

Practice Guidelines After Sacred World Assembly

I. Introduction: Purpose and Benefit of the Primordial Rigden Ngöndro

The Primordial Rigden: The Magical Heart of Shambhala, composed by Sakyong Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche at the 2004 Vajrayana Seminary, is now the first ngöndro that is received and practiced on the Shambhala Vajrayana path. Ngöndro literally means “preliminary practice”, or “that which goes before”. As such, it prepares the student to receive the Rigden Abhisheka, *The Roar of the Werma: The Sadhana of the Warrior*, and to enter the Scorpion Seal Path.

“One of the overriding themes in the Druk Sakyong’s teachings is overcoming doubt. Doubt can be a perpetual nuisance and ultimately undermine the warrior. In order to counteract this hesitation and remedy doubt, we need to support each other, engaging daily in developing our own windhorse, increasing our personal dralas, as well as gathering with friends and in groups to gather group energy and windhorse... Openhearted bodhicitta makes life not only livable, but truly enjoyable.” – Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Letter from Kalapa Valley

The practice of the Primordial Rigden ngöndro can help us make a direct connection with the stream of blessings and realization of our whole tradition: Kagyü, Nyingma, and Shambhala. The refuge tree encompasses all three lineages, and the language and imagery of the text are both Buddhist and Shambhalian. In short, this text presents the view of the inseparability of Shambhala and buddhadharma. Like all ngöndro practices, it connects with the principles of refuge, devotion and surrender; purification of obscurations; offering ourselves completely to the service of our world; and joining our heart with the heart and vision of our teacher. As a Shambhala practice, it particularly works to increase personal and group windhorse to overcome the heavy materialism of this dark age.

II. Individual Home Practice and Practice Requirement

A. The Primordial Rigden Ngöndro Shrine: From the Primordial Rigden Manual (in Progress):

The shrine for this ngöndro is nearly identical to the main Primordial Rigden shrine, found in all Shambhala centres. The addition of a mandala plate behind the water-offerings would convert such a shrine into a Primordial Rigden Ngöndro shrine. On the mandala plate, arrange five piles of rice; one in the centre and one in each of the four directions.

For home ngöndro practice, you will need a shrine following the same basic design. If you already have a shrine box painted red-orange, it is fine to use this. Regardless of color, cover the shrine box, at least the front of it, with white or gold satin. The top of the box should be slightly higher than the heart level of a seated practitioner. Many people choose to place a piece of clear glass atop their shrine, as the basis upon which the other objects sit, and offerings are made.

On the wall, or a gold-colored backdrop behind the shrine, hang a framed representation of the Primordial Rigden. When the Shambhala Lineage thangka is complete, it would be appropriate to hang a framed print of this as the central representation. To the shrine right of the central picture (your left) hangs the official shrine portrait of the Dorje Dradül; to the shrine left of the central picture (your right) hangs the official shrine portrait of the current Sakyong, Jampal Trinley Dradül.

Place a riser box at the rear of the shrine, and on it, place a dharma text, which has been wrapped in brocade or other nice cloth. The text could be held in a picture stand; it could also be elevated with another smaller riser, but in any case, do not put anything on top of the text. In front of the text, place a crystal ball, or large jewel-shaped cut crystal, well supported. For the text, it would be fine to use any of the works of the Vidyadhara Trungpa Rinpoche, or Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. One of the Shambhala root texts would be ideal.

The mandala plate with the five piles of rice goes in front of the riser, on the surface of the shrine, and at the front of the shrine you would arrange five or seven water-offering bowls, depending on the space. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has indicated that the water bowls should be filled generously—that is, close to the top. The water should be changed daily.

Two candles go on the shrine, slightly behind the water bowls. It is fine to use small, elegant, kerosene lamps instead of candles. Small bowls of fine ash or sand in which to offer incense and do a small lhasang could go on a low table in front of the shrine. Do not put the bowls, or any offerings, directly on the floor, at any time.

On the back part of the shrine place a small bowl or cup, with a saucer, for the protector tea. Tibetan serkyem sets—an offering cup and stand designed for this purpose—are widely available. The protector tea should be the first tea made each morning, and in the evening, it should be offered in a clean place, where no one will walk. Having offered the tea, place the cup upside down, with a matchstick underneath it, so that the inside is not completely closed off. If you are using a serkyem set, place the cup on its side back in the stand. Traditionally, the protector tea cup is only cleaned once a year, on Shambhala Day.

B. Home Practice Requirements

The Sakyong has requested that students engage in individual practice of the Primordial Rigden ngöndro for approximately one year. The guideline is to complete 160 individual sessions of ngöndro (or more), practicing at least three times per week, for an hour or longer. One would complete at least 40 sessions of prostrations, 40 sessions of mantra, 40 sessions of mandala and 40 sessions of guru yoga.

During the remaining days of the week, if one cannot practice for 60 minutes, one's practice session could be a shorter and include Ashe Mahamudra, Dharmaraja Guru Yoga, White Tara, Rain of Blessings Guru Yoga, or other Vajrayana practices, and as always, sessions of shamatha and Shambhala Meditation are appropriate.

It may take some people longer than a year to complete 160 sessions of individual practice. Other students, who have the opportunity to do more practice, may complete the requirement sooner.

Practitioners will naturally extend their individual practice beyond the 160 sessions, until the group practice is completed, and until attending the Rigden Abhisheka.

Practitioners who have serious obstacles to practicing the Primordial Rigden ngöndro in the manner described above should discuss alternative formats with their meditation instructor and the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education.

III. Group Retreat

A. Purpose of Group Practice

A practitioner's understanding of ngöndro is developed through individual practice over the course of approximately one year in combination with group practice, monthly feasts, and study.

When the Sakyong introduced the Primordial Rigden ngöndro in 2004, he began to emphasize the importance and power of group vajrayana practice. With all of our practices, the point is not only how we do our individual practice, but how we connect to each other and live our lives altogether. Particularly with our aspiration to create enlightened society, it is important for us to gather, practice, study, work, and celebrate as a community. In addition, practicing under the guidance of senior teachers in a group setting helps us to deepen our practice and understanding of the vajrayana, and feel more connected to what we are doing.

The practice guidelines that follow describe how the Sakyong would like students to proceed if possible. Students or groups who are unable to practice in the manner described are encouraged to discuss an alternative plan with their meditation instructor and/or the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education. The main point is to continue with one's practice—not to get held up because one cannot attend a group retreat, for example.

B. Group Practice Guidelines and Requirements

Please note: These requirements changed in 2014, and now may be adopted by those who attended Sacred World Assembly or Vajrayana Seminary in previous years.

The group retreat practice requirement is to attend a total of three weeks of group retreat. This would mean spending about five days on each of the four ngöndros within a group retreat context, practicing prostrations first for five days, then mantra for five days and so on throughout the year. It is powerful when you are able to synchronize the group retreats with the specific ngöndro you are practicing at home; however, it may be that after finishing 40 sessions of prostrations at home, and having begun mantra, you are now able to attend your first week-long group retreat. In this case, you would practice 5 days of prostrations and two days of mantra. Try to keep the individual sessions and group retreat sessions as closely synchronized as possible, but do not worry if this is not possible.

Students are requested to accomplish the three weeks of group retreat as follows:

1. Residential Practice Center:

Engage in at least one week of group Primordial Rigden ngöndro practice at a residential practice center with an acharya or senior teacher. This retreat could be at any point in one's practice, for example, one might practice five days of mantra and two days of mandala, or four days of mandala and three days of guru yoga

2. Local or Regional Centers

Complete the equivalent of two weeks of group retreat at a city center or residential practice center. These two weeks may be accomplished by accumulating 14 days of group practice through any combination of week-long ngöndro retreats, weekend practice retreats or weekly ngöndro classes.

a. Weekend Practice Retreats:

These must be at least one full day of practice with 2 practice sessions (1.5 – 3 hours long) and one study period per day to qualify as a local group practice intensive day. Senior ngöndro instructors and teachers may lead these local group intensives and provide guided study. If a teacher is not available, the group may listen to an on-line presentation. See study suggestions below.

b. Weekly Ngöndro Classes.

Each course is comprised of three modules (each module is about 5-6 weekly classes). Each module equals 2 days of group practice. These courses can be led by a teacher, done peer study-group style, or include an on-line class. Each class generally consists of 1.5 hours of ngöndro practice, a short tea break, and 1 hour of study and discussion.

IV. Ashe Mahamudra

Beginning in 2014 at the Sacred World Assembly, the practice of *Ashe Mahamudra* was given by the Sakyong as an encouragement to recognize the nature of mind transmission as the basis of all Vajrayana practices. Mixing mahamudra with visualization practices such as ngöndro or Werma is very beneficial and traditional. There are no practice requirements for Ashe Mahamudra.

Students who have received the Ashe Mahamudra lung at SWA or at a local or regional program may begin to practice it as often as they would like, for as long as they would like. It is important to practice the entire text, but it is also fine to emphasize one of the dignities in a session, reading more quickly through the other three dignities.

V. Solitary Retreat

Students may wish to do some of their individual practice in solitary retreat, once they have some familiarity with the practice. Solitary retreat is usually four sessions a day, the first session, before breakfast, being shorter. This is a good time to practice Ashe Mahamudra, Dharmaraja Guru Yoga, or just sit with a session of Shambhala Meditation. The evening session may also be shorter, again a wonderful time to practice Dharmaraja Guru Yoga or Ashe Mahamudra. Each session of ngöndro counts toward the individual ngöndro requirement.

VI. Feast Practice

Students are encouraged to attend at least one Werma or Padmasambhava feast per month; both are open to all tantrikas. There is no need to receive a lung for the Werma Sadhana, as that will occur at the Rigden Abhisheka. Werma Sadhana is not practiced at home, but only at Werma feasts.

VII. Study

During this year of ngöndro, the practice will be supported greatly by readings from the following sources. The first of these listed below were distributed at Sacred World Assembly:

Adhishthana by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

The Oral Instructions by The Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Sacred World Shambhala Ritual by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

Courses of study on this text are offered through local programs:

The Ritual Academy

Extraordinary Perception

1978 and 1999 Vajrayana Seminary Transcripts by the Vidyadhara and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

The following texts were not distributed at Sacred World Assembly, but are very important for Vajrayana students:

The Profound Treasury v.3 by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Shambhala Dzokchen by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

The Collected Vajra Assemblies by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

The study of these talks is rich and powerful. “Ground, Path and Fruition” can be especially important at the beginning of the ngöndro path, as a further study of the nature of mind transmission.

Ashe and the Four Dignities by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

2004 Vajrayana Seminary video tapes

These are the first talks that were given by the Sakyong on the Primordial Rigden ngöndro:

Talk 7: Commentary on the Royal Invocation, Outer Preliminaries

Talk 9: Commentary on the bodhichitta practice, prostrations, mantra, mandala, and the transmission for lungta practice. (This section of Talk 9 should only be shown if all the participants have had this transmission; if not, fast forward through this section.)

Talk 10: Commentary on guru yoga

Talk 11: Questions & answers

VIII. Group Practice: How to Practice Together at Your Local Centre

The following are guidelines to help center administrators and teachers coordinate and lead weekend or one-week intensives at their local centres.

A. Establishing the container

Establishing a strong container for the intensive is an important aspect of the practice environment, and is particularly important for weekend retreats where practitioners may be commuting to and from home. Encouraging attendance for the whole retreat and having lunch and dinner together (if you are including an evening event) will help to create a cohesive and supportive retreat environment. Some recent intensives included oryoki meals.

In addition to two practice sessions daily, the intensive should include afternoon or evening talks and discussion if there are experienced ngöndro instructors or senior teachers available. If not, the group could study and discuss selected readings from various Vajrayana sources (including the text itself) or listen to on-line talks. (At practice centres, acharyas or authorized senior seminary faculty may lead the intensives.)

People practicing the Primordial Rigden ngöndro should engage in one ngöndro at a time – ie., prostrations for 5 days, mantra for five days, etc. The Sakyong has been clear that he would like new ngöndro students to spend some time with one practice in a group retreat before beginning the next one.

B. Single practice or mixed practice groups

In centres with large numbers of Werma or Rigden ngöndro practitioners, for instance, it makes sense to hold group practice events specifically and exclusively for a particular practice. It is powerful to practice out loud as a group, and to study material that is focused on your particular practice.

If all practitioners in the group are practicing the Rigden ngöndro, the group can begin with opening chants and continue together out loud through the Outer Preliminaries. Then individuals would continue with their own practice until the end of the session. If the group includes tantrikas doing the Karma Kagyü ngöndro, then the group can begin together with opening chants, and continue quietly with whichever practice they are doing until the end of the session.

If there are a number of practitioners beginning a particular practice, the umdze could read the visualization section aloud once in the middle of the practice session—this was helpful to prostrators at one recent intensive. At Sacred World Assembly, the umdze reads the refuge formula aloud for the entire practice session, helping students new to prostrations coordinate body, speech and visualization. This could also be done with the mantras for the other three practices. This approach would not be helpful if the group is mixed and practicing in the same room.

Centres with small numbers of practitioners doing a variety of practices, may need or want to hold mixed-practice group retreats. In this case, everybody would practice together. The group study could be based on more generally applicable vajrayana

materials such as the *Vajra Assemblies*, *Adhishtana* by the Sakyong, or vajrayana recordings. Alternatively, the group may divide up during the study period for more focused study using readings and recordings.

Some centres, during recent week-long holiday intensives, extended an invitation to sadhakas and shamatha students to participate. All practices were done simultaneously in the same room. In these cases, shamatha students practiced in the front of the room with prostrators behind them and sadhakas near the back. For the benefit of the shamatha students, a senior teacher gave a brief and general explanation about ngöndro and sadhana practice.

Centres will have to assess their local situations and determine whether single-practice or mixed practice group retreats (or a combination) best meet the needs of their practice population.

C. Ngöndro Group Practice Guidelines: With Other Traditions

Ngöndro practitioners from other sanghas – even those using other texts – are welcome to practice with Shambhala ngöndro students. Differing texts should not be shared as they require different lungs. Vajrayana students of other teachers should not be given commentary or oral instructions (*Vajradhatu Ngöndro Manual*, *Vajra Assemblies*, *Early Tantra Groups*, etc.) from our lineage relating to these practices unless they have requested and received permission from the Sakyong to study these materials. These students should practice and study following the instructions they have received from their own teacher. Many ngöndro students from other traditions may also not have received the nature of mind transmission, so please do not share open discussions or on-line talks.

If there are ngöndro instructors available who are doing this practice, include opportunities for interviews with an instructor. Group interviews with an instructor might be helpful at centres where there is limited MI support.

D. Online Talks

Many centres have found it helpful to schedule their intensives on weekends when there are vajrayana teachings given on Shambhala Online by an acharya. This could count as the study component for your weekend intensive.

Centres are strongly encouraged to have a microphone and webcam so students can interact with the instructor online. It is also possible to purchase the recordings of these talks and play them in the context of your local weekends.

Please go to <http://www.shambhalaonline.org> for a schedule of online talks on vajrayana topics.

E. Morning and Evening Chants

At Sacred World Assembly, the following chants are chanted, as it is an international Vajrayana program. At home, however, or at local Shambhala Centers, students may simplify. For example, in the morning, one may omit the Supplication to the Takpo Kagyu and the Great Clouds of Blessings if one wishes. The others are fairly standard for ngöndro practitioners. As for the protector chants, these vary from center to center but one chants at least the Protectors of the Three Courts and Concluding Request. At home, practitioners may choose which chants they would like to include in addition to the Protectors of the Three Courts and the Concluding Request to the Protectors.

Morning Chants

Proclamation of Goodness
Supplication to the Shambhala Lineage
Seven-Line Supplication to Padmakara
Supplication to the Takpo Kagyu
Great Clouds of Blessings
The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge
Homage
Supplication to the Rigden Father
Supplication to the Mother Lineage
Invocation for Raising Windhorse

Protector

Four Armed Mahakala
Vetali
Ekajati
Vajrasadhu
The Silver Banner of the Golden Drink of Pomera
Gampo Lhatse
Abbreviated Supplication to Gesar
Protectors of the Three Courts
Concluding Request to the Protectors

Closing

Supplication of the Longevity of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Supplication to Padmasambhava
Invocation
Aspiration of Shambhala
Dedication of Merit

IV. Sample daily schedules

These are some possible schedules. Local centers and teachers may wish to adjust the timing for various reasons, while following the general guidelines of 2 long practice sessions a day that allow students to do 50-60 minutes of their main ngöndro practice each session, plus a daily dharma class involving a live or recorded talk and discussion group.

A. Schedule for Prostrators with Morning Class – Times are approximate

9:00 – 9:30	Opening Chants, Sitting
9:30	Dharma Talk, On-Line Presentation
10:45	Break
11:00	Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplating 3-4 minutes each, concentrating on one or two sentences)
11:20	Prostrations
12:00	Bodhicitta contemplation
12:15	Conclude, contemplate, dedication of merit
12:30	Lunch
2:00	Shambhala Lineage Supplication, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplating 3-4 minutes each, concentrating on one or two sentences)
2:30	Prostrations
3:20	Bodhicitta contemplation
3:45	Conclusion
4:00	Tea
4:30	Discussion
5:30	Protector and Closing Chants

B. Schedule for Prostrators with Afternoon Class – Times are approximate

9:00 – 9:30	Opening Chants, Sitting
9:30	Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplating 3-4 minutes each, concentrating on one or two sentences)
9:50	Prostrations
10:50	Bodhicitta contemplation
11:15	Conclude, contemplate, dedication of merit
11:30	Break
11:45	Reading / Study
12:30	Lunch
2:00	Shambhala Lineage Supplication, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplating 3-4 minutes each, concentrating on one or two sentences)
2:30	Prostrations
3:20	Bodhicitta contemplation
3:45	Conclusion
4:00	Tea
4:30	Talk and Discussion or On-line presentation
5:45	Protector and Closing Chants

For groups with people doing different Rigden ngöndro practices:

Do opening chants, shamatha, expel stale air, the Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries together as a group, then continue with individual practices until 12:30 and after lunch until it is time for closing chants.

For groups with people doing different ngöndros (ie., Rigden and Kagyü ngöndro) and/or other practices:

Do opening and closing chants together. Include the Supplication to the Kagyu Lineage.

* These materials are available from Shambhala Media – <http://www.shambhalamedia.org/>

Note: Detailed practice instructions accompany the published text of the Primordial Rigden. Please refer to these. They are available from Shambhala Media

<http://www.shambhalamedia.org/>