

Shelter in the Heart

HOME RETREAT

GUIDE



The Meditating Teacher

HEART-CENTERED EDUCATION

www.themeditatingteacher.com

written & designed by



Paula Cristina Azevedo, PhD

The Meditating Teacher, LLC. Copyright © 2020
by Paula Cristina Azevedo, PhD. All rights reserved.



paulacristina@themeditatingteacher.com
www.themeditatingteacher.com

CONTENTS

written & designed by Paula Cristina Azevedo, PhD



2	Introduction
5	Frequently asked questions
6	How to plan your home retreat
7	Retreat schedule options
11	Notes about schedule
12	Final tips
13	Example of personalized stay at home retreat
15	Plan your stay at home retreat
23	My retreat schedule
28	After the retreat



Have the **courage** to
be still with yourself.

introduction



Retreat helps to deepen your mindfulness practice, but what do you do when you can't attend a retreat?

Many of us since March of 2020 are being required to and/or are choosing to stay at home due to the global pandemic. No one asked for this, but it's happened. Life dramatically changed. We've had to work from home, homeschool children, cancel work related trips and vacations, postpone events and celebrations, learn to cook and bake, stay home to take care of young children or other family members, and so much more. We had to radically change our lives in a short time period to stop the spread of the virus, while also fearful of the unknown, stressed about finances, scared that a loved one might get sick or die, and unsure of what the future might look like. What a strange time to be alive, but also an interesting and unique time to sit still, self-reflect, and explore the boundless heart. We have nowhere to go, fewer distractions, and have time to retreat in place and shelter in the heart.

Every year I go on several day-long retreats and one residential retreat. Unfortunately, I was only able to attend one retreat in early January and the rest of the retreats have been canceled due to the pandemic. I've been longing for a retreat experience when I realized I didn't need to go anywhere to retreat. I was already in a sort of retreat at home. All I needed to do was create an intention (and a practical plan) to participate in a home retreat.



What you seek is
seeking you.

– Rumi

I can already hear some of you say, “But, Paula I can’t retreat at home because everyone is home too!” That’s a legitimate concern, but one that you can be resolved.

But, before we tackle the barriers to home retreats let’s first define the word “retreat.” The word “retreat” comes from the Latin word *retrahere*, which means to pull back. We often hear the word retreat as a military term meaning to move back or withdraw. A mindfulness retreat is a form of pulling back and withdrawing from the daily pressures of the world. In a mindfulness retreat you have the opportunity, space, time, and guidance from a teacher to be present with whatever arises in your surroundings, in your body, in your mind and heart. Often people believe retreats are a form of escape and time to “bliss out”. In my experience retreats have never been about escaping from the world or reality. It’s a time for me to deeply practice mindfulness, to remember to return to this moment, and to heighten my ability to be grounded in the wisdom of my heart.

In a sense we’ve all started this withdrawal from life as we knew it whether we chose to or not. Now we have an opportunity to use this retreat

as a time to intimately reacquaint and befriend ourselves.

Now that you have a foundational understanding of what the purpose of a mindfulness retreat is, let’s return to the question, “How do I retreat at home when everyone’s home?” The answer depends on your situation. However, I want to acknowledge that if you’re a single parent, working from home or an essential worker, with a young child at home and little or no support to balance work and child care then participating in a mindfulness home retreat may just not be possible for you. And, let’s be honest.... That’s okay! I’m not here to shame you, tell you that you need to be more creative with your time, you need to be more positive, or any of that other rubbish that you already hear from others. Having a mindful retreat at home may just not be an option for you right now, and that reality may change in a few weeks, months, or years. And if and when it does you can always refer back to this little pdf on how to retreat at home. With that said, if you have the time, support, and a tiny space with limited distractions then you have the potential to retreat at home. Let me address some logistical questions.

frequently asked questions

What if I live with other people?

There are several options:

- You can inform your roommate(s), friends, loved ones and/or family members that you are planning a mindful home retreat and that you need x number of hours with little or no interruption. This may mean you remain in a certain area of your home, which transforms into the “retreat center.” The number one rule of the retreat center is no one interrupts you unless it’s an emergency, and you can define what emergency means for you and your family.
- If you have teenagers, adult children or other adults living with you you can ask them if they’d like to participate in the retreat, you may even involve them in the process of planning in the retreat.

How long does the retreat take?

Again, it depends on your situation. If you have two or three hours to retreat then your retreat will be for a few hours. If you have 12 hours then a half-day retreat is right for you. If you have 24 hours (awesome!) then retreat for a whole day. Note: Since this is a self-paced retreat I would not recommend anything longer than 24 hours unless you’re a seasoned mindfulness and meditation practitioner.

How do I plan a mindfulness retreat at home?

Well, that’s where I come in with suggestions on how to plan your retreat and different retreat schedules you can use and adapt for your situation. I’ll provide an example and resources to support your home retreat. Finally, I’ll provide a retreat planning worksheet that will help you plan your own personalized stay at home retreat.

how to plan your home retreat

Self-Compassion

Be compassionate towards yourself and your situation. You may have a particular vision of what the “perfect” retreat may look, sound, or feel like, but you may feel limited by your ability to create the “perfect” retreat. The reality is that even when you are on a retreat that someone else designed, it's still not always the “perfect” or blissful retreat that you envisioned. So, drop the “shoulds” and perfectionistic attitudes that you may have. Remember what the purpose of retreat is... it's a time to pullback, to withdraw and go within.

Realistic

Be realistic with yourself. Plan a stay at home retreat that takes into account your current situation. So, if you only have two hours to yourself then plan for two hours. Also, take into account your experience with mindfulness and meditation practices. It may be unrealistic to plan a 24 hour retreat if you're brand new to these practices. So, if you've never been on a retreat or are new to meditation I suggest easing yourself into it by planning a 2 - 3 hour retreat.

Honest

Be honest with your support system. Explain to your loved ones that you're planning this time for yourself and why you're doing it.

Learn

Consider what you want to practice on this retreat. What do you want to deepen in your practice? In essence what is the retreat's theme? Here are some suggestions: loving-kindness, working with difficult emotions, living during challenging times, focus on the heart-center, forgiveness, working with the wandering mind, working with anxiety, what it means to be joyful, investigating the four elements, befriending the body and there are so many other interesting topics to explore.

Create

Finally, select all the guided meditations and talks/teachings prior to the day of the retreat. I recommend (if possible) to download the recordings before the retreat so you don't have to access the internet to listen to the recording. If the recording is a streaming audio or video have those links easily available and accessible on the day of the retreat, and focus on just those sites, avoiding other websites during the retreat.

retreat schedule options

Three Possible Options

Below are some example retreat schedules for your stay at home retreat. Remember, be realistic with your mindfulness experience, situation, and time constraints as you decide which schedule is best for you. Also, feel free to modify and change the amount of time you spend during each meditation, mindful movement, and other mindful activities.

Option One

*2 - 3 hour mindfulness
home retreat*

- Set an intention (5 - 10 minutes)
- Meditate- use a guided meditation to set the tone of the retreat (15 - 25 minutes)
- Mindful cooking, eating, and if time resting (45 - 60 minutes)
- Meditate- if you practice meditation regularly and it's in your practice silently meditate without guidance (15 - 25 minutes)
- Listen to a mindfulness teaching (45 - 60 minutes)
- Mindful movement, i.e. walking meditation or yoga (30 minutes)
- Meditate- use a guided meditation or in silence (15 - 25 minutes)
- Reflection (5 - 10 minutes)

Option Two

8 - 12 hour mindfulness home retreat

- Set an intention (10 - 15 minutes)
- Meditate- use a guided meditation to set the tone of the retreat (20 - 25 minutes)
- Mindful cooking, eating, and mindful free time (60 - 90 minutes)
- Meditate- if you practice meditation regularly and it's in your practice silently meditate without guidance (20 - 25 minutes)
- Listen to a mindfulness teaching (60 minutes)
- Mindful movement (30 minutes)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (20 - 25 minutes)
- Mindful movement (30 minutes)
- Mindful free time (20 - 30 minutes)
- Meditate- use a guided meditation (20 - 25 minutes)

- Mindful cooking, eating, and mindful free time (60 minutes)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (20 - 25 minutes)
- Listen to a mindfulness teaching (60 minutes)
- Mindful movement (30 minutes)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (20 - 25 minutes)
- Mindful free time (15 - 30 minutes)
- Practice walking meditation (30 minutes)
- Reflection (15 - 30 minutes)

Option Three

*24 hour mindfulness
home retreat*

- Mindfully practice your grooming habits (i.e. bathe, brush teeth) and do these activities awareness, ease, and a careful attention of being as quiet and silent as you can. For example, avoid blow drying your hair since the hairdryer is loud, or if you use an electric toothbrush, choose to manually brush your teeth. (7 AM – 8:00 AM)
- Set an intention for the retreat day (8:00 – 8:15 AM)
- Meditate- use a guided meditation to set the tone of the retreat (8:20 – 8: 45 AM)
- Breakfast: Mindful cooking, eating, cleaning, and mindful free time (8:45 – 10:00 AM)
- Meditate- if you practice meditation regularly and it's in your practice silently meditate without guidance (10:00 – 10: 25 AM)
- Listen to a mindfulness teaching (10:25 – 11:25 AM)



The Meditating Teacher

- Mindful movement- practice walking meditation or yoga (11:30 AM – 12:00 PM)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (12:00 – 12:25 PM)
- Mindful movement (12:25 – 12:55 PM)
- Lunch: Mindful cooking, eating, and cleaning (1:00 – 2:30 PM)
- Mindful free time / rest (2:30 – 3:00 PM)
- Meditate- guided meditation (3:00 – 3:25 PM)
- Walking meditation (3:25 – 4:25 PM)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (4:25 – 4:55 PM)
- Listen to a mindfulness teaching (5:00 – 6:00 PM)
- Practice walking meditation (6:00 – 6:25 PM)
- Dinner: Mindful cooking, eating, cleaning and mindful free time (6:30 – 8:00 PM)
- Meditate- silent or guided meditation (8:00 – 8:30 PM)
- Gentle Yoga (i.e. Yin Yoga, Restorative Yoga) (8:30 – 9:00 PM)
- Mindful free time and preparing for bedtime (9:00 – 10:00 PM)
- Sleep
- Post-retreat reflection (next morning)



notes about the schedule

Mindful movement

You'll notice that each schedule includes time between each meditation to practice mindful movement, such as mindful walking, tai chi, qi gong or yoga. Sitting for long periods of time can be challenging and even painful for the body; so, these periods of mindful movement gives your body time to move. However, mindful movement practices are not a break from the retreat. You're continuing your mindfulness retreat, but using this time to mindfully move the body and perhaps expand your focus beyond the breath to the body.

Mindful free time

There are periods of "mindful free time." These are not periods of the day to take a break from the retreat, but rather to continue to deepen your practice during down time. So, I highly recommend that you not distract yourself by reading, writing in a journal, checking social media or email, watching videos, or anything that pulls you away from yourself and the experience of this personalized retreat. Remember this is a sacred time you've created for yourself in order to deepen your practice, to withdraw for a short period from the outside world, and to deeply reconnect with yourself.

Mindful eating

There's time to mindfully prepare your food and practice mindful eating. Again, this is an opportunity to connect mindfully with the food you're preparing to eat during your retreat and to pay attention to how you prepare your food, what you're eating and your eating habits. So, take this time of preparing and eating your meal as an opportunity to become intimate with the food you're eating, how you eat it, and notice when you're truly full. Also, many people eat while they are bored or when they're anxious. This is a way for the mind to do something beside being with itself or as a way to distract itself. Use this as an opportunity to notice when you're really hungry and need a snack or if this is an instance of the mind using food to distract you.



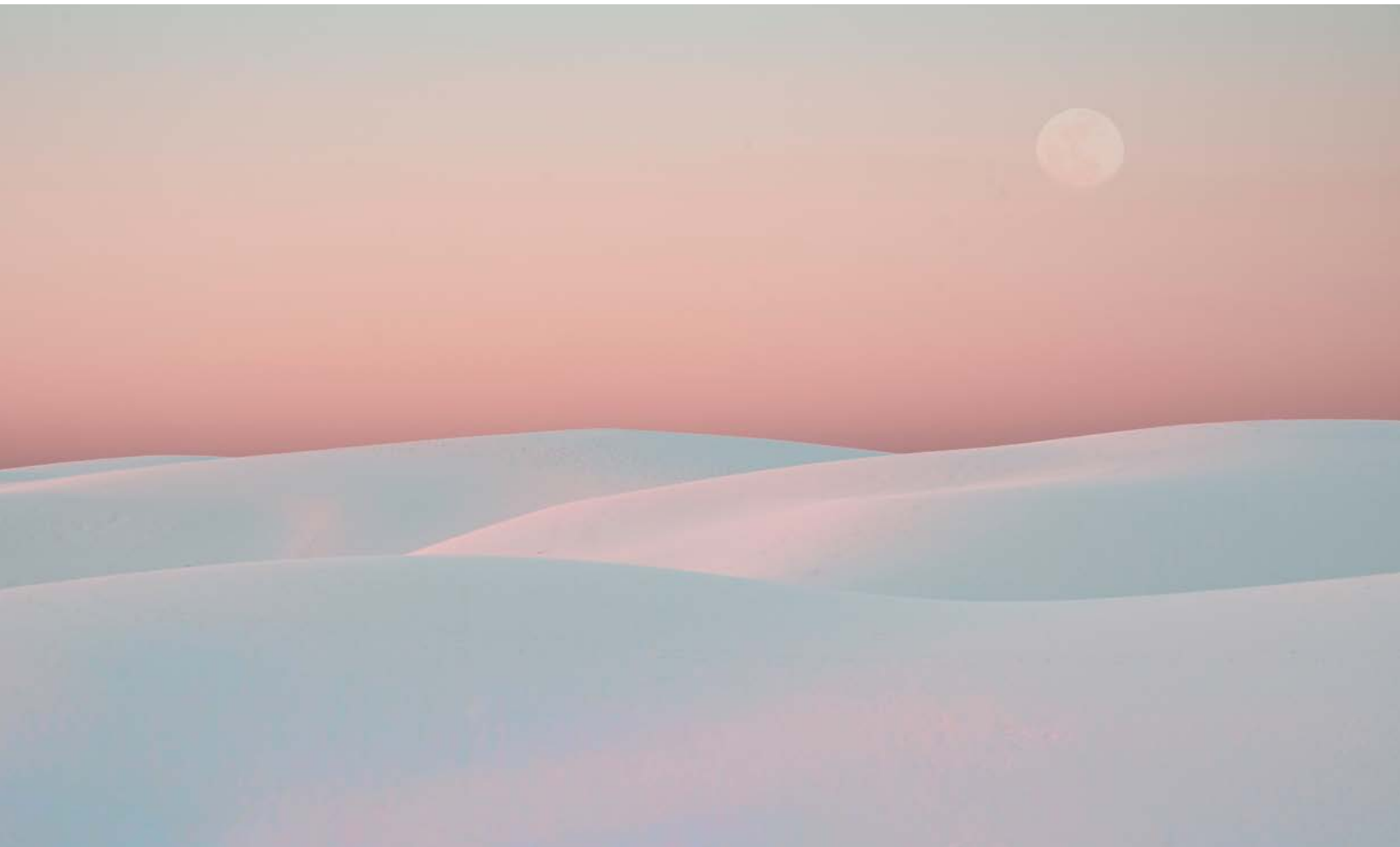
final tips

Be in silence

This is a silent retreat. Well, as silent as it can be. Of course there will be sounds throughout the day. You'll hear cars passing by, your family in the other room, toilets flushing, water running, and of course the teachings and guided meditations you've chosen for the day. The intention is for you to be silent. Meaning that you don't have the pressure of communicating with anyone. In addition, try to minimize the sounds you make. For instance, if you tend to walk quickly and stomp then try to slow down and minimize the sound that your feet make as you walk. Of course, you'll make sounds. You're alive and human, but the intention is to be mindful of the sounds you make throughout the retreat time.

Limit distractions

Turn off all devices or at least put them on silent or airplane mode. Throughout the day pay attention to how frequently you have the urge to check your phone, watch a video, listen to music, news, etc. This isn't about policing yourself or shaming yourself each time you have the urge to check your device(s), but rather a noticing, an awareness of this habit, and making the conscious choice of not needing to respond and read every post.



example of a personalized stay at home retreat

Date: June 2020

Time: 8:00 am - 5:15 pm

Theme: Loving-kindness

Retreat Schedule

Intention setting: Write in my journal setting an intention for today's the stay at home mindful retreat (8:00 - 8:15 AM)

Grounding meditation: "Relaxing the body, stilling the mind" by Jill Shepherd (8:15 - 8:30 AM)

Breakfast: (8:30 - 10:00 AM) Mindful cooking, eating, and mindful free time

- Menu: toast, scrambled eggs, cup of berries, coffee
- Prepare meal
- Eat
- Clean
- If time and weather permits walk outside

Brief talk & meditation: "Sharon Salzberg - Lovingkindness in Difficult Times (10:00 - 10:30 AM)

Mindful movement: Gentle yoga practice- Heart Opening Yoga Class by Yoga by Candace (10:30 - 11:00 AM)

Silent meditation: no guidance (11:00 - 11:30 AM)

Mindful break: use restroom, walk, stretch (11:30 - 11:45 AM)

Listen to a talk/teaching: Loving Kindness by Sharon Salzberg (11:45 AM - 12:35 PM)

Retreat Schedule

Walking meditation: (12:35 - 1:00 PM)

Lunch (1:00 - 2:30 PM) Mindful cooking, eating, and mindful free time

- Menu: Baby lettuce salad with chicken
- Prepare meal
- Eat
- Clean
- If time and weather permits walk outside or take a nap if feeling sleepy

Meditation: Use a guided meditation Embodied Meta by Tara Brach (2:30 - 2:50 PM)

Talk/Teaching: Loving Kindness Talk by Mark Nunberg (2:50 - 3:30 PM)

Walking meditation: (3:30 - 4:00 PM)

Mindful break: use restroom, walk, stretch (4:15 - 4:15 PM)

Silent meditation: no guidance (4:15 - 4:45 PM)

Gentle yoga: Yin Yoga with Laura van Ree (4:45-5:00 PM)

Closing reflection: write in journal reflecting on experience during this retreat. (5:00 - 5:15 PM)

Note: For the rest of the day try to continue to move through the day mindfully. I can choose to continue to avoid checking email, social media, listening to the radio or watching television. I may choose to continue to avoid alcohol or foods and drinks with refined sugars. By continuing my day mindfully I might notice my mindfulness practice continue to deepen, have new insights, or a sense of being in a state of ease. This is truly a beautiful gift to give to myself.

Plan your stay at home retreat

Directions

How to use this worksheet. This worksheet is a guide to support you in your planning process. I ask guiding questions throughout to ensure that you create a retreat that supports your practice and intentions. So, if there's some aspect of the retreat that you'd like to add, switch around, delete then feel free to do so. In addition, below is a list of a few resources that may help you find guided meditations and talks about mindfulness practices.

Resources

You can find mindfulness talks and meditations on various topics from an array of experts and teachers. In addition, if you have a particular topic that you'd like to learn more about or that you're interested in you can type in search words in the search engine of these websites.

- Dharma Seed <https://dharmaseed.org/talks/>
- Insight Timer <https://insighttimer.com/>
- There are individual teachers that I really enjoy, such as [Tara Brach](#), [Jack Kornfield](#), and [Ruth King](#)
- I also have guided meditations that you can access at <https://soundcloud.com/paula-cristina-azevedo>.



Reflective questions

How experienced am I with mindfulness and formal meditation practices?

Do I have a daily meditation practice?

Why do I want to "go" on retreat?

What do I intend to get out of my stay at home retreat?

Logistical questions

What day can I “go” on retreat?

How much time do I have to retreat? What time will I start and end my retreat?

Where will I practice throughout the retreat that is relatively quiet and I can be alone?

Do I need childcare or petcare? Who will babysit or petsit while I’m on retreat?

Do I have to take time from work? If so, what arrangement do I have to make with my employer?

Who can I call if I’m struggling with a difficult emotion, memories, pain, etc. during the retreat or after the retreat?

Theme



What is the theme of my retreat?
Or, what topic do I want to focus on during my retreat?

What concept or form of practice do I want to explore more deeply?

What have I been struggling with lately?

What do I intend to get out of my stay at home retreat?

If you're really not sure what your theme for your retreat will be here are some suggestions: loving-kindness, working with difficult emotions, living during challenging times, focus on the heart-center, forgiveness, working with the wandering mind, working with anxiety, what it means to be joyful, investigating the four elements, befriending the body and there are so many other interesting topics to explore.

Retreat details

Meditation playlist

Review your responses to the pre-planning guiding questions and the theme for your retreat. Based on your response search for meditations related to your retreat topic. If you don't have a list of favorite meditations then here are some resources you may want to search in:

Dharma Seed <https://dharmaseed.org/talks/>

Insight Timer <https://insighttimer.com/>

Meditations by Dr. Azevedo <https://soundcloud.com/paula-cristina-azevedo>

What's my meditation playlist going to include?

Teachings playlist

Review your responses to the pre-planning guiding questions and the theme for your retreat. Based on your response search for dharma talks or teachings related to your retreat topic. If you don't have a list of favorite teachers or talks then here are some resources you may want to search in:

Dharma Seed <https://dharmaseed.org/talks/>

Insight Timer <https://insighttimer.com/>

There are individual teachers that I really enjoy, such as [Tara Brach](#), [Jack Kornfield](#), [Ruth King](#), [Thich Nhat Hanh](#), [Pema Chodron](#), and [Susan Piver](#) just to name some teachers.

What's my teaching playlist going to include?

Retreat details

Mindful movement playlist

Sitting all day or even for a few hours can place a lot of stress on the body especially if you're a pretty active person. This is why moving throughout a retreat is essential. There are several mindful movements you can practice, such as walking meditation, yoga, qi gong, or tai chi. Choose one or two types of mindful movements to incorporate throughout your retreat day.

I highly recommend you include walking meditation or at least mindful walking. If you're not familiar with walking meditation I suggest you read about it [here](#). You may also want to download a meditation that specifically guides you through a walking meditation.

There's also yoga, qi gong, tai chi and other mindful movement practices that you can include. If you don't feel comfortable practicing yoga, qi gong, or tai chi you can skip this. However, there are plenty of great videos and resources about these practices that you can discover online and especially on YouTube.

What's my mindful movement playlist going to include?



Retreat details

Mindful eating meal plan

This is your retreat and your body so eat and drink what nourishes you. However, retreat is a special time to be more mindful of what we consume. This doesn't mean you have to radically change your diet, but it does mean to be more selective of what you eat during retreat. So, for instance, you may consider avoiding sugary snacks, foods, and beverages. Also, avoid alcohol.

Breakfast

What will I eat for breakfast? What ingredients and items will I need to prepare this meal?

<i>Meal</i>	<i>Ingredients</i>



Retreat details

Lunch

What will I eat for lunch? What ingredients and items will I need to prepare this meal?

<i>Meal</i>	<i>Ingredients</i>

Dinner

What will I eat for dinner? What ingredients and items will I need to prepare this meal?

<i>Meal</i>	<i>Ingredients</i>

Snacks

What healthy snacks will I be sure to stock up for the retreat?

--

My retreat schedule

Date:

Time:

Theme:

Retreat Schedule

Intention setting: (-) *time*

Grounding (-)
meditation:

Title of guide meditation _____

Weblink: _____

Breakfast: (-) _____

Guided (-)
meditation:

Title of guide meditation _____

Weblink: _____

Mindful (-)
movement:

Title of practice _____

Weblink: _____

Silent meditation: no guidance (-)

OR

Guided Title of guide meditation _____
meditation:

Weblink: _____

My retreat schedule

Mindful break: (-)

Listen to a (-)

talk/teaching: Title of guide meditation _____

Weblink: _____

Walking (-)

meditation: Title of talk _____

OR

Weblink: _____

Mindful Title of guide meditation _____

movement: Weblink: _____

Lunch: (-) _____

Silent meditation: no guidance (-)

OR

Guided Title of guide meditation _____

meditation: Weblink: _____

Listen to a (-)

talk/teaching: Title of talk _____

Weblink: _____

Additional notes:

My retreat schedule

Walking meditation: (-)
Title of practice _____

OR

Weblink: _____

Mindful movement: Title of guide meditation _____
Weblink: _____

Mindful break: (-)

Silent meditation: no guidance (-)

OR

Guided meditation: Title of guide meditation _____
Weblink: _____

Walking meditation: (-)
Title of practice _____

OR

Weblink: _____

Mindful movement: Title of guide meditation _____
Weblink: _____

Dinner: (-) _____

Additional notes:

My retreat schedule

Listen to a (-)
talk/teaching: Title of talk _____
Weblink: _____

Silent meditation: no guidance (-)

OR

Guided meditation: Title of guide meditation _____
Weblink: _____

Closing reflections: (-)

Additional notes:





Allow the
retreat to
unfold.

After the retreat



The practice is to remember.

Remember to show up for yourself and others.

The only way you can show up in the world as your authentic, awesome self is to sometimes pause and retreat. After the retreat you might feel nothing at all, you might be more sleepy, you might feel more emotional, you might notice memories, thoughts, old stories that you haven't thought about for years percolate up. This might be something that you weren't ready to deal with before, but are now mature enough and have the fortitude to work with in a healthy and loving way. This is why it's important to have your supports available and ready just in case you need additional support either during or after the home retreat.

Welcome whatever arises with compassion, gratitude, and non-judgment. Most often it's not the retreat itself that deepens your mindfulness practice, but what comes afterwards. That's why it's important to allow the retreat to unfold even after the day of the retreat. And, most often the lessons reveal themselves in unexpected ways. Just be present with whatever arises.

Thank you!

I hope you found this stay at home retreat planning guide helpful and that it supported you in creating your own private retreat.

If you want to learn more about mindfulness and meditation check out my courses, private coaching sessions and other resources at www.themeditatingteacher.com.

Sending lots of love.

Peace.

Paula Cristina Azevedo, PhD



Dr. Paula Cristina Azevedo is an experienced school teacher, teacher educator, mentor, certified mindfulness coach and yoga instructor. She's a former high school history teacher and currently teaches pre-service teachers at George Mason University.

She believes that working with children and teens should bring joy, curiosity, and passion for both the adult and child. Sadly, this is not always the case due to many external and internal pressures and stresses that impede our work of supporting, teaching and raising children.

That's why she created The Meditating Teacher where she supports, coaches, and teaches parents, educators, counselors, and school leaders interested in incorporating mindfulness into their teaching and/or parenting practices. She believes that mindfulness isn't a set of strategies that can be imposed on young people, but rather that mindfulness starts with you being present and compassionate with yourself, your family, colleagues, children and students.

The Meditating Teacher

HEART-CENTERED EDUCATION

www.themeditatingteacher.com



The Meditating Teacher
HEART-CENTERED EDUCATION