

Feedback from Satipanya on-line retreat in recent months.

Christine: “Online retreats are a great opportunity for some extended practice at home. They are flexible, so you can commit to a level that is right for you. And they offer a sense of community, which often continues after the retreat. A great way to kick-start your regular home practice!

Louise: I am grateful to have recently attended an online retreat with Noirin and Carl, and very happy that they have embraced this new online zoom format.

I usually try to attend a retreat once a year at Satipanya, but due to the restrictions of shielding in the COVID climate, this was looking increasingly unlikely, so I was delighted when I saw that I could attend online.

The flexibility of tailoring this retreat to fit in with my home environment enabled me to step out for couple of mornings to teach online in my college job; this brought another very welcome dimension to the retreat, giving me the wonderful opportunity to explore the transition from formal sitting practice straight into the heart of my everyday life in my home with my family.

The retreat was skilfully led with gentle guidance and a sympathetic understanding. Sitting in the meditation hall with other participants, despite it being a virtual zoom space, gave a refreshing sense of connection and support. The evening dhamma talks were informative and gave me the opportunity to work with and gain more confidence with the practice. I would definitely recommend an online retreat with Satipanya.

Richard: I’ve been on retreat plenty of times before, but this was my first experience online. I knew it would be different, but it surpassed all my expectations – in a good way.

I had a strong sense of participating in something that was more than just me practising at home. The structure and support I associate with being at Satipanya were able to subtly manifest themselves in my home retreat space – a heart-lifting surprise!

I felt really ‘held’ by Bhante and the group, and was pleasantly surprised at the depth of practice as the week rolled on. The great encouragement, warmth and humour I associate with Bhante were all live and present, as was the necessary (for me, anyway) inspiration from the evening dharma talk.

I came away from the retreat seeing the online experience as more than a stop-gap and something that offers some new options for practice. Nice not to have to hold in a cough or a sneeze, mid-meditation, too!

Natalia: Online retreat with Bhante Bodhidhamma was very nourishing and profound experience. All of my questions about how is it going to work meditating at home online had vanished within first day of the course. You naturally go into the rhythm of practice in a

comfort of your own home. The presence and discipline of other participants were very helpful and inspiring. Bhante was always available to answer all questions and support us in any difficulties that would come out during the practice. It has been much appreciated. It is a unique experience and opportunity to integrate awareness into your daily routine handling with mindfulness preparation of your meals, taking care of small or big household, family or even work tasks (there is an option for a full or flexible schedule). I'm looking forward for the next opportunity in my life to do this retreat again.

Annie: "This past week has been so beneficial. I didn't know if the schedule would be manageable with the distractions of home, but amazingly it was, with a bit of re-organisation of space and family support. I enjoyed all the challenges it brought and feel much better for it.

Noirin's skilful guidance, sympathetic understanding and advice has been very much appreciated. This was truly enhanced by meaningful examples and her personal experiences of how the Dhamma comes into everyday life and can be realised through both joyful, difficult and mundane events.

The commitment to the full schedule was worth every moment, I have learned so much, thank you."

Daniel: In my current situation, where I have to accompany my mother in her loss of autonomy, online retreats are ideal for me.

Indeed, for the moment, it is very difficult for me to go on retreat in a center for 15 days

This retreat allowed me a very good formal practice and helped me a lot not to be unsettled by Mom's moods.

I just missed the 2 p.m. sitting meditation, but the retreat allowed me to refocus very well

Nic: Sitting the on line retreat with Bhante at Satipanya and our small group of 10 was one of the best things I could have done this summer. I could feel my body unwind gradually as the simple days past and I reconnected with noting and the slow slow walking with big skies above and Bhantes jokes and gentle teaching to guide me to a very quiet and sensitive place.

I returned to work today with a sparkingly refreshed body and mind. I feel reconnected to the joy of life again!

Samuel Tribehou: I have found the online course with Banthe Bodhidhamma extremely beneficial.

The online setting was never a problem, Bhante was very available for an interview and seeing the other meditators really helped.

Mahasi noting in daily life seemed mechanical at first but I'm finally finding that I'm getting drawn to it as it leads the mind to peace and spaciousness.

Carl Sharman: This online retreat was excellent. Zoom format worked well, providing the perfect balance of accountability and flexibility. Best of all you got individual interviews with an immensely experienced and skilled practitioner and teacher.

As an experienced retreat attendee, I never would have thought an on-line retreat would work so well."

Andrew: I try to go on retreat every year, but it is problematic when trying to find something which happens to coincide with leave from work and within reasonable travelling distance. When this retreat was offered it seemed like a perfect solution.

Since I was working from home due to Covid restrictions I was able to follow the retreat guidelines pretty faithfully, and it does compare well with a retreat-in-person.

What is extra great about this format is that the schedule is flexible so that it would be possible to do even if you are working more-or-less full time.

It was refreshing to be part of a sangha and to get some one-to-one time from bona fide teachers.

Wendy: They say that 'Necessity is the Mother of Invention' and this has proved to be the case with the birth of The Online Retreat. When Bhante and Noirin found themselves locked down at Satipanya but unable to go ahead with the usual calendar of residential retreats, moving online seemed to be the way to go. I was fortunate to be able to sit one of the first online retreats for a week with Noirin and Carl.

At the beginning Noirin told us that it was an experiment for the teachers as much as for the participants and that we could all learn from the experience as we went along and that feedback was welcomed on what worked and what didn't.

At the end we had a lively discussion and feedback session and the unanimous response was a big thumbs up to this new way of retreating. The word that kept coming up in peoples' appreciative comments was 'flexibility'. This was experienced in a lot of ways. Geographically it allowed people from all over the world to participate (all those air miles saved for the planet!)

Then there was the flexibility of the schedule, giving people a choice of whether they wanted to commit to the Full Schedule, similar to that of the residential Satipanya retreats (but with the slightly less rigorous first sitting at 6 am rather than 4), a medium time-commitment schedule which could be tailored to suit each person's circumstances, and a minimum time commitment to joining any of the sittings and the daily evening dharma talk.

This meant that people with all kinds of work and family commitments could join the retreat who might not otherwise have been able to get away. There were parents with family at home who could switch off their Zoom screen if a child needed immediate attention. Other people were able to blend the retreat with work commitments. Someone used his campervan in the drive to find seclusion away from the family and confessed to sometimes scooting across the drive in his pyjamas to get to the early morning sitting. If anyone wishes to sit the online retreat with the Full Schedule as rigorously as if they were at Satipanya this is perfectly possible if an undisturbed place can be created for themselves at home.

One of the advantages of the online retreat for most people was the very fact that going backwards and forwards from sitting meditation to all the busyness and distractions of Samsara over an extended time presented a great opportunity to notice the different mind states generated by these contrasting conditions. Larry Rosenberg in 'Breath after Breath' encourages us to, 'Investigate your distractions' and we had the perfect conditions to do just that. At the end of most of the sittings Noirin reminded us in a lot of fresh ways about the value of watching our minds spin off into story-telling and attachment and aversion as we went back into daily life activities and to keep coming back to the 'physicality' of present moment reality. It was such a helpful practice.

Another way in which the flexibility of the retreat and being able to blend meditation with daily life was interesting and helpful was that there wasn't the sharp contrast of the purity and protectedness of the residential retreat conditions and the demands and bustle of daily life which can hit with full force when coming out of retreat. This contrast can lead to a sense that the 'retreat mind' is better, more real or longed for, and set up an inner conflict. With the online retreat we were dealing on a daily basis with the warts and all nature of Samsara while being able to go back onto our cushions regularly to check out all of it, so there was no metaphorical cliff to fall off at the end.

The general feeling at the end of the online retreat was 'Can we have more please!'. In fact, I was so enthusiastic that others and myself immediately signed up for another 4 week online retreat. I normally wouldn't have been able to take such a long time out because of work commitments which I can now 'blend' with the retreat. What had begun out of necessity has proved to be a different and positively valuable experience for us all.