

9. Meditation Instruction

INTRODUCTION.....	3
ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR	4
ADMINISTRATION AND REVIEW OF MEDITATION INSTRUCTORS.....	6
PERIODIC REVIEW OF INSTRUCTORS	6
MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR NETWORK	6
GOALS AND COMMITMENTS	8
MEDITATION AND PRACTICE INSTRUCTOR TRAINING	10
CLASSIFICATION OF BUDDHIST INSTRUCTORS	10
<i>Shamatha/Vipashyana Instructor</i>	10
<i>Tonglen Instructor</i>	11
<i>Ngöndro Instructor</i>	11
<i>Sadhana Instructor</i>	11
INSTRUCTOR TRAINING PROGRAMS	12
<i>Shamatha/Vipashyana Instructor's Handbook</i>	12
SETTING UP THE PROGRAM.....	13
<i>Administrative Guidelines for the Instructor Training</i>	13
<i>Authorization to lead the training</i>	13
LOJONG INSTRUCTOR'S TRAINING FOR MEDITATION INSTRUCTORS.....	13
NGÖNDRO INSTRUCTOR TRAINING.....	13
SADHANA INSTRUCTOR TRAINING	14
INSTRUCTOR VOWS.....	14
PRACTICE INSTRUCTOR'S VOW	15
MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR'S VOW.....	16
MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR MENTORS.....	17
ROLE OF MEDITATION INSTRUCTORS IN PRACTICE CENTERS OR MAJOR PROGRAMS.....	18
<i>Resident Meditation Instructors</i>	18
<i>Outside Instructors for Program Staffing</i>	18
<i>Vajradhatu Seminary</i>	18
MEDITATION INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN.....	19
<i>Qualifications to Instruct Children</i>	19
<i>Shambhala Training</i>	19
<i>Seminary</i>	19
GUIDING STUDENTS ON THE PATH.....	20
INTENSIVE PRACTICE — NYINTHÜN/DATHÜN	20
REFUGE VOW	20
BODHISATTVA VOW.....	20
RECOMMENDING A STUDENT FOR SEMINARY.....	21
<i>Levels of Recommendation</i>	21
STUDY PROGRAMS	22
TEACHER TRAINING/MEDITATION INSTRUCTOR TRAINING.....	22
SHAMBHALA TRAINING	22
MEDITATION INSTRUCTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL / SOCIAL ISSUES	23
OFFICE OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING (OHSWB).....	23

SARPASHANA.....	23
AMARA	24
DESUNG	24
DATHUN LETTER.....	25
MEDITATION PRACTICE: A TALK TO YOUNG PEOPLE	31

9. Meditation Instruction

Introduction

"We need to be aware of our students' journey and understand that it will take many shapes and many forms. Ideally, people will feel like they can come to you and you don't have to hound them to find out if they are okay. So that is some kind of view that you could keep in mind. And also, needless to say, take care of each other. Sometimes you might feel that, when you are relating with the students here, the distinction between who is helping whom becomes questionable. Who is the teacher, and who is instructing whom? So please take care of one another."

*The Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Talk to Meditation Instructors, 1994 Vajradhatu Seminary
RMSC
June 14, 1994*

Meditation practice and instruction is at the heart of all other activities at centers. Buddhism in our tradition is synonymous with strong meditation practice. Centers must have competent instructors and practice administration in order to function. Therefore, one of Vajradhatu's most important responsibilities is to ensure that proper instruction is available at all levels of practice.

Individual instruction is a key component of how meditation is taught in Vajradhatu Centers. Each student should have an individual instructor.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Meditation Instructor

At the local center, the meditation instructor has functions and duties that go beyond simply giving meditation instruction. At the ground level, he or she is the student's spiritual friend. The following is a partial list of an instructor's overall responsibilities:

1. Accurate and clear communication of the meditation technique to students.
2. Guidance, encouragement and friendliness toward students as they progress along the path.
3. Being an active representative of the local center and of Shambhala/Vajradhatu for new people who visit your center. An instructor needs to be able to respond to a variety of questions:
 - What is the essence of buddhism?
 - What is the goal of meditation?
 - How is Tibetan buddhism different from Zen buddhism — or from TM?
 - Who is Chögyam Trungpa? The Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche? The Vajra Regent? The Karmapa? What is the Kagyü/Nyingma lineage? And so on.
 - What is the meaning of the chants?
 - What is the Shambhala mandala? The gates?
 - Why meditate?
 - What are those people in the sweat pants doing in that shrineroom?
 - ... and many, many more.
4. Responsibility for the practice environment, which includes staffing open houses, nyinthüns, weekthüns, Shambhala Training, and other programs.
5. Deepening one's own understanding and realization through practice and study.
6. Advising students about how to integrate formal practice and post meditation experience: job, school, family, marriage, etc.
7. Being a reference point for students as they progress on their journey: refuge vow, bodhisattva vow, attending dathün, going on a retreat, applying for Seminary, and so forth.

8. Volunteering to teach and to help with practice administration at the local center.
9. Knowing the forms: shrines, chants, leading meditation, umdze-gekö-gatekeeper, posture, etc.
The Vajradhatu Practice Manual can be used as a major reference in this area.
10. Advising students on taking courses and pursuing the study of the dharma, Shambhala Training levels , and so forth.
11. Guiding students, pacing instruction.
12. Being familiar with the terms and definitions commonly used within Vajradhatu, including some understanding of how these same terms are used within different traditions or in different yanas. For example, vipashyana means something different to a Theravadin than it does to us and it is used differently in the mahamudra teachings than it is when we talk about mindfulness/awareness.

Administration and Review of Meditation

Instructors

Periodic Review of Instructors

It is the responsibility of Practice Department Heads to initiate a periodic review of the meditation instructors at their center. This review should be considered a means of cultivating instructors and helping them to improve their instruction, rather than a way of "policing" them.

There is no standardized procedure for this review. Relevant issues to consider include:

1. Quality of personal practice.
2. Attitude toward giving instruction.
3. Frequency of giving instruction.

Ongoing standards that instructors are expected to commit to are delineated later in the section on "Goals and Commitments."

The format of the review is determined at the local level. A weekend or series of one-day retreats for instructors could be scheduled. These could include practice, discussion of particular issues that are arising at the center, a talk on practice with discussion, discussion of how to improve one's individual practice as an instructor and perhaps how to improve the overall quality of instruction at the center.

Meditation Instructor Network

Centers are encouraged to work toward establishing a meditation instructor network. The network serves both as an aid in communication amongst the instructors, as well as a forum for working with the ongoing development of an individual's practice as an instructor.

The network is to be comprised of small groups of instructors, where the most experienced instructors are the group leaders. The groups would meet periodically, perhaps every two or three months. Topics for discussion could range from how to work with a particular individual or the administrative practicalities of working with practice and study at the center, to the vastness of investigating mahamudra and general principles of how to understand shamatha/vipashyana and applying this to working with students. Confidentiality can be maintained by keeping the instructees anonymous. If confidentiality cannot be maintained, then this is not a forum for discussion of individual cases.

The group leaders hold responsibility for staying in touch with the members of the group, and for working with them individually and as a group to support and strengthen the meditation instruction

situation at the center. These senior instructors could also meet periodically to pool their understanding, and to act as an advisory body for all the instructors.

Goals and Commitments

Active meditation instructors are expected to make a commitment to the following standards. Periodically, the Practice Department Head needs to remind MI's of these standards and to put them into practice through skillful administrative policies.

1. *Confidentiality.* An important aspect of instruction is creating and maintaining a feeling of trust between the student and the instructor. Confidentiality is key to fostering trust. Unless an instructor feels that the well-being of a student or of another person is truly at stake, what is discussed or revealed in a meditation interview should never be discussed with anyone.
2. *Personal relationship / intimacy with students.* If an intimate, personal relationship begins to develop between a student and an instructor, the student should be assigned a new instructor. It is obviously inappropriate for a formal teaching relationship to be mixed with a personal one.
3. *Frequency of interviews.* It is recommended that instructors meet with students every two months on average. When working with new students, more frequent interviews are recommended. There may be periods when a student needs or wants more time with the instructor, and obviously one should respond to that.
4. The recommended frequency of interviews at different practice levels is:
 - *New students.* The second interview is very important and can be scheduled for two to three weeks after the first interview. Invite the new student to make the appointment at the conclusion of the first interview. This saves a call back, gets around the issue of handing out phone numbers, and is simple and straightforward. It is an invitation to the new practitioner to come back and talk about what has been happening as they begin to practice the technique. This should be regarded as an act of generosity and compassion, not as an act of being too pushy or invasive.
 - *Shamatha students.* It is best to give instruction within a formal context rather than within an informal social setting. Ideally, the instructor could see students during nyinthüns.
 - *Ngöndro students.* Ngöndro instruction should also be given in a formal context, ideally during group practice situations, such as nyinthüns or Vajra Assembly weekends. Sometimes group instruction can be scheduled with a few students doing the same ngöndro practice guided by a senior student. Although this format is useful to discuss many general issues, it is not a substitute for individual instruction.
 - *Sadhana students.* Although sadhakas are advanced students, it is recommended that instructors take an interest in the progress of their students and make contact with them on an ongoing basis. Sadhakas can receive much valuable instruction within the context of

group discussion. New sadhakas especially should be strongly encouraged to study the sadhana and tris together.

5. *Distribution of students.* It is recommended that instructors at all levels have some shamatha students. Vajrayana instructors are strongly urged to continue to participate at nyinthuns and give initial instruction, although in some cases this may be unrealistic.
6. *Responsibility for staffing.* Whenever possible, instructors should assist in staffing practice events at the center. This could take any number of forms, depending on the individual instructor's inspiration: being umdze at a nyinthun, leading a practice intensive, helping with the tantra group, and so forth.
7. *Practice continuity.* Instructors should maintain a personal meditation practice of at least 20 hours a month, including feast practice.
8. *Continuing education.* Instructors should periodically complete one advanced meditation instructors training, such as lojong training, when offered by the local or major regional center. Individual study such as Ngedön School is strongly recommended.
9. *Meditation guidance.* Instructors are urged to seek periodic guidance and instruction pertaining to their own practice.
10. *Inactive status.* Instructors who cannot meet these goals and commitments should discuss with the Practice Department Head whether or not they should become inactive. A decision to become inactive does not imply a penalty or a stigma. Their students will be transferred to other instructors. They may have to meet some qualification requirements to become active again.

Meditation and Practice Instructor Training

Classification of Buddhist Instructors

There are three classes of authorized buddhist meditation instructors. These levels depend upon the instructors' own practice, the training they have received, and the extent of their experience in giving instruction:

1. Shamatha/Vipashyana Instructor
2. Ngöndro Instructor
3. Sadhana Instructor

Shamatha/Vipashyana Instructor

Pre-requisites for authorization to participate in a training program and evaluation criteria

GENERAL

- Completion of a dathün
- Connection to their personal practice some sense that they are themselves tamed, processed, softened.
- Willingness to work with others, attitude of "other is more important".
- Understands that this authorization is a journey and a commitment, not a credential.
- Commitment to the teachings of the Vidyadhara and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (devotion or loyalty)
- Commitment to Shambhala

PRE-REQUISITES

Shambhala Training Assistant Director

- Graduate of Warrior Assembly
- Dathun

Shambhala Training Practice Instructor

- Graduate of Warrior Assembly
- Dathün
- Authorized as an Assistant Director
- Shambhala Vow ceremony (maybe eventually- this demonstrates a level of commitment more directly to the Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and the entire organization)
- Two recommendations, - one from resident director, one from personal instructor.

Buddhist Meditation Instructor

- Vajradhatu Seminary graduate

- Dathun
- Bodhisattva vow, (being a Seminary graduate pre-supposes this)
- Two recommendations - one from their MI, one from the Coordinator or P&S person in the local center.

Tonglen Instructor

There is no separate authorization for tonglen/lojong instructors. If questions about tonglen arise during shamatha instruction, instructors can respond simply based on their experience and training. All shamatha instructors are encouraged to complete the weekend training program on Lojong for Meditation Instructors given periodically at centers. All ngöndro instructors are authorized to give tonglen instruction.

Ngöndro Instructor

In addition to the requirements outlined for shamatha/vipashyana instructors:

- The candidate should be well experienced as a shamatha/vipashyana instructor.
- The candidate should be well established in their sadhana practice.

Sadhana Instructor

- The candidate should be well experienced as a ngöndro instructor.
- The student should be well established in their sadhana practice, preferably having completed both of the Vajrayogini Fire offerings.

Instructor Training Programs

Overview

The program is designed to take place in several blocks:

1. A weekend of study and practice of shamatha emphasizing mock interviews, the first interview, the shamatha aspects of relating with students.
2. An interim six-week class for more in-depth study of
 - the theoretical background of the shamatha/vipashyana practice in the two teachings
 - special problems that arise in practice instruction
 - how to run discussion groups, or group interviews
3. A second weekend of study and practice of vipashyana also emphasizing mock interviews but going more into follow-up interviews and special problems. This weekend would take place three months after the initial weekend. Participants should have completed their take-home examinations as well as their sitting requirements of 30 hours per month for three consecutive months. The function of the second weekend is to further the training of the prospective instructors—both for more practice in mock interviews and to introduce the approach to instruction in vipashyana.
4. A third weekend (or single day) during which applicants for buddhist MI and for Shambhala Training AD will meet separately and go over specific aspects of their path that are not dealt with in the main program.
- 5.

Shamatha/Vipashyana Instructor's Handbook

Revised Edition 1997

The Instructor's Handbook contains transcripts of talks by the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and the Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche recorded at various Seminaries and dathüns. Also, Myth of Freedom, Heart of the Buddha, Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior, Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, and other writings by VCTR, as well as Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand by Ösel Tenzin are excerpted in the handbook. The readings are sorted according to the class subjects of the Instructor's Training program.

All materials used in the handbook are by gracious permission of Diana J. Mukpo, Lila Rich and Sakyong, Mipham Rinpoche, Vajradhatu Publications, Shambhala Archives and/or Shambhala Publications. Materials are available from Vajradhatu Publications, at 1084 Tower Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 2Y5, or by telephone at (902) 421-1550.

Setting up the Program

Administrative Guidelines for the Instructor Training

Instructor Training is a rich and complex program and demands a high level of support. Vajradhatu International will endeavor to work with you as much as we can in order to ensure that these trainings are fruitful, productive, and challenging.

Please contact Shambhala in Halifax to schedule this program. Once the program is scheduled, please inform other centers in your region. If there is enough advance notice the dates can be included in the master calendar. The program consists of two full weekends, with six classes in between. In addition, there follow a one-day program just for those who fill the criteria to become Assistant Directors and Practice Instructors for Shambhala Training, and a one-day program for those encouraged to be buddhist Meditation Instructors.

Once contacted, Vajradhatu will supply all the details and send out the curriculum of the program.

Authorization to lead the training

Vajradhatu and Shambhala Training International in Halifax will approve the leaders for these programs. In general, the approach is to have co-leaders who have a good balance of practice and teaching experience in both the buddhist and Shambhala teachings.

Lojong Instructor's Training for Meditation Instructors

This program is recommended for all meditation instructors as a means for deepening the practice and understanding of tonglen and the lojong slogans.

Ngöndro Instructor Training

This training program is designed to take place over the course of a long weekend (Thursday evening to Sunday afternoon, or the equivalent). If possible, it is preferable to schedule the training over the course of two weekends. The syllabus is available through the Vajradhatu Office in Halifax. The *Ngöndro Instructor's Manual* is required for the training, and is available through Vajradhatu Publications. Please contact the Vajradhatu Office for permission to hold this program and for a list of authorized leaders.

Sadhana Instructor Training

Currently there is no formal program for training and authorizing sadhana instructors. As the need arises on a local or regional basis, contact Vajradhatu for further guidance.

Instructor Vows

The Meditation Instructor and Practice Instructor vows can be given by the Sakyong or by one of the Acharyas. They are included here as reference only. Nevertheless, it has proven very helpful for aspiring instructors to have these commitments clearly articulated.

Practice Instructor's Vow

The Dralas of Shambhala, the Ancient Lineage of Warriors, The Ancestral Sovereigns, Omniscient Holders of The Mother and Father Lineages, guide me, inspire me. Following the command of Sakyong Mipham Jampal Trinley Dradül Rinpoche, I, (Shambhala name, given name), as a Shambhala training meditation instructor, pledge myself to follow the command of the Sakyong in arousing the sanity of our community.

I vow to maintain my own discipline in the sitting practice of meditation and to cultivate mindfulness and awareness in my daily life.

I further vow to train my mind in the vast and profound practices of Sacred Path of the Warrior and thereby to educate and inspire the members of the community to become mature and responsible participants in the vision and work of Shambhala.

I vow not to project my personal neurosis into the minds of students. I shall seek guidance if my own state of mind should produce doubtful effects on students.

I promise to work with my fellow meditation instructors in ensuring genuine and accurate communication throughout the community. At the same time, I promise to respect the confidentiality of the affairs of my meditation students as well as of Shambhala Training that shall be confided to me during the performance of my role.

I pledge not to misrepresent or distort the teachings of Shambhala Training and not to encourage factions or divisions which misinterpret the teachings and promote setting sun outlook.

On the whole, I commit myself to be genuine and good and extraordinarily sane in relating with myself and my fellow Shambhala Training warriors. If I violate these pledges, I request that I may be removed from my role of meditation instructor, while remaining as a practitioner and student, and that I may, when it shall be appropriate, apply for reinstatement as an instructor.

In taking this oath, I reaffirm my Shambhala vow and my loyal devotion to the Ancient Warrior Lineage of Shambhala.

Meditation Instructor's Vow

The three jewels, the gurus of the lineage, herukas, dakinis, dharmapalas, and lokapalas, guide me, inspire me. Following the command of Sakyong Mipham Jampal Trinley Dradül Rinpoche, I, (refuge name, given name), as a Vajradhatu meditation instructor, pledge myself to follow the command of the Sakyong in arousing the sanity of the sangha.

In keeping with the narrow path of the hinayana, I vow to maintain my own discipline in the sitting practice of meditation and to cultivate mindfulness and awareness in my daily life.

I further vow to train my mind in the vast and profound way of the mahayana and thereby to educate and inspire the members of the sangha to become mature and responsible participants in the vision and work of Vajradhatu.

In keeping with the principles of the hinayana and the mahayana as well as with the demands of the indestructible vajrayana, I vow not to project my personal neurosis into the minds of students. I shall seek guidance if my own state of mind should produce doubtful effects on students.

I promise to work with my fellow meditation instructors in ensuring genuine and accurate communication throughout the sangha. At the same time, I promise to respect the confidentiality of the affairs of my meditation students as well as of Vajradhatu that shall be confided to me during the performance of my role.

I pledge not to misrepresent or distort the teachings of buddhism and not to encourage factions or divisions which misinterpret the teachings and promote spiritual materialism.

On the whole, I commit myself to be genuine and good and extraordinarily sane in relating with myself and my fellow students in the vajra sangha. If I violate these pledges, I request that I may be removed from my role of meditation instructor, while remaining as a practitioner and student, and that I may, when it shall be appropriate, apply for reinstatement as an instructor.

In taking this oath, I reaffirm my refuge and bodhisattva vow and my loyal devotion to the Practice Lineage of the Kagyü and the Ancient Lineage of the Nyingma.

Meditation Instructor Mentors

The newly-authorized instructor should be assigned to an advisor. The advisor is an elder, experienced instructor and senior practitioner who acts as a reference point for questions and who helps guide the new instructor in working with students. There is a sense of 'minding each others business' in the most positive way. The advisor is bound by the same ethic of confidentiality as is the instructor to the instructee.

Role of Meditation Instructors in Practice Centers or Major Programs

Resident Meditation Instructors

As a staff member of a contemplative center such as Karmê-Chöling or RMSC, a meditation instructor has an opportunity for intensive practice in instructing. A resident instructor may be asked to serve as an instructor for programs, for staff members, and in some cases for retreat.

Outside Instructors for Program Staffing

Staffing a program at a contemplative center is an excellent opportunity to gain further experience as an instructor and it is highly recommended that instructors make the time to staff dathüins, fire offerings, and other programs. This is important not only for the health of the contemplative center's programs, it is also extremely enriching on the local level in that people gain experience in an intensive situation that cannot be duplicated in the Dharmadhatu or Shambhala Centers, and then bring that experience back home.

The local Practice coordinator could encourage and remind instructors of the value of staffing programs as an instructor. The Practice and Study Heads at the centers can be contacted for further information, or contact the Office of Practice and Study in Halifax.

Vajradhatu Seminary

As a staff member at Seminary an instructor has a wonderful opportunity to work with students as they progress through the yanas and prepare to enter the vajrayana. There is also an opportunity for instructors to work together on issues of instruction, and instructors and staff alike have a pivotal role in shaping and nurturing the Seminary mandala.

Meditation Instruction for Children

The Vidyadhara gave instructions and guidelines for children's meditation on several occasions. Children should not be pushed into meditation practice, but very often they are curious and want to meditate. The Vidyadhara said that one of the most important things was to leave the children with a good memory of what happened, and also to be very straightforward and direct when teaching young people. In other words, children can understand a lot. In general, children should not be given formal instruction until they are eight years old, which is traditionally when the young tulkus (including the Vidyadhara) and monks begin formal practice. The instruction for young people is not different from that for adults, although the recommended length of a session, and frequency of practice varies with age. Included in the appendix to this chapter is a short talk to young people given by the Vidyadhara at the 1979 Vajradhatu Seminary.

Qualifications to Instruct Children

There are no specific procedures in place for giving authorization to children's instructors. Ideally, the instructor is a parent or in some way experienced with children, having an understanding of how young people develop and what they can or can not be expected to understand or do at a given age.

Shambhala Training

A young person could begin to take Shambhala Training levels at the point where they are able to make the commitment to participate in the entire weekend. Some experience with sitting practice would be helpful, as it would give the young person a better frame of reference for deciding if they can make the commitment to sit for the entire program.

Seminary

Young people are expected to fulfill all requirements and pre-requisites for attending Seminary before they will be accepted, including the full dathün and study requirements.

Guiding Students on the Path

One of the important roles of a meditation instructor is to advise students when to take the next step in the path of practice and study. Some students tend to want to proceed very quickly, some never want to apply to Seminary, or having attended Seminary, never want to do their ngöndro, and so forth. It is up to the instructor to help the student pace their journey in a way that is helpful to the growth and well-being of the individual. The following guidelines should be regarded as a frame of reference for advising students. Needless to say, instructors are also expected to use their own judgment, and to seek guidance when unsure of how to work with a student.

Intensive Practice — Nyinthün/Dathün

Nyinthün

Students could be encouraged to participate in full or partial nyinthüns quite early in their dharmic career. Students could begin by sitting a nyinthün — the full day if possible, otherwise one or two sessions. It is helpful to meet with a new student prior to their first nyinthün and go over shrineroom protocol, shrines, chants, and so forth.

Dathün

There are no pre-requisites for attending dathün. A brand-new student could sit the program, although it might not be recommended. It is hard to say when precisely it is time for dathün. Introducing the idea of such a program early on seems good – some students get excited at the possibility and some feel it would be impossible even to consider. Work from there.

Refuge Vow

The guidelines for requesting this vow are found in the Practice and Study Manual, chapter 8, page 1.

Bodhisattva Vow

The guidelines for requesting this vow are found in this Practice and Study Manual, chapter 8, page 6.

If the student is not already practicing tonglen, they will (or should) receive this practice at the point of taking this vow. This is also the point where the Mahayana Morning Liturgy is added to the opening chants and daily practice for the student.

Recommending a Student for Seminary

The following are guidelines for recommending a student for the Vajradhatu Seminary. Completing the dathün requirement is the most crucial. Completion of the pre-seminary study requirement is also extremely important. For individuals in remote locations where courses not offered regularly or at all, it is possible to substitute an at-home tutorial.

The applicant must submit an application for review by the Shambhala Practice and Study Committee and the Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. The instructor must complete and submit a recommendation form. A student's application will not be reviewed until the recommendation form is received. The following criteria should be considered when making the recommendation:

1. Completion of a full dathün.
2. Completion of the pre-Seminary study program including hinayana/mahayana Seminary transcript study.
3. At least two full years of practice and study in affiliation with a Shambhala/ Vajradhatu center.
4. Refuge and Bodhisattva vows. These are offered at Seminary for those who have not had the opportunity to receive them. They are required before receiving Vajrayana transmission and this should be made clear to the student prior to applying for Seminary.
5. Shamatha retreat. This is not required, but is highly recommended.
6. Shambhala Training levels. There is no requirement that a student participate in Shambhala Training. However, it is strongly recommended that students study the Shambhala teachings prior to Seminary if it is available to them regionally.
7. Commitment to the Sakyong and the Shambhala mandala. The student must be ready to undertake vajrayana level commitment with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. Although many students have relationships with other teachers, by attending Seminary they indicate their willingness to take the Sakyong as their primary teacher, and commit to follow the Vajradhatu path of practice and study.

Levels of Recommendation

There are three levels of recommendation — 'highly recommended', 'recommended' and 'not recommended'. Recommending a student for Seminary should be considered seriously.

Entering the vajrayana is a commitment that should not be entered into prematurely. Recommending a student who is not prepared, no matter how wonderful they are, does them and others a disservice.

Study programs

All instructors should understand the path of study for students at all levels. The Education Coordinator in your center should have an outline of the basic curriculum for study, from beginning to advanced classes. Further information can be obtained by contacting Vajradhatu Practice and Study in Halifax.

Teacher Training/Meditation Instructor Training

After Seminary, some students should be encouraged and/or allowed to begin training as a teacher or meditation instructor. Guidelines for recommending students to attend a meditation instructor training are outlined earlier in this manual.

Shambhala Training

All students of buddhadharma should be encouraged to go through the Shambhala Training program.

Meditation Instruction and Psychological / Social Issues

A meditation instructor is often called upon to help students with issues and problems that seem beyond the scope of literal instruction on the technique. Helping a student to join post-meditation experiences with the view and practice of meditation is at the core of working with students. When a student/instructor relationship is based on mutual trust and friendship, as well as a sound dharmic foundation, the student may begin to share difficult experiences and seek guidance in life issues. Nevertheless, there are times when situations arise that are beyond the scope of a meditation instructor's training. For example, if you suspect mental illness, substance abuse, sexual abuse, or any other traumatizing life situations. This is a subtle, and perhaps controversial, area. However, it is extremely important to acknowledge one's limit and to seek advice when something comes up with a student that is beyond one's ability to help with. Perhaps the advice of a more senior instructor is needed; perhaps professional, outside assistance is required. Within our sangha, a number of groups have formed to provide assistance and support with social, physical, and psychological issues.

Office of Health and Social Well-Being (OHSWB)

The International Office of Health and Social Well-Being (OHSWB) is a group of people residing in Halifax who are trained in the healing professions, both Western and alternative. They can be used as a resource for instructors if other local resources have been exhausted or if they are unsure how to handle a situation, such as drug or alcohol abuse, child abuse, extreme illness, and so forth. The Office is currently chaired by Mrs. Conner Loomis and Mrs. Donna Hanczaryk. They can be reached through Shambhala/Vajradhatu in Halifax, (902) 425-4275. As well there are additional committee members for OHSWB available for consultation. It is recommended, especially in larger centers, that someone be appointed to act as a liaison with the Halifax office and to assist instructors locally in determining when outside help is warranted, and how to access it. Many Centers currently have an OSHWB person on their Shambhala Councils who can be consulted. It is preferable to use local talent because they will be more familiar with the various aspects of a situation and with what is available locally.

Sarpashana

Sarpashana is a buddhist-oriented educational and support network for people who are working with addictions. In working with addiction, some practitioners may use skillful means, such as AA, in addition to the practice and study of buddhadharma. Sarpashana can provide group

support in discussing how to relate practice and recovery. There is an active group in Halifax, as well as in many other Vajradhatu centers. Individuals or Centers can make contact with the Sarpashana group in Halifax through the Practice and Study Administrator at Vajradhatu. The "Sarpashana Sourcebook" is currently under revision and out of print; However, many Centers have a copy of the original sourcebook which has relevant and useful information.

Amara

Amara is an association of health professionals established by the Vidyadhara in 1978. Amara is a Sanskrit term meaning "no death" or "no obstacle." Its fundamental principle is the experience of "basic healthiness," an unconditional healthiness based on trusting one's relationship with things as they are. Working in health care is a powerful forum for practicing warriorship in the world. Amara serves as a network that can facilitate communication among health professionals. A primary objective is to disseminate teaching regarding health and healing. Currently a sourcebook and bibliography are being developed from the Vajradhatu Archives. The Amara coordinators can be contacted through Shambhala Central in Halifax.

Desung

The Desung Corps is the body of the Dorje Kasung whose role is to protect the Shambhala Community. "De" means "bliss." However, in this context the quality of desung would be that of a "harmony protector." The "De" is same as in Dekyong, and "Sung" is protector (as in kasung). The Desung should, in concert with various administrative or community groups such as Dekyongs, Shambhala council and meditation instructors, provide support for members of the community experiencing social or health disturbance, so that these events could become part of their path as practitioners. Desung have been present at practice programs and at Shambhala centers such as Boulder (since 1983) and Halifax (since April 1994). Further information can be obtained by writing to:

Simon La Haye, Desung General or e-mailing at <SElahaye@aol.com>
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CANADA

Dathun Letter

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

I would like you to know that I appreciate your participating in this particular discipline, and that we can share this world in the way the great teachers of the lineage have. We cannot even say that we are applying old methods to a new world, but only that we are leading our lives fully. The shamatha style of meditation is particularly recommended by the Buddha. It has been known as the only way for beginning meditators for 2,500 years.

To begin with we could discuss the attitude that brings about possibilities of mindfulness. This attitude is not particularly opinionated. When we talk about attitude in this context we are talking about awareness of mind, which is precisely what mindfulness is. Awareness of mind means that you are aware, that your mind is aware of yourself. In other words, the basic point is that you're aware that you're aware. The suggestion here is that you are not a machine; you are an individual person relating with what's happening around you. And mindfulness in this particular case is the sense of being.

We could use the phrase *touch and go*. You are in contact, you're touching the experience of being there, actually being there, and then you let go. That applies to awareness of your breath and also to your day-to-day living awareness. The point of *touch and go* is that there is a sense of feel. The point of *touch* is that there is a sense of existence, that you are who you are.

When you sit on the cushion, you feel you are sitting on the cushion and that you actually exist. You don't need too much encouragement to develop that kind of attitude. You are there, you are sitting, you are there, you are sitting. That's the *touch* part. And the *go* part is that you are there, and then you don't hang on to it. You don't sustain your sense of being, but you let go of even that. Touch and go. There's a sense of individuality, a sense of person. Actually, we are here, we exist.

We might question what will happen to us at that point. What about the non-existence and egolessness buddhism emphasizes so much? What about the current issue of spiritual materialism? What's going to happen to us if we do that? Aren't we going to stray into some kind of pitfall? Maybe you are. Maybe you are not. There's no guarantee, since there's no guarantor. However, it is possible that you could just do this. And I would recommend that you shouldn't worry about future security, but just do this, directly, simply, and the rest of the problem will be taken care of by the sangha and the guru. Somebody is there to mind your business, somebody unshakable. You can't shake them off. That's happening anyway. Since you are committed, since you are into it, that means you've asked somebody to mind your business already anyway. And that is happening, or could happen. So let us not feel too much concern about future security of that nature at all. Let us do the *touch and go*.

There is a further *touch* that is necessary. The *touch* applies not only to awareness of a sense of being, or mindfulness of a sense of being, it also happens at the level of mindfulness of situations. That is, one's mental state of aggression or lust has to be acknowledged. Those states should not just be acknowledged and pushed off, but actually looked at. That is a very important point here. There's no suppression or shying-off involved. You have that experience of being utterly aggressive and angry, or being utterly lustful, whatever. You don't just say, "Oh, it's okay. This is what's happening." Or, very politely, "Hi. Nice seeing you again. You are okay. Good-bye, I want to get back to my breath." That's like meeting an old friend who reminds you of the past and saying, "Well, excuse me, I have to catch the train to make my next appointment." That's somewhat deceptive.

So in this particular shamatha approach to practice you don't just sign off. You acknowledge what's happening, and then you look at it as well. The point is that you don't give yourself an easy time so you can escape the embarrassing and unpleasant moments, the self-conscious moments of your life. Such thoughts might arise as memories of the past, or the painful experience of the present. Or painful future prospects — maybe what you're going to do after this. All those things happen and you experience them and look at them and then come back to your breath. This is very important. Extremely important.

There is the possibility that we could twist the logic all around. If you feel that sitting and meditating, coming back to the breath, is a way of avoiding problems — then that is the problem. You might feel your practice is sanctioned by the Buddha, since you have the technique of mindfulness of breath which he recommended. Therefore it's something extremely kosher and extremely good and sensible and real, and you don't have to pay attention to all those little embarrassments that happen around your life. You can regard them as unimportant and just come back to the breath — then you are creating a patchwork; you are bottling-up problems and keeping them as your family heirloom. Therefore it is very important to look at those embarrassments and then come back to breath. However, there's no implication at all that if you look at them it's going to be an expression of freedom, an escape from one point to another, or that that's the end of the story.

In fact, most of the problems in life do not come so much because you are an aggressive or lustful person. The greatest problem is that you want to bottle those things up and put them aside, and you have become an expert in deception. That is one of the biggest problems. Meditation practice is supposed to uncover any attempts to develop a subtle, sophisticated, deceptive approach. It is to uncover those patches. That's a basic point, which is extremely important to realize and work with.

I think as far as sitting practice is concerned, there is a need for some kind of rigidity, some strict discipline. Your posture should be correct. It is constantly recommended that you sit cross-legged, as opposed to hanging out in any convenient posture. You might say, "Suppose I lie down and meditate, wouldn't that still be valid?" Somehow it doesn't seem to be. Not because there is a rigid rule, but it's a practicality. Once you sit, you sit properly. You have a straight spine, your breath doesn't have any strain, and your neck doesn't have any strain. So sit, upright, cross-legged. You can change your posture and rearrange yourself. There's no point in punishing yourself and trying

to strain constantly. But you sit, properly, so there's no strain on the breath. If you sit up properly, you are there. Your breathing follows naturally.

It's the difference between animals and human beings. Animals find relaxation by going horizontal. Horses can sleep that way. They could even meditate that way, if anybody taught horses to meditate. Snakes and lizards and horses and cows could meditate horizontally. But as far as human beings are concerned, we don't walk on four feet at this point of our evolution. We have no chance of going back, so we have to walk on our two feet. For us that vertical posture always happens, including when we sit. So since we are formed this way, we should do it this way. The Buddha set an example. The Buddha for human beings sits upright in the meditation posture. This isn't particularly anthropocentric, in the sense that human beings are regarded as the highest beings. It's a question of what our make-up is, and we should go along with our make-up. So posture is very important. It's upright as opposed to animal style, and not too tense in your neck. Just sit up, very simply.

I've noticed that when people see something very interesting happening in a movie everybody sits up in perfect posture. And when the movie gets slightly dull and uninteresting, people begin to do all kinds of things. But at first, they have perfect posture. So that's an example for us. It is happening, it is your life, and you are up, and you are breathing. It is very personal and very direct. You are sitting, you are sitting upright, and your head is forward, neither up nor down, direct. Posture is very important, extremely important, in this case.

The attitude towards breathing in meditation is that once you are set properly in your posture, there is breath coming out of you. The shamatha approach to relating with that is: breath is coming out, become the breathing. Try to identify completely rather than watching it. It's just, you are the breath; the breath is you. Breath is coming out of your nostrils, going out, and dissolving into the atmosphere, into the space. You put a certain energy and effort towards that. And then, as for in-breathing, should you try to breathe in and deliberately try to draw things in? That's not recommended. Just boycott your breath, boycott your concentration on the breath. As your breath goes out, let it dissolve, just abandon it, boycott it. So in-breathing is just space. Physically, biologically, one does breath in, obviously, but that's not a big deal.

Then another breath goes out — be with it. So out, dissolve, gap; out, dissolve, gap. Constant opening, gap, abandoning, boycotting that of you which would follow through. Boycotting, in this case, is a very significant word. If you hold onto your breath, you are holding onto yourself constantly. Once you begin to boycott the end of the outbreath, then there's no world left. Except that the next outbreath reminds you to tune in with it. So you tune in, dissolve, tune in, dissolve, tune in, dissolve.

Thoughts arise in the midst of that practice. "Well, back at home . . ." "How should I do my calligraphy?" "How can I compose another article?" "What's happening in the financial scene of Karma Dzong?" "I hate so and so who was so terrible to me." "I would love to make love if she

were only here," and "What's the story with my parents?" All kinds of thoughts begin to arise naturally. If you have lots of time to sit, endless thoughts happen constantly.

The approach to that is actually no approach. When I feel an ache in my neck, okay, I'm thinking "ache in my neck." Reduce everything to thought level rather than to concepts. Usually what happens is that if you have mental chatter, you call it your thoughts. But if you have very deeply involved emotional chatter, or fights and struggles in your mind, you call it emotion, and you give it special prestige. You think it deserves the special privilege of being called *emotion*. "I'm actually angry, it's more than my thought." "I feel so horny, it's *more* than my thought." Somehow, in the realm of actual mind, things don't work that way. All of them are thoughts, all of them are thoughts, all of them. It's just thinking; you're thinking you're horny; you're thinking you're angry. It's thinking process taking place all the time.

So the idea, as far as this shamatha practice is concerned, is to depersonalize the thoughts. Your thoughts are no longer regarded as VIPs in your life, while you meditate. You think, you sit; you think, you sit; you think, you sit. You have thoughts, you have thoughts, thoughts about thoughts, thoughts about thoughts. So let it happen that way; call them thoughts. You are thinking, you are constantly thinking, nothing but thinking. You are not really getting angry. Maybe you have physical repercussion from it, but still it's the thought process generating that. You might have erections in the middle of your sitting, but it's your thought. Your mind gets erected first, then your body becomes erected afterwards. Usually that's the pattern. So it's thinking process, constant thinking process, thought, nothing but thought, thought patterns.

But there is a limit. By thinking and thinking, thinking of thinking, you can impose intensity on your body which undermines it. In other words, if you regard the body as your little brother and tell it to shut up, because big brother is more important, that is not really a good thing to do. You could go too far and strain your body, your leg, your back or something. Rearrange your posture if it is necessary; at some point it's good to do that. But at the same time, it's a thinking process, and relate to it as a thinking process.

Another thing I would like to mention is the focus of the eyes when you look at things. Sometimes, if you are paying too much attention to visual details and colors, you find you're getting a tight neck and a headache. That's because your visual expenditure is much more than necessary. Usually in our ordinary life we walk and we move our bodies and we look, so the whole thing is balanced. In this case you sit so much and the only thing you have left to do is to listen and to look. And there's not much noise either, so everything is concentrated visually. So there is tension and that's a problem. The idea is not to focus too much on the visual situation, but just open your eyes and see it, and look at it maybe. But don't manipulate your visual hallucination.

The next challenge is the walking practice of meditation. We have found in the past that a lot of people treated it as an opportunity for dramatic display. Everybody tried to compensate for the fact that when they sat they couldn't do very much. However when they stood and walked they could at least exercise their self-existence. That became a very troubled and problematic situation. The walking meditation was regarded as comic relief, a time to do something extraordinary, or self-exploratory, self-expressive. The poets walked their way, the theater people walked their way, the

freaked-out people walked their way. I think that's not particularly advisable. Since we have a chance to review what happened before, we can bring this issue to the surface.

Walking practice is the same as sitting practice, except that you're walking. Instead of paying attention to your breath you work with the movement of your legs. And your body still is in good posture. You raise your right leg, swing out, touch your sole on the floor and press; then the left leg releases its tension, you swing across, touch and press; then the left leg releases its tension, you swing across, touch and press. The right leg swings across, touches and presses. It's a very natural, very ordinary walk. Often people attempt to run around and race with everybody or they do it *very* slowly. Both of those are unnecessary affectations. And you should be careful that your awareness has shifted to your legs.

In fact, walking practice is very important. It relates to your everyday life situation much more closely than sitting practice. In walking practice you rise from your meditation cushion and begin to get into walking in the street, speaking, and working. So walking practice is a very important transitional period, although in this case it's still part of formal practice. So regarding it that way, you have to pay heed to it. Hopefully you can do it somewhat deliberately but at the same time freely.

The duration of each sitting period is not predictable; that's part of the approach, the same as with nyinths. You have day number one, day number two, day number three, and each day has a particular unpredictable schedule. The schedule is not released to the public, so to speak, except to the timer, so you do not prepare yourself to go fight through that long sitting, or to expect that long tea break. Things are just worked out as ongoing life situations. The basic idea is to dissolve the sharp edges between sitting and non-sitting periods, so that an ongoing awareness practice is developing, constantly happening. That seems to be the basic approach.

The next question is how should we handle ourselves during the periods when we are not sitting here? Should you just tip-toe back like walking on eggs still trying to hold onto your meditation experience? Or should you make a big splash and come right on? Or should you be somewhat dumb and hesitant and try to play along with other people's energy? Those three choices are the passion, aggression and ignorance syndromes that usually happen. In this case I think the point is not so much that you should tip-toe, or make a big splash, or be hesitant. But you should try to continue the sense of meditational awareness that has developed in your state of being; just continue that way. This doesn't mean especially working with the breath or working with your walking, but there is a *flash* of awareness, the *memory* that you sat and that you are committed to this particular course. It's the recognition that you have set your purpose and that being here is part of that. It's nothing particularly moralistic or a question of behaving like good boys and good girls. It's just a basic recollection of why you are here. And you are here; you have sat and meditated; it's very simple and factual.

Another general recommendation — which I recommend very heavily as a matter of fact — is to minimize unnecessary chatter. This means you should refrain from conversing or commenting among yourselves and limit your verbal statements to what is purely functional and necessary. For example one might say, "Pass the salt," or "Close the door."

That brings us to the point of mealtimes. Mealtime, as I have observed, becomes like a company cafeteria. It's a moment of release, a moment of freedom — which is unnecessary in this case. I think we can approach it differently; we can approach the whole thing very directly and precisely. One problem is unnecessary chatter and another is a sense of a gap, a vacation. You are eating and drinking — no doubt having a relatively pleasant time — and you regard it as completely outside of what we're doing here. There's a big dichotomy, a big gap, a shockingly big gap. Which is unnecessary. If we develop such a gap during the mealtimes or during free time — thinking that this is free time, release time, time to release energy — then obviously your sitting practice is going to be like imprisonment. Then you are creating your own jail. The meditation hall is where serious things take place, and when we get out of the door, then everything's okay, back to normality or something. Although our physical environment is somewhat isolated and restricted, still, we can improvise with our free time and enjoy ourselves. By doing that you're developing hatred towards one place, considering it a jail, while the other place comes to represent freedom, having a good time.

So the suggestion here is that we could even out the whole thing and have a good time all over the place. This is not so much a jail, and that is not so much a vacation, freedom, a holiday. But everything should be evened out. That seems to be a basic approach: if you sit, if you stand, it's the same thing; if you eat, if you squat, it's the same process. It's the good old world. You are carrying your world with you in any case; you can't cut your world into different slices and put it into different pigeon holes at all.

The point is that we don't have to be so poverty-stricken about our life. We don't have to try and get a little chocolate chip from our life. All the rest will be sour, but here I can take just a dip in pleasure. If your body is hot, and you dip your finger in ice water it feels good. It's so painful at the same time, not particularly pleasurable. So if you really know the meaning of pleasure in the total sense, this dip in pleasure is just further punishment and an unnecessary trick that we play on ourselves. Actually the practice of meditation is not so much about a hypothetical attainment of enlightenment, but in this case about leading a good life. In order to learn how to lead a good life, a spotless life, we need continual awareness that relates with life constantly, directly, very simply.

Meditation Practice: A Talk to Young People

This is a talk given to young people attending the 1979 Vajradhatu Seminary at Lake Louise, Canada. This talk was given after the group had been sitting for two hours, by the Vajracarya, Venerable Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche on May 15, 1979.

Has anybody talked to you about meditation? The basic idea of the sitting practice of meditation is that it is what the Buddha did, and because of that, he attained enlightenment. That's the basic point. And we have been told how to practice that way too, so that in turn, we can attain enlightenment. One of the basic ideas is that generally, when we are about in the world, we want a lot of things and we can't get them. And sometimes we get angry with other people. Then we want to destroy them. Sometimes we have so much desire to get something to hold onto. All those things are called obstacles to meditation. They are the problems that we face.

Because of these things we suffer quite a lot and nobody is basically comfortable with themselves because they are filled with all these feelings of anger and aggression, passion and all the rest of it. Sometimes people say they are happy but, at the same time, they are restless all the time and in the depths of themselves they are suffering quite a lot. Such pain and suffering comes from having too many thoughts and the confusion of passion, aggression, and ignorance — which is called ego. You know about that: ego? Right.

The idea of meditation is not necessarily to just get rid of these thoughts and feelings right away, but simply to work with them. As you sit, first you begin to feel some sense of yourself. Then as you sit more, you begin to find lots of thoughts coming out. Just look at them and don't necessarily push them aside or cultivate them, but come back to your breath.

Holding the meditation posture is doing what the Buddha did. And the idea is that if you make this gesture of good posture, that straightens your sense of discipline and presence. And then, experiencing that, you feel your breath, and go along with the breath. The basic idea is that you don't have to push the thoughts away but you can almost get underneath thoughts. Out of that you could develop some sense of calmness, sometimes it goes away. It's like trying to catch a fish in the water with your naked hand. It slips away.

The idea is to remain with the discipline and to slowly overcome — first of all the thought process, then after that, to slowly overcome passion, aggression and ignorance until, at some point, they begin to become meaningless — until they no longer are a big deal.

Then your ego begins to diminish a little bit, become less, become less of an ego. You begin to have a glimpse of what is called egolessness, which is the first step towards enlightenment. In order to do that, you also have to work with your everyday life situations. Sometimes when you're

not sitting, you might suddenly develop mindfulness. When that happens, look at yourself and try to be calm with some sense of not holding on to anything; just be steady, still. That doesn't necessarily mean to say that you physically have to hold steady, but psychologically you do.

If you're about to have a fight, just flash, and then hold steady. The idea of wanting to have a fight begins to dissolve and, in turn, because of that, one begins to develop what is known as compassion. You begin to have more trust in yourself, less destructiveness in yourself, and less pain. And because you have less pain, therefore you're able to communicate that to other people working with oneself that way; in turn, you begin to work with others. That seems to be the basic point of why you have to practice meditation.

If you have any questions you are welcome.

QUESTION: Why do you follow your breath, and concentrate on your breath, instead of your finger, or whatever?

VCTR: Yes, well that's a good point. You see breathing is actually a communication between your mind and body. Body is too solid to concentrate on because it's too gross a level. And you can't hold on to mind because it's constantly moving. So breathing is something in between, which communicates mind and body together. See what I mean?

Q: Yes.

V: It's tangible, but not really tangible. And also it has rhythm. You can't hold the mind completely still. Breathing has movement; therefore it helps you to go along with the rhythm, right?

Q: If you're not physically still, but you hold your mind still — how can you move around if your mind's just still?

V: How can you what?

Q: You see, your mind controls your movements and if you keep your mind still how can you move?

V: Sometimes the mind's not still. You see? Your mind may be still for a fraction of a second, but then it begins to start moving. I think that's the point: when your mind is completely still it is a reflection on your body, so you can sit still as well.

Q: I thought that when you got egolessness that you were enlightened, and instead, it's just one step toward enlightenment?

V: Well, it's like removing a cloud.

Q: In the sky?

V: Yes, in the sky. The sun is there already. But this is removing the clouds.

Q: Oh.

V: So you have the sun already, but ego is a layer or covering rather than anything fundamental. Therefore, basically we are good but we've been covered up. So we are removing coverings. That's why you can actually undo them. Otherwise, if the clouds were permanent, you couldn't do anything with them, right?

Q: When you have a clear sky you're noticing . . .

V: That's it, yes.

Q: It's like having a clear mind.

V: Absolutely, that is clear mind.

Q: But my parents are telling me that people are all enlightened but they just don't know that . . .

V: Well we might say that we know there is a sun, but still it is very cloudy.

Q: Oh. (laughs)

V: You see, that is the only reason that enlightenment is permanent: it is not manufactured. It's there all the time. And anything beyond that, such as ego and passion, aggression and ignorance, are impermanent. They come and go. Therefore we can handle them. And they come back too: sometimes when you remove them they come back. So you keep on clearing out.

Q: What would happen if you didn't have a clear mind?

V: Then you suffer a lot. You're constantly tortured.

Q: Is it like being tortured in a torture chamber?

V: Yes. People take drugs to cheer themselves up and then they become addicted to them. They get a hangover from the drugs and they resent it; things like that. You know, people are trying to please themselves but there's no way of doing it, even if you're a millionaire. Sometimes they end up killing themselves because they're suffering so much. They have everything physically that they want; lots of money and a comfortable situation, but they're not very happy fundamentally.

Q: Do you have a clear sky?

V: Good. Yes. Please try to sit. All right?

Q. Thank you.

V: You're welcome.