

A virtual retreat with Patrick Kearney Friday 10 – Tuesday 14 April 2020

This retreat will be conducted by Zoom. We will schedule three meetings a day:

- Morning (10:00 a.m. – 12 noon): Morning workshop followed by a group meditation session. In this session we will establish the theme for today’s practice.
- Afternoon (3:00 – 5:00 p.m.): Group meditation followed by a check-in.
- Evening (8:00 – 10:00 p.m.): A dharma talk followed by a final group meditation. We will formally close the day by reciting the Mettā Sutta.

Please note that these sessions are optional. While we strongly recommend you commit to the whole retreat, there is no reason to be trapped by perfectionism. If the demands of your life mean that you can only attend part of a session, feel free to drop in and out as you require. For example, you may find that staying up until 10:00 p.m. is too late for you, in which case you could go to bed after the dharma talk.

Individual one-on-one’s will be offered during the retreat. These also are optional, although they are recommended as this is where you will be able to fine-tune your practice.

All participants will receive a handbook in pdf format containing all the talks and practices provided during the retreat. This will enable you to read the teachings and practice the exercises at your own pace.

Finally, everyone is strongly urged to do at least 30 minutes bodywork a day to cultivate mindfulness immersed in body (*kāyagatā sati*). I recommend you do a session immediately before the morning meeting.

Retreat plan

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Morning	Mindfulness	Body	Breathing	Thinking (cognitive)	Feeling/emotion (affective)
Theme	Relax, and be aware.	Feeling your body – posture & precision.	Becoming intimate with air element.	Taking refuge in body (<i>kāya</i>).	Taking refuge in heart (<i>citta</i>).
Evening	The one-way street.	Tracking experience.	Finding right effort.	The realm of the cognitive.	The realm of the affective.

Talks

Day 1 (AM) Introducing mindfulness

The difference between awareness and mindfulness. The introduction of memory and time to our understanding of mindfulness meditation. The problem of effort and of time. The problem of distraction. Remembering our natural awareness. “Relax, and be aware.”

Day 1 (AM) Introducing Mahāsī method

Introducing the specific approach to meditation we will be discussing during this retreat. Looking at meditation from the perspective of its activities (noting, noticing and naming) and its objects (grounding and secondary objects).

Day 1 (PM) The one-way street

Introducing Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and the concept of the “one-way street” to nibbāna. What is nibbāna? How does this practice link to nibbāna? Introducing Mahāsī Sayādaw’s approach to mindfulness meditation. The importance of continuity of awareness and our relationship to distraction.

Day 2 (AM) Tracking body

Beginning with our relationship with body. What is our actual experience of body? Not our concepts, but the felt reality. Learning to ground awareness in the physical. This can be done in detail (tracking elements) or more widely (tracking posture).

Day 2 (PM) Tracking experience

Exploring the central activity of mindfulness practice, that of “tracking” (*anupassanā*) experience over time. Awareness is always now; mindfulness takes place over time. Mindfulness meditation is *not* object-specific and *not* technique-specific. It is therefore wide open and requires flexibility and creativity in its practice. The qualities needed to track experience: ardency, mindfulness and clear understanding.

Day 3 (AM) Tracking breathing

Focusing on the air element (*vayo dhātu*) in the form of breathing, the “generic” meditation object. Breathing is unique in its sensitivity to the state of both mind and body, so can be a bridge between both. While there is a lot happening in breathing, it is not suitable as grounding object for everyone. Exploring alternatives to using breathing as meditation object.

Day 3 (PM) Finding right effort

The art of right effort – i.e., sustainable effort. The relationship with time and attainment. The connection between mental effort and physical tension; and between physical tension and mental effort. Using lying posture to explore this.

Day 4 (AM) Tracking the thought stream

Using thinking as meditation object. All the challenges this entails. Thinking is not the problem; our relationship to thinking is the problem. Exploring this relationship. This opens up to our relationship to the realm of the cognitive more broadly.

Day 4 (PM) The realm of the cognitive

We are ruled by our concepts. Learning to see that a concept *about* something is not that something. Learning to keep one’s centre of gravity in body rather than in concept. What happens when I do not believe my thoughts? The intimacy of not-knowing (Bodhidharma? The departing monk?).

Day 5 (AM) Tracking feeling

The nature of feeling and its role in meditation, both as activity (feeling the meditation object) and as object (feeling as meditation object). How to work with emotion. Noticing the close link between body and the affective.

Day 5 (PM) The realm of the affective

The nature of feeling (*vedanā*) and its role in constructing the world we live in. Feeling found through intimacy with body and mind. The affective transforms from drivenness (*taṇhā*) to the opening of the heart (*saddhā* and *karuṇā*). The unity of the affective and the cognitive.