

Retreat Handbook

“Every person needs a ‘retreat’, a dynamo of silence where he may go for the exclusive purpose of being recharged by the infinite.”

PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



GROUP PHOTO NEW YEAR'S RETREAT, GERMANY 2017

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Introduction

It is a blessed and wonderful opportunity to organise a spiritual retreat, during which devotees of our Guruji's family can gather and spend a joyful and contemplative time together.

How then, to best go about planning a retreat?

We would encourage you to feel free to put forward your own ideas if you are inspired to do so; every retreat is different and there are countless ways a spiritual retreat can be beautiful.

However, there are a few tips that we would like to share with you. This short booklet aims to share the experience we have gathered in organising such auspicious events, so you don't have to start from scratch. See it as suggestions rather than rules.

Practical steps

Organising alone or as a team?

ORGANISING SOLO

For a small retreat in a private setting

Uncomplicated, as there is no team coordination

Some enjoy organising alone

The retreat is taking place on a private location

ORGANISING AS A GROUP

For retreats with more than ten yogis
(more attendees = more organisers)

Less work through sharing of the various tasks

It's fun together!

A property is rented for the retreat

Getting the team together

It is best that the organiser be present during the whole period of the retreat, and also available on his/her phone.

The organising team should have the following:

- Motivation and Joy
- Love and faithfulness to God and Guru and to the teachings of Self Realization Fellowship
- Time to organise and take part in the retreat - arriving first and leaving last from retreat

Notifying of a retreat

The easiest way to notify us of a retreat is to send the main information about the retreat or an invitation text, with a couple of pictures if you wish, to us: info@youthofgoldenage.de

Be sure to include these:

- Date
- Place
- Short description
- Contact details of organiser for registration and questions (name, email, mobile number)
- The program, or activities suggested
- "How to get there" information
- A cost per person estimate

→We will then share the upcoming retreat on our website as well as in our newsletter.

Organising

Requesting information upon registration

Once yogis have confirmed they are attending, make sure to ask them the following

- Date and time of arrival
- Mode of transportation
- If 'by car', ask where they are driving from (some other devotees might need a ride)
- Food allergies
- Vegan?

Communication

It can be a good idea to create a common Telegram group (or Whatsapp, Facebook group...). This facilitates communication between attending devotees and is a practical way to share pictures with each other after the retreat.

Attendance

The organisers should convey to all the benefit of enjoying the entirety of the retreat. This will help foster a higher vibration and a convivial atmosphere.

Due to the disturbing nature of constant arrivals and departures, we recommend that the devotees staying for a short while organise themselves their arrival and/or departure.

Check-list

If you are renting or staying in a house together, it is probably wise to have a walk around the house, to check the rooms and the common spaces. Double check the following before the retreat:

Around the house:

- Electricity is on, lights are working
- Necessary cleaning items (broom or Hoover, mop...)
- The hot water is working

Bathroom:

- Soap at the sinks
- Toilet paper in each bathroom + toilet brush

Kitchen:

- Washing-up liquid
- Sponge and cleaning utensils

Welcome and farewell rounds

Beginning of the retreat: Arrival, relaxing after the trip and replenishing energy. Introducing one another, getting to know each other. Presenting or deciding upon the retreat program.

End of the retreat: A farewell round gives everybody the possibility to share their experience with the group and to give thanks. This can also be an opportunity, if desired, to obtain feedback about the retreat and decide how to improve those in the future.

Packing list

You can also suggest a packing list to the attendees. Naturally, the necessary items to be packed depend on the kind of retreat, the season, and the activities that are to be shared. There are some items that should be on all lists however:

- According to use, arm-rest, kriya beads, meditation blanket and pillow
- Good walking shoes and a rain jacket (outdoor activities always take place)
- Pen and paper
- Personal hygiene items (toothbrush, toothpaste, shower gel...), towel
- Sleeping bag, and iso mat if needed
- Swimming trunks
- Musical instruments
- Camping equipment: cutlery, plate, cup, pocket knife, pocket lamp

Food

Buying the Food

The food is vegetarian and/or vegan. Food intolerances should be asked upon registration.

Before you decide what to buy, identify what cooking means you will have during your retreat, and plan accordingly (ovens, hot plates, stove...).

A great solution is to drive to a **farm** before the retreat, and purchase vegetables, eggs, and dairy (cheese, butter and milk) from there. Buying in one go, from a **small local producer** or two, will ensure the quality of the products, is cost efficient and environmentally friendly (no transport/packaging/storage...).

When buying from the shops, prioritise local, fresh, seasonal, fair-trade, and organic products, whilst remaining within a budget.

Cooking and meals

After the morning meditation, it's time to share a brunch! Having brunch spares preparing lunch and there is then time for activities until the evening meditation. For very large groups it is good to have cooking teams assigned for different meals who can prepare the food during the meditation.

The gap between brunch and supper can be a little long, so make sure you buy food for tea-time and nibbles (fruits, nuts & raisins, whole grain biscuits...). You may want to provide a selection of herbal teas also.

Brunch suggestions: Orange juice, fruit juice, plenty of fruit (fruit salad), milk, oatmeal (porridge), eggs (omelette, hard boiled, scrambled...), salad, tomatoes, whole bread, jam honey, yoghurt...

Supper suggestions: Whole grain rice, potatoes, polenta, whole grain pasta, vegetables (aubergine, leek, carrots, beans...), salad, cheese, desserts...

Spiritual program and Meditation

The morning and evening meditations are the backbone of the retreat. All activities should be arranged so that these meditations can take place at the same time every day. Make sure the afternoon's activities still leave the yogis with plenty of strength to concentrate for the evening meditation.

The Altar

Preparing the altar is a beautiful task. Choose a pleasant room with enough space and air. You can use an SRF travel altar or larger pictures of the Gurus. If possible place the altar so that people will be turned Eastward in meditation. You can place a sheet over the altar table. Light candles in front of the altar or of the pictures and place flowers also.

Sequence of meditation

- Energising exercises together (15 min)
- Maha mudras individually (10-15 min)
- Opening prayer
- Cosmic chants
- Short reading (a text by Guruji, the Bhagavad Gita,...)
- Meditation (45 to 60 minutes)
- Healing service
- Closing prayer

Remarks to meditations

It is advisable, and wonderful for all, to hold at least one long meditation (3 hours) during a retreat.

If there are younger devotees, or devotees relatively new to meditation, it can sometimes be helpful to divide longer meditation periods (1 hour and more) by having a chant after, for example 35 minutes. The person leading the meditation can announce the length of the meditation periods before meditation.

Through the choice of texts and chants, meditations can focus on certain themes such as peace, joy, Divine Mother, or tuning in to the vibrations of one of the Gurus.

It can be a nice touch to have the service in two languages if a situation lends itself to it (ie. German and English devotees). The leader of the meditation can read and sing in German and English alternately.

Financial help

If before a retreat, certain costs are due for the renting of the accommodation or for the purchase of food, **you can ask for an advance payment from the participants. You should set a deadline for the advance payment** (the deadline should be before the date at which the organisers have to pay these expenses).

For this, you can either give your bank details, or after contacting our treasurer (treasurer@youthofgoldenage.de) you can give the bank details of the organisation.

Advance Payment

If you're concerned that you personally will have to take on some of the costs, because you have made an advance payment and you aren't sure that enough people will attend the retreat, the organisation - after prior consultation and discussion - can take on these costs. Please bring this up with the treasurer.

Refunding if someone has paid in advance and cannot attend

Generally you should only make a refund if the attendee has done a written cancellation himself. In these cases, we recommend, depending on the size and the costs of the retreat to offer the possibility of refunding between 2 and 4 weeks before the retreat starts. Until that date a complete refunding of the prepaid amount will take place. After that date, this can only happen if another person signs up and takes that particular spot.

There are always exceptions. If you are unsure, you are welcome to contact us.

Retreat Schedule examples

NEW YEAR'S RETREAT SCHEDULE EXAMPLE (80+ ATTENDEES)

29.12 Arrivals	30.12 Day Out	31.12 New Year's coming!	01.01 New Year's here!	02.01 Guru Day	03.01 Shine forth!
Set up	8h EE + long meditation	8h EE + meditation	9h EE + semi-long meditation	8h EE + meditation	8h EE + meditation
Set up	11h45 silent Brunch	9h30 Brunch	11h30 Brunch	10h30 Brunch	10h Brunch
Set up + arrivals	13h Nature Outing	11h different workshops and activities	13h30 outing, hatha yoga, swimming...	12h Workshops 15h Guru procession	Packing and Cleaning
17h EE + meditation	17h EE + meditation	16h30 EE + meditation	17h EE + meditation	17h EE + meditation	Departures
19h30 Dinner	19h Dinner	18h Celebration Dinner	18h30 Dinner	19h Dinner	
21h Welcome round, games, intro	20h Dance / Kirtan practice	19h45 introspection 21h30 Kirtan + Meditation into New Year	20h Y.OG.A. meeting, social time & film night	Final round, social night, viewing photos	
23h Rest	23h Rest	00h30 Party!	23h Rest	23h Rest	

EXAMPLE OF A WEEK-END RETREAT (10 DEVOTEES)

(activities such as hatha yoga, kirtan, silent walks, listening to a talk by Guruji, are also great additions)

Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
	8h EE + meditation	8h EE + long meditation	7h30 EE + meditation
cleaning / preparing	10h brunch	11h30 brunch	10h brunch
arrivals	visiting holy place - walk in nature - tea	long hike - tea	leaving
18h30 EE + meditation	17h EE + meditation	18h EE + meditation	
20h15 dinner	19h30 dinner	20h dinner	
		DVD: SRF Talk	

Feedback

We are always very glad to receive your feedback after a retreat. You are also welcome to send us a couple of nice pictures from the retreat (info@youthofgoldenage.de). These will be integrated to our end-of-the-year review and shown to all during our New Year's retreat.

Ressources:

WORLDWIDE PRAYER CIRCLE:

http://www.yogananda-srf.org/uploadedFiles/aboutsrf/WWPC_E.pdf

UNDREAMED OF POSSIBILITIES:

http://www.yogananda-srf.org/uploadedFiles/Primary_Navigation/AboutSRF/UndreamedPossibilities/UOPandLessonApplcnt.pdf

AFFIRMATIONS:

<http://www.yogananda-srf.org/Affirmations.aspx#.WxmNTkiFMdU>

YOUTH OF GOLDEN AGE E.V.

<https://www.youthofgoldenage.de/en/home-3/>