

Guidelines for Retreat

A. Things to bring & not to bring

- 1) No books, magazines, newspapers, or other reading materials except Dharma works that relate directly to the subject of your retreat; better even to take a book for reference when you need it but to learn the subject so well in advance that you don't need to look at it, because generally reading any book is like talking to someone
- 2) If you are doing a mantra retreat, be sure to bring a good non-petroleum lip balm
- 3) Loose, baggy clothes, enough to get you through preferably without a wash
- 4) Sweaters and socks; stay warm—layers of sweaters are good in cold weather because you can peel them on & off to achieve ideal temperature
- 5) Create a small first-aid kit for yourself, imagining any kind of minor medical problem you might have; include for example aspirin (Advil is good); pepto bismol; bandaids and methiolate; neosporin antiseptic cream; diarrhea medicine
- 6) Very important to bring sleeping tablets, even if you never use them, in the event of a sleep disorder caused by inner wind
- 7) Bring a journal with lots of empty pages, write down ideas as they come to you between sessions, without disturbing actual meditation time

B. Foods

- 1) Eat well, pamper yourself but also don't over-eat to where it disturbs meditation

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- 2) Avoid sweets, caffeine, sodas, excessive carbohydrates (although different bodies have different needs)
- 3) Eat a lot of protein (nuts and other oily foods are good if you tend to get inner wind problems); tofu is good, cheese is usually good
- 4) Avoid juices that have a lot of sugar; make sure the juices you do drink are not the corn syrup concoctions but really juice; natural organic juices are good and help retreat
- 5) Fresh vegetables (especially greens) are very helpful
- 6) Whole milk causes problems with many people in meditation; try either soy or rice milk, or non-fat milk; but important to have something to get protein
- 7) Avoid garlic or other foods that might affect you negatively
- 8) Highly preferable if you can find someone to cook for you; it is subconsciously very distracting to be planning meals etc; if no one is available, plan far in advance so that you will not have to think about what to eat, etc

C. Place

- 1) If you can, meditate in a place which has been used by a holy being for meditation
- 2) Clean it well, especially remove any reading materials such as magazines and newspapers; avoid these carefully
- 3) Must be totally quiet; try turning off all electrical appliances while actually meditating, especially unplug refrigerator

D. Behavior

- 1) Don't talk at all, to anyone; don't see anyone at all if possible

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- 2) If possible stay indoors entire time, and do not even look out windows; except that if inner wind problems start to come, it can be beneficial to look out top of windows at open blue sky or starry night to reduce it; put a sheet up almost all the way to the top of the window
- 3) Learn how to do protection practices for your meditation place
- 4) Spend a lot of time setting up your meditation cushion properly, so that it is completely comfortable; keep your bare legs off the floor by using a cotton or similar porous material with a lot of "breathing"
- 5) Your posture should be completely comfortable and conducive for long sitting; don't begin with a posture which will be painful and distracting
- 6) It is sometimes beneficial during long retreats to have a back support of some kind
- 7) OK and probably beneficial to keep a journal of experiences, thoughts, and resolutions, but don't write letters or receive any kind of communication
- 8) Don't get too warm, or you will get sleepy
- 9) Don't get too cold or do anything else that would have any chance of making you sick
- 10) Set a schedule and keep to it; best to rise early before sun-up and do a session, and to avoid sessions after eating
- 11) Do some kind of exercise like yoga, walk around the room, etc once or twice during the day
- 12) Multiple short concentrated sessions are better than long unfocussed ones
- 13) Once you have taken your meditation posture, stop moving completely; if you get into the habit of shifting around you will never be able to sit well
- 14) Learn the meditation object well and have it clearly defined before you begin
- 15) Decide who might be allowed to enter the retreat area; prepare one or two good assistants to whom you can write notes to ask for very necessary help,

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and have a way worked out to contact a good lama and doctor is necessary

16) The scriptures say that retreat should flow like water out of a pitcher: start very light and easy, then build up to a rigorous practice, and then before the retreat lets out, come down in stages

17) Do not come straight back to the world immediately; return in stages, starting to reduce the practice time and meditation several days before meeting people or driving, etc

18) Several days before the end of the retreat, begin designing a program that will allow you to maintain the progress and insights of your retreat during your normal life afterwards; give this a lot of thought, challenge yourself, but do not also make unrealistic resolutions—design a very effective and simple program for yourself

19) The smoke from incense and candles can sometimes begin to be a problem; make sure nothing hinders your easy breathing

20) If you have any trouble at all sleeping, take action immediately; take a sleeping tablet to get a full night's sleep; if insomnia lasts more than one or two entire nights, it is very possible that you should break the retreat; in an extreme case, reading a light book or speaking to someone might break the inner wind problem, and then you can go back in

21) Pabongka Rinpoche said "Don't get high expectations of some immediate meeting with an Angel, and don't be too disturbed by small problems like a bad dream or slow progress; slow and steady wins the race"

22) Clear up any physical problems you can before going into retreat, such as dental work, so that they will not disturb you during meditation

23) Try to resolve any problems you are having personally (such as in a relationship) before beginning retreat, so that it will not be on your mind

24) Do some great virtue before retreat, and dedicate the power to the retreat

25) Don't try to do too much during retreat; concentrate

26) Don't block up the time before and after retreat; give yourself a few days to get settled in and do shopping, etc; make sure you have open time after

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E. Offerings

- 1) Spend a lot of time beforehand preparing incense, candles, flowers, and other offerings; set in a supply of each that will last until you finish
- 2) Spend a lot of time each morning on preparing the altar carefully and setting out fresh offerings
- 3) If retreating in an isolated location, make sure there are ways to cover the offerings if necessary to prevent mice and similar problems (they make noise and ruin the offerings)