

## Guidelines for Group Ngöndro Practice Intensives

Introducing the new Shambhala ngöndro, the Sakyong has emphasized the importance and power of group vajrayana practice. With all of our practices, the point is not only how we do our individual practice, but how we connect to each other and live our lives altogether. Particularly with our aspiration to create enlightened society, it is important for us to gather, practice, study, work, and celebrate as a community. In addition, practicing under the guidance of senior teachers in a group setting will deepen our study and practice of the vajrayana.

One format for the intensive group practice will be a month long program, led at our practice centers by acharyas or authorized senior seminary faculty. For now, week long group retreats are currently being scheduled locally, as well as at practice centers. Schedules for residential and local intensives are on the following web page - <http://www.shambhala.org/programs/SN/>.

Students are strongly encouraged to attend at least two week long group intensives at a practice center. For the remaining two weeks, one could do group intensives at local or regional centers for time periods of one weekend up to two weeks. Senior ngöndro instructors and teachers who have received the lung and are familiar with the Shambhala ngöndro can lead these local group intensives.

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

### **I. How to practice together**

- People practicing the Shambhala ngöndro should engage in one ngöndro at a time - ie., prostrations for one week, mantra for one week, etc. The Sakyong has been clear that he would like new ngöndro students to spend some time with one practice before beginning the next one.
- Regardless of which of the Shambhala ngöndro practices people are doing, the group can begin with opening chants and continue together through the Outer Preliminaries. Then individuals would continue with their own practice until the end of the session.
- If the group includes tantrikas doing the Karma Kagyü ngöndro, then the group can begin together with opening chants, then individuals would continue with whichever practice they are doing until the end of the session.
- Ngöndro practitioners from other sanghas – even those using other texts – are welcome to practice with Shambhala ngöndro students. Differing texts should not be shared as they require different lungs. Vajrayana students of other teachers should not be given commentary or oral instructions (*Vajradhatu Ngöndro Manual*, *Vajra Assemblies*, *Early Tantra Groups*, etc.) from our lineage relating to these practices unless they have requested and received permission from the Sakyong to study these materials. These students should practice and study following the instructions they have received from their own teacher.

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- Some centers, during recent week long holiday intensives, extended an invitation to sadhakas and shamatha students to participate. All practices were being done simultaneously in the same room. In these cases, shamatha students practiced in the front of the room with prostrators behind them and sadhakas near the back. For the benefit of the shamatha students, a senior teacher gave a brief and general explanation about ngondro and sadhana practice.
- Establishing a strong container for the intensive is an important aspect of the practice environment, and is particularly important for weekend retreats where practitioners may be commuting to and from home. Encouraging attendance for the whole retreat, having lunch and dinner together (if you are including an evening event), and planning some discussion, a tape, or a celebratory event for the evening will all help to create a cohesive and supportive retreat environment. Some recent intensives included oryoki meals.
- If there are ngondro instructors available who are doing this practice, include opportunities for interviews with an instructor. Group interviews with an instructor can also be arranged at centers where there is limited MI support.

## II. What to practice

- There are several suggestions for those doing prostration practice intensively:
  - Do as many prostrations as you can, then do the bodhichitta contemplation for the rest of the session.
  - Begin prostrating. Sit down periodically, continuing to hold the visualization and to recite the refuge formula. Resume prostrating.
  - If the whole group is doing prostrations together, increased emphasis could be placed on the bodhichitta contemplation during the last few days of the intensive.
  - The umdze could read the visualization section aloud once in the middle of the practice session—this was helpful to prostrators at one recent intensive. At seminary, the umdze read the refuge formula aloud for part of the practice session, helping students new to prostrations coordinate body, speech and visualization. This could also be done with the mantras for the other three practices. This approach wouldn't necessarily be helpful if the group is mixed and practicing in the same room.
- The Sakyong has said that introducing other vajrayana practices in these intensives would be overly complicated. However, as a celebratory conclusion to the intensive, the group could do a Sadhana of Mahamudra feast together. Please note that, as a rule, this feast is restricted to vajrayana students who have received pointing out instruction. The only exception to this is during the observance of Parinirvana Day for the Vidyadhara.
- In addition to two 3-hour practice sessions daily, the intensive could include evening talks and discussion if there are experienced ngondro instructors or senior teachers available. If not, the group could study and discuss selected readings (including the text itself) or listen to audio tapes. At practice centers, acharyas or authorized senior seminary faculty will lead the intensives.

### III. Suggested Study Materials:

- 2004 Vajrayana Seminary video tapes\*–
  - Talk 7 (commentary on the Royal Invocation, Outer Preliminaries),
  - Talk 9 (commentary on the bodhichitta practice, prostrations, mantra, mandala)
  - Talk 9 also contains the transmission for lungta practice. This section of Talk 9 should only be shown if all the participants have had this transmission; if not, fast forward through this section.
  - Talk 10 (commentary on guru yoga),
  - Talk 11 (questions & answers)
- The oral instructions contained in the *Vajradhatu Ngöndro Manual*\*
- *The Chariot of Liberation* (book or audio tapes) These are four talks on each of the ngöndro practices by The Vajra Regent and the Dorje Loppön\*
- *Torch of Certainty* by Jamgön Kongtrül
- *Words of my Perfect Teacher* by Patrül Rinpoche
- *Werma Sadhana Manual* (available to Kalapa Assembly graduates)\*\*
- *1978 Kalapa Assembly Transcripts*, by the Dorje Dradül (available to Kalapa Assembly graduates \*)
- *Letter of the Black Ashe* (received during Drala in the Sacred Path)
- *Windhorse Sourcebook* (received during Windhorse in the Sacred Path)
- *Dignities of Shambhala Sourcebook* (received during Meek in the Sacred Path)
- *Golden Key Which Fulfills Desire* (root text received during Golden Key in the Sacred Path)
- *Golden Sun of the Great East and the Tiger, Lion, Garuda, Dragon Glory Auto-commentary* (root text and commentary received at Warrior Assembly)

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**IV. Suggested daily schedule**

**I. For groups consisting of prostrators only and no evening event:**

9:00 am – 12 noon

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|------------|---|
| 9-10 am    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening chants: Seven-Line Supplication, Kagyü Lineage Supplication, Homage</li><li>• Shamatha, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplate 4-5 minutes each)</li></ul> |
| 10-11      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prostrations (see II. What to Practice for suggestions on doing prostration intensively)</li></ul>  |
| 11 -11:30  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bodhichitta contemplation</li></ul>   |
| 11 - 11:45 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tonglen</li></ul>   |
| 11:45-12   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conclusion and dedication of merit</li></ul>  |

12 – 2                      Lunch

2 – 6pm

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|-------------|--|
| 2 - 3       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sitting, talk, discussion</li></ul>  |
| 3 - 3:30    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shamatha, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplate 4-5 minutes each)</li></ul>        |
| 3:30 - 4:30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prostrations (see II. What to Practice for suggestions on doing prostration intensively)</li></ul> |
| 4:30 - 5    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bodhichitta contemplation</li></ul>  |
| 5 - 6       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conclusion and closing chants</li></ul>  |

**II. For groups consisting of prostrators only and an evening talk or tape:**

9:00 am – 12 noon

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|-------------|---|
| 9-10 am     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening chants: Seven-Line Supplication, Kagyü Lineage Supplication, Homage</li><li>• Shamatha, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplate 4-5 minutes each)</li></ul> |
| 10-11       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prostrations (see II. What to Practice for suggestions on doing prostration intensively)</li></ul>  |
| 11:00-11:30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bodhichitta contemplation</li></ul>   |
| 11:30-11:45 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tonglen</li></ul>   |
| 11:45-12    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conclusion and dedication of merit</li></ul>  |

12 – 2                      Lunch

2 – 5 pm

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 2-2:30    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shamatha, Royal Invocation and Outer Preliminaries (contemplate 4-5 minutes each)</li></ul> |
| 2:30-3:30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prostrations (see II. What to Practice for suggestions on</li></ul>                         |

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	doing prostration intensively)
3:30-4	• Bodhichitta contemplation
4-4:15	• Conclusion
4:15-5	• Closing chants
5– 7 pm	Dinner (if there is an evening session)
7 – 9 pm	Talk and discussion or 2004 Vajrayana Seminary video

**For groups with people doing different Shambhala ngöndro practices:**

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

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

Do opening and closing chants together.

\* These materials are available from Vajradhatu Publications & Kalapa Recordings – [shop@shambhala.org](mailto:shop@shambhala.org)

\*\* The Werma Sadhana Manual is available from the Nalanda Translation Group

Note: Detailed practice instructions accompany the published text of the Primordial Rigden. Please refer to these. They are available from Vajradhatu Publications– [shop@shambhala.org](mailto:shop@shambhala.org)