

PREPARATION FOR ON-LINE MEDITATION RETREATS

Dear On-Line Retreatants,

Welcome to our next OBS hybrid (residential and on-line) retreat. We are delighted that you are choosing to participate in the on-line part of this experience.

This is indeed a special opportunity for such a widely dispersed and diverse group to join in community to share the wisdom and guidance of our monastics and to deepen our meditation practices together.

FYI, this note is written generically, for all of our hybrid retreats. We hope it will be useful to you in preparing for your participation on this next retreat.

A more specific note will follow. It will provide versions of your specific retreat agenda that have been adjusted to reflect different time zones, for the convenience of those of you joining us from other parts of the world. This separate note will be added to the OBS Retreat website closer to the start date of your retreat.

Note: The ZOOM Coordinates are already available to you on the website. **Please make note of them so you will have them available to you as the retreat starts.**

OVERVIEW

This note provides you with information about how we expect the retreat to unfold, as well as your participation in it. Specifically, you will find:

- General information about our use of **ZOOM** for our retreats;
- General information concerning the **retreat schedule**, including guidance on how to participate in the Question and Answer sessions;
- **Integration** of the on-line and residential aspects of the retreat;
- General guidance about **How to Prepare** yourself and your home environment for your participation in the retreat; and
- Information concerning **Donations**.

SECTION 1: ZOOM Information

The retreat will be conducted through ZOOM, a format familiar to many of you. With no waiting room, you will be able to come and go as needed throughout the week, without disturbing the other registrants. Simply turn off your video, or you can log-off and rejoin later. **While at the retreat, whenever possible throughout each day, please leave your camera on so that we can all see each other and maintain a sense of community and support for each other.**

Please note that you can sign-in on ZOOM up to 15 minutes before the beginning of the first session. This will give you time to adjust any technical issues that might arise.

Please also note that **you will be muted upon arrival**. This is important throughout the session to minimize potential background noise.

If you want to test your Internet /ZOOM connection and settings before the retreat, use this link: <https://zoom.us/test> It will bring you to a sample meeting and give you a chance to confirm that your audio and video functions are working.

Note: If the link does not work for you, then go to <https://otago.zoom.us/join> Enter the Meeting ID and Password that you have been provided in the appropriate fields and click 'Join.' You may be prompted to give a display name. This is only to identify you.

(If you are not familiar with ZOOM and would like additional instruction, please let me know at annvregistrar@gmail.com and I will send you more detailed information.)

SECTION 2: The Retreat Schedule (& Questions & Answers)

For those of you who are joining the retreat from time zones different from the Canadian Eastern Daylight/Standard time zone:

Sample retreat agendas which have been **adjusted to reflect different national and international time zones** will be provided in a subsequent note that will be posted on the OBS Retreat website closer to your retreat start date.

Please Note: Any recordings of the teachings during the retreat will be edited and posted **only after** the retreat

Question & Answer Sessions:

There will be an opportunity to ask questions by submitting them using the CHAT function of ZOOM. **Please address them to our retreat manager.** S/he will provide a paper copy of all questions and give them to our monastic for his/her consideration. S/he will then respond to them during the evening sessions. **Please send your questions by 5PM each day** so that they can be collected in time for this transcription to be completed.

Note: All questions are provided to our monastic, however you may not hear your question posed *precisely* as you submitted it. Given the number of on-line and residential retreatants, and the time available, similar questions will be combined.

SECTION 3: Integration of the On-line and Residential Aspects of the Retreat

All retreatants (on-line and residential) are asked to follow the guidance below:

A Hybrid Retreat:

The Residential retreatants will be with us throughout the retreat – in the Meditation Hall, outside walking, or eating in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, we will not be able to see them, nor will they see us. The camera will be directed at our monastic at all times. When s/he is not present, the on-line retreatants will see the shrine. As the retreat will mainly be conducted in noble silence, we will only hear each other occasionally, perhaps during the opening and closing of the retreat. Nonetheless, we will all be together as we move through each day.

The Eight Precepts and Meals:

Our monastic will usually offer instruction about the Precepts as part of the introduction to the retreat.

If your circumstances allow, you are encouraged to follow the Eight Precepts which include the precept of not eating at inappropriate times. This would involve setting up a disciplined eating schedule, with 2 meals before noon and a light nutrition snack of your choice at 5PM, (your time). If this routine is not feasible in your situation, you could choose your own schedule and attempt to bring as much discipline to it as possible.

Chanting:

Here is the link for the PDF format of *Chanting Volume 1*: <https://cdn.amaravati.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/30/Chanting-Book-Vol-1-Web.pdf>

The specific chants will also be shared on-screen as they occur throughout the schedule.

Noble Silence:

To the extent possible within your individual environment, the retreat will be conducted in noble silence.

What to Wear:

Although you are participating from your home, please dress appropriately for being in the company of a monastic.

Wrap-Up:

For the last day of the retreat, we will ask 2 or 3 retreatants to write a short message for the closing (about 1 minute long when spoken). Your message might include reflections on your experience of the retreat and/or words of appreciation for our monastic and the teachings received during the retreat. If you would like to contribute in this way, please let our retreat manager know in advance.

Note: All messages will be read out loud by in-person volunteers during the closing.

SECTION 4: How to Prepare – Creating a Supportive Environment at Home

The following are recommendations from retreatants of previous OBS on-line retreats. Most of these are suggestions for simplifying your lives during the retreat to reduce distractions and make it easier to devote time to your practice. It is hoped that adopting some of these options may enhance your experience in following the retreat at home:

— Consider your practice space: Setting up a clean, uncluttered space, perhaps with a candle (etc), may help you to settle and focus.

— Communicate with those who live with you so that they can support Noble Silence as much as possible for the retreat time. Perhaps share the retreat schedule with them so they will know the timing of sittings and talks.

— Plan ahead for simple nutritious breakfasts, lunches and snacks. Prepare whatever you can in advance.

— Reduce interruptions by turning off /putting away your phone, etc. As much as possible, ignore newspapers, radio, television, etc.

— Once the retreat begins, try to treat interruptions as opportunities to practice: finding ease in the midst of whatever arises. Many have suggested that their efforts to move their practice “off the mat” and into their everyday lives has been supported by the on-line approach and particularly by the challenges of balancing some aspects of daily life while on retreat. Of course for others – not so much!

SECTION 5: Donations

As many of you know already, our monastics offer their teachings freely. In Buddhist tradition, retreatants practice generosity through their donations (dana) to support the monasteries, monks and nuns who share the teachings of the Buddha with us. Please consider making a donation to support the monastic who has shared his/her teachings with you at this retreat. [You will find the details on how to do this on the OBS Retreat website.](#)

If you also wish to make a donation to the Ottawa Buddhist Society please go to:
<https://ottawabuddhistsociety.com/participate/donate/>

If you are a Canadian resident, you will receive a charitable tax receipt for your donation at the end of the year.

Lastly

We are all making an effort to deepen our practice through attending this retreat and have carved out a time in our busy lives to do so. That said, our objective is not to control our external environment to eliminate all potential inconveniences. Any challenges which may occur, ideally, may be seen as opportunities to strengthen our practice, rather than disturbances that take away from it. During the retreat, when our bodies ache, when the insects are hovering, when someone is breathing loudly and there are noises outside, we can recall these words once again:

"Of course we can always imagine more perfect conditions, how it should be ideally, how everyone should behave. But it is not our task to create an ideal. It's our task to see how it is, and to learn from the world as it is. For the awakening of the heart, conditions are always

good enough."

~ Ajahn Sumedho.

ANY QUESTIONS in advance of the retreat: please contact me at retreats@ottawabuddhistsociety.com or at annvregistrar@gmail.com .

Please Note:

This hybrid retreat approach unfailingly gives rise to an on-going series of challenges and hurdles. We hope you will bear with us should there be any unexpected glitches along the way. ... or for any reason!

With metta,

Ann

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"If you understand, things are just as they are.
If you don't understand, things are just as they are."
Zen saying