Mama Bodhi Retreat

Preparation Workbook

The M.V. Seon: Mama Bodhi Retreat is self-guided. You can start whenever you are ready and participate for as long as you want. To embark on this journey with me, all you need is an openness to spiritual growth and determination to do it with baby in tow.

Yet like most things, some planning can help. I put together the following four-item and three bonuses workbook. I gave examples with my experiences and the words of wisdom by some of my close friends. Please feel free to read through and work with it to prepare for your spiritual retreat as a mommy. It is also available for download if you prefer to use a text editor.

**1. The first step is to write down your intention in a personal vow** and post it somewhere you can see frequently. The version I use is as following:

I vow to turn the challenges of motherhood into fuel for my spiritual growth.

I vow to transcend the sufferings rooted in my ignorance –– I will not pass their unconscious seeds to my baby.

I vow to ignite the awakened mind under all circumstances.

**Your Vows:**

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**2. Decide on the retreat’s length and write it down.** The Mama Bodhi Retreat is a self-guided program. Pick a period that makes sense for you to integrate your spiritual practice and your everyday life. It can be for three weeks, several months, or even a year. I practiced in this fashion for about 6 months with each child. Each time, the retreat gradually became a part of my everyday routine, deepening my spiritual practice and enriching my life. Since your time can be highly scattered with very young children, I recommend giving yourself ample time to ease into the program. For example, try starting with a 3-week-retreat and extend it if you want.

**Your Retreat Period:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Aspire to an attainable amount of daily meditation and write it down.** The quite inwardly gaze of daily meditation was my refuge during the mayhem days of newborn care. It is still my energy-warehouse now that I’m in the toddler chasing stage. It’s crucial to adopt the mindset of integrating practice and everyday life, and daily contemplation is its cornerstone.

We both know it: life is anything but routine for mothers with young children. The best I could do when caring for little ones was to set an aspiration of meditating for 20 minutes a day. More often than not, circumstances didn’t allow me to do it all in one stretch either, so I squeezed in the practice time whenever I can. If they tally up to 20 minutes, I call it a victory.

On a day where the baby graces me with a little more time, I might do more and give myself a pat on the back. There are also days, especially towards the beginning, where all I could do was baby care, eat, and sleep. That happens. Don’t be too hard on yourself. During those days, I gave myself extra compassion, practiced mindfulness while falling asleep, and renewed my aspiration for a daily practice the next dawn. You get the spirit. Now, how many minutes a day do you aspire to meditate? Write it down.

**Your Daily Meditation:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**4. Brainstorm ways to integrate meditation practice and kiddo-care and write them down.** Here are some that worked for my friends and me as examples:

* 1. Standing meditation while putting the baby to sleep.
	2. Walking meditation when taking baby on a stroll.
	3. Loving-kindness meditation while nursing.
	4. Body scan meditation helps me fall asleep. (I don’t include it in the daily tally, otherwise I can’t fall asleep.)
	5. My friend Lilu uses a chant to put her babies to sleep.

**Your Retreat Activities:**

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# Bonus:

I have more observations and anecdotes to further prepare you for this most exciting and rewarding spiritual journey:

**1. Toss that perfectionism.**

It is easy to fall into the “perfect mom” trap by trying to do everything right for your little ones. That is exhausting and not necessary. It is easy to fall into the “perfect practitioner” trap too, which is also exhausting and counterproductive.

Let’s face it: we all mess up. I have “messed up” hundreds of times on the meditation cushion. “Wasted” weeks of retreat time, but in the end, it does not matter. To have inner development is like walking. When physically moving forward, we get out of balance, regain it on the other foot, and repeat. When turning our gaze inwardly, we open up to where we struggle the most, embrace it, and grow from it.

Fortunately for us new mothers, the reality of imperfection is ever more prominent. You can use this section to write down situations where you might slip out of your spiritual aspirations and how you could get back into regular practice. Here are some of mine as examples:

Circumstance: I had too much pain in late pregnancy to sit cross-legged like the “perfect meditators.” I couldn’t even sit in a chair.

Solution: I sat on an exercise ball.

Circumstance: I was too sleep-deprived to meditate sometimes.

Solution: I slept and renewed the aspiration after some rest.

Circumstance: Emotional melt-down.

Solution: Embrace whatever comes and try to be mindful of the hormonal rush.

**Your Circumstances:**

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**2. Flexibility is a blessing.** Impermanence is everywhere. This fact is in our face when, as mothers, we create and nurture new life. Our bodies transform, our mood swings, and our babies grow every day! I lost count the number of times when I thought to myself, “this is a nice routine to settle into.” Only to have the baby outgrow it the next day.

You can use this section to write down some changes that might happen and how your practice can adapt. Here are some of mine as examples:

* + I used to chant a mantra when nursing, but then the baby got too distracted to feed when there is any sound. I switched to silently practice loving-kindness meditation.

**Your Circumstances:**

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**3. You are not alone.** It takes a village to raise a child, and chances are that someone in your community is happy to support you and your baby. You can use this section to write down areas to let others support your inner well-being. As examples, somethings I did that are helpful are:

* + Get into the mindset that it’s okay to let someone else, like daddy, other family members, friends, or paid nannies take care of the baby while you take care of yourself. Remember, it takes a village to raise a child. For us, I went into the woods to meditate and let my partner bond with the baby.
	+ I am a member of an online Dharma forum. Even when I don’t have the energy to participate in any conversations, reading other people’s posting about related issues once in a while helps me feel connected.
	+ My friend Ying says,

“For me personally, sharing a regular video call with two other moms who are spiritual practitioners during our pregnancies, and sharing writing occasionally in the couple years following, was tremendously helpful.”

**Brainstorm Some Places Where You Can Get Support:**

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# You Are Ready to Go!

Our aspiration to transcend all suffering for ourselves and our babies is as powerful as any previous women who attained Buddhahood. We can do it, and let’s do it together.