

Update from the Office of Practice and Education October 4, 2005 Werma Sadhana group practice and the Werma feast

This summer marked the occasion of the first Rigden Abhisheka, bestowed by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche at Shambhala Mountain Center.

Adapted from the Scorpion Seal text received by the Druk Sakyong, the Rigden Abhisheka is the empowerment for practicing the Werma Sadhana – seeing our nature as the Rigden and learning how to manifest this in our lives. The Werma Sadhana is a profound blessing and practice, which is now central in the path of our Shambhala community.

We hope that the remainder of this communication provides the necessary information for the energy of this summer's events to be captured and brought forward into our personal practice and at our centers. **As we continue to clarify questions about the Shambhala path of practice and study we will send more information to keep you informed.**

Group Practice of the Werma Sadhana

For students who have **completed** a month of Primordial Rigden group ngöndro practice and attended the Rigden Abhisheka, the Sakyong's instruction is to complete one month of group Werma Sadhana practice.

Although the main Shambhala practice and study path consists of month-long group retreats, the point is not to speed through one month of one practice and then jump directly into a month of another practice. The Sakyong is encouraging people to really steep in each practice, as we did in the year of Rigden ngöndro following Vajrayana Seminary 2004. Therefore, he is encouraging students to do the Werma Sadhana as their daily practice, along with a course of study, for a period of a year or more, while at the same time working to complete the month of group retreat.

There are several reasons why the Sakyong is emphasizing group practice. One is to invigorate the lungta of the group of practitioners. This is likely to have a significant effect on the dynamics of our growing sangha. The other is to revitalize the whole tantric environment by strengthening the container in which discussion and learning takes place. Many people have been practicing on their own, trying to decipher the vajrayana teachings in an environment where the MI/student relationship is not always strong.

The Sakyong has been stressing the importance of a structured study component to the group practice retreats so that we can develop a deeper understanding about what we are doing. For that reason, at least two weeks should be done at a practice center program led by an acharya or senior teacher. The other two weeks can be accomplished as a combination of weeks, weekends, or weekly Werma practice and study groups at local centers. We have developed a series of weekly Werma Sadhana courses to begin this fall. See the next section for more about this course.

The Sakyong is encouraging senior students who may already have done a significant amount of Werma practice to also do one month of group Werma practice and study. Mixing the study of the Kalapa Assembly transcripts with the Werma practice, along with memorizing the practice text, are key to preparing for the profundity of the Scorpion Seal retreat.

The Scorpion Seal text will be made available at some point later in our path, probably in the context of a program to prepare us to use it on retreat, and after we have accumulated a number of mantra recitations (to be determined). For that reason, the Sakyong recommends that Werma practitioners keep track of the number of mantras they recite, without becoming too obsessive about it. For example, after some experience, it is possible to "guestimate" the number of mantras recited for a given period of practice time.

Weekly Werma Sadhana course

Three courses of 5-7 classes each have been developed. Meeting once a week, attendance at all three courses would be the equivalent of a week of group practice. Each course would be the equivalent of a weekend (2 days) unit of group practice. The course syllabus will be available soon. We will distribute it to centers and post it on the Shambhala web site for teachers.

These courses, combining group practice and study of the sadhana, are open to:

- experienced Werma practitioners who received the sadhana at Kalapa Assembly
- sadhakas who received the sadhana at the Rigden Abhisheka.
- students who completed the Primordial Rigden ngöndro and attended the Rigden Abhisheka.

Ngöndro practitioners who received the Werma Sadhana at the Rigden Abhisheka, while encouraged to attend Werma feasts, should focus on completing their ngöndro practice and study before attending any of these courses.

The Werma Feast

Any Werma practitioner can receive a lung to practice the new Werma feast. Acharyas or governors of the Council of Warriors who attended the Rigden Abhisheka, or who have since received the lung can give these lungs. If there is no such person nearby, or planning to visit in the near future, please contact our office so we can authorize a Center Warrior or senior student (who attended the Rigden Abhisheka) to give the lung. The Sakyong also mentioned that Werma practitioners can start doing group Werma feasts even before receiving the lung, should the situation arise.

Anybody who attended the Rigden Abhisheka has been fully entered into the Werma feast practice by virtue of having been there, even though a formal reading lung was not given.

The Werma feast liturgy may be purchased through Samadhi Cushions in Vermont—info@samadhicushions.com or the Nalanda Translation Committee in Halifax—nalanda_translation@yahoo.ca To facilitate distribution of the text, centers could arrange to submit group orders where possible.

The Werma feast liturgy is inserted into the sadhana after returning to recite the outer offerings for the second time (after the self-visualization). After the feast section of the practice, the practitioners then dissolve the visualization, chanting the Vajrasattva mantra, and close the practice in the usual way.

The feast should be scheduled at your center once a month, on or close to a protector day. The Werma feast can be conveniently scheduled so that people are able to attend it easily. As indicated on the annual liturgical calendar, protector days fall on the 9th, 19th or 29th days of the Tibetan lunar calendar. Your center may choose to schedule a feast on a weekend day close to or on one of these protector days. Please consult the Tibetan lunar calendar in the Practice and Education section of our web site for a schedule of the protector days (listed as Werma practice days) <http://www.shambhala.org/members/practice/WoodBird.pdf>

Further Information

As mentioned above, we will continue to clarify questions about the path of practice and study and send more information as it becomes available.