

Mindful Academy International.

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The Heart of Wisdom and Kindness,
Online Silent Retreat Guidelines



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Participant Guidelines for a Successful Online Retreat.

Please Read Carefully

A silent meditation retreat is an opportunity for deepening your mindfulness-based practice in a sustained and powerful way. In the past, you may have dived deep with sustained practice by attending residential retreats away from home, however with the COVID-19 restrictions, we now have the opportunity to attend in a new, greener online Silent Retreat without the need to travel.

As Pico Iyer shares in his book **'The Art of Stillness, Adventures in going nowhere'**

"At some point, all the horizontal trips in the world stop compensating for the need to go deep, into somewhere challenging and unexpected, movement makes most sense when grounded in stillness."

"In an age of speed, I began to think, nothing could be more invigorating than going slow. In an age of distraction, nothing could feel more luxurious than paying attention. And in the age of constant movement, nothing is more urgent than sitting still"



An at home silent retreat offers you the chance to practice 'adventures in going nowhere' and invite yourself to find stillness in body and mind, however there are unique benefits and challenges that come with this online format that need your kindness, care and attention. This preparation will really make the difference in your retreat experience, so it is time well spent.

(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 Silent Retreat

1. Setting up your Retreat Space



a) If at all possible, set up a dedicated space for the retreat where you have a stable internet service, a fixed, rather than wifi signal is usually best. Where possible, we recommend that you only use headphones if you are in a noisy environment.

Your retreat space should be in an area without other people present unless they are participants on the retreat. Where this is not possible, other people should not be visible in the background at any point and we ask that you wear headphones to assure confidentiality for the whole group.

We recommend that you organise your usual meditation seating such as a chair, meditation cushion or bench, plus a blanket and pillow for added comfort. A yoga mat or 2nd blanket for reclining practice is also useful. You may also wish to find a place for a candle, flowers, or whatever else helps you create a sense of a "sacred space" for your retreat.

If you share your home 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 garden, 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.

Online Silent Retreat Guidelines

2. Electronic Media

a) Your retreat talks and mindfulness-based practices will be delivered using zoom online video-conferencing system. Please make sure you are familiar with the system and have tried it out before your retreat begins. We recommend that you watch this video tutorial on YouTube called Joining a Meeting with Zoom www.youtube.com

To support yourself and the group, before your retreat begins please close all other programmes than Zoom 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.

c) Consider writing a meal plan so you do not have to decide what to prepare for each meal.

d) Please do not eat during the online sessions.



Online Silent Retreat Guidelines

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

Have a conversation about your retreat time. Here are some things you might want to cover:

1. Acknowledge that it will most likely feel awkward and strange at first, but a rhythm can develop that can work for everyone.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Discuss and post your retreat schedule.

5. Suggestions if you have children

1. 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.
2. 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.



During the silent 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) Please note: In order for your retreat to qualify as a retreat for the Mindful Academy International teacher training pathway, showing up to sessions with your video on is a requirement. Please plan to have your video turned on during the online retreat sessions. This is also helpful for creating a community and can also help navigate some of the disconnection that can come with using an online format.

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 find a stable base for your laptop/tablet/phone and refrain from moving it 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.



Online Silent Retreat Guidelines

3) Facing difficulties

a) Whatever you notice is your experience, and we would suggest that as best you can, do not judge what is happening. You could perhaps even congratulate yourself for noticing!

We all experience times of difficulty and challenge at one time or the other so rather than struggling to have an experience you want, or get rid of an experience you don't want, see if its possible to offer yourself some kindness. This is compassion in action, to acknowledge what is really happening and take action if needed, rather than getting stuck in resisting.

Perhaps even bringing into the noticing any habitual patterns, are you practicing attachment, aversion or indifference? Rather see if it feels possible to open with friendliness, curiosity and understanding knowing that you can chose to stop practicing or come back to your anchor at any time you need to.

This can provide a sense of direction and purpose which can keep us grounded and has the potential to bring us into balance, no matter what is happening inside us or in the world around us.

4) Committment to practice

One of the challenges of home practice is getting swept away and forgetting about sustaining your formal and informal silent retreat practices, even when your intention was to attend every session. The pull of life can be very strong, and at times like these, it can be helpful to reflect on what brought you to the retreat, to find your mountain, and start again.

The Huffington Post shared a quote in 2016 that sums up what it is we are practicing. They say the the basic path to mindfulness, or more deeply heartfulness, is recognising that there is a deeper experience than that of our chattering minds. So you could say that our 'job' is to practice seeing the comings and goings of experience as events in consciousness, holding ourselves gently, practicing heartfulness.

Finally, you may find it beneficial to be open and honest in group meetings, or ask for an individual meeting if you are facing difficulties or committment challenges. Please know that it happens to us all and you are completely normal!



When we are devoted to the
development of kindness,
it becomes a movement of the heart
so deep and subtle it is like a movement of the sea
close to the ocean floor,
all but hidden yet affecting absolutely everything
that happens above.
That's the force of kindness.
Sharon Salzberg.
"The Force of Kindness"



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