



How to set up for an Online Retreat at home*

Below are some guidelines for practicing together in an Online Retreat environment. We've found that they help us as a community to be together smoothly as well as to assist each of us to maximise the practice opportunity provided by our virtual retreat.

Before the retreat

Creating a retreat-like environment

- If possible, try to have your home as neat and tidy as you can before the retreat starts. Having a well stocked fridge and pantry, some meal plans and perhaps even some meals already cooked can be helpful. Lessening the demands of daily life during the retreat will allow you to more fully focus on the retreat practices.

Tell people you are doing a retreat

- Tell people closest to you that you won't be in regular contact and might not get back to messages in the next few days as you're doing a retreat.
- Turn off your phone notifications so you don't get distracted by any messages coming through. If you do need to check messages or emails, dedicate a certain time of day to look and respond and then put your phone/email away.

Creating a contemplative ambience

- To support the meditative aspect of the meeting, you might like to clear the area around your computer of distracting objects, books and other devices such as mobile phones and tablets, so that you can give your full attention to the meeting.
- You might also set up your meditation cushion or other equipment close to your computer, so that you can move from sitting at your device to sitting in Meditation.
- Some people find that having fresh flowers nearby, having images of the Buddha or teachers around the computer, and lighting a candle or incense at the start of the meeting can support a more contemplative orientation.

Positioning your laptop and your practice space

- Position your computer in a quiet, well-lit space where you won't be distracted by others, and others won't be distracted by you. Make sure you're not sitting in front of a window where you will be back lit and your face is in shadow. You might like to check the lighting and how you will appear on the screen, before the meeting. On zoom you can click on 'hide self view' so you don't have to see yourself but others can see you. This option is available by clicking on the 3 dots (...) in the right corner of your picture.
- If you're using a mobile phone or tablet, make sure that it is propped up in a stable position to minimise movement during the meeting, which can be visually distracting.

During the retreat

Committing to being here together

- Please make a commitment to engage as fully as you would if we were meeting in person, and don't multi-task while online with our community. Because we're practising together, it makes a big difference if someone is checking their text messages, looking at other screens on their computer or eating. When one person's attention is pulled elsewhere, it affects all of us.
- To support yourself and the group we ask that you close all programs except Zoom, and put any other devices around you into flight mode.
- Avoid eating or drinking during group sessions.
- Please keep your pets away from your screen and your meditation space. While cute they are a distraction!
- Avoid any unnecessary moving about during group meetings, or socialising with others at home. During a practice period it is fine for you to do a moving meditation, or to have a stretch. If you need to deal with a domestic situation during a group meeting, turn your video camera off and make sure you are muted, then turn it on again when you are ready to re-join.

Keep your video camera on when participating

- Please do not have your screen turned off all the time. Zoom has a "Gallery View," which fills up your screen with multiple mini-views of your fellow participants. Having your screen on so everyone can see everyone helps strengthen our sense of community, the understanding that although we are separated by physical distance we are together in this practice space. Having your screen turned off all the time creates a sense that someone is hiding.
- On zoom you can click on 'hide self view' so you don't have to see yourself but others can see you. This option is available by clicking on the 3 dots (...) in the right corner of your video.

Using the mute function

- Zoom also has a “mute” button, which allows you to turn off any sound you make. Please keep yourself muted during group meetings unless you wish to ask a question. This ensures that background noises do not enter into the Dharma Hall and potentially disturb others, and also makes it easier to hear the teacher or manager.

- If there is chanting or reciting on your retreat, make sure you are muted during group chants and recitation. If everyone is unmuted the limitations of the technology mean that instead of a choir we will get a cacophony. You will hear only the teacher, but you are encouraged to join in at home.

Other important considerations

Ethical commitment to non-harming, and maintaining confidentiality

- All of our communication during the meeting is grounded in an ethical commitment to non-harming. Just as with in-person meetings, we undertake to refrain from false, harsh or frivolous speech, and aspire to communication that is kind, timely, and beneficial.

- Likewise, the same guidelines around confidentiality apply. Please don't divulge any information shared by people on the retreat with people outside the retreat. With the same intention of maintaining confidentiality, please do not record the group meeting, either using Zoom or other devices.

Attendance by those who have registered only

- Remember that as you have registered for this retreat and been admitted, you are entitled to participate fully in it. Other members of your household, who have not been admitted to this retreat, are not entitled to participate.

Thank you for your cooperation with these guidelines. We look forward to practising with you online soon, and hope these suggestions will support a safe, relaxed and mutually beneficial learning experience.

*Melbourne Insight Meditation would like to thank Insight Teachers Patrick Kearney and Jill Shepherd for their permission to use large parts of their online guidelines in putting this document together.