



Evaluation Report for a Veteran's Meditation Retreat  
Hosted by Life Transition Meditation Center

**ABSTRACT**

Benefits of a Meditation Retreat for Veteran's. A much-needed service that many have heard of, but know little about. The retreat, for many, provided the opportunity to continue a meditation practice.

**Sindy Bolaños-Sacoman**

Life Transition Meditation Center's  
Veteran Meditation Retreat

## Veteran's Meditation Retreat

From October 13th to October 16th, a total of 23 veterans attended Life Transition Meditation Center's Veteran Meditation Retreat. SBS Evaluation & Program Development Specialists analyzed the data and wrote the report. The following report summarizes participant's experiences. Survey data was collected from all veterans at the end of the retreat.

### Retreat Experience

All of the participants were satisfied with the location of the retreat. The majority (78%) were satisfied with the duration. Participants enjoyed that the location of the retreat was "very serene, quiet, and tranquil in relation to meditating." Additionally, 74% of participants felt that the instructors were good or very good at explaining the meditation exercises. As will be explained in the Suggestions for Improvement section, some felt that the reasoning behind the exercises could have been more thoroughly explained. Others felt that communication skills varied from instructor to instructor.

Participants found that the Walking and Moving Meditation and the Sitting or Standing Meditation were the most helpful (78%). Participants least enjoyed the Sound Meditation (57%) and the Lying Meditation (48%). One participant explained that although they were extremely satisfied with the Sitting/Standing Meditation, they were "very triggered with the sound system noises, doors opening and closing," however, they were "able to regroup with much effort." Another participant said that the Sound Meditation was their favorite part of the retreat, stating that it was "probably the most foreign exercise to me that we did, and it was likely the most powerful for me this weekend."

### Retreat Takeaways

As a result of the retreat, 78% of participants gained new skills and knowledge to manage mental health, and 91% feel confident using their newly acquired skills about meditation. This is a very important outcome, as participants are indicating the use of their newly acquired skills. One participant explains that they "feel inspired [by their new knowledge] but nervous with the follow through." Despite any potential nerves, most participants (87%) still expect to see a positive change in their daily life after this retreat.

Many participants said that the best part of the retreat was the camaraderie and connection with fellow veterans, while others enjoyed learning new practices. To the latter, one participant said, "I liked the new experience of how to slow down, concentrate on my breath, experience how difficult it is to stay focused on the breath and overall the positive benefits of awareness and how it increases overall health inside and ultimately outside demeanors."

Most participants also said that they gained a better understanding of what meditation is as a result of the retreat. Many went into the retreat without knowing much about meditation at all. After the weekend, they were able to describe meditation in more detail. For example, one participant said their understanding of meditation was "not a whole lot" before the retreat. Afterwards, they explained that meditation is "**an inner search and reflection of yourself within your environment.**" Other participants had some prior meditation experience before the retreat, but still felt that they learned new techniques and practices as a result of the retreat. By



the end of the retreat, a participant with prior meditation experience said the experience **“honed and reminded me of the many different types and that there is no one size fits all when it comes to meditation. Do what (which) feels best for you.”**

### Suggestions for Improvement

Overall, participants felt that the pre-retreat preparation was the most lacking aspect of the retreat experience, with 30% of participants feeling that the goals and objectives were not clearly stated, and that they did not receive sufficient information and materials to prepare. Preparing participants is an area that should be improved on for future sessions. One participant mentioned that they were told it would be cold on the weekend of the retreat. As a result, they packed for cold weather, only to find that it was not cold. Another participant mentioned that they were not told where to park and struggled to find the correct parking structure. In general, participants felt as though they needed some more logistical support before the retreat.

Another participant mentioned that one of the biggest challenges they faced at the retreat was not understanding everything that was happening. They suggest explaining the mission or goal of each form of meditation before it is practiced, including explaining what the chants mean and why they are an important part of the practice.

A third challenge that participants faced was with the sound system. As previously mentioned, one participant found the noises of the system to be very triggering. Another said that the system was not working well, which was difficult for veterans who had hearing loss to hear the instructors. This was echoed by a third participant who suggests the instructors “utilize the PA system better - make adjustments and leave it alone; use the microphone consistently and hold the microphone when speaking; pass the mic around to the attendees when they speak.”

To find out more information about why some forms of meditation were more popular than others, we recommend asking participants more open-ended questions about their experience with each practice in future evaluations. Additionally, it may be beneficial to debrief with participants after each practice. For example, asking how they slept after the Lying Meditation or what they enjoyed or disliked about the Sound Meditation.

### Conclusion

Overall, participants felt that the retreat was a positive experience and 19 out of 23 (83%) said they would recommend it to other veterans. Many feel that meditation is a unique practice that many veterans don't know about. One explains that the “VA does not deep dive into meditation. They tell you it helps but most have no clue how beneficial it truly can be for not only your mental growth but all around growth. It needs to be taught more.” Another adds, **“our veterans could very much use learning/teaching about how to quiet the mind, learn to breathe, and experience nature around them.”** Two were hesitant to recommend the retreat simply because their recommendation would depend on what other veterans are looking for. One participant felt that the experience was too long and did not teach enough to recommend to others. The biggest takeaway for many participants was learning new ways to cope with PTSD and methods of overcoming isolation. **“I served my country and I deserve help and disability support for my service. I am not alone.”**

