

Tips for structuring a meditation retreat –

Here are some suggestions and tips regarding the practice of retreat. This guideline could be used for a retreat of any length - one day, a weekend, a week, or longer. The guidelines and principles of retreat practice remain the same. These are suggestions. Any retreat can be tailored to your particular aspiration, experience and circumstance. If you do plan to do a retreat, particularly a solitary retreat, it's essential that you're in close communication with a friend, mentor, or teacher who has experience with retreat. It is also suggested that you start with shorter retreats first. This will help you get comfortable with retreat. It will also help you develop a natural appetite for doing more. By far the best retreat is one that matches your own experience level, and aptitude. In other words, more is not better, better is better.

During your retreat you'll want to be alone. It's best not to see or talk with anyone, or engage in distractions - using the internet, listening to the radio etc. Try to maintain silence during the retreat. If possible, do the retreat in a place where you won't hear people talking.

The day is spent meditating, with a little time allotted for reading and contemplation. You could take a book for study and contemplation, or perhaps, a book to inspire you, such as a life story of a great meditator from the past. In general, your reading should support and inspire your practice. Reading and study are not meant to be the focus of a meditation retreat.

At the start of the retreat, take some time to reflect on your aspiration for the retreat. You might contemplate the aspects of your path that you would like to emphasize, or what you would like to learn from the retreat. As you know, it is best to open each day with an aspiration and close with a dedication.

During the breaks, you could choose to do something physical to stay fresh, such as stretching, or yoga, or Tai Chi. If you're in an isolated place where you won't see anyone, you could take a walk.

Start each session with whatever opening liturgies are appropriate to the practice that you're doing. This could include, among others, the lines for Taking Refuge and Arousing Bodhichitta, the Four Immeasurables, and a lineage supplication. You can add whatever other liturgies that you choose, such as the Heart Sutra. End each session with a Dedication of Merit. You could also add whatever else you choose, such as long life supplications, aspirations etc.

It's always best to decide on the schedule that you want to maintain at the beginning of the retreat and try to stay with it. Of course, if for some reason you need to alter the schedule during the retreat, you're free to do so.

Keep a normal diet during your retreat. Retreat is not the time to begin special diets, or fast. Keep a normal sleep schedule.

There's a 'retreat resource page' on the Tergar Learning Center site that you might find most helpful.

The following are some suggested schedules for retreat. These are just suggestions. As you become more experienced with retreat practice, you may want to add more time for practice in the schedule. You could take any of these schedules as the basis for a one-day, weekend, week-long retreat, or longer.

Here's a suggested schedule that includes 8 hrs. of meditation practice:

6:00	Wake up
6:30	Meditation (you might stand/stretch for 5 minutes every 20-25 minutes)
8:00	Breakfast
8:30	Reading and contemplating
9:00	Meditation
10:30	Break
11:00	Reading and contemplation
Noon	Lunch
1:00	Meditation
2:30	Break
2:45	Reading and contemplation
3:15	Break
3:45	Meditation
4:45	Break
5:00	Meditation
6:00	Dinner
7:00	Meditation
8:30	End the day with a dedication

Here's a suggested schedule that includes 10 hrs. of meditation practice:

6:00	Wake up
6:30	Meditation
8:00	Breakfast
8:30	Meditation
10:30	Break

11:00	Meditation
Noon	Lunch
1:00	Meditation
2:30	Break
2:45	Reading and contemplation
3:15	Break
3:45	Meditation
4:45	Break
5:00	Meditation
6:00	Dinner
7:00	Meditation
9:00	End the day with a dedication

Here's a suggested schedule that includes 12 hrs. of meditation practice:

5:30	Wake up
6:00	Meditation
8:00	Breakfast
8:45	Meditation
10:30	Break
11:00	Meditation
12:30	Lunch
1:30	Meditation
3:00	Break - Reading and contemplation
3:15	Meditation
5:00	Break
5:30	Meditation
6:30	Dinner
7:00	Meditation
9:30	End the day with a dedication