

## Pyramid Retreat Orientation

Schedule, Retreat Components & Core Practice Instructions

### Retreat Schedule

#### Wednesday

<b>3:00pm – 5:00pm</b>	<b>Arrival</b> Please notify us if you will be arriving outside of this window
<b>6:00am – 7:00pm</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
<b>7:30pm – 9:00pm</b>	<b>Opening Session</b>

#### Thursday – Saturday

<b>7:00am – 7:50am</b>	<b>Meditation</b>
<b>8:00am – 8:50am</b>	<b>Breakfast</b>
<b>9:00am – 12:30pm</b>	<b>Morning Session</b> Includes Sitting, Walking, Break, Talks/Instructions & Group Inquiry/Dialogue, Optional 1 on 1 interviews.
<b>12:30pm – 1:30pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>1:30pm – 4:00pm</b>	<b>Personal Practice</b>
<b>4:00pm – 6:00pm</b>	<b>Afternoon Session</b> Includes Sitting, Walking, Break, Talks/Instructions & Group Inquiry/Dialogue, Optional 1 on 1 interviews.
<b>6:00pm – 7:30pm</b>	<b>Dinner</b> Timing for dinner and evening session may vary evening to evening depending on meal prep.
<b>7:30pm – 9:00pm</b>	<b>Evening Session</b>

#### Sunday

7:00am – 7:50am	Meditation
8:00am – 8:50am	Breakfast
9:00am	Departure

## Notes on the Retreat Format

### Morning, Afternoon & Evening Sessions

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With the exception of the first morning sit at 7:00am, the remainder of the day is organized into “chunks” or long session blocks. The main reason we do this is because we have found the energetic and meditative needs of each retreat to be unique.

That said, the morning and afternoon sessions will generally include sitting, group Q & A, optional one-on-one interviews, and walking/resting in awareness in nature. The ratios of these will vary greatly. There may also be somatic movement work done in the pyramid on some days.

#### **Group Q & A & Teaching Sessions**

These sessions (during morning, afternoon and sometimes evening sessions) are in some ways the heart of the retreat.

They are where you get to tell us exactly what is going on with you as you are being intimate with your experience. At any given moment, your experience will be wonderful, surprising, confusing, sad, extraordinarily frustrating, or liberating.

In being able to make a direct report about your experience and formulate a question or inquiry, many things happen.

The first and most important thing that happens is that *your experience is clarified*. Why? Because what happens when you speak honestly with a pure heart is that the thoughts, images, sensations and emotions that have been in the background (at the edge of the unconscious) *are brought completely forward*. This allows you to remain intimate with them *without being in a state of complete identification with them*. Without having them run you “in the background.” When our experience is stated honestly, we can then have a true relationship with it precisely because it can now be witnessed clearly.

Reporting and questions, in this way of thinking, are an extension of the practice of noting, as well as the practice of contemplative journaling. In all these cases, the goal is to externalize and clarify what is murky, under the surface and hard to see/be with.

Our main job as retreat teachers is to hold space for – and provide selective feedback to – this process. These sessions are also the place where retreat themes are spontaneously unearthed/discovered and then addressed. The small, intimate nature of these retreats makes this process particularly potent. We can feel, at an energetic level, the relationship of our experience to someone else's. This is a totally wonderful and supportive thing to have happen.

Our main request during group sessions is that participants agree to refrain from giving “lateral feedback” about each other's experience in session.

This has as much to do with the person giving the feedback as it does the person receiving it. You might be a teacher or a therapist or a healer in your own right, but right now, you are doing your own work on retreat. The importance of allowing yourself to drop all other identities and enter simply and completely into the space of your own healing cannot be overstated. Let us hold the facilitation space so you don't have to.

### **Optional One-on-One Interviews**

During morning and afternoon walking periods Megan (usually in the morning) and Chris (usually in the afternoon) have three, 15-minute slots to talk to folks one-on-one. Several things can happen in this space.

- You can bring questions and reports that are confidential or that don't feel right for the group in some other way.
- You want a little more focused time on an issue, inquiry or facet of practice.
- You just have some intuitive inclination to speak with one of us, although you don't have a conscious “reason” for doing so.

15-minute slots are always optional. Given the small size of our group, we have not had any issues with people getting the one-on-one support they need.

### **Silence, Mealtime & Ana**

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We stated on the website that:

“Pyramid Retreats” are done at our home in an intimate but not-altogether silent container (dinner is generally eaten out of silence). Our experience with this form of practice thus far has been extraordinarily positive. The relaxed intimacy of the group and the easy-going, unpressured connections that are made profoundly support our ability to deepen into presence-awareness as a group.

Basically, your retreat experience comes with a 4-year old (Ana).

This will mainly be felt during dinner, where we eat delicious food together with said 4-year old around a big table. There will obviously be talking, and it is usually lighthearted and wonderful. It has been surprising how quickly folks feel at ease and form bonds.

Be aware that you are invited to eat outside or downstairs if your system is asking for silence (listening for what you need/what is right in any given moment is one of the core instructions of our retreats).

At all other times (including breakfast and lunch), we are in silence. This means that, even if you are having a spacious, lovely chat around the dinner table, as soon as you leave our living area, you return to silence and re-focus on the unfolding of your simple, moment-by-moment experience.

This is great training for “being in the world.” Going through the process of coming into and out of silence over the course of a few days can actually make integrating the states and insights of retreat easier and less disjointed.

## Pointers for Practice

Being on retreat is basically an act of *simplifying the external* so that *the internal can be seen clearly*. To put it another way, our experience is, roughly speaking, made up of two things:

1. Space (Awareness)
2. Things (Content)

Normal human patterning puts overwhelming (compulsive) emphasis on #2 while basically ignoring #1 (with occasional exceptions in peak experiences). The essential instruction on retreat is to completely reverse this ordering. We put *spacious awareness completely in the foreground of experience*, and let thoughts, emotions, sensations, and all of external reality simply be “things that pass through” this changeless awareness.

This is not the same thing as suppression! It is actually the opposite. In letting awareness be the basis of our experience, *everything is put in its right place*. Everything is allowed and honored despite its ephemeral, transitory nature!

With this basic frame in mind, here are a few “frames” that you can try on during the retreat.

## Listening, Waiting, Receiving & Acting

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The relative spaciousness of our retreat schedule is deliberate (particularly the afternoon free time). While the concentrated energy of formal practice sessions is important, the time around formal practice is often where various forms of deepening and fruition are noticed and harvested. Do not ignore the free time, the transitions between one thing and the next, the chores, the basic self-care of showering, brushing your teeth and putting yourself to bed!

It is in the unfolding of these mundane experiences that the extraordinary luminosity of your own true nature can be glimpsed and enjoyed!!

Basically, your commitment is not just to a few meditation sessions per day, but to staying with your moment-by-moment experience as it unfolds through all states and situations.

In simplifying your life down to the essentials (retreat takes away the complexity of your various responsibilities and the competing demands they engender), you have given yourself a perfect laboratory to *listen deeply to your own heart*.

In a sense, each moment of our life *is an open question*. What now? What is right in this moment? Is there an action to be taken? An impulse to be followed?

*Presence-awareness will guide this process of where to place your attention and “what to do next” with flawless precision.*

But you have to let it. And you have to get quiet enough to hear it. You have to vow to listen to it. You have to wait without expectation and go slowly. We have been listening to the conditioned mind and ego structure to live our life and make our decisions for so, so long. This is a great, patient retraining of *what is fundamentally in charge of our life* (true nature or egoic conditioning).

The fundamental purpose of retreat is to experiment with putting true nature in charge of *absolutely every aspect of our being* in a safe, controlled and low-pressure environment. You are not deciding to leave your job or your core relationship (although those facets might surface for consideration if you have been repressing them).

You are deciding whether to take a walk, have more salad, or another cup of tea. But the mechanism is the same. Are you listening for the wisdom-voice? Are you attuning to the information this moment is giving you? Will you follow it?

## All We Are Doing is Being Aware

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Question any attempts by the conditioned mind to make what we are doing complicated or “technique-y.”

*We are just simply being aware* – resting in the sense of “knowing” that is the fundamental core of our experience.

This sense of being aware was the same when you were a child and it will be the same when you die. You cannot lose, alter, damage or corrupt what you fundamentally are! But it *can* be covered over by conditioned patterns and energies.

So, when accessing awareness feels complicated or difficult....

- Allow awareness to settle into your felt-sense. The inner energy field of the body. The breathing. The sensations in your hands or feet. The openness of the sense-fields (seeing, hearing). Rather than fighting the mind, gently re-direct into feeling and sensation.
- Don't struggle with the sense of awareness “coming and going.” This is natural. Instead, we emphasize “short moments of awareness, repeated many times.”
  - When awareness wakes up, recognize it and surrender to it. It will be covered up again. And then it will appear again. Do not subtly resist this coming and going or harbor shame around it!
  - When it comes back each time, embrace it like the beloved! This creates unshakable confidence and continuity over time.

## Don't Bypass Pleasurable States

For many of us, there can be a subtle but pervasive habit of “excavating suffering.” We see the path as “looking for what’s wrong with us” with a few brief moments of calm and respite thrown in to keep us going!

No doubt things can get gnarly, but we need to watch out for unconscious tendencies to suppress bliss, pleasure, and profound well-being. So, if there is presence-awareness and even a subtle sense of well-being in the body....

- How good can we let it get?
- Can we let it deepen?
- Can we invite the intense pleasure of embodiment in?

Anytime presence-awareness is foreground, and no apparent suffering is perceived, this is the inquiry. Basically, our only job is to deepen! We don’t go hunting for conditioning if none is bubbling up. Doing so is one of the ego’s most subtle and pernicious tricks to keep us on the treadmill of “me.”

### **Be Specific About States of Suffering**

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One thing about being quiet and “internal” is that states of suffering and dis-ease can take on a vague, murky quality. Actually, we know that we are beginning to make contact with deeper levels of the unconscious precisely when things get “murky” and hard to pin down. States, tendencies or syndromes emerging from the unconscious can have a “dream-like” quality as they come into conscious view. Retreat invites these states because the system knows it actually has the space to experience them/work through them there!

So work slowly! And be specific. If you’re feeling a murky collection of thoughts, images, emotions, and sensations, you can drop a simple inquiry into awareness:

- What is this?
- How should I be with this?
- What do I need to know about this to work with it?

From our point of view, each moment of awareness is also a moment of investigation. Awareness is always curious!

You should feel free to journal short responses to your inquiries. These actually help when you are in one-on-one interviews with the teachers, as well as reporting in the group.

## See How Awareness Changes Your Interaction Style

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As noted above, there will be some talking on this retreat at lunch and dinner. Our experience of this has been overwhelmingly positive. As pack animals, humans have deep wiring to make contact with the tribe around them. Far from interrupting states of deep presence, we want to present the possibility that human contact can deepen presence if engaged in consciously.

So, we get to play with the balance of letting ourselves be natural and free (following our impulses to talk and connect in a relaxed way) *and* noticing where we are using speech to leave our experience, avoid discomfort, make a positive impression on others to mask insecurity, or enable some other (usually quite subtle) defense mechanism.

In our teaching, “Right Speech” is not some kind of protocol. It is also not “not talking a lot.” Not talking can be just as much of a defense as talking.

What it is = an ongoing, deeply sincere inquiry into how speech manifests directly from our true nature.

*What do we say (or not say) when we are not trying to be someone or defend or enhance an identity?*

This is a deep investigation....