

To: Tsadra Foundation
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Contemplative Scholarship final report for phase 2 of the three year retreat at Söpa Chöling
Drime Shiwa
12 September 2015

(i) Activity summary.

Our phase 2 of retreat at Söpa Chöling consisted of two main practices: Vajrayogini (inner and secret) and Chakrasamvara (outer, inner, secret and very secret), both comprising about 5 ½ months of practice and ending with a Drupchö and Fire Puja.

I believe you have our retreat schedule; it consists of four thüns a day: thün 1 from 5:00-7:30 AM, T2 from 9:00 to 12:00, T3 from 2:30-4:45 PM, then Mahakala practice from 5:00-6:30 PM, T4 from 7:30-9:30 PM. In the retreat we also engage in monthly feasts for Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara and Mahakala. And we observe the bi-weekly Sojong ceremony on the full and new moon days.

Overall I can say both practices have changed my outlook tremendously. They both have a very deep inner practice aspect which works on all levels: energetically, emotionally and even physically. During the retreat I've found that my mental states were in general positive and engaging strongly with the practices and the group. There is a sense of calm and composure that are new to me. And I seem to be more able to just go along with whatever is happening and needs to be done.

Physically it has been challenging at times. As I mentioned in my December 2014 report, I experience migraines with some regularity due to menopausal hormonal changes and sometimes needed to take some extra rest. I've tried to do that in the break times between practices, but also have missed some practice thüns. I've also experience back pain and have had to work with that.

As I also mentioned in my December report, I had to travel to Halifax in December to have my interview with Immigration to become a Permanent Resident in Canada. Because of this trip I missed 3 days of retreat.

The last 5 weeks of retreat, after the group retreat was finished, I've spent in a retreat house on the Gampo Abbey terrain, together with another scholarship participant. We both had our own room and shared a little kitchen. Food was brought to us and we could keep well to the practice thüns as outlined above. In those 5 weeks I practiced mainly Mahamudra, which was approved by our druppön. And in these 5 weeks I've had much less physical problems as there was more time to exercise and there were less group demands on my time.

(ii) An honest appraisal of your retreat detailing what you feel were its strengths and weaknesses.

“Strengths”: Both practices we did are very profound and I feel that we got a lot of support to fully engage with them this year. We had two excellent cooks who provided us with nourishing meals, our druppön was very available for questions and interviews, we had also a very engaging liaison who took care of a lot of our ‘worldly’ affairs and Gampo Abbey provided other support where needed.

As always the musical component brings an extra and strong dimension to the group practices and I got to engage with it more strongly as I was training people in playing them.

The two fire pujas were also well set-up at Shedra House, which has a good room with excellent ventilation for the occasion and is right within our retreat boundaries.

“Weaknesses”: This year we’ve had no visiting teachers to introduce us to the various practices. All was done by our druppön Nancy Huszagh. I must say I missed the input from experienced teachers even though Nancy really did her best to address our questions. Another point is that we did group practices that were set up for 16 people with only 10 people, which meant for all of us a lot of extra work both in terms of preparation (tormas !) and in the roles we had to fulfill during the practices. This was definitely taxing for most people including myself.

(iii) How you feel your retreat may have prepared you to benefit others and generally have a positive impact in the world.

I’ve noticed how I developed a lot more patience this year in retreat. It was especially noticeable during the Chakrasamvara group intensives that took about 4 weeks altogether and where there was a lot of interaction with the group. I learned to tolerate more other people’s ways of doing things and also their “mistakes”. I think this is a very important quality to take into the world. My mind in general has become more balanced and I seem able to deal with difficult situations in a more composed manner and look for solutions. In general the notion of sacred outlook has started to make more sense to me and viewing people and situations from that perspective is tremendously helpful.

(iv) Explicitly confirming that the grant funds were used as set forth in the agreement.

The scholarship money was directly transferred to Gampo Abbey to pay for the retreat tuition and room & board for the whole of phase 2. I have used all the funds to pay for costs related to phase 2 of retreat.

With kind regards,

Drime Shiwa