



Sravasti Abbey

A Buddhist Monastery

Retreat from Afar 2023: The Four Establishments of Mindfulness

Participant Manual



Retreat from Afar

Every year during the winter, Sravasti Abbey residents enter a three-month silent retreat. Some people join us in person for the first month of retreat. For most people, however, that's not possible. So, we invite our friends to participate from afar for one, two, or all three months of retreat.

What does this mean? While the Abbey community meditates 4-5 sessions a day on a particular practice, you can do "Retreat from Afar" by committing to meditate for one or more sessions a day on the same practice. Many people find that one session a day for 1-3 months is totally doable within their existing routine of working, family life, and other activities.

This year, the topic of the Winter Retreat is the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, otherwise known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, or the Four Close Placements of Mindfulness. To participate in the Retreat from Afar, we ask you to commit to doing the Shakyamuni Buddha practice at least once daily, paired with analytic meditation on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. This would be for the one, two, or three months you decide to do retreat. You can shorten or lengthen the duration of your retreat at any time.

The Four Establishments of Mindfulness

What are the Four Establishments of Mindfulness? In the words of the Dalai Lama:

The purpose of the four establishments of mindfulness is to gain direct insight into the nature of our body and mind and to use this wisdom to eliminate the afflictions that bind us to saṃsāra.

Through realizing the body and mind are impermanent and unsatisfactory, we want to generate the wisdom realizing emptiness that eradicates the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra... By practicing the four establishments of mindfulness, we will become intimately familiar with our situation as saṃsāric beings in an experiential way.

-- *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps, Volume 4, the Library of Wisdom and Compassion* (p. 327-8).

This winter we will *establish mindfulness* on body, feelings, mind, and phenomena to gain an experiential understanding of our unsatisfactory situation in cyclic existence. These meditations will lead us to understand impermanence and emptiness, and support our bodhicitta motivation as we see all beings are in the same situation of unsatisfactory conditions.

Retreat Support

Each week, Sravasti Abbey will send weekly emails to support your practice. These emails will include links to video teachings on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, excerpts from books, transcript excerpts, guided meditations, and more.

We will continue to post three short talks (Bodhisattva's Breakfast Corner) each week on the [Sravasti Abbey YouTube Channel](#), which will address the topic of retreat in general, and more specifically the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. Longer teachings will also be given as part of the ongoing study curriculum at Sravasti Abbey. See our calendar [here](#).

To meditate with a group, consider joining a group of Abbey friends who meditate together each day on Zoom. They will lead the practice of the retreat, and every Saturday an Abbey monastic will lead the practice. Find out more [here](#).

Registration

If you have not yet registered, please fill out [this form](#).

Take part in our digital photo wall so that our resident community can connect with our fellow retreaters from afar. **Title the photo with your name and country** and drag and drop it into [this folder](#).

Preparing for Retreat

It is helpful to prepare for retreat before it begins, by familiarizing yourself with the practice. You can find the Shakyamuni Buddha practice [here](#). You can also find this practice in *Pearl of Wisdom I* which you can find in [hardcopy](#) or [softcopy](#).

An excellent resource to begin your studies of the four establishments is [Following in the Buddha's Footsteps](#), volume 4 of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion. Chapters 11 through 13 provide a detailed map of how to understand and practice the four establishments.

You can also watch teachings on this topic by our resident teachers, Venerable Thubten Chodron and Venerable Sangye Khadro:

- Venerable Sangye Khadro gives a [12-part series](#) on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness with an emphasis on mindfulness of breathing and mindfulness of the body. These one-hour classes include guided meditations.
- Venerable Thubten Chodron gives in-depth instruction on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness from both the Pali and Sanskrit traditions. This [26-part series of 1-hour teachings](#) add interesting points brought up in Gyalwa Chokyi Gyaltzen's *A Presentation of the Establishment of Mindfulness*.
- Venerable Thubten Chodron gives an [overview of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness in 6-parts](#). The teachings include translation into Russian.
- Venerable Sangye Khadro teaches the Four Establishments of Mindfulness, including guided meditations, as part of a series on the 37 Harmonies with Enlightenment. Watch the videos [here](#).
- Venerable Thubten Chodron explains how the Four Establishments of Mindfulness are presented in Chapter 9 of Shantideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds*. This is a [9-part series of 1-hour classes](#).

Here are other resources you may find helpful:

- Read: [Sutras](#) on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness.
- Read: Guide on how to meditate on the [32 parts of the body](#).
- Listen: [7 guided meditations](#) on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness by Bhikkhu Analayo.

Session outline

Each retreat session should include:

- Begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation to settle the mind
- Set a bodhicitta motivation
- Follow the practice outlined in the [Shakyamuni Buddha Meditation](#)
- Pause after the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, or the mantra recitation, to practice mindfulness of breathing
- Add an analytical meditation on one of the many topics of mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, or phenomena.
- You could also do a glance meditation on the lam rim, such as the [Foundation of All Good Qualities](#) or [Three Principal Aspects of the Path](#).
- Dedicate merit

Considering joining the Lay Practitioner Practice Group to experience a guided meditation. They meet twice a day, 5:30 am & 6:00 pm Pacific Time, on Zoom. Find out more [here](#).

Topic outline for 3-month Retreat from Afar

During retreat (January 6-April 3, 2023), Sravasti Abbey will send weekly emails to support your practice. These emails will include links to video teachings, excerpts from books, guided meditations, and more. We will structure the content of these emails according to the following outline.

Of course, you can structure your retreat as you wish, but here is the topic outline the emails will follow:

Week	Start Date	Topic of meditation
1	January 6	The four distortions
2	January 13	Mindfulness of the body: foulness of the body (32 parts)
3	January 20	Mindfulness of the body: foulness of the body (32 parts)
4	January 27	Mindfulness of the body: the four elements
5	February 3	Mindfulness of the body: skeleton meditation
6	February 10	Mindfulness of feeling: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral; worldly and unworldly
7	February 17	Mindfulness of feelings: Causes and results of feelings
8	February 24	Mindfulness of feelings: Causes and results of feelings
9	March 3	Mindfulness of the mind: impermanence of the mind
10	March 10	Mindfulness of the mind: conventional nature of the mind, emptiness of the I
11	March 17	Mindfulness of phenomena: the five hindrances. a. Identifying the hindrance b. Causes for when it arises c. How to temporarily suppress the manifest affliction
12	March 24	Mindfulness of phenomena: the five hindrances.
13	March 31	Mindfulness of phenomena: the five aggregates

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Does the Retreat from Afar cost anything to participate in?

A. All courses and teachings from Sravasti Abbey are offered freely, including the Retreat from Afar. The Abbey runs entirely on donations from our kind supporters, so if you would like to make an offering to the Abbey, that would be gratefully received. Offerings of all kinds (money, food, offering service) are welcome. You can find out more here: <https://sravastiabbey.org/giving/>

Q. I'm not sure I want to participate in three months of retreat. Is it okay if I only do one month?

A. Yes. You can choose to participate in the Retreat from Afar for either one, two or three months. If you are unsure, it is good to set yourself an initial timeframe of one month and follow that through. Then, if you want to increase the length of your retreat, for another one or two months, you can do that. You don't need to tell us how long you plan to participate. We will send you the weekly emails for the full three months unless you request otherwise.

Q. I've never done a retreat before. Am I qualified to take part in this retreat?

A. Yes. You can structure your Retreat from Afar in a way that suits your level of practice. You can start with one session a day, for 30 minutes, and slowly get familiar with the practice text and the analytic meditations. There are many resources online to help you with this. As you get more familiar, you can increase the length of your sessions in small increments (e.g. 5 minutes) building up to 45-60 minutes if you wish.

Q. What time of day should I meditate?

A. We encourage people to meditate first thing in the morning, when the mind is most fresh and clear. Setting a strong motivation and spending some time in meditation in the morning really helps set the tone of the day, allowing love, compassion, and wisdom to guide your actions of body, speech and mind. However, we understand this is not possible for some people for various reasons. Please meditate when it fits best into your schedule, and where you can really settle the mind and focus on what you are doing.

Q. Is there a way to connect with other retreatants from afar? It would be nice to have a regular discussion group about the practice.

During Winter Retreat, Sravasti Abbey residents are not available to facilitate Retreat from Afar discussion groups and so forth. If you would like to be in touch with other retreatants, you can put your details on this [Google Doc](#), and reach out to others who have also shared their information.

Sravasti Abbey will not monitor and accepts no responsibility for the sharing of personal details on this page.

Q. What happens if I have questions come up during retreat?

A. The Sravasti Abbey community will be in silent retreat, and not actively monitoring emails. However, you can write to us (retreat@sravastiabbey.org) with questions about the practice, which residents may answer in the short pre-lunch talks that are posted to the Sravasti Abbey YouTube

channel. We hope the support and resources provided in the weekly emails will also answer many questions that may arise.

Q. What is the retreat schedule Abbey residents will follow? I want to use that as a model for my retreat and try to meditate at times when the Abbey monastics are meditating.

A. Below is the daily schedule of Sravasti Abbey residents during Winter Retreat. Keep in mind that the schedule changes when we have weekly teachings.

If you have not done long-retreat before, it is helpful to build up your meditation practice slowly. Start with a one-day retreat with four meditation sessions. After that, you could try a weekend retreat. It's important to not have a tight mind that is pushing yourself to do more than you are ready for. Rather, we build up our practice slowly and steadily, so that we can have a joyful mind that is happy and satisfied with what we have been able to do.

5:00 am	Wake up
5:30 – 7:00	Meditation Session 1
7:30	Breakfast
8:45 - 10:00	Meditation Session 2
10:30 – 11:45	Meditation Session 3
Noon	Lunch
2:45 - 4:00 pm	Meditation Session 4
4:00 – 6:00	Study time
6:00	Medicine meal
7:00 – 8:15	Meditation Session 5
8:15 – 10:00	Study time / rest