

# 5. Group Practice and Individual Retreats

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# **Group Practice Formats**

## **Nyinthün**

At local centers, nyinthüns are usually the most important form of group practice. Community nyinthüns are strongly recommended, in order to encourage group practice and inspire the sense of sangha.

Traditionally, nyinthüns last for a full day: 9:00 am until about 9:30 pm; they include oryoki practice and functional silence. For some centers, however, it may be more realistic to schedule two three-hour practice sessions in the morning and afternoon. Formats can vary from month to month. Try to schedule at least one full-day nyinthün per month.

Thoughtful planning and attention to hospitality make nyinthüns more enjoyable and well attended. Tea, coffee, and breakfast rolls could be served in the morning before the first session of sitting; collect a donation to defray expenses. A special tea snack could be prepared for the afternoon break. Although oryoki meals require a lot of organization and preparation, they are usually much appreciated.

## **Sample Morning Schedules**

### *Schedule A*

9:00	Opening Chants
9:15	Sitting
9:55	Walking
10:05	Sitting
10:35	Bodhichitta and/or Tonglen
10:55	Sitting
11:00	Walking
11:05	Sitting
11:20	Reading and continue sitting
12:00	Lunch Break

### *Schedule B*

9:00	Opening Chants
9:15	Sitting
10:05	Walking
10:15	Reading and continue sitting
10:30	Walking
10:35	Sitting
11:05	Bodhichitta or Tonglen
11:25	Sitting
11:30	Walking
11:35	Sitting
12:00	Lunch Break



*Schedule C*

9:00	Opening Chants
9:15	Sitting
10:00	Walking
10:20	Sitting
10:30	Reading and continue sitting
11:05	Walking
11:10	Sitting
11:20	Bodhichitta and/or Tonglen
11:40	Sitting
12:00	Lunch Break

*Schedule D*

9:00	Opening Chants
9:15	Sitting
9:55	Walking
10:05	Bodhichitta or Tonglen
10:25	Sitting
10:40	Walking
10:50	Sitting
10:55	Walking
11:00	Sitting
11:15	Reading and continue sitting
12:00	Lunch Break

**Sample Afternoon Schedules***Schedule A*

1:30	Sitting
2:15	Reading and continue sitting
2:25	Walking
2:30	Sitting
3:10	Walking
3:30	Tea Break
4:00	Sitting
4:10	Tonglen
4:25	Sitting
4:50	Evening Chants
5:00	Closing

*Schedule B*

1:30	Sitting
2:30	Walking
2:40	Sitting
3:00	Tonglen
3:15	Sitting
3:30	Tea Break
4:00	Sitting
4:10	Reading and continue sitting
4:50	Evening Chants
5:00	Closing

*Schedule C*

1:30	Sitting
2:15	Walking
2:25	Sitting
2:40	Walking
2:45	Sitting
2:50	Reading and continue sitting
3:30	Tea Break
4:00	Sitting
4:15	Tonglen
4:30	Sitting

*Schedule D*

1:30	Sitting
2:05	Walking
2:15	Sitting
2:30	Tonglen
2:45	Sitting
2:55	Walking
3:30	Tea Break
4:00	Sitting
4:10	Reading and continue sitting
4:35	Walking

4:50 Evening Chants  
5:00 Closing

4:40 Sitting  
4:50 Evening Chants  
5:00 Closing

## **Umdze Schedule**

Unpredictability of the schedule helps to wear out habitual tendencies and blur the boundaries between meditation and post-meditation. The local practice coordinator can create schedules in advance and keep them on file. Sitting periods may range from fifteen minutes to one hour. Periods of walking meditation may range from five to twenty minutes.

## **Oryoki**

It is preferable if meals are served oryoki style to encourage the continuity of all-day practice. Lunch or dinner, or both, could be oryoki meals, followed by a half-hour break for coffee and tea.

## **Work**

You may wish to include a work period after lunch, which would extend the lunch break to two hours. It is important to have the work well organized, so that everyone has something to do. Functional silence could be observed during work period.

## **Readings**

Readings may be scheduled in the morning or afternoon sessions, or both. Readings should be relatively short, and on practice related topics. The following books are good resources:

- *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*
- *Myth of Freedom*
- *Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand*
- *The Wisdom of No Escape*

## **Personnel**

It is important to periodically schedule training sessions in order to teach new people the roles of umdze, gekö, and gatekeeper.

## Community Nyinthün

A community nyinthün (or "MI nyinthün") includes a practice talk and meditation interviews in the schedule. The staff for this nyinthün should be senior students: meditation instructors, teachers, and executive committee members. Short meditation interviews should be scheduled for all participants during the late morning or afternoon practice sessions. Here are some suggestions to promote community nyinthüns:

1. Meditation instructors personally invite their students to attend the nyinthün.
2. Send invitations to the nyinthün to the entire membership.
3. Include practice talks in the morning, evening, or both. Here are some possible topics, all based on the 1979 Hinayana-Mahayana Seminary Transcripts:
  - obstacles and antidotes
  - nine stages of shamatha
  - seven characteristics of a dharmic person
  - six points of good posture
4. The nyinthün could be concluded in various ways:
  - a practice talk and discussion
  - a community meeting
  - a social gathering
  - oryoki banquet

## **Three-Yana Nyinthün**

The three-yana nyinthün is a means for drawing together sangha members of all levels of practice at your center. In one day, all the principal practices can take place at the same time: sitting and tonglen, ngöndro and sadhana practice. Concurrent practice is scheduled for morning and afternoon only; if practice is scheduled in the evening, everyone could sit together.

At the beginning of the morning session, the umdze could say a few words about the nature of the three-yana journey for the benefit of newer students. She or he could briefly explain the progression of the journey in our tradition: refuge vow, bodhisattva vow, seminary training, ngöndro practice, and sadhana practice.

## **Shrine-Hall Usage**

If there is a separate vajrayana shrine hall, ngöndro students and sadhakas leave the main shrine hall at some point to do their own practice. Sadhakas could practice at the back of the vajrayana shrine hall at practice tables, ngöndro practitioners in the front.

## **Outline of Morning Session**

1. All do the morning chants together.
2. All sit together for twenty minutes.
3. After the first walking meditation, shamatha students, ngöndro practitioners, and sadhakas go to their respective practice places.
4. The umdze remains to lead sitting for the entire morning.
5. The Mahayana Morning Liturgy and tonglen practice are included in the morning sitting schedule.



## Outline of Morning Session

1. All sit together for twenty minutes.
2. After the first walking meditation, shamatha students, ngöndro practitioners, and sadhakas go to their respective practice places.
3. The umdze remains to lead sitting practice all afternoon.
4. At 4:15, the umdze informs vajrayana practitioners that it is time to begin closing their practice.
5. At 4:45, all practitioners do the evening chants together in the main shrine.

## Suggested Schedules for Three-Yana Nyinthun

### *Morning*

9:00	Opening chants, sitting
9:40	Brief explanation of three-yana path
9:45	Walking meditation; practitioners change location
9:50	Sitting
10:20	Walking
10:30	Sitting
10:40	Mahayana morning liturgy, begin tonglen
11:00	End tonglen
11:15	Walking
11:25	Sitting
12:00	Oryoki lunch

### *Afternoon*

2:00 pm	Sitting
2:25	Walking; practitioners change location
2:30	Sitting
2:55-3:25	Tonglen or bodhichitta practice
3:35	Walking
3:45	Sitting

4:15	Notify vajrayana practitioners to close
4:45	Evening chants
5:00	Tea and coffee social

## Ninethün

In order to strengthen and inspire community practice, it is recommended that Shambhala Centers and Shambhala Meditation Groups schedule two ninethüns each year.

*Format.* A ninethün is two full weekends of nyinthün practice, with sitting scheduled on intervening weekday evenings from 7:00-9:30 pm. A one-hour sitting each weekday morning could also be included.

*Meals.* Lunches could be served during the weekend nyinthüns, oryoki if possible. It would also be helpful to provide evening meals. A simple dinner could be served from 5:30-6:30 pm, with sitting again at 7:00 pm.

*Commitment.* It is helpful for students to make a firm commitment in advance to attend all or part of the ninethün. Making a commitment to oneself and to one's meditation instructor encourages attendance.

*Talks.* A senior student could give a practice talk or two during the weekend portion of the ninethün. It would also be fitting to organize the closing weekend as an ITS, taught by a visiting Shambhala teacher.

## Sangha Gathering

The Sangha Gathering is scheduled for one morning each month. Its purpose is for the entire sangha to come together on a regular basis, in order to practice the three wheels of meditation, study, and activity. It is open to all who are interested: practitioners and newcomers, adults and children, families and singles. At Karma Dzong in Halifax, it is scheduled on the first Sunday morning of each month, from 10:00 am until noon.

The Vidyadhara suggested that such gatherings should include three components:

1. simple practice, such as shamatha
2. some study, or opportunity to think about the dharma as it has been taught
3. some social aspect, or chance for people to interact

The following is a possible format for the morning, based on the one used at Karma Dzong Halifax.

1. *Chants.* Morning chants begin at 10:00 am in the main shrine hall, with all sangha members together with their children.
2. *Sitting.* There is thirty minutes of sitting after the chants. Children who want to sit – usually those over eight years old – are welcome to stay.
3. *Child care.* Children who do not want to sit, along with their caretakers, are excused after chants. The children have games and other organized activities downstairs, with adult supervision. Older children and adults who are not parents are invited to help with child care.
4. *Dharma talk.* A dharma talk for adults and interested children follows the sitting period, with time for questions and answers, lasting about forty minutes.
5. *Social.* At the end of the morning, about thirty minutes is devoted to a light brunch and socializing. A donation is collected to pay for the cost of food. The gathering ends at noon.

## **Vajrayana Group Practice**

There should regularly scheduled group practice for vajrayana students at the Shambhala Centers and Shambhala Meditation Groups. Even though vajrayana students may be practicing sufficiently at home, the notion of group practice at the center is very important, as it serves to energize the atmosphere and create a strong practice mandala.

An all-day session could be scheduled once or twice a month, preferably on the alternate weekend from nyinthün practice. Vajrayana practice could occur as part of a nyinthün. Refer to the section on three-yana nyinthün, above. Three-hour sessions for vajrayana students could also be scheduled on weeknights.

## Functional Silence

Functional silence, sometimes known as "functional talking," means to refrain from talking altogether, unless it is necessary to communicate information to another person. It is often observed during intensive practice programs such as dathüns and nyinthüns as a support for mindfulness-awareness practice during post-meditation periods.

It is important to understand silence as a discipline to simplify and work with oneself, rather than as a set of abstract rules. Breaks could be considered as a part of post-meditation practice. Silence helps to mirror one's own state of mind and to make one more sensitive to the environment. It also minimizes food for discursive thought during subsequent practice periods.

There are two opposing arguments to consider when deciding whether to introduce functional silence during nyinthün at your center:

1. Strict functional silence makes for a good practice environment.
2. Members of the sangha need an opportunity to socialize and develop friendships with each other.

*At Shambhala Meditation Groups.* For groups where nyinthün is one of the few times that everyone is together, it might be good to include some socializing to bind the group together. For example, there could be strict functional silence at lunch, but dinner could be a social situation. If groups have two nyinthüns a month, one could have a strict hinayana format, including shrine room meals; the other could be more social.

*At Shambhala Centers.* At larger centers or where the sangha has more cohesiveness, most nyinthüns could be more formal, including oryoki meals as well as strict functional silence.

## **Lojong Practice**

The Vidyadhara first introduced lojong slogans and tonglen as practices at the 1979 Vajradhatu Seminary. Since that time, they have become an integral part of our practice at all levels. In Tibetan, *lo* means "mind" or "intellect"; *jong* means "training" or "application." Therefore, lojong means "mind training," referring to the mahayana teaching of mind training in seven points, handed down from Dharmakirti and Atisha.

One element of lojong is the formal sitting practice of *tonglen*, or "sending and taking." Another element is working with lojong slogans, which deal both with meditation and post-meditation experience. The slogans, translated and printed by the Nalanda Translation Committee, are available on cards (from Drala in Halifax, Samadhi Store at Karmê Chöling, Ziji mail order, and other shops).

### **Recommended Reading**

*1979 Hinayana/Mahayana Seminary Transcripts*, pp. 87-142.

*The Great Path of Awakening* by Jamgön Kongtrül, translated by Ken McLeod (Shambhala Publications, 1987).

"Sending and Taking", chapter 12 of *The Wisdom of No Escape* by Pema Chödrön (Shambhala Publications, 1991).

*Start Where You Are* by Pema Chödrön (Shambhala Publications).

*Training the Mind* by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, edited by Judith Lief (Shambhala Publications).

### **Brief Outline of Tonglen Practice**

*Note:* The following is based on instructions given by Ane Pema Chödrön at the 1983 Vajradhatu Seminary.

*Step 1: Openness.* As the ground for the practice, first flash absolute bodhichitta.

*Step 2: Working with texture.* Work with the textures of dark and light. Breathe in dark, heavy, and hot; breathe out light, bright, and cool.

*Step 3: Personalizing.* When you have a sense of synchronizing your breath with these textures, work with some personal thought or experience, taking in the negative reaction and sending out space, or your positive feelings. For example, If you feel hunger, fear, anger, and so on, take that in and feel it fully. With the outbreath, send out the opposite feeling – satisfying hunger, having confidence, patience – or simply have a sense of letting go, opening up and ventilating the whole thing. The main point is this: Whatever feels bad or neurotic, breathe it in; whatever feels good or sane, breathe it out.

*Step 4: Universalizing.* Each particular personal thought should be expanded into a more general contemplation, taking and sending for all sentient beings. For instance, take in the hunger, fear, and discomfort of all sentient beings; breathe out satisfaction, sanity, and general well being to all sentient beings. In this way, what you experience personally becomes a stepping stone for truly understanding the experience of others.

*Joining 3 and 4.* In step 3 you may be breathing in the depression of a friend and breathing out to your friend a feeling of spaciousness and accomplishment. In step 4 you could breathe in the depression of all beings and breathe out well being to everyone, in this way making a vast connection with others.

## **Tonglen Practice Guidelines for Students and Instructors**

Since the Vidyadhara first introduced tonglen at the 1979 Seminary it has been included in a student's daily practice at the point of taking the Bodhisattva vow. Over time, tonglen began to be introduced in various contexts, including dathun, Maitri psychology programs, and Amara, among others. Over the past few years a number of books on lojong practice have been published, including the Vidyadhara's book *Training the Mind*, and Pema Chödrön's *Start Where You Are*. In addition, Ane Pema and others have been teaching tonglen extensively both for the public as well as in the context of intensive practice such as dathün.

In general, it seems appropriate to offer this practice a little more widely than has been done in the past. This is not unprecedented – it has often been the case that when a practice was initially introduced the Vidyadhara would make the boundaries very tight. Then, as time went on and more and more practitioners and instructors became familiar and well versed in these practices, the boundaries were widened. Further, given the Sakya's increasing focus on mahayana community more emphasis on this practice seems quite timely.

Based on discussions with the Sakya and the Shambhala Practice and Study Committee, it seems that it would be appropriate at this point to articulate the following guidelines and policies regarding the teaching of lojong, and its place in an individual students' path.

## Instructors

All shamatha-vipashyana instructors who practice tonglen are authorized to advise their students in this practice. The initial instruction should be given by a senior instructor, preferably a ngöndro or sadhana instructor in the context of a weekend or day-long intensive, or as a group instruction prior to the Bodhisattva vow. Further, it is recommended that all centers hold a Tonglen Intensive for Meditation Instructors. This could be seen as a vehicle for gathering instructors together for a day or weekend, and a means of refreshing everyone's connection with this practice.

## Students

### *Bodhisattva Vow*

At the point of taking the bodhisattva vow, students incorporate both *the Mahayana Morning Liturgy* and the practice of tonglen into their daily practice. Although a student may already be practicing tonglen, it is now part of the mahayana commitment that comes along with taking this vow.

Prior to taking the bodhisattva vow, tonglen can be given to students at any level. The following guidelines should be considered, however:

### *Public tonglen programs*

Ane Pema, Judy Lief and others have been teaching tonglen programs at the public level. For centers that would like to do so, it is recommended to consult with one or the other of these two, or with the Office of Practice & Study in Halifax. These programs are best presented by our most senior teachers, and could be the theme for a weekend by one of the teachers in the Vajradhatu Teacher's Academy. In these programs, it's suggested that students make shamatha-vipashyana their main grounding practice, and to go slowly in terms of incorporating the tonglen.

### *Intermediate level tonglen programs*

Training the Mind is an intermediate level pre-seminary course based on the Vidyadhara's book of the same name. The syllabus goes through the Seven Points of Mind Training and culminates in a weekend practice intensive. This is the best way to introduce the technique to students. Following this course those who make a connection with the practice, could be encouraged to make this a regular part of their practice.

### *Intensive practice and Lojong Dathiin*

Most centers include sessions of tonglen during nyinthün. Gampo Abbey and Karmê-Chöling have both offered lojong dathiins that were not restricted. Halifax has been offering a ‘mahayana’ nyinthun once a month. This is when the *Maitri Bhavana* practice is done, and a *Sukhavati Ceremony* if appropriate. As needed either group or individual tonglen instruction is offered. The umdze reads through the slogans at the beginning of one or both of the tonglen periods. If there is interest, a discussion group is held during the afternoon tea break.

### *Tonglen During Nyinthüins*

If there are a significant number of practitioners who have taken the bodhisattva vow at your center, nyinthüins should include a session of tonglen practice. Fifteen minutes of tonglen could be scheduled during both the morning and afternoon sessions, beginning soon after a walking meditation. After tonglen, there should also be some shamatha practice before the end of the session. For tonglen umdze procedures, see Section 3.

## **Working with Slogans**

Contemplation of the lojong slogans goes together with the formal sitting practice of tonglen. People who have taken the bodhisattva vow are encouraged to work with the slogans as post-meditation practice and to study the material on lojong training (see "Recommended Reading," above).

## **Lojong Weekend**

A lojong weekend or day should be scheduled for those students who have taken the bodhisattva vow. Schedule it soon after a bodhisattva vow ceremony. Possible format:

### *Friday evening*

7:00 - 9:00 Sitting

9:00 - 10:00 Talk: Overview of lojong and tonglen instruction.

### *Saturday*

9:00 - 10:00 Sitting and 15 minutes tonglen

10:00 - 11:00 Tape: Talk 11, "Training in Ultimate Bodhichitta," 1979 Seminary

11:00 - 12:00 Discussion

12:00 - 1:30 Lunch

1:30 - 3:00 Sitting and 15 minutes tonglen

3:00 - 4:00 Tape: Talk 12, "Training in Relative Bodhichitta," 1979 Seminary



4:00 - 5:00 Discussion

*Sunday*

9:00 - 10:00 Sitting and 15 minutes tonglen

10:00 - 11:00 Tape: Talk 13, "Point III," 1979 Seminary

11:00 - 12:00 Discussion

12:00 - 1:30 Lunch

1:30 - 3:15 Sitting and 15 minutes tonglen

3:15 - 3:45 Break

3:45 - 5:00 Final talk on Points 4-7. Emphasize: memorize the slogans, knowing their meaning, and work with them in daily life.

## **Lojong Day**

*Morning*

9:00 - 9:15 Morning chants and sitting

9:15 - 9:30 Introductory talk: review tonglen instruction

9:30 - 10:15 Sitting

10:15 - 10:30 Tonglen

10:30 - 11:00 Sitting

11:00 - 11:10 Walking

11:10 - 12:05 Tape: Talk 11, 1979 Seminary

*Afternoon*

12:05 - 1:05 Oryoki lunch

1:05 - 1:45 Break

1:45 - 2:15 Sitting

2:15 - 2:30 Tonglen

2:30 - 3:00 Sitting

3:00 - 3:10 Walking

3:10 - 4:10 Discussion group and short break

4:10 - 6:00 Tapes: Talks 12 and 13, 1979 Seminary

*Evening*

6:00 - 7:00 Oryoki dinner

7:00 - 7:30 Break

7:30 - 9:00 Concluding talk and discussion

9:00 - 9:40      Sitting and 10 minutes tonglen  
9:40              Evening chants

## Public Lojong Weekend

This program is designed for people who have been meditating for at least one year, whether or not they have taken the bodhisattva vow. Ideally, a lojong class would be offered before the weekend; a four to six week course is recommended. The Friday night talk could be open to the public.

### *Friday evening*

6:30 - 7:30      Director meets with meditation instructors  
8:00 - 9:00      First talk: Overview of lojong; perhaps a talk on "Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue."

### *Saturday*

9:00 - 12:00 Sitting meditation  
                    Talk on the absolute slogans  
                    Group tonglen instruction  
                    Guided tonglen practice (15-30 minutes)  
12:00 - 1:30 Lunch  
1:30 - 2:00      Guided tonglen  
2:00 - 4:00      Individual meditation interviews  
                    Sitting meditation in shrine hall, including 10 minutes tonglen  
4:00 - 4:30      Tea break  
4:30 - 5:30      Sitting and 10 minutes tonglen  
5:30 - 7:00      Talk and discussion. Possible topics: "Drive all blames into oneself."  
                    "Contemplate the great kindness of everyone." "All dharma agrees at one point."

### *Sunday*

9:00 - 11:00 Sitting meditation and guided tonglen  
11:00 - 12:00 Discussion groups  
12:00 - 2:00 Lunch  
2:00 - 4:30      Sitting and tonglen (may include half-hour tea break)  
4:30 - 5:00      Sitting and 10 minutes tonglen  
5:00              Final talk, followed by a reception

## **Bodhichitta Practice on Love and Compassion**

*(Note to umdze: Following is instruction on the bodhichitta practice on love and compassion. You may simply read these instructions aloud, choosing the short or the extended explanation, and allow time as designated for contemplation. If you yourself have done this practice a lot, you may use your own words, but it should be kept short and simple, not overly personal, and follow the general outline as described below.)*

At this time, we are going to do a short contemplative practice from the mahayana buddhist tradition, known as the bodhichitta practice on love and compassion. Bodhichitta means “awakened heart.”

In a contemplative practice, rather than labeling our thoughts as “thinking,” we make use of our thoughts by directing them in a particular direction. Contemplating a particular topic for a concentrated period of time can be a very powerful tool in deepening both our understanding of the topic and of our own minds.

In this bodhichitta practice, we direct our thoughts towards the aspiration that all beings may be happy and free from suffering. We do this simply by thinking in this way for a few minutes. The aspiration that all beings may be happy and free from suffering is the basis of the bodhisattva path.

### **Short Explanation**

We will begin with the aspiration that all beings may be happy. This is connected with love and a feeling of warmth. Think about someone you love and how you would like them to be happy. Then expand that feeling to include all beings. We will contemplate in this way for three minutes. *(3 minutes)*

Now we will move to the aspiration that all beings may be free from suffering. This is connected with the experience of compassion. Again, think of someone close to you – a child, a parent, a lover – and think of how you would feel if this person were suffering, how you would want them to be free from that suffering. Then expand that feeling to include all beings. *(3 minutes)*

*Announce "Now we can return to shamatha-vipashyana practice," and ring one gong.*

*or*

### **Extended Explanation**

We will begin with the aspiration that all beings may be happy. This is connected with the experience of love and a feeling of warmth. Think about someone you love and how you would like them to be happy. *(1 minute)*

Now expand that feeling to include others – your family, friends, everyone in this room, in this community. *(1 minute)*

Now think of someone you don't like; perhaps an enemy who is trying to harm you. Since everyone would like to be happy, make the aspiration that they could indeed enjoy happiness. *(1 minute)*

Finally, expand this feeling of love to all beings, that they may enjoy happiness and the root of happiness. *(1 minute)*

Now we will move to the aspiration that all beings may be free from suffering. This is connected with the experience of compassion. Again, think of someone close to you – a child, a parent, a lover – and think of how you would feel if this person were suffering, how you would want them to be free from that suffering. *(1 minute)*

Now expand that feeling to others – your family, friends, the people in this room. Think that you would like them to be free from suffering. *(1 minute)*

Now think of someone you don't like; perhaps an enemy who is trying to harm you. Arouse the aspiration that they could be free from suffering. *(1 minute)*

Finally, expand that feeling of compassion to all beings, that they may be free from suffering and the root of suffering. *(1 minute)*

*Announce "Now we can return to shamatha-vipashyana practice," and ring one gong.*

## **Precepts**

The Vidyadhara introduced the taking of the upasaka (lay) precepts at the 1982 Vajradhatu Seminary. There are five precepts:

1. To refrain from killing any sentient being
2. To refrain from taking anything not freely given
3. To refrain from sexual activity
4. To refrain from lying
5. To refrain from drinking alcohol or taking intoxicating drugs

Gampo Abbey, Karmê-Chöling, and Rocky Mountain Dharma Center are authorized to introduce the taking of precepts. They are also introduced at Vajradhatu Seminary and at all dathüns. At Gampo Abbey, all residents keep the precepts.

## **The Benefit of the Precepts**

1. By not killing, aggression and carelessness can be seen clearly and they can diminish.
2. By not stealing, one's grasping and craving can be seen clearly and they can diminish.
3. By remaining celibate, one's craving, one's attachments, one's hopes and fears can be seen clearly and they can diminish.
4. By not lying one's various reasons for wishing to deceive others can be seen clearly and they can diminish.
5. By not drinking or taking drugs, one's tendencies to use these substances to escape can be seen clearly and they can diminish.

## **Taking the Precepts**

The precepts are always optional, a matter of one's personal inspiration. To begin practicing them, one must receive them formally from an authorized preceptor. In intensive practice situations such as dathün or seminary, taking the five precepts is included optionally each day as a part of the morning chants. They are renewed daily with the intention of keeping them for the next twenty-four hours.

### **Ceremony of Receiving the Precepts from a Preceptor**

Sometime before formally giving the precepts to new students, the preceptor should give a talk on the meaning of precepts and the method of taking them, including the following points:

- the basis of precepts in the vinaya, going back to the time of the Buddha
- living by precepts as an awareness practice, allowing the space to see clearly
- precepts as optional and entirely voluntary
- precepts are renewed daily for a period of twenty-four hours only
- possibility of taking from one to five precepts on a given day
- better to omit a precept than to break it
- confessing broken precepts – not like confessing our sins
- questions and answers

Immediately before giving the precepts, the preceptor should explain the ceremony to students. Clarify the period of time for which they are making the commitment, such as for the length of a dathün. For the ceremony, refer to the *Ritual of Taking the Five Precepts*.

1. After morning chants, all do three half-prostrations and chant the liturgy in unison through the triple refuge section.
2. After the triple refuge, the preceptor chants each precept by himself, one at a time, and waits for others to repeat after him or her.
3. Students repeat only the precepts they have chosen to work with for the duration of their commitment.

## **Who can be a Preceptor**

The preceptor should be an "elder" of the sangha. He or she must have received precepts from an already authorized preceptor, and should have made some relationship to them as a discipline. In most cases, the preceptor should be the director of a center, a senior meditation instructor, or senior teacher, and should be someone whom students would respect and identify with practice and discipline.

## **Daily Ceremony for taking the Precepts**

Precepts are ordinarily taken immediately after the morning chants. Refer to the liturgy of Taking the Five Precepts.

1. All recite the morning chants through the Heart Sutra (unless the ceremony is later in the day).
2. All get up and perform three half-prostrations to the shrine.
3. All kneel on their zabutons, with hands in anjali.
4. All chant the homage to the Buddha (NAMAS TASMAI . . . SAMYAK-SAMBUDDHAYA) and the triple refuge in Sanskrit, with the proper melody.
5. All chant the five precepts, each individual repeating only those which she or he intends to keep for the next twenty-four hours.
6. All sit on their cushions and the umdze rings the gong once to begin sitting practice.

## **Duration of the Precepts**

Each day when one recites the precepts, alone or in a group, one is committed to keeping them until dawn of the following day. Naturally, a person who has taken the precepts for a year has a general intention to make them a daily discipline; nevertheless, the actual commitment to keep some or all of them must be made daily.

## **Selectively Taking Precepts**

On a given day there may be precepts one does not want or does not intend to keep. At the same time, one still intends to keep up the long-term commitment. For example, one can decide in the morning not to take the drinking precept for that day only. In this case, one recites the precepts one is taking and omits those one does not wish to take. In this way, one is still living by vow rather than by impulse. In general, it is better not to take a precept at all, rather than to take a precept and break it.

## **Interpretation**

The hinayana precepts refer to the level of outward behaviour. They are considered kept or broken on the basis of one's outward actions. For instance, the celibacy precept is broken if one has intercourse; it is not broken by the arising of lust in one's mind. In fact, part of the value of the precepts is that the play of one's mind becomes very clear. The view is that, if confusion can be seen without judgment, it can correct itself.

The Vidyadhara decided that within the Vajradhatu sangha, the brahmacharya vow should be interpreted as celibacy. This differs from the custom in some buddhist countries, where the precept may be interpreted simply as sexual fidelity.

The precept about intoxicants, though explicitly about alcohol, also covers drugs. Drinking amrita, or blessed liquor, at a vajrayana feast is not considered a violation of this precept.

## **Confession of a Broken Precept**

If you break a precept, you should confess to the authorized preceptor as soon as possible after the precept was broken, preferably on the same day. Confession in this case does not imply sin or forgiveness. Confession simply means that you keep things out in the open by acknowledging to the preceptor that you have broken a precept. If a preceptor is not available, one may confess to (in order of preference):

- a sangha member who has also received precepts
- any fellow sangha member
- any human being who is sane.



## **Setting Aside a Precept**

An extraordinary situation could arise when one decides to set aside a commitment previously taken. In this case, one has to declare to any human being who understands one's words: "I have previously taken on this commitment, but now I am setting it aside." Again, it is better to set it aside than to break it.

## **Introducing Precepts During Dathun or Weekthun**

At the beginning of the dathün, on the day before actually giving the precepts, the preceptor should give a talk on precepts. People should not feel pressured. If they accept the discipline, they should do so without qualms. Those who do not wish to take the precepts can simply refrain from taking part in the liturgy, starting with the three half-prostrations.

*The precepts given by the preceptor are also binding on the preceptor until the dawn of the following day.* The Vidyadhara suggested that dathün staff should take the precepts daily along with the participants, so that they will share the experience of the other practitioners.

Following the initial giving of the precepts, they can be taken daily without the preceptor. The liturgy is simply led by the chant umdze. Before participating in the liturgy, however, a new arrival must formally receive the precepts from a preceptor.

## **Traditional Days for Taking Precepts**

It would be appropriate for sangha members to take the five precepts on the full and new moon days, even if they are not working with them on a regular basis. These are traditional "poshadha days," when the monastic sangha confess and renew their vows. Also the eighth day of the lunar calendar is auspicious. Of course, this is entirely voluntary.

## **Taking the Precepts for an Extended Time**

Some students may wish to take the precepts, some or all, for an extended period of time, such as a month or a year. Although the intention is to make the precepts a daily discipline, the actual

commitment to keep some or all of them is made on a daily basis. This daily quality leaves room for students to celebrate at times; it also makes taking precepts workable for married people. Some students may approach this commitment as an opportunity of living their life in a more disciplined and conscious way. Others may approach the year as preparation for undertaking full monastic vows.

The preceptor should interview an interested student to explore why he or she wishes to take precepts. The preceptor should make sure that the student understands that precepts are not an escape from anything. Rather, they are a method for seeing clearly one's intentions and actions. It is not a good idea for people with addictions to alcohol, drugs, or anything else, to "use" precepts as a method for quitting. This generally backfires. Make sure the student clearly understands:

- which precepts he or she is taking
- for how long
- renewing precepts daily
- selectively taking precepts
- confession

# Walking Meditation

## Instructions

1. *Feet.* In walking meditation, the mindfulness of each step replaces the mindfulness of breath. The pace should be slow but natural: slow enough to direct your attention easily towards the distinct movements of your feet as they touch the ground (heel, sole, toe) as well as towards the movements of your legs (bending, lifting, swinging). Do not verbalize this process; just be aware of it happening. Each step should flow as one continuous movement without any break or pause in the process.
2. *Hand mudra.* The essential point is to have a sense of walking with dignity like the Buddha. Maintain good upright posture, with attention to head and shoulders. With arms relaxed, hold your hands at hara level (about an inch below the navel) in this mudra:
  - Fold in the left thumb and make a fist over it with the other fingers of the left hand.
  - Place the palm and the fingers of the right hand naturally around this fist, with the thumb of the right hand resting on top of the fist.
3. *Eye gaze.* Begin walking meditation with a slightly lowered gaze. It should not be so low, however, that you are looking at your feet. Draw your attention in and practice undistractedly. When you feel somewhat stabilized and settled, you may raise your eye gaze and experience the sense of your body moving through space, with a more panoramic awareness of the environment. You may work with both raised and lowered gaze, using the guideline of "not too tight – not too loose."
4. *Labeling.* When you discover that your attention has wandered from the movements of your feet and legs, label that "thinking" and return your awareness to the process of walking. It might also be helpful to lower your eye gaze at this point.
5. *Posture.* The main point is to walk like the Buddha. Your posture is uplifted and noble. If you feel yourself slumping, come back to your good upright posture which is relaxed and dignified.
6. *Returning to one's seat.* When the gandi is struck, pick up your pace and walk briskly, in a clockwise fashion, to your place. Stand at your seat on your zabuton, with hands still in the walking meditation mudra, until the umdze sits down. When the umdze sits, everyone sits.

7. *Transition to sitting.* After taking your seat, adjust your posture and briefly check the six points. Place awareness on the outbreath when the gong is rung.

## **Kinhin**

The Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche introduced the walking meditation practice of *kinhin* at the 1994 Vajradhatu Seminary. This Zen style of walking meditation is slower than that which has been traditionally practiced in the Shambhala community:

This time we can do it slower. One heel will come to the midsection of the other [foot]. We slowly move. We slide. Slide your heel, as opposed to stepping up. Move your hips. Your body is forward. Place your hips. Let the weight transfer, feeling the bones connect and the flesh on top. You're balancing everything on one leg. The way your hip moves best is if you rotate it underneath. For those of you who are going to do drill, drilling is just an extension of walking meditation. If you do lama dancing, it is the same movement. We are moving our way along the ground. It's not a big deal, but when we reduce it, we find out that we have never spent time learning how to walk slowly and properly. We begin to lose our balance. All of that is really important to relate to- how you see yourself in an activity that you think you should be able to know how to do, and seemingly you can't. That comes up a lot of times.

When we do the walking meditation, the chin should be in and the gaze up.... A lot of people feel more comfortable looking down when they are walking, but you want to keep your gaze straight. We are not looking at each other. We have our own practice here. We are doing walking meditation. Our focus should be on our heel and toe....

The walking meditation we will do will be slower. Speed is not a factor. We are not trying to make one circumambulation. Try to be aware of your own position relative to somebody else. You should not be so absorbed in your own meditation that you create a traffic jam. You need mindfulness and awareness.... It's important that we have a mahayana attitude of walking around.... Try to make sure that your weight is completely transferred to the other side, and then place your heel and toe. If your right foot is moving, your heel should be at the center of your left foot. It's not a big step. This is obviously not a practice where you are trying to get somewhere. In the Zen tradition this is called *kinhin*.

(Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 1996 Seminary Transcripts, HINAYANA: 12-13)

*Kinhin* is recommended as a scheduled practice for nyinthüns, dathüns, and Seminary, as seems appropriate. It is not intended to replace regular walking meditation.

## **KINHIN GUIDELINES**

1. *Walking.* Steps are no longer than one foot length and not shorter than one half-foot length. With each step, your weight is shifted completely to the other foot. Feet stay close to the ground.
2. *Breathing.* Walking and breathing are synchronized, such that the out-breath coincides with stepping forward and the in-breath happens when your weight is shifted onto the forward-stepping foot.
3. *Posture.* The left thumb is enclosed within the fist of the left hand, which is gently held by the right hand, with the right thumb on top of the left fist. Hands are held at the level of the solar-plexus, such that the forearms are horizontal. Shoulders are relaxed.
4. *Standing Meditation.* After returning to your seat, the period before the umdze begins sitting meditation is an opportunity to practice mindfulness-awareness while standing. The *kinhin* posture can be maintained in the standing position.

## **Individual Retreats**

Historically, retreat practice has been central in the practice lineages of the Kagyü and Nyingma. As Milarepa has sung:

The kindness of the father guru is repaid by practice.  
Lord guru, please keep me in your kind heart.  
Grant your blessings so that this lowly one may keep to retreat.

In his early days of teaching in North America, the Vidyadhara placed considerable emphasis on individual shamatha retreats. This was often a student's first exposure to extended shamatha practice. Retreat cabins were built at all the practice centers, and regular retreat practice was encouraged. This was before the establishment of the dathün and weekthün (month and week long group retreats) and the introduction of vajrayana practices.

Over time, the dathün and weekthün replaced retreat practice as most students' first introduction to intensive practice. However, the dathün was not designed to replace the solitary retreat, but to provide a powerful and supportive group situation to enter new students into intensive practice. At this point, dathün is required before doing a retreat.

Solitary retreats are still highly encouraged for shamatha students, as well as for ngöndro and sadhana practitioners. In the new Buddhist curriculum, a 7-day solitary retreat is one of the requirements for Vajrayana Seminary, and for some vajrayana practices, extensive retreat is necessary. It is also extremely important that teachers and meditation instructors have a regular retreat practice to deepen their understanding. Though retreat is not required on the Shambhala Training path, many students have found it very powerful to do Shambhala practices such as stroke and Werma in retreat. In any case, whether required or not, retreat can be one of the most powerful and inspiring experiences that practitioners can have.

It is best to do a retreat at a practice center offering guidance as well as dedicated retreat cabins in beautiful locations. Visits by an experienced retreat master are included. In-house retreats at major practice centers are another option.

Most of the following guidelines are meant for shamatha retreats, and vajrayana students will have additional specific instructions based on the practices they are doing.

## Retreat Guidelines

1. You should sit a dathün (month long group retreat) before going on solitary retreat. This will give you the depth and stability of experience in the practice and your own mind, so that you can properly benefit from a solitary retreat. If you have a special situation, you can discuss this with your meditation instructor and/or a retreat master at a retreat center.

Just as important as the dathün, if not more so, is having a strong daily practice. Retreat practice will only be meaningful if you have already established a good understanding of the practice and good discipline in doing it. If you are having difficulty with regular practice in daily life, you can't expect retreat to magically make it better.

2. It is required that you meet with your meditation instructor in advance to discuss your retreat plans. In certain circumstances—such as mental instability, unusual stress, relationship difficulties with your spouse or companion, a severe family illness, etc.—a meditation instructor may discourage a student from doing retreat.

The Sakyong has advised that you should go on retreat when your life is settled and you are feeling confident about your practice, so that you can attain some realization. Many times, people say things like, “I don't know what to do with my life, so I thought it would be a good idea to do a retreat,” or, “I just lost my job, so I thought I should go on retreat.” Some people have an idealistic notion of retreat as a vacation with good spiritual side effects. On the contrary, retreat is often hard work, and meditation instructors can provide advice as to when retreat is appropriate and when it is not.

In the same way, it is always key to consider your motivation for going into retreat. Retreat and the path in general are about realizing the nature of mind, not taking time off from a hectic life, or accumulating numbers of mantras.

3. In meeting with your meditation instructor, you should set the length of your retreat. A first retreat for shamatha practitioners and for some ngöndro practitioners who are unfamiliar or uneasy with retreat should not be longer than one week.
4. The retreat master will generally come to visit a retreatant during the retreat, particularly for shamatha practitioners or people who have not done much retreat. These visits can be very helpful as a check in and a chance to clarify any questions or practical issues.

5. You should practice approximately eight to ten hours per day. Shamatha students should set up a daily schedule, roughly following a dathün schedule. A study period after lunch helps to inspire the afternoon practice. See the sample schedule below.
6. The most important thing is to be kind to yourself. Since you are the only one there, retreat is a great opportunity to make friends with yourself. However, don't bring all the comforts of home with you. Take the attitude that "whatever you have in retreat is enough." Simplicity allows space for your practice to blossom.
7. Eat normally: simple and nutritious food. There should be no fasting or dieting.
8. No "self-improvement" projects, such as trying to quit smoking.
9. There should be no writing: letters, diaries, or memoirs. No telephone calls except in an emergency.
10. No alcohol or drugs. However, sadhakas may have amrita for daily practice and feasts.
11. There should be no music (except for sadhakas' use of ritual instruments).
12. The morning and evening chants should be done daily. Use the protectors chants you usually do at home and, if you like, those appropriate for the retreat center where you are practicing. Protector chants are done at the end of the session around dusk. Make the tea offering after the Concluding Chant to the Protectors. Longevity and rebirth supplications should be done at the end of the final session for the day.
13. The Sadhana of Mahamudra can be practiced on new and full moon days.
14. The books you take on retreat depend on the length of the retreat and your main practice. In general, a minimum of reading material should be taken. This is because a little bit goes a long way in retreat. Your mind can become very clear and open, and so contemplating a short section of reading can be most effective. Readings should be directly relevant to your practice, serving primarily as inspiration for practice rather than intellectual study. You should discuss this with your meditation instructor, and select a couple of books from the section below.
15. Audio tapes are not generally recommended for shamatha retreat. However, exceptions could be practice instruction tapes such as the "Resting the Mind" seminar by Sakya Mipham Rinpoche or bodhichitta practice programs by Acharya Pema Chödrön. For vajrayana retreats, audio tapes such as transmission talks and sadhana tris are fine. Choice of tapes can also be discussed with your meditation instructor or retreat master.
16. After you have completed your retreat and returned to your "ordinary" life, it is important to resume your daily practice. Oftentimes, after the intensity of a retreat, you may want to take



some time off from your practice. Unfortunately, for many people, this may last for weeks! The main point to have continuity: not regarding retreat as a big deal and not regarding daily practice as unimportant.

You should also check in with your meditation instructor soon after returning, while your experiences, insights, and questions are fresh. In essence, the whole purpose of retreat is to more fully engage in our life, so coming out of retreat properly and with care is just as important as the retreat itself. Ultimately, the separation between retreat and our life dissolves, but until that truly happens, we should exert ourselves in retreat!

## RETREAT SCHEDULE

This is a sample shamatha schedule. You can adjust it as you develop the rhythm of your retreat. Do not be too rigid about keeping a tight schedule and hard on yourself if you cannot. On the other hand, don't be too loose either, constantly changing the schedule to meet your whims and moods. Traditionally, it is good to start with a looser schedule at the beginning (fewer hours), tightening the schedule gradually. It is good to take time to relax at the beginning, exert yourself in the middle, and at the very end, lighten up a bit to prepare for your transition into the world.

As you can see from the schedule, it is traditionally recommended to practice for a while as soon as you wake up before taking any food. During the day, it is fine to take a walk outside, as long as you do not go near to where other people are. If you by chance see other people, you should not engage or talk to them.

### *Morning*

6:30	Wake-up
	Morning chants and sitting
7:30	Breakfast
9:00	Sitting and walking meditation
12:00	Lunch

*Afternoon*

1:00	Walk and rest
1:45	Study
2:45	Sitting and walking meditation
4:30	Tea break
5:00	Sitting and walking meditation
6:50	Protector chants
7:00	Dinner
8:00	Sitting and walking meditation
9:30	Longevity and rebirth supplications
10:30	Bed

## SUGGESTED READINGS

### **Books for shamatha retreats:**

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Meditation in Action, Myth of Freedom, Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, The Heart of the Buddha, Training the Mind, Hinayana Mahayana Seminary Transcript(s), Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Great Eastern Sun, The Path Is the Goal, The Lion's Roar, The Rain of Wisdom*

Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind/Beginner's Mind*

Tsangnyön Heruka, *The Life of Milarepa, The 100,000 Songs of Milarepa, The Life of Marpa*

Pema Chödrön, *The Wisdom of No Escape, Start Where You Are, When Things Fall Apart, Places that Scare You*

### **Books for vajrayana retreats (in addition to the books above):**

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Collected Vajra Assemblies (vols. 1 & 2), Early Tantra Groups, The Torch of True Meaning, Crazy Wisdom, Illusion's Game, Journey without Goal, Vajrayana Seminary Transcripts*

Jamgön Kongtrül, *The Torch of Certainty*

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Wishfulfilling Jewel, Pure Appearance, Primordial Purity*

Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, *As It Is (vols. 1 & 2), Vajra Heart, Rainbow Paintings*

Crystal Cave: A Compendium of Teachings by Masters of the Practice Lineage

Lama Shabkar, *The Flight of the Garuda (and other selected titles)*

Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahamudra: The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*

## EXTENDED RETREATS

Some centers can accommodate experienced retreatants who would like to do a longer solitary retreat of several months or longer. Other centers have a limit of one month or so for retreats.

### Three Year Retreat

One unique retreat is the traditional three-year retreat, which is an advanced vajrayana retreat of practicing both by oneself and with a group. This retreat takes place at Gampo Abbey in its three year retreat center, Söpa Chöling (Dharma Place of Patience), which is a separate building isolated by a fence.

The retreat practices are based on the Karma Kagyu (Kamtsang) tradition, and all participants take temporary ordination for the duration of each segment. The segments are one year in, one year out. In this way two groups of 16 people alternate in participating in the retreat which takes a total of six years.

To enter the retreat one must complete the vajrayana preparatory (ngöndro) and deity practices.

## SHAMBHALA RETREAT CENTRES IN NORTH AMERICA

In-house retreats only:

### **Dorje Denma Ling**

2280 Balmoral Rd.  
The Falls, NS B0K 1V0  
902/657-9085 FAX: 902/657-3159  
[denma@shambhala.org](mailto:denma@shambhala.org)

A small program center in the Cobequid Mountains of Nova Scotia, 1 1/2 hours northwest of Halifax. It is located on 400 acres of meadowland and forest overlooking the Northumberland Strait.

Rocky Mountain Shambhala Center  
4921 County Rd. 68-C  
Red Feather Lakes, CO 80545-9505  
970/881-2184 FAX: 970/881-2909  
[rmsc@shambhala.org](mailto:rmsc@shambhala.org)

A large and growing program center on 600 acres of a mountain valley in northern Colorado. It is located about 2 hours from Denver.

Gampo Abbey  
Pleasant Bay, NS B0E 2P0  
902/224-2752 FAX: 902/224-1521  
[gampo@shambhala.org](mailto:gampo@shambhala.org)  
A small monastic center with a 3-year retreat center. Remote location in the highlands of Cape Breton island, Nova Scotia

Solitary and in-house retreats:

Karmê-Chöling  
369 Patneade Lane  
Barnet, VT 05821  
802/633-2384  
[kcl-retreats@shambhala.org](mailto:kcl-retreats@shambhala.org)

A busy program center with strong retreat facilities as well. There are 7 cabins in the wooded hills in secluded locations on their 540 acres.

Solitary retreats only:

Dorje Khyung Dzong  
P.O. Box 131  
Gardner, CO 81040  
719/746-2264 FAX: 719/746-2997  
[dkd@shambhala.org](mailto:dkd@shambhala.org)  
This is a dedicated retreat center that has 7 cabins on 400 acres of secluded forest in the mountains of southern Colorado.

Ötso Shingsa (Milk Lake)  
c/o Gregg and Connie Clause  
R.R.1  
Italy Cross, NS B0J 1V0  
902/543-1417  
[milklake@shambhala.org](mailto:milklake@shambhala.org)  
This is a dedicated retreat center about 1 hour south of Halifax, Nova Scotia. There are 3 large, comfortable cabins next to a lake. Not as isolated, but very quiet and well situated.

# Guidelines for Meditation Instructors

1. *Myths about Retreat* None of the following statements are true, yet still appear.

Shamatha practitioners can't do retreats.

Retreats must be at least 10 days or 2 weeks.

You must do 40,000 prostrations before doing a ngöndro retreat.

Chakrasamvara retreats must be at least 2 weeks.

You have to practice 12 hours a day on retreat.

Please read these guidelines closely, and if you have any questions or suggestions about the proper guidelines for retreat, contact the Office of Practice and Education.

2. *The Importance of Retreat.* In general, meditation instructors should heartily encourage retreat practice to their students. The original guidelines from the Vidyadhara were that within one year after a dathün, it would be good to do a solitary retreat before Seminary. However, the appropriateness of embarking on a solitary retreat is unique to each situation and should be discussed with the student. In any case, solitary retreat is an extremely powerful way to ripen our understanding of our practice, mind, and life. Retreat practice will be required for students who want to go to Vajrayana Seminary. Students should do a 7-day retreat after their dathün. Meditation instructors should explain fully the purpose of retreat and understand clearly why a student wants to do a retreat, his/her practice history, previous retreat experience, etc. If a meditation instructor has questions about the appropriateness of the planned length of a retreat for a particular person, they should discuss their concerns with the retreat master at the retreat center.
3. *Length of Retreat.* A ten-day minimum was suggested by the Vidyadhara, because, as he said, it usually takes about four days to switch into a retreat state of mind. However, because of the demands of livelihood, family, etc., a seven-day retreat may be all that some students can manage. A first retreat for shamatha practitioners and for some ngondro practitioners who are unfamiliar or uneasy with retreat should not be longer than one week. Sadhakas could begin with a ten-day retreat. Exceptions to these guidelines can be decided on an individual basis.
4. *Practice Schedule.* Retreatants should practice at least eight hours per day, but no more than ten hours. Sadhakas can practice more hours if they feel they want to do more. This includes opening and closing chants, blocks of shamatha, protector chants, the Sadhana of Mahamudra on new and full moons, and other appropriate practices. With first-time retreatants, it is

helpful to work out a daily schedule (see suggested schedule, p. 5). As a retreat evolves, a student may decide to adapt the schedule to practice more—begin earlier, practice later. It is good to start slowly at the beginning of the retreat, intensify the practice during the middle section, and relax a bit toward the end. Shamatha students could follow a dathün schedule.

- Ngöndro students could have two long sessions with an hour of shamatha-vipashyana to begin and end the day. Sometimes it is better to have three shorter sessions, as boredom tends to set in during lengthy sessions. In any case, ngöndro students should understand that each session should be properly closed—the ngöndro mandala does not remain open all day.
- Vajrayogini practitioners should follow the four-session guideline in the Vajrayogini manual. The longest session should not exceed three or three and a half hours. The meditation instructor should make clear that these schedules are guidelines and not rigid rules; no marathons; develop maitri.

5. *Mixing Practices.* Keep it simple and do not use supplemental practices to avoid the root practice. Additional practices might include:  
for shamatha-vipashyana retreatants: tonglen, perhaps stroke  
for ngöndro retreatants: shamatha-vipashyana, tonglen, perhaps stroke  
for sadhakas: all of the above. If the retreatant also plans to do Werma, it is best not to alternate each day—better to do, for example, five days of Vajrayogini, then five days of Werma, during a ten-day retreat.
6. *Reading Material.* Books and/or transcripts should be kept to a minimum. Study material should complement the main practice, rather than providing an opportunity to avoid the schedule or indulge in philosophical speculation. Meditation instructors should always discuss this before the retreat and have a working knowledge of books to recommend. Retreat centers generally have a library of all the recommended books and tapes, as well as some by other teachers, which might be helpful. Retreatants could check with the retreat master regarding other suggestions.
7. *Visits.* If possible and appropriate, meditation instructors can arrange to visit the retreatant. The day and time of the visit should be set in advance so that the retreatant does not become discursive about when the meditation instructor will arrive. Although not every student needs to be seen during retreat, he/she should definitely be seen before and after. When visiting a retreatant, it is polite to announce your presence before actually knocking on the door, so that he/she has a chance to collect his/her thoughts, get dressed, or whatever. Please do not gossip or be discursive with the retreatant.
8. *Requirements for Meditation Instructors.* Generally, all meditation instructors should be doing regular solitary retreats to deepen their own understanding and confidence so that they can genuinely guide others in their practice and experience of retreat. If a meditation instructor has not done a retreat in several years, it would be good to refer his/her student to

someone who has done a more recent retreat, or to request the retreat masters to meet with this person at the start of their retreat.

9. *Confidentiality*. It is important to maintain confidentiality. In spite of our genuine desire to share the retreatant's experience with others who care about him/her, it is best to let the retreatant do this her/himself when the retreat is over. When asked by others how a retreatant is doing, the best response is, "He/she is fine... practicing hard... working with his/her mind", etc.
10. *Leaving Retreat Early*. Occasionally a student leaves a retreat early. The retreatant should be encouraged to return and finish the retreat if possible. If a pattern of leaving retreat prematurely is established, it can undermine a student's confidence in working with her/his mind, both in and out of retreat. However, sometimes a student is trying too hard, and it would be best to end the retreat and return at a later date for a fresh start. Likewise, in cases of physical illness, unbalanced mental states, or external emergencies, it would be appropriate to terminate a retreat early. In such cases, it might be good to continue the retreat on an in-house basis, in order to keep the continuity of the practice.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

*Manual for Shamatha Instructors*, pp. 37-8

*Meditation Instructor Training Seminars*, Karmê Chöling, 1975, pp. 35-7

*Meditation Instructors' Meeting*, Boulder, 7/15/76

Reginald Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, pp. 426-461