

## **Participant Guidelines for a Successful Online Retreat**

*Please Read Carefully*

A meditation retreat is an opportunity for deepening your mindfulness practice in a sustained and powerful way. In the past, we deepened our understanding by attending residential retreats away from home. Now we have the opportunity to attend in a new online format. Since you will be doing this retreat from your home rather than with the support of a dedicated retreat center, it is important that you are aware of the unique benefits and unique challenges that come with virtual retreats.

The following guidelines will help you have the most successful retreat experience possible. (Note: We gratefully acknowledge that these guidelines were modified from ones that were offered to Spirit Rock Meditation Center's Advanced Practitioners Program.)

### **PREPARING FOR THE RETREAT**

1. Setting up your retreat space
  - a. If at all possible, set up a dedicated space for the retreat where you have internet access. Useful supplies include a chair and/or meditation cushion for seated meditation, a yoga mat and/or blanket for movement meditation or reclining practice. You may also wish to create a small altar with a candle, flowers, meaningful photos of loved ones or teachers, a statue, or whatever else helps you create a sense of "sacred space" for your retreat. If you share your space with others, let them know the hours you will be practicing in this space--you may even wish to put a sign on the door.
  - b. Find a place for walking meditation. This might include walking around the block or in a hallway or larger room. It is preferable not to have to

navigate street crossings or traffic.

- c. Print this document and the retreat schedule prior to the retreat.

## 2. Electronic media

- a. Your retreat teachings and meetings will be delivered using an online video-conferencing system. Please make sure you are familiar with the system your retreat is using and have tried it out before your retreat begins. To support yourself and the group, before your retreat begins please close all other programs than the one that you are using for your retreat and turn off all of the notifications on your devices.
- b. Set up an auto-reply for email and phone as if you were out of town letting people know that you are on retreat and will not be responding until the retreat is over.

## 3. Meals

- a. If possible, do all of your food shopping before the retreat begins.
- b. Plan to keep your meals simple, perhaps pre-preparing some food that can be eaten throughout the week--for example, a large pot of soup for dinners.
- c. Consider writing a meal plan so you do not have to decide what to prepare for each meal.

## 4. Navigating housemates, spouses, partners, and children in the home who are not on retreat

- a. Have a conversation about your retreat time. Here are some things you might want to cover:
  - i. Acknowledge that it will most likely feel awkward and strange at first, but a rhythm can develop that can work for everyone.
  - ii. Let them know that this is a silent retreat and see if you can get support in being in noble silence for the duration of the retreat. If necessary, you might want to discuss a specific time of the day to connect verbally so that the communication is contained.
  - iii. 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.

- iv. Discuss and post your retreat schedule.
- v. Suggestions if you have children
  1. If you have children at home, silence may not be a realistic option throughout the entire day. In that case, you may wish to think about and discuss “mindful speech” practices at times like family dinners.
  2. If they are old enough, talk with your kids about what you are doing and ask their input for how to create a supportive environment. Enlist them as allies.
  3. With younger children, hold the time with them as part of your mindfulness practice. Consider choosing activities for your time together that support your mindfulness--for example cooking or baking together; art projects; playing imaginative games; time in nature; storytelling or reading aloud--rather than consuming media together.
- b. Navigating those you live with will be part of the retreat and there will be opportunities to discuss this in your meetings with teachers as part of the practice.

## **DURING THE RETREAT**

1. Online Format & Etiquette
  - a. Please log in to your session five minutes early to ensure that your tech is working properly and so that sessions can begin promptly with all participants present and settled in.
  - b. If your circumstances allow, it is preferable to have your video turned on during all the online retreat sessions. This is helpful for creating a community and can help navigate some of the disconnection that can come with using an online format. By showing up with your camera on, you support your fellow practitioners in their practice. It's also easier for

the teachers to teach if they can see who they are talking to!

- c. Please don't multitask while attending the online sessions. Attend fully as you would if in person and give your full attention to the presentation.
  - d. Please keep your audio muted unless you are actively engaged in speaking with the group or teacher.
  - e. Please refrain from moving your laptop/tablet/phone around with the video camera on. This helps bring a quality of settledness to the online experience.
2. Media, phones, and other technology
- a. As with an in-person retreat, for the duration of your online retreat please refrain from using electronic devices for anything other than connecting to retreat materials through video conferencing.
  - b. Take this as a digital detox. One of the transformative things that can come from home retreats is having time in your own living space in which you are not engaging in other technology and media. This alone is helpful in touching a different way of being in your life.
3. Commitment to Practice
- a. Self-discipline – One of the challenges of home practice is getting swept away and forgetting about sustaining your formal practice. This is a normal challenge to have. It is very helpful if you can be open and honest about this in your group meetings so your teachers can address it.