

Practising Wisdom and Compassion in Turbulent Times

July 6th–10th 2020

Pre-retreat information & suggestions from the teachers

Welcome to our online retreat! We very much look forward to practising with you. To make the most of this precious opportunity, we encourage you to read this information in advance about how to prepare for a retreat using Zoom. We will speak more about these guidelines at our opening session on Monday. If you are not familiar with Zoom, you can get support with learning how to use it by clicking on the link below. You should do this before the retreat starts.

<https://gaiahouse.co.uk/using-zoom/>

Preparing for the retreat

You are welcome to participate in our retreat in the way that works for you. At the same time, it is important that you honour your own commitment to participate and our retreat community by being as fully present and engaged as possible.

We suggest that you have in mind your plan for the four days of our retreat. For example, will you be:

- Maintaining silence?
- Continuing with a sitting and walking schedule?
- Cultivating an attitude of retreat throughout?

If so, be sure to set up conditions that support you, including discussing with those you share your space at home with. If you have the chance to do so, we encourage you to set aside the entire five days.

Even if this isn't feasible for you then it would be helpful to plan in advance, using the guidelines below, to simplify as much as you can and set boundaries around what you will and will not engage with. Both approaches are skilful ways of creating continuity and settling more deeply into practice and quiet.

Creating a retreat environment

- Find a quiet and comfortable space to practice and make it as pleasant and welcoming as you can
- If you like, you can arrange a small altar with candles, flowers, or altar objects near you
- You may like to keep a small candle burning throughout the day as this helps to remind us that we are practising on retreat
- We want to create a space that feels like we are with each other as much as possible. Even though we are not together physically, arriving on time is still important. Settle in and prepare your space and yourself before each session begins
- Whilst we are online together, don't multitask. Turn off your other devices and any other programs you have been using. Engage with the session and teachings offered just as you would on a retreat you attend in a retreat centre. Give yourself this time to be present and awake
- Consider how you are going to use the time between our online sessions and try to keep life as simple and free from distractions as possible.

Practicalities

- Arrange your computer or device so you can see and hear well
- Make sure you have easy access to the schedule and Zoom links and arrive on time for all the sessions you can attend
- If you have to miss any sessions, please check the resources folder for any updates from the teachers, and use the link you will be given to access recordings of the missed sessions at another time if that is helpful
- Think about where you might go to practice any walking meditation
- Shop before the retreat if you can so that you don't have to do this during the retreat. Planning meals in advance may also be helpful
- Think about disengaging from unnecessary conversations and interactions: explain to any other people in your household what you will be doing and discuss how they can support you.

Some Zoom etiquette

- It is helpful for us all if we all approach the sessions as if we are entering a meditation hall: This means we don't drink or eat or walk in and out during a session. It also supports us all to maintain an engaged presence during the sessions, rather than treating them like a programme we are watching passively. Although we are online, the presence we each bring will support us
- Please keep your microphone muted (we will help with that), unless we invite you to unmute it, which we will do from time to time. This helps eliminate background noise that will be heard by everyone
- It is supportive for your fellow retreatants and teachers if you leave your camera on when you are sitting in front of your computer. This gives a sense of sitting together, instead of simply viewing names on a screen. But if you have need to turn it off due to distractions in your camera view, are meditating away from your screen, or simply do not want to turn it on, that is also ok
- Please don't move the computer around with the video on. If you need to move rooms or step away from the screen, please turn off the video. It is less distracting and allows us collectively to have a more settled feel
- Likewise, if you find you are interrupted by another being (person or pet), please turn off your video to avoid being a distraction. And turn it back on when things have settled again.

Some of us are by now quite familiar with practising and teaching using Zoom, for others of us this will be a totally new experience. Everyone is welcome and we will all be learning as we go along. We will find our way with this and whatever happens make it part of our retreat practice.

We wish you a very enjoyable and beneficial retreat!

Chris, Jaya and Mat