

Home/On-Line Retreat: May 16 – 22

Exploring the Diversity of Meditation

(adapted from the retreat planned for Cloud Mountain May 15-22)

Retreat Overview and Parameters

In this At Home retreat, or other safe accommodation, teaching will take place online, via [Zoom](#). You will need to [download and install the Zoom app](#) to participate. (If you are new to Zoom, I will provide a practice session so that you can get comfortable with Zoom.) This will be my second On-Line Retreat since the Covid-19 pandemic has upended many aspects of our lives. This format can support you in deepening your at-home practice, responding to the contingencies of the situation, and fostering sangha during physical distancing.

The retreat's theme will carry over from that planned for Cloud Mountain with adaptations to the evolving Covi-19 Samsara. I've rewritten the original description accordingly and you'll find it at [the end of this pdf](#).

Participants are expected to follow the entire retreat, listen to all the talks live or by recording, practice with each day's guided meditation, and meditate on your own at least two additional times.

Schedule: We'll start with an Introduction to Format, Schedule, and Activities at **9 am on Saturday May 16th** (all times Pacific) and will keep the following schedule through Friday 22nd evening:

7 am Guided Meditation: brief introduction, 40 minute practice, and questions.

10 am Meditation teaching "**Exploring the Diversity of Meditation**"

2 pm Meditation Q/R

7 pm Dhamma Talk

Sit at least 2 times daily at times that work best for you.

Add **walking meditation, yoga, or qigong** as able.

If you wish, pick a favorite **Dhamma book** to read and reflect upon daily. Limit reading periods to 15 minutes each and leave adequate time for patient reflection and journaling.

If possible, take **Meals** alone or with practice friends, and keep them simple.

Noble Silence: within the realities of your living situation, abstain from speech as much as possible, especially trivial and frivolous speech, as well as worry-perpetuating, complaining, and blaming speech. If possible, stay off the internet and don't check email. If you must use devices, create realistic guidelines for yourself to wisely limit net browsing and email activity.

You may need to make a few modifications in what I have outlined, according to your circumstances. Please stay within the spirit of retreat.

Dāna: Santikaro's time and teaching are offered on [a donation basis, as are all sharings from Kevala Retreat](#). Like many others we are facing income uncertainty during these times and your generosity is appreciated. (We also recognize that many of you as well may be facing financial uncertainty.)

Registration: Please email **Santikaro** <santi@kevalaretreat.org> to confirm your registration, to newly register, or if you have questions. I will need your email address to invite you to the Zoom sessions.

Preparation: On Thursday May 14th, I will send an email with guidelines and further suggestions for your participation.

I hope you can join us in this experiment.

Santikaro

A friend passed on this gem concerning sangha:

We need physical distancing not social distancing
-- we actually need to increase our social cooperation.

Understanding the diverse terrain of meditation practices strengthens the practices we choose to cultivate.

We may feel we've had a "good" or "bad" meditation, but what is the basis for that feeling? What makes our practice effective or not? How are we evaluating meditation as "successful" or "disappointing"? The answers to these questions depend on the type of meditation we are doing, our purpose in following that approach, and why we are meditating in the first place.

Some of us may find ourselves meditating in only one way, unfamiliar with other approaches. Others might be mixing different approaches without recognizing possible contradictions. Purpose and direction might be fuzzy. We might think what we are doing is successful because it feels good or serves an egoistic need. Not all forms of meditation — and there are many in Early Buddhism — make us feel good, even while being beneficial or needed for progress on the path. With greater awareness of the different types of meditation, we can be more on-target in our practice and better serve our deeper psychological and spiritual needs.

The **Discourse on the Four Kinds of Meditation** (*Samādhībhāvanā Sutta*, AN 4.41) sketches four categories of meditation that make use of the power of *samādhi* (collected, integrated mind). Reflecting on the wide variety of meditation practices mentioned in Early Buddhism, we can easily expand the four kinds to eight or more.

1. Meditation for the sake of **PLEASANT ABIDING HERE-NOW** (resulting in well-being, calmness, and joy)
2. Meditation for the sake of **CLEAR WAKEFULNESS** (fostering open awareness and a sense of clarity & brightness)
3. Meditation for the sake of **ALERT, MINDFUL COMPREHENSION** (observing the arising & passing of feelings, perceptions, & thoughts)
4. Meditation for the sake of **ENDING INFLUXES/LEAKS** (observing the arising & passing of the sense of self (I, me, mine) and ending clinging)
5. Meditation for the sake of **HEART CULTIVATION** (involving the cultivation of wholesome intentions, attitudes, and dispositions connected with lovingkindness, gratitude, patience, forgiveness, compassion, equanimity, etc.)

6. Meditation for the sake of **REFLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION** (reflecting on & exploring one's experiences in light of Dhamma teachings, including meditative review)
7. **MOVEMENT PRACTICES** for the sake of body-based mindfulness & health (such as Qigong and Yoga-asana)
8. **CHANTING** and other devotional practices that inspire & strengthen faith & commitment
9. **HEALING PRACTICES** that address psycho-physical wounds and traumas (drawing upon a variety of traditions ancient & contemporary)

I find this framework helpful for exploring and expanding understanding of what “meditation” is. By sampling practices from these various categories, practitioners can add to their palette of meditative-contemplative skills. These broad groupings of meditation practices outline categories rather than specific techniques. All involve mindfulness, wise effort, and calm focus yet may employ them in varying ways. Some meditative systems, such as mindfulness with breathing (*ānāpānasati*), can support more than one of these categories.

Understanding this variety of practices clarifies the dynamics and subtleties of practice. Further, we may ask key questions: What is the purpose of any practice or approach that we try out or hear about? What needs do each practice or approach meet and how do they do so? What is required to cultivate each approach?

In this retreat we will survey and practice examples from these main categories of meditation. Following guided meditations, each practice and its category will be discussed in ways that show how we might practice them and when. What happens in these meditations, and what do we aspire to in such practices? Having an overview of the broad meditative terrain — with all its diversity and competition for our practice time — will be helpful in assessing our true needs and choosing approaches that suit those needs.

This framework helps us to better understanding what we are “doing” in meditation and adjust our aspirations as needed. What we experience in meditation is influenced by our sense of purpose, which is in turn shaped by our understanding of what meditation is and what it is for. We also will consider how fundamental aspects of meditation — such as mindfulness, concentration, effort, investigation, relaxation, curiosity, courage, and compassion — operate in the various approaches. Seeing mindfulness and concentration in various contexts leads to a richer understanding of them. This will provide yogis with richer perspectives on all of these essentials. A series of sessions that begin with guided meditations representative of the above categories can be an opportunity for us to discuss what happens in meditation, what we aspire to in such practices, and more clarity about how we can foster, cultivate, or allow — as the case may be — a wider range of contemplative growth.

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In **times of extra stress and anxiety**, having a well-rounded meditative toolkit is especially valuable. Therefore, the practices explored on this retreat will be chosen with **our pandemic situation** in mind.