

2021

retreat guide

“Especially during
this time of isolation,
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anxiety, to take a
break from screens.”
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Retreating in 2021

FIRST TIME? HOW TO
CHOOSE THE RIGHT RETREAT

SAFETY FIRST: HOW
RETREATS HAVE ADJUSTED

GO VIRTUAL: HOW TO PREP
FOR A DIGITAL RETREAT

Spirituality
& Health



WHEN YOU FINALLY GO ON A RETREAT ...

WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND—AND
WHAT TO STEER CLEAR FROM

BY MARY BEMIS

Retreats have been an honorable American tradition since Henry David Thoreau went off to Walden Pond. “I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him,” wrote Thoreau.

By the time I was growing up in New England, it was well understood that poetry and art, as well as nature, were part of spiritual questing. I attended my first retreat as a preteen, along with my family, through our Unitarian church. Off we went for a weekend in the woods of Vermont, where my father would teach a jazz workshop and my mother a painting workshop. Retreat-goers of all ages enjoyed the fresh air and the camaraderie, shared values and the communal kitchen, and learned new ways to be and to see.

A good retreat teaches (or refines) the skills you need to be a better person, to live a better life. A good retreat offers physical, emotional, and spiritual nourishment in a safe environment with trusted teachers. It offers camaraderie or silence, depending on what you seek. It offers a chance to reconnect with nature or with yourself. Nowadays, a retreat can mean building a straw-bale house, a stone wall, or a permaculture garden.

Especially during this time of isolation, there is a need to shed anxiety, to take a break from screens. Retreats offer a chance for voluntary solitude as opposed to pandemic-induced solitude. In today’s world, it has become increasingly important to take good care of ourselves, so we in turn can take good care of others (and our planet). In my three decades of writing about wellbeing, I’ve never



witnessed such a hunger for what we now call self-care—both inside and out.

So, if you feel ready for a retreat, there's good reasons why. Take the time to quietly sit with yourself and make a list. What are you yearning for? Is there something specific you are going through that needs guidance? What do you need to work on? How much time do you want to, or can you, dedicate to a retreat? What do you hope to gain by attending? What is a realistic budget?

THREE THINGS TO LOOK FOR

1 The setting. Think about what kind of an environment makes you feel safe. Going to a place without cell service, phone, or Internet can be liberating—or just anxiety-making. What works for you? Do you prefer a women-only or men-only retreat? Do you need a single room or cabin? How flexible are you willing to be—that's the edge. You may be much happier with much less than you think. Or not. How open can you be? Maybe you need TLC instead of a spartan getaway.

2 The activities. A good retreat is most often a well-marked path. You should know where you're going and what you're getting into. That may mean that nothing is happening at all—but you should know that in advance.

3 The intentions. Most retreats come into existence because of a founder's personal passion—does that passion resonate with you? There are retreats founded by billionaires, there are retreats founded by penniless monks—and everything in between!

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THREE RED FLAGS

1 Fishy founders. If you're not familiar with the founder or teachers, do your homework! Make sure the leader (and teachers) of the retreat are the real deal. Do they have the qualifications needed to be leading the retreat? The rules and expectations of the retreat should be clear and readily available and not subject to the whims of a potential nut case. Sadly, pretty much anyone can create a "retreat" and gladly take your money.

2 Lack of planning. Look for well-planned itineraries and detailed agendas. Is there an easy-to-navigate website and a telephone number with a live voice at the other end? A good retreat may not be easy to reach immediately; staffs are often small and take their own retreating seriously. That said, a good retreat should feel accessible and welcoming.

3 Extreme experiences. No one should have ever been cooked in a plastic-tarped sweat lodge—as occurred in James Arthur Ray's infamous Sedona retreat. But crazy things still happen in the name of self-improvement. Don't check your good sense at the door. If something doesn't feel right, don't do it.

...

"Life itself becomes one long retreat, if you are open to seeing it that way," Jon Kabat-Zinn shared with me during an interview a few years back. "I love looking at life that way, whatever unfolds is the curriculum of the retreat, and the challenge always is: How are you going to be wise in relationship with whatever arises, be that wanted or unwanted?"

Mary Bemis is a pioneering spa and wellness journalist who has spent decades reviewing retreats. She is the Editorial Director of InsidersGuideToSpas.com.

A good retreat offers physical, emotional, and spiritual nourishment in a safe environment with trusted teachers.



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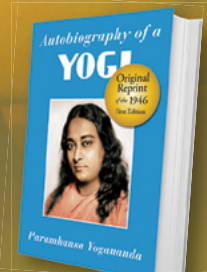
Diksha is the Director of the Ananda Spiritual Counseling Training and co-Director of the Ananda Meditation Teacher Training. She is a spiritually dynamic yogi of great warmth and humor, gifted in both intelligence and intuition. Diksha has been a Kriya Yogi for more than 30 years, training meditation teachers around the world for more than 18 years.

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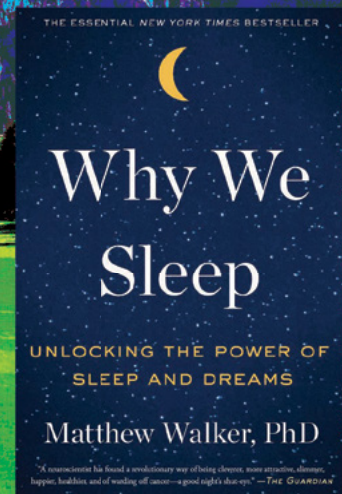
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REDOING RETREATS

BY BRANDI-ANN UYEMURA

A weeklong escape to the woods might seem fantastical right now. A retreat, in every definition of the word, may be unattainable in your corner of the world. But retreat centers are anticipating your visit in 2021.

A handful of years ago I went on a mother's pilgrimage. The type you take when you're overflowing with babies and need a break. When I think of that time now—yoga with a dozen or so people and open buffet dining with 30 other guests—it's easy to believe that way of life is extinct. But Gary Palisch, the **Sedona Mago Center's** marketing advisor, reminds me that there are parts of the country remote enough that partaking in a normal retreat experience is possible.

"We're 12 miles out in the desert," he says.

The center, located in northern Arizona, is on 173 acres of land. Currently it's allowing 30 people on the grounds at a

time. "The rooms are pretty well spaced out, so we literally have no chance of you running into someone," Palisch says.

The Sedona Mago Center has had to quickly adapt. Temporarily closing the center, cutting pay, and declining large, profitable group bookings are some examples. "It's a challenge financially. ... The key was how do we maintain a safe environment for people? Because we are out in the desert, so a lot of our teachers, trainers, and operational staff live out there. How do we make sure they're all safe?"

The center has implemented social distancing and masks in common areas. Only couples are allowed to share rooms. Gone are buffets. Hand sanitizer is plentiful. Teachers are heard from at least six feet away through speakers. The good news, Palisch says, is "most of your time at Mago is spent outside."

Low occupancy makes the retreat feel like a private getaway. "[It] allows the opportunity for people to go on really deep-dive personal retreats," says Palisch. Another change is the length of stay. More people are opting for longer stays that can make lasting change in their life. "Mago really is a place that can help people who are asking, 'What's the next phase of my life going to look like?'"



SEDONA
MAGO CENTER

COURTESY OF SEDONA MAGO CENTER

Canyon Ranch, a luxury wellness resort with four locations, is attempting to meet the need for human connection while staying safe. The retreat has a medical facility and employs, among others, Richard Carmona, a former surgeon general. Under the guidance of its experts, it has been able to offer in-person spa services like massage. The resort is actively working on offering group experiences for corporations and social and wellness travel groups.

In the virtual space, Canyon Ranch offers videos, articles, and online coaching, and it gives guests the opportunity to continue working with health professionals they've seen in the past. Jim Eastburn, the resort's director of transformational experiences, says,



CANYON RANCH
WOODSIDE

COURTESY OF CANYON RANCH

“I think it will be an ongoing extension of our brand to help people stay connected through life and wellness coaching and looking at elements of telemedicine.”

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In addition to the pandemic, the **Ratna Ling Retreat Center**, located in Cazadero, California, has had to endure the California wildfires. While the center was not directly impacted, its codirector, Rosalyn White, says the challenges have taught her patience. “I need to have patience and by that, I mean just to face the reality as it is. Not how you wish it could be or used to be, but how it is now and what we can do to help.” This has trickled down into the center’s programs.

“We’ve actually been planning to move more in a spiritual direction in our teaching. Our founder is a Tibetan Buddhist master. Most of us are long-term students and teachers who have this grounding in the Buddhist practices. We’ve been more of a yoga retreat center and we’ve been moving more toward our roots in Buddhist practice. It seems like it’s what the world needs right now.”

White says the center is working on developing programs that “go beyond Shavasana,” and the five or ten minutes of relaxing that it brings. Instead, it is hoping to introduce a deeper spiritual practice that will bring greater joy and make a difference in people’s lives. “We are going to create this hybrid something that feels good like yoga does but also helps you feel better on more an emotional level.”

Ratna Ling is planning ways to invite people back to the center safely. An option is offering personal retreats for individuals who would stay in one of 14 guest cottages and

may choose to bring their own food or have meals brought to them. Classes may take place via Zoom and guests can receive directions on how to do their own self-guided nature walks.

The center is also hoping to return to its camping roots. “One thing we’re looking at resurrecting is a camping option. We used to have really nice platforms tents and yurts. We’re looking at making those available again. It will offer different price points and be a little more affordable. We already have permission to do that in the summer months.”

Before the pandemic and its consequent financial burdens, the **Shambhala Mountain Center** in Colorado was already dealing with reported sexual misconduct by its clergy. Add in the movements in society to bring more awareness to racial and gender inequity, and the center felt called to move in a different direction. Executive director Michael Gayner says it is “focusing on community development, bringing together meditative practice and community life.”

The center, which had to be evacuated in the summer due to forest fires, has also been working on building “resilient and healthy forests. ... Any further development that we do will be anchored in good ecological and environmental standards and net zero construction, providing energy to the grid rather than taking from it.”



RATNA LING
RETREAT CENTER

COURTESY OF RATNA LING

Another part of the center’s plan is strengthening its online presence to reach a more diverse audience. “One of the things COVID accelerated for us is developing good online programs. Some programs will be online purely and we’re also looking to develop hybrid programs with some number of students on land and other people who could be joining elsewhere. That would also make it more affordable if people are experiencing economic challenges.”

Traditionally, the center has offered a significant number of Buddhist programs from different traditions. It has expanded that to include yoga, running, hiking, and writing retreats. All programs have a contemplative meditative element. These are held over a day, a weekend, or even a month.

What you don’t get in luxury spa offerings, he says you gain in 600 acres of nature. “The only traffic jam we have is when there’s a bunch of deer on the road. You have those kinds of intimate experiences. It’s more about being up in an



SHAMBALA MOUNTAIN CENTER

COURTESY OF SHAMBALA MOUNTAIN CENTER / COREY RUFFNER

incredibly beautiful, potent space exploring nature.”

Gayner is excited about the changes the center is undergoing. “When part of your livelihood is to host people ... there’s a yearning for guests and friends.” **S&H**

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STAYING IN FOR A VIRTUAL RETREAT?

HERE'S WHAT TO DO BEFOREHAND

BY KALIA KELMENSEN

One of the best parts of a retreat getaway is the actual getting away. Away from the demands of everyday life, away from the dishes, the laundry, the chores that call to you from your home. These days, so much of our lives are spent in our homes that the idea of a retreat feels like a dream, the elusive, foggy type we can't quite wrap our mind around.

A retreat offers a powerful container for growth and change. It's a place ripe with intention, where there is space to focus wholeheartedly. So, in this time of physical

distancing, we can still cozy up in community virtually. It just requires some pivoting.

Just as you would do for any retreat, there are preparatory steps to take so your experience will be satisfying rather than frustrating. Try these ideas to enhance your virtual retreat.

Create a sacred space. Be sure to clear any clutter or piles of unfinished chores or work. Set it all aside so you can relax fully in the present. Let the people around you know that you are taking some space or invite them to join you if it feels appropriate. If you live in a noisy place, consider using a white noise machine to limit intrusive sounds.

Set the intention for the room. If you have enough ventilation, you may want to smudge the room with sage, light a scented candle, or diffuse your favorite essential oils

Let the people around you know that you are taking some space or invite them to join you if it feels appropriate.

into the air. You could also have a face mist on hand to use throughout the retreat. Clearing the energy and igniting inspiration through your sense of smell can help to create a shift in your awareness.

Gather what you need to feel fully cared for. Be sure to plan ahead so you have what you need on hand. You may want a yoga mat, a cozy sweater or throw, a journal and beautiful pen to write with, an eye pillow, or a mug of your favorite tea and some snacks. You will be well-served by not having to run out of the room to grab these things mid-retreat. Your retreat organizer will most likely provide a list of suggestions, so be sure to look for it in your welcome packet.

Prepare your technology. Set yourself up with the appropriate ways to engage with the retreat. Connect speakers to your computer and adjust the sound so you will easily be able to hear what is being shared. Update any programs you are using, and although it might be tempting to slide in last minute, log on five to ten minutes early so you

can be sure that all of your technology is working. Figure out beforehand how to get support from the retreat team if something goes awry while you are trying to connect.

Find a way to transition. In ordinary circumstances, retreats involve a fair amount of travel, often over great distances. This allows space for adjustment, anticipation, and preparation. Give yourself this time to transition both as you prepare for your retreat with the above steps and also when the retreat is over. Don't just jump back into the chores of your life. Plan on drawing a bath or engaging in something creative. Go on a walk or let yourself lay down and rest in order to process the information you have just taken in. Give yourself this gift by identifying and recognizing what it is that you need the most in order to transition.

Retreats are ultimately about self-care. You are choosing to participate in a way that is meant to nourish you on a deep level. With some planning and clear intention, your virtual retreat can offer potent benefits. **S&H**

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Six Secrets for Planning a Retreat for a Group of Friends

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

YOU'VE ENVISIONED IT FOR AGES—escaping for a retreat with a group of dear friends. You're laughing together in terry-cloth robes and mud masks. Or maybe your gang is at a wilderness retreat, journaling around a fire pit. Perhaps your group is together deepening a faith practice, experiencing a festival, or traveling in an exotic locale. But getting your squad off on a retreat can easily become a logistical challenge (ever heard the term herding cats?). Here are six secrets for turning a “maybe someday ...” dream into a concrete, and pleasurable, reality.

*At press time, the COVID-19 crisis has affected travel and many retreat centers. This article is written with the hopeful assumption that planning far ahead—especially necessary when traveling with a large group—will take us into a window of time when greater mobility is again possible.



1 Think big picture. Clarity is important. One person's idea of a retreat might be learning Arctic survival skills while another envisions painting mandalas, so it's key to determine what level of adventure and what types of activities the group is most comfortable with. Is there a certain presenter your group of friends would love to hear? Would everyone enjoy a creativity retreat? Mindfulness and meditation? Yoga and vegan food? Be honest with each other about budget and expectation, and be fair when it comes to choosing a geographic location. If everyone is spread all over the U.S., for example, you might consider rotating: One year your group could do a retreat in the Southwest, and the following year, in the mountains of North Carolina.

2 Block off time like a boss. The earlier everyone can block off a week or a weekend and keep it as sacred space for the trip, the more likely it is this retreat is going to actually happen. Planning far ahead lets everyone set aside money for their retreat budget; arrange for child, house or pet sitters; and figure out any other logistics, such as getting a passport. Even for a relatively simple weekend away, plan at least three to eight months in advance. Otherwise, you'll face an endless chorus of "well ... how about the 22nd?"

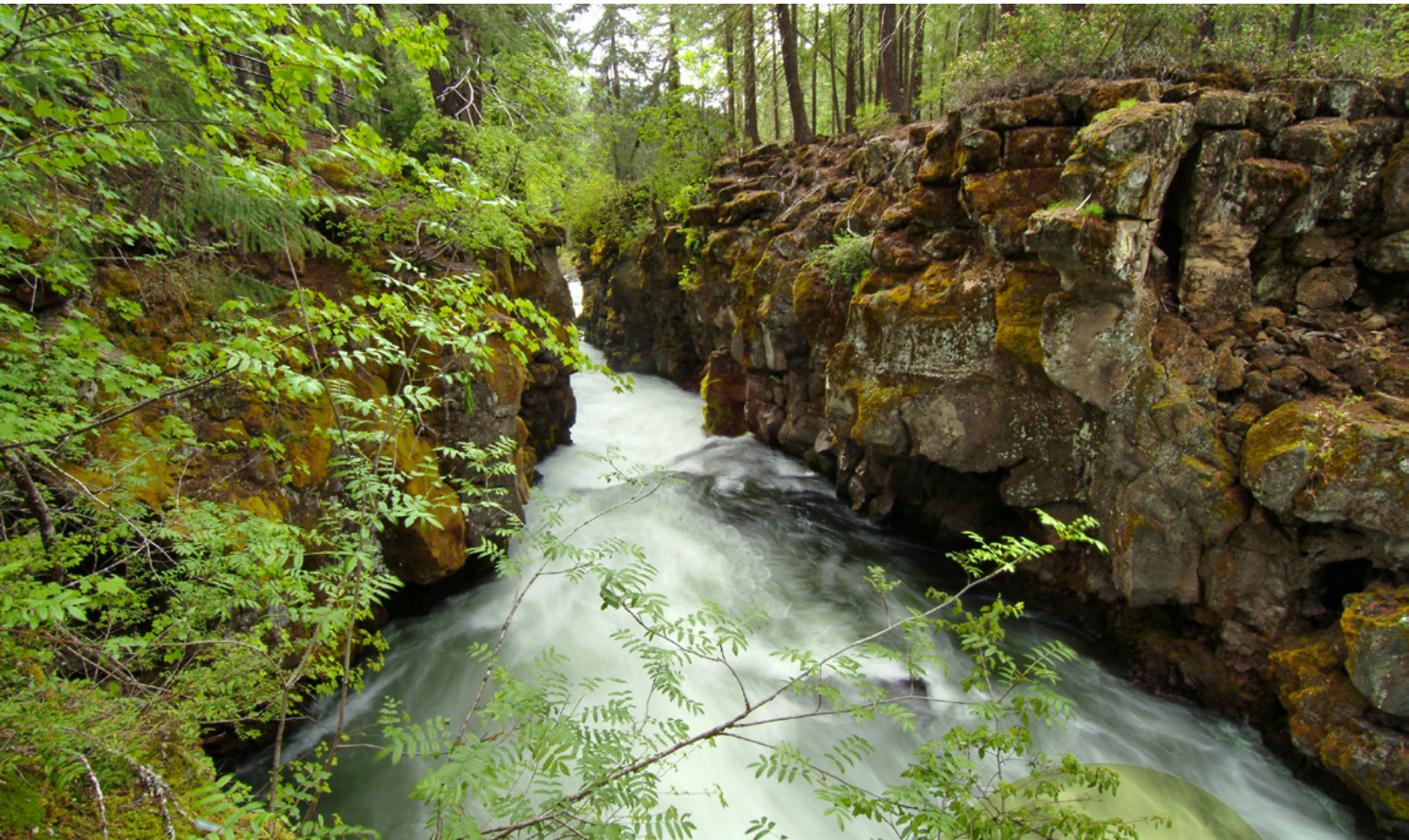
3 Play to the strengths of your group members. Some people are savvy deal shoppers, who nimbly leap from Kayak.com to Priceline to Travelocity and

other travel-planning sites, comparing flight prices, departure times, and rental car offers. Other people are allergic to that type of thing, but will happily research which guided hikes or ayurvedic treatments the group should sign up for. Designate based on people's interests and skillsets, and tasks will fly off the to-do list.

4 Select one form of communication. Decide as a group how you'll plan your retreat—an email thread? A monthly Zoom?—and stick to it. Nothing is more annoying than getting endless texts from one person, having to return calls from another, and "didn't you read Susie's email?" from still another.

5 Ask about a group discount or exclusive rental. If your group is large enough, you may be able to secure a cabin, building wing, or entire retreat center for your group, depending on the venue. You may also be able to get group discounts. Either way, be sure to ask about the available options when booking for a group.

6 Embrace "you do you." Yes, you'll be together with dear friends and the main goal is bonding. However, remember that everyone is a little different. If one person wants to slip off for a solo botanical garden exploration, and the rest of the group wants to try Watsu and a cooking class, no hard feelings. You can meet back up at lunch and you'll have even more to talk about. **S&H**



My Solo Whitewater Rafting Retreats

BY MARTY THOMMES

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I decided to do a monthly solo retreat in a nine-foot raft on the famed Wild & Scenic section of the Rogue River in Oregon. This 35-mile stretch has lots of class III and some class IV (expert) whitewater, no roads, primitive camping (no toilets), and a few bears. This three-day retreat is like entering into another dimension. Maybe it is a substitute for the psychedelic mind-altering drugs of the Sixties.

Getting away from traffic, away from the phone and Wi-Fi, and out of electronic fields provides lots of exquisite time for reflection and meditation. It's time to spend with the gods of the river, as well as the bear, eagle, osprey, and salmon.

Going solo has its risks. One bad oar stroke at the wrong time and you are flipped upside down in the middle of a tumultuous rapid, with no one to call for help. Then the river goddess may suck you down to her cold, wet bosom, where she tumbles, pummels you in a chaos of passion and bubbles. If you're buoyed by a good lifejacket, she typically spits you back, and you thrash toward shore, sputtering, gasping for air, relieved to have escaped, knowing she has left only a damp kiss on your throbbing heart, and not a fatal bump on the head.

Sometimes we think the gods are fickle and arbitrary, but they just follow the law of consequences. When people drown in the river, which they do every year, it is usually because they weren't wearing a lifejacket, or they made a careless decision. Or maybe they didn't take into account the water level of the river, which can change your routes, expose holes and rocks, and shift current eddies.

The mindful river rafter studies the course of the current, the changing channels; he watches subtle bulges and motions of water, listens to the quality of sound; feels the dancing surges and vibrations through his oar blade. He becomes one with the flow, using her power and forces in a liquid aikido—sliding around a suckhole, pivoting on a crest, rolling in a curl, pirouetting between rocks.

I row backward (with a bike mirror) in the flat water for more power, and forward in the whitewater to navigate the rocks. At times I see where I have come from *and* where I am going, and this perspective flows into the course of the meditation. One can assess the choices that changed the direction and goals of a lifetime.

After pulling into a quiet, sandy cove for the evening, one must be mindful of the neighbors: the ever-sniffing bears. Rogue bears know how to open most brands of cooler and drybox. The others they just rip apart. Smells that attract them are bacon and eggs, cold cuts, sausage, and other traditional camping fare. So I have oatmeal for breakfast, sardines for lunch on the river, and a can of chili for dinner. Simplicity: no campfire, no large kitchen or stove, no temptation for bears.

Watching the river go gently by in the evening is a good time to remember family and friends who have passed on. One can imagine a flow of loved ones drifting by, destined for the cosmic ocean of infinite dimensions. And just as this river water flows into the ocean, then to return to the mountains by rain and snow, and back down this riverbed, so we humans may complete our own everlasting cycle.

Nights are long on the river. When the sun disappears from the narrow canyon, the camp cot calls. The quiet is



broken only by the night critters chirping and the occasional fish rising for a bug. This is a time to watch where one's thoughts go, to be an observer of mind meanderings, to quiet the inner workings of the psyche. This is when the spirits pass by, looking into the windows of our soul.

The starry sky is brilliant, without ambient light. The frequent calls of an old bladder are welcome, if only to step outside the tent to gaze at the jewel-studded galaxy. Much of the river is in steep canyon, so it is important to choose a campsite for either early morning light or long afternoon light. I like the early morning light, to be cruising down the river just as Lord Sun peeks over the mountain.

Putting in the river at the beginning of a solo trip feels like entering the river Styx. I know this will be an exciting adventure. It is like jumping off a high cliff, or entering a doorway to a new dimension, a stargate to another reality. It feels like what the final transit will be, exciting yet scary.

And you have to do it alone... **S&H**



Shhh ... a Silent Retreat Guide

BY BETH ELLIOTT

ARE YOU READY FOR A SILENT RETREAT? I had tossed around the idea for years but I had never met someone who had actually attended one. One evening at a candlelit dinner party, the guest next to me told me about his Vipassana, a word that I had never heard before. He said, “If you can arrange your life to do it, it will be the greatest gift that you can ever give yourself.”

I scoffed and thought about privilege. Really?! Wouldn't I be of better service volunteering to help the needy of the world? Not a self-indulgent silent retreat! He assured me that it would change my life. For the better. And in turn that will help change

the world. Four months later, I found myself at Quepasana on Maui for a ten-day silent retreat. I was scared, yet willing to commit. Could I do it?

I did. And you know what? He was right. A silent retreat is a gift to yourself to recalibrate, to connect, to learn about yourself in a beautiful way. In such a way that you can only get when your basic needs are taken care of and you are given the time, space, and instruction to meditate in silence. My friends said that I glowed upon my return. I felt clear and strong. And I carry the changes I made through that retreat to this day.

Here are some tips to help you plan yours.



Truth: Being in silence is possible and can even be fun.

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR RETREAT

From California to Maui, Western Massachusetts to Myanmar, silent retreats are available worldwide. Do some research and trust your intuition. Are the teachers qualified? What kind of food is provided? What are the sleeping accommodations—tents or cabins, bunks, or private rooms? Research the reviews and ask any questions you might have to the retreat manager prior to registering. A weekend or four-day retreat is a great way to dip your toes in.

The Vipassana, a ten-day silent retreat, is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation as a path for self-transformation through self-observation in silence. S. N. Goenka is the founder of the worldwide non-commercial silent retreat centers, meaning there is no charge to attend and attendees donate after they have completed the course, so that others may attend in the future.

Vipassana means “to see things as they really are.” During the Vipassana, course attendees are guided by Goenka's audio and video recordings and sit for a full day of meditation in one to one-and-a-half hour sessions.

Most silent retreats that are not called a Vipassana are a variation on it. They may teach a different meditation technique or could include yin yoga movement while the attendees observe silence.

SILENT RETREAT MYTH BUSTING

Myth: *Being silent will be impossible for me.*

Truth: *Being in silence is possible and can even be fun.*

At first, being-in-silence might take some getting used to. I thought I might have to use duct tape over my mouth! Then you realize that most tasks in a day can be accomplished without words.

We were allowed to write notes to the retreat manager about logistics or in case we needed some thing, such as a nail file or toothpaste. We could write notes to the instructor with any questions about our meditation practice, which he would then read out loud and answer after our evening session.

I have to admit that I had some really fun times in silence. It's a solo retreat in the company of others who are all committed to silence.

Myth: *My family needs me and I could never get away.*

Truth: *You will find a way to arrange your life to be away and if your family needs you they can contact you at the retreat.*

My dad had major surgery six months prior to my retreat and I was very worried about him. What if something happened to him and I couldn't be there for him? Give your family the retreat center emergency contact phone number and email. They will notify you if your family calls and needs you.

Myth: *I won't be able to sit for that long in meditation every day.*

Truth: *Your body will adapt and there are ways to relieve discomfort.*

Around day five my legs started to hurt at about Level 11. My instructor saw my discomfort and he brought me a pillow and showed me a different way to sit during our sessions and the pain went away. You can use a pillow, rolled up blankets, or even sit in a hard-backed chair during the meditation sessions.

THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Read your retreat documents! Read and then reread your retreat documents again. They will be packed with all the pertinent information for your retreat. I was sent a 14-page PDF with the rules to abide by, what to pack, recommended reading before the retreat, details on the food that would be served, the daily schedule, and a strong recommendation to start a daily meditation practice and wean yourself off any caffeine addictions. (Bye-bye lattes!)
- Take care of your upcoming bills, water your plants, set up your offline email auto-reply, mail the birthday cards, get your pets cared for so that you will feel settled and able to go into your course without anything pending at home!
- Give family and friends the retreat emergency contact phone number and email, with the stipulation that it is for an emergency only. This is YOUR time.
- Go all in. Why not? Take this time to do it. The guidelines for my retreat laid out the restrictions: no reading, no writing/journaling, and no cleansing or dieting during the retreat. And yes, no cell phones. We turned our phones in to the retreat manager and she locked them up. That was very hard to do, but I did it. And I am so glad I did!
- Schedule some days off upon your return, you will want one or two nights to readjust. And yes, you will be waking up at 4:30 am automatically for a little while!

More Info:

dhamma.org
quepasana.com
kailayu.com

WHAT TO PACK FOR A SILENT RETREAT

- Flashlight or headlamp for the early morning sessions.
- Watch or clock to keep track of the daily schedule.
- Your favorite skincare products. You will have the time to exfoliate, cleanse, and hydrate.
- Sheets, pillows, blankets, and earplugs to make your sleeping space cozy and your rest as deep and comfortable as possible.
- A large water bottle to stay hydrated and your favorite tea mug for the bottomless turmeric ginger tea. A touch of home will be a welcome part of your day.
- Speaking of tea; if you are a tea lover bring some of your favorite teas and some to share.
- Your favorite chocolate bar or two. You will be really glad that you did.
- Some Advil or pain killer, just in case.
- Clothing. Think layers and pack loose comfortable clothing. The 5:30 am meditation can be chilly and I was glad to have my soft knit poncho, a cotton hoodie, and loose sweatpants. Don't bring any super tight lycra, itchy fabric, or unbreathable fibers—go for light cotton, linen, and natural fibers. I wore my comfortable bralettes and sports bras with t-shirts and loose sweatpants. Bring your slippers/flip flops for the shared shower areas and ease of taking your shoes on and off to meditate multiple times a day. **S&H**



Take a Moment for an Ayurvedic Head Massage

EXPLORE SHIRO ABHYANGA, A POWERFUL TOOL FOR NOURISHING THE MIND.

BY KATE O'DONNELL



IN AYURVEDA, therapies are essentially of two kinds: *apatarpana* (reducing) and *santarpana* (building). In cases of stress, nutritional deficiency, and weakness, ayurvedic medicine advises an increase in earth and water elements and their slow, dense, and unctuous qualities. These qualities are found in nourishing, warm, moist, oily foods; in quiet time; and in the king of santarpana: oil.

You may have heard of abhyanga, ayurveda's self-massage technique. There are many benefits in extending this nourishing therapy to your head. This technique is especially useful for relaxation and stress relief. Most therapies for nourishing your mind generally involve the head, as it is the home to four of the five sense organs.

Oiling of your scalp, ears, and nose can be used to calm your mind; plus, you'll get the bonus of improving the luster of your hair and promoting its growth.

Because oiling your scalp requires a good shampooing to follow, practice the head massage one or two times weekly, when it is convenient for you to wash your hair after, such as a weekend morning. When sleep is a problem, head massage can be an excellent way to calm your mind at bedtime. Your head can be wrapped in an old towel, scarf, or hat, and the oil can be washed out in the morning, but take care not to let your head get cold in the night. Head massage with oil is contraindicated in cases of congestion, illness, brain fog, or lethargy.

- Melt 2 tablespoons of coconut oil in a small vessel or ramekin. If you run cold, refined sesame oil or an herbal hair oil such as amalaki oil is also a good choice. Slightly warm the oil if it is cold out.

- Remove any hair ties, and brush tangles out of the hair.
- Begin by gently kneading your shoulders and neck with circular motions a few times.
- Dip your fingers into the oil and distribute it evenly over your fingertips.
- Spread your fingers, and work your hands into your hair on either side of your head, above the ears, fingers facing up.
- With a shampoo-like action, work your fingertips to the crown of your head. "Shampoo" the scalp around the crown of your head gently with oiled fingertips until you have covered the top of your head, which is the most important part of the scalp.
- Dip your fingers into the oil again and "shampoo" the rest of the scalp until finished; this should take five minutes or more.
- Rub a bit of the oil onto your entire ear with small circular motions, and slide your pinky tips into your ear hole to coat it with oil.
- Wrap your head if it's bedtime, or relax for 10 to 30 minutes with the oil on your head.

To clean your hair, apply shampoo first to dry hair and work into the first 2 inches or so of your hair. Add a small bit of water to make suds and shampoo. Add more water as needed to get enough suds for your whole head. If you have thick hair, you may need to shampoo again to remove the oil. Sesame oil may require a bit more shampooing than coconut oil. **S&H**



Turn Your Weekend Into a Retreat

BY KALIA KELMENSEN

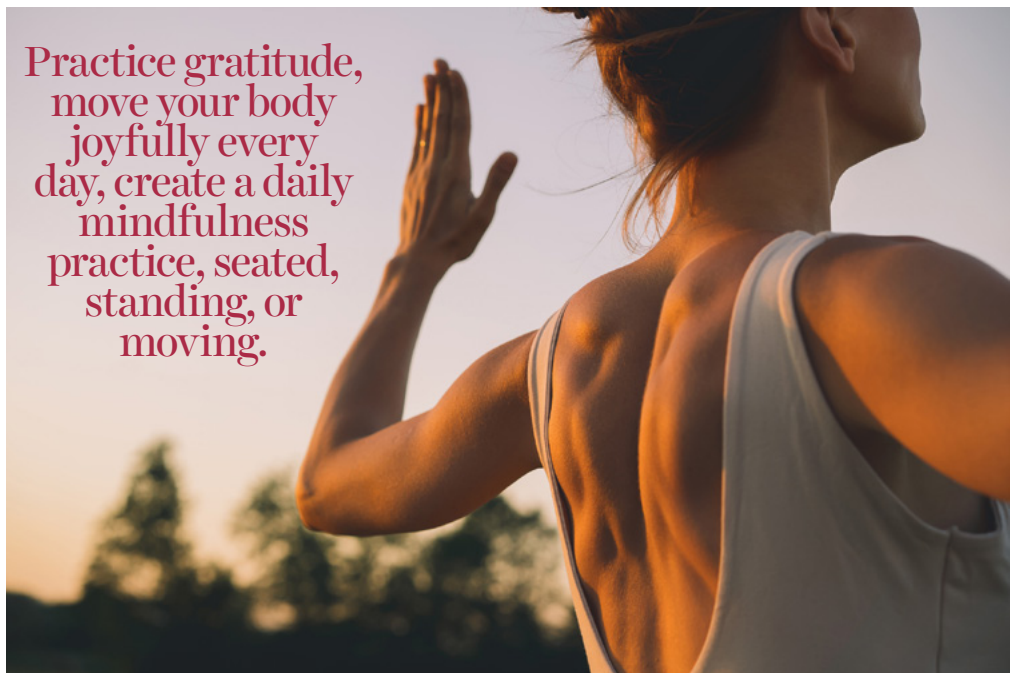
GOING ON RETREAT is a wonderful experience. I recently went on one 20 minutes from home, which was kind of wonderful—except for the amount of stuff I felt compelled to bring since I was driving there. It was wonderful, 5 days away from the daily workings of my home—sort of. I was doing a story about the retreat, so my “work brain” was still turned on. Plus, I was close enough that one day I ended up going to pick up one of my kids and taking them home. This was completely jarring to my tentative state of relaxation, and I realized I had to set a boundary and actually *go* on retreat.

So much of our ability to be on retreat involves being intentional about it. Jon Kabat-Zinn reminds us “wherever you go, there you are,” and it’s especially true when going on retreat. In their new book *Long Weekend: Guidance and Inspiration for Creating your Own Retreat* authors Richelle Donigan and Rachel Neumann offer an invitation to *being*, “taking our time is a radical and necessary act that gives us the opportunity to nurture the qualities inside that we also wish to cultivate in the world.” Neumann and Donigan and both retreat leaders themselves, so they realize what it takes to create a meaningful retreat—and the power in it. They insist, “We can take space for ourselves and for each other. To stop and feel and breathe and enjoy requires awareness, and awareness requires our intention.” There are many variables you can choose from when creating a retreat, but there are some basic guidelines that they suggest starting with:

Preparation. This is where you look at your calendar and you set aside a long weekend for yourself. Write it in ink, and commit yourself to taking that time off. Then, take a few minutes to check in with yourself, be with your breath and ask yourself what you are craving. Maybe you want to be with friends, or you need alone time, near the ocean, or in your own home. Set the intention to honor what you most want for this time you have set aside. Invite friends if that is what you want, just make sure they are ready for the same kind of retreat you are.

Remembering who you are inside. Make the time to transition to your retreat. If you are traveling somewhere, let the retreat begin when you leave your house. Resist the urge to do last-minute phone calls or emails en route. If you are staying home, let your journey start as you create the space for your retreat. Turn off phones and computers, gather what you want to create your retreat space. Donigan and Neumann suggest thinking of your intention for the retreat and “some of the words and feelings of your intention and imagine playfully dropping them on the floor. See the words written on the glass window pane: *rest, fun, ease, play*. See them written across the ceiling, floating in the sky above.” From there, practice grounding and centering, cleanse yourself with ritual baths, and bring full presence and gratitude into your meals.

Practice gratitude,
move your body
joyfully every
day, create a daily
mindfulness
practice, seated,
standing, or
moving.



Choosing. The next step is remembering to choose from a place of being rather than from a place of doing. Starting the day by noticing how you feel, without judgment and being aware of what your dreams were about, and finally by being grateful for your body and your breath is a way to start your day with full awareness. In addition to practicing gratitude with mealtime and moving your body—hiking, dancing, stretching—with mindfulness, they offer a practice called *Writing your go-to story*. These are “the stories we have running in our mind about ourselves.” The key here is to notice what you saying about yourself. Notice the tone of what you say about yourself and consider whether you would talk that way to someone you love. Then sit down with paper and pen and write your story about yourself with the tone you would use with someone you deeply love. Next, do body scrubs or facials, offering yourself heartfelt self-care.

Returning. As a way to seal your retreat, Donigan and Neumann suggest grounding and practicing opening your heart with breath and movement practices. As you return to your life from the retreat, let yourself stay aware of the voice that is truly you. Bring some of the practices from your long weekend into your daily life. Practice gratitude, move your body joyfully every day, create a daily mindfulness practice, seated, standing, or moving.

Creating space for a weekend retreat is to create space for getting to know yourself again. It takes making a choice and being intentional about what and who you include in your retreat. Pablo Neruda offers this insight, “If we were not so single-minded about keeping our lives moving, and for once could do nothing, perhaps a huge silence might interrupt this sadness of never understanding ourselves.” **S&H**

Digital Cleanse: Shut Off the Smartphone and Walk Away

BY JACKIE ASHTON

EVER FEEL LIKE it's time to tuck the smartphone in a drawer, log off of the computer, shelve the e-reader, and take a complete digital vacation to a land without Wi-Fi, far, far, away? After speaking with Dr. Larry Rosen, an expert in the psychology of technology, I think you might be onto something.

Like many, Dr. Rosen, author of *iDisorder: Understanding our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming Its Hold On Us*, is alarmed at the rapidity of technological change in today's society. Our online lives are increasingly reactive—we communicate because we can, not because we need to. Hilarie Cash, Executive Director of reSTART, the first Internet addiction recovery center in Falls City, WA, agrees. Both of these experts champion the idea of regular technology breaks and recommend that all adults do a complete technology cleanse a couple of times a year, even if they are not exhibiting signs of technology addiction.

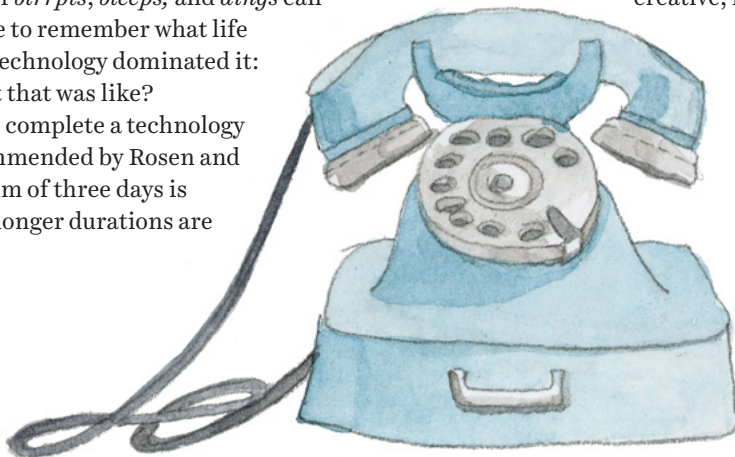
In the same way that cutting out sugar for several days can eliminate poor eating habits, a technology cleanse can be a boon to fostering a healthy relationship with technology. "When you complete a detox of this nature, life begins to take on a different look," says Cash. "You start paying more attention; you are more present to the here and now." Cash advises taking regular breaks from technology to give the brain a chance to adjust and re-set back to normal functioning. A prolonged break from the daily grind of *blrrpts*, *bleeps*, and *dings* can provide a chance to remember what life was like before technology dominated it: Remember what that was like?

Here's how to complete a technology cleanse as recommended by Rosen and Cash. A minimum of three days is recommended; longer durations are encouraged.

- 1 Put the smartphone completely away and use a land line instead. (If you don't have one, consider buying an inexpensive flip phone.)
- 2 Take a total vacation from TV.
- 3 Create an automated response for incoming email to let friends and colleagues know you will be away, but that you can be contacted via landline if needed.
- 4 Unplug completely from the Internet, turning off all devices completely: Shut down all tablets, smartphones, laptops, and all other digital technology.
- 5 Refrain from reading on screens; get your news the old fashioned way by relying on physical newspapers, magazines, and books.

When we fail to give our brains a chance to rest or pause—to take some time to not be busy—it is difficult for the brain to store and remember information. Humans need a break to be contemplative and introspective, and research has shown that multitasking is quite bad for us.

After completing the cleanse you can consider integrating a weekly digital technology sabbath: Pick one day of the week to refrain from using digital technology, and notice how the extra time spent offline gives you the opportunity to be reflective, creative, human, and, best of all—relaxed. **S&H**





Reclaiming Your Most Valuable Resource: Your Attention

BY JULIE PETERS

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR PHONE IS RIGHT NOW? If it beeps or vibrates, will you keep reading this or stop to check the notification?

Of course you'll stop and check. We all do it. In fact, we're chemically wired to stop and check. Texting and tweeting drives an addictive dopamine loop in our brains related to seeking and experiencing pleasure. Ironically, what addicts us is often the promise of connection, and yet many of us can't make it through dinner with another human without one hand anxiously clutching our phones.

In a 1997 article called "Attention Shoppers!" Michael H. Goldhaber argued that with the glut of information available at our fingertips, what's become truly valuable is our attention. In this new "Attention Economy," Dr. Alan Jacobs asserts, "to 'pay' attention is not a metaphor." So where are we spending our attention?

We sure are busy. It seems like there's never enough time. We are too tired to do all the things we want to do. Our nervous systems are fried. And yes, many of us are working more and longer hours. But how much of our time is disappearing along with our attention while idly scrolling through Facebook?

A friend of mine recently decided to turn off his phone for several weeks. He signed out of all social media, communicating only by email. Though the whole reason he decided to do this was to focus on a period of intense work, he told me he felt much calmer and more relaxed. "It's not that I don't still waste time," he said. "Of course I do. It's just that it's *my* time I'm wasting."

Perhaps it indicates something about our cultural addiction that many of his friends balked at his decision. Rather than disconnecting from his friends, though, it

meant he had to show up, committed to the time and place agreed upon, rich with attention to spend just on us.

Attention is one of the most intimate things you can offer to another person. So what would it mean to spend some attention on ourselves? What if the secret to health, wellness, and serenity was just beyond this little screen? What if it turns out you're not actually that busy?

No one has a right to your attention but you. So in an effort to reclaim time and manage the crippling cultural attention debt, here are some things we can try:

- 1 If possible, turn off the notifications on your phone. Mindfully choose when you want to check things, but don't let a beep pull your focus.
- 2 Leave your phone at home sometimes.
- 3 When you step away from social media, sign out. The extra step to sign back in will give you a chance to ask yourself if that's really what you want to do right now.
- 4 When you are not at work, don't check your work email. Remind yourself that truly resting now will make you more productive on Monday.
- 5 Invite your friends to slow down with you. We've all created the expectation that texts and emails should be replied to within minutes. A friend of mine often leaves her phone at home all day, making some of her friends crazy. "What if it's an emergency?" they ask. "If it's really an emergency," she responds, "call 911. Not me." **S&H**



Taking Refuge in the Big Picture

BY PHILIP GOLDBERG

One quick, effective way to counter the fear, pessimism, and brooding despair that so easily overwhelms us in these days of non-stop alarming news is to shift to a Big Picture perspective. We usually perceive reality from the metaphorical ground floor, if not through a basement window. When we ascend to higher levels, our vista expands and we see things afresh. We notice details we couldn't see before. We see what's lurking and what's on the way. We see better how the pieces interact, and we can comprehend events in a broader, more spacious context. This is what happens when we mentally enlarge our vision and enfold the specifics of the moment into a cosmological or theological frame.

In difficult times, some people turn to the Big Picture of a faith tradition, perhaps to comforting phrases such as: “It is God’s will” or “We are in God’s hands.” Or they recall one of the soothing aphorisms commonly attributed to the Bible (even though they can’t be found there): “The Lord moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform,” or “This too shall pass”—an assertion of the impermanence of all phenomena that Buddhists and Hindus would be quick to affirm, along with Teresa of Avila, who said: “Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing dismay you. All things pass. God never changes.” And many a Christian and non-Christian resonates with the assurance of the 14th Century mystic, Julian of Norwich: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Others in search of a Big Picture shift to a saint’s-eye perspective. They ask how Jesus, or Buddha, or their favorite guru or spiritual mentor would see the situation that is making them angry, fearful, or bitter. Of course, we may never know how those we venerate would actually react to the circumstances that vex us, but merely asking the question, imagining an answer, and attempting—however feebly—to put the template into practice has a way of lifting us up.

These days, of course, many spiritual voyagers locate higher ground in the Eastern concept of *karma*. We’ve all heard karmic theory expressed in colloquial terms—every action has an equal and opposite reaction; we reap what we sow; what goes around comes around, etc. Karma presents a system of cosmic justice that sounds less like theology than a scientific principle or a law of nature, like gravity. **In the Big Picture of karma, justice prevails in the long run; good is rewarded and wrong is penalized, even though it may not seem that way through our ordinary lens.**

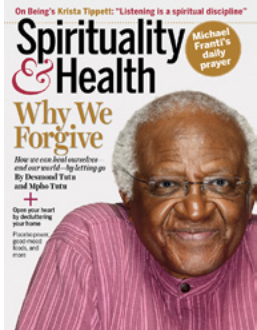
If you prefer a scientific perspective, the vastness of the known universe might do the trick. It may not take more than gazing at the night sky or looking at images from the Hubble Space Telescope and contemplating the fact that what you’re seeing actually occurred millions of years ago. In the Big Picture of time and space, the worrisome present is a speck of dust on the garment of Infinity. Even a relatively brief historical view can do the job. Reflecting on the horrors of the past reveals that, by most measures of human misery, the common feeling that things have never been worse is illusory. One can readily find evidence for Martin Luther King Jr.’s optimistic statement that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”



Another possible vantage point is the possibility that our present turmoil is a symptom of a collective cleansing, like the discomfort that arises when the body rids itself of toxins. That view can be dismissed as New Age drivel, of course, but maybe we are, as W.B. Yeats put it, slouching toward Bethlehem to be born. Maybe, as many believe, chaos and destruction are needed to eliminate poisons and clear the way for a healthier, more progressive future.

There is comfort in an expansive perspective, and all it takes is to step into your mental elevator and press the button for Cosmic Penthouse. The view from the top is not unlike the healing revelation all of humanity shared when we saw the first images of Earth from space, when the boundaries that wreak so much havoc were nowhere to be seen, and the sound of bombs and guns could not be heard, and troublesome human beings were not even specks.

But there is a downside to taking refuge in a Big Picture: it can trick you into false complacency and escapism. I’ve seen too many spiritual people dwell in the assumption that a positive future is pre-ordained because their version of a beneficent Higher Power has things under control. Well, that may be so, but what if that Higher Power needs human beings to help out? What if the cosmic plan, whether it was designed by a benevolent God or set in motion by an indifferent set of evolutionary laws, *requires* our active participation? What if the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice only if we help bend it by doing good? So, by all means, let’s take refuge in an elevated perspective whenever we can. But let’s then come back down and pitch in. Our humble offerings to the greater Good, however small they may seem, might very well be essential. And if they’re not? Well, we’ll feel a lot better for having made them. **S&H**



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