this, consider how to incorporate this into your practice.
- If you have children who are old enough, talk with them about what you are doing and ask their input on how to create a supportive environment. Enlist them as allies.

With those who are on retreat with you:

- Sitting together in the same location can be very supportive
- Decide before the retreat how much speaking you will do with each other.
- Decide before the retreat how chores will be shared. It can be helpful to create a schedule for these activities.

Zoom Sessions:

- **Please arrive early** to online sessions, just as you would in a meditation hall. Usually, the retreat host will mute your microphone until periods set aside for Q&R or discussions. Be conscious of keeping your microphone muted until those times retreatants are invited to engage in questions or discussions.
- **Video:** It can be supportive for a sense of community if you leave your video on during Zoom sessions. However, if you are doing non-retreat activities please turn off the video so as to not distract others. Some people find it supportive to have the computer screen to their side or at a distance during the meditation sessions so that they are not distracted by the screen. **We trust your discernment in deciding what you need to do to take care of yourself.**

- **Please be mindful of your physical movements:** during stationary meditations- the same way we would in a meditation hall - please limit extraneous movement, do not eat or “leave the hall” unless necessary. If needing to sip water, please do so mindfully. Please be mindful of moving the phone or tablet while the camera is on; for example, it can be visually disturbing for someone to see the camera moving while you’re moving and carrying the device. If movement or conversation on your end can be heard by other participants, the retreat host may turn your camera off or mute your microphone.

Meeting What Arises With Kindness

- Retreat is an opportunity to learn how to meet all experiences with openness, curiosity, care and kindness and to respond appropriately. It is not about pushing, forcing and overwhelming ourselves. **Please know that you can be in choice and take good care of yourself.**

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