

Thubten Yeshe, at Katog Rithrod Drubgyu Atiling.

Dear Lama Drubgyu:

Greetings from Arkansas! I am very grateful for my opportunity here and for Tsadra for making this possible. I dedicate to you and the “tsadra folks” daily. Please pardon as this report is very unpolished, disjointed and rambling. I have been thinking in general on my experience for a while, but I only have very limited time having just received this computer to use for a few days, with the actual questions for the report. I will lay out the facts first with my narrative to follow. Thanks again to Tsadra and you, Lama Drubgyu, I am very motivated to make your investment in me, for the benefit for others, to be truly appreciated by doing my very best daily, at my capacity.

## 1. Retreat schedule (daily schedule of sessions and activities).

(We were instructed to begin our first session 2 hours prior to dawn. After a few months of that I was encountering difficulties that were severely affecting my practice because of sleep issues. When I do not get 8 hours of sleep a night I go down hill quick. I consulted with Khentrul Rinpoche and our drubponma and rearranged my schedule. I did not change the actual number of hours for practice, but condensed my break times. When I resumed 8 hours of sleep a night, the problems disappeared. The symptoms were strong emotional upheavals and a negative frame of mind. I have known that this was a issue with “my brain”, but tried the program as long as I could. So what follow is the amended daily schedule. I make aspirations to be able to functions well in the future with less sleep. Rinpoche has forbidden me to try functioning on less sleep for this particular drubdra.)

7-8:30 a.m. First session. Open shrine (also open shrine of temple when it is my week on the rotation). Ngondro practice using a Jamyang Khentse Wangpo’s Ngondro called “Noble Path of Enlightenment. The concise Preliminary practices”. I am focusing on those sections not covered in the general drubdra: Vajrasattva 100 syllable mantra accumulation, Mandala offering, and prostrations.

8:30-9:00 “Vajra recitation” practice : shamatha practice with gentle vase breath retention using Om Ah Hung.

9:00-9:30. First of “four activities” : Water tormas offering practice: extracted from the Namcho Mind terma with 2 armed Avalokiteshvara with addendum.

9:30-10:00 Break

10:00a.m.- 12:30 p.m. Second Session. The section from the retreat schedule we are on (see below).

12:30-1:00 p.m. Second of “four activities”: White Sur Offering (from terma of Orgyen Chogyur Dechen Lingpa): 4 armed Avalokiteshvara with addendum.

1:00-3:00 p.m. Break

3:00-5:30. Third Session. The section from the retreat schedule we are on (see below).

5:30- 6:15 p.m. Third of “Four activities”. Riwo Sangchod “Offering Sang on the Mountainside- Lhatsun Namkha Jigme- with self visualization as Guru Rinpoche. And protectors practice: Katog and longchen Nyingthig protectors, plus confession.

6:15-7:00 Break.

7:00-8:30 p.m. Fourth Session. From beginning of drubdra until Nov 1 this was also the same as session 2 and 3, from Nov 1 through December it has been training in the lojong of “The wheel of analytical meditation” by Mipham Rinpoche. Analytical meditation on multiplicity, impermanence, suffering, and selflessness of compounded phenomena.

8:30-9:00 p.m. “Vajra recitation” practice : shamatha practice with gentle vase breath retention using Om Ah Hung.

9:00-9:30 p.m. 4<sup>th</sup> of four activities. Dudjom Lingpa's "White Chod Feast, with the preliminary Tromas Laughter. With drum and thigh bone trumpet.

9:30-10:00 Prayers of dedication and Aspirations.

10-10:30 p.m. Close Shrine and other chores

10:30 p.m. lights out

The thun tsam practices between sessions included:

1. The daily 4 activity practices of chu tor, sur, sang and chod.
2. The yoga of waking: thinking dakas and dakinis paying bells and damaru, calling to get up to practice the dharma.
3. The yoga of eating
  - a. according to sutra: thinking that am feeding microorganisms, and feeding body to be strong for practice.
  - b. according to tantra: food becomes timeless awareness offerings to peaceful and wrathful deities within.
4. The yoga of incorporating whatever the main practice is into the moment to moment activities.
5. The yoga of sleeping.
  - a. Going to sleep with the perception of impermanence thinking I don't know when I will die.
  - b. Going to sleep with the perception of appearances, such as the Guru in the heart (changes with each session).
  - c. Going to sleep with the perception of waking: thinking if I don't die tomorrow will be another day to practice dharma.

I also have a personal commitment of “6 Sessions (Guru) Yoga” received with the Kalachakra empowerment from HH Dalai Lama- which helps to maintain awareness of the 3 vows. I am using this drubdra as an opportunity to delve much deeper into the knowledge of the tantric samayas. I incorporate this study into my daily Vajrasattva 100 syllable mantra accumulations (as part of my confession to repair samaya).

We also met twice monthly for Guru Rinpoche tsok and Green Tara tsok on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> days of lunar month. Also for the 4 main Buddhist holidays for a simple Shakyamuni Buddha practice (from Mipham Rinpoche called A Treasury of Blessings). Also we met a drubdra temple to receive Teaching from Khentrul Rinpoche, and a few weeks of tutorial with Rie, the drubponma to practice/learn tormas (with kargyens, etc) and review the elements of a sadhana practice as regarding offering tormas, etc. My regular role in the tsoks is the drum with simultaneous conch playing. I have tried the chopon role a few times (we have a regular chopon), and have played the role of umze a few times. I will be learning to play the cymbals, and hope to umze on occasion (we have a regular umze). I serve as a kind of (Gon-la sp????- holding the energy of the Temple)...by doing my riwo sangchod and the protectors daily in the Temple with the drum and conch.

We rotate weeks to set up and close the shrine in our little Drubdra Temple. I took upon the task of keeping up on the cleaning of the drubdra temple. There has been various maintenance chores to do to keep up the drubdra grounds such as maintain the pathways (we use sawdust), weeding them, raking, firewood for the drubdra temple, etc.

(please pardon if the following is more detail than you wish, and it's disjointed flow, it is kind of a stream of consciousness)

Personally: activities for my break involved preparing and cooking my own meals (I only eat breakfast and lunch which makes it easier), cleaning cabin, cleaning leaves off roof, raking, firewood preparation, emptying human waste (I used a grey water and bucket method to dilute waste to disperse in designated area), physical exercise (my exercise consists of Kora around the

Temple and chores such as hauling wood and water.). We also had to have our shopping lists and garbage and recycling, etc. ready every 2 weeks. We used a system of ordering from an organic catalogue that was delivered nearby for our drudra support person Rie (also our drubponma) to pick up monthly, along with our Harrison shopping from Walmart and one organic grocery store. On the alternate time she shopped in Jasper for us (grocery, post office, pharmacy, hardware store). This system worked very well, was very organized and orderly. We had access to most all we needed. Rie also did online shopping for our occasional specialty needs. Our outgoing and incoming mail was regulated to every 2 weeks (I will share more later in my narrative- this was intended to give the facts here). I personally burned a lot of my burnable wastes to minimize a need for garbage pick up. I ate very healthy with fresh organic produce to supplement the organic bulk supplies from the catalogue ordering. I ate a lot of grain and beans. I was sure to eat a good volume of food, but kept it very simple and did not eat after the midday break. Because of my simplicity I was able to eat organic. In my life I have not ever been free to eat all organic, and here I did not consider it a luxury, but rather a focus on very clean diet to help the meditation. I minimized any superfluous foods or purchases. I maintained good weight, muscle tone and energy throughout the whole time. We had our monthly \$250 fee to cover expenses of utilities such as firewood and cost of paying drubponma and for shopping support. We had occasional expenses such as purchases of ritual items such as bowls, bhumpa, etc and offering substances, cd recordings (from our own archives of teachings), and a few books, small dakini drum, thigh bone trumpet, cd player, etc. (there was a lot of items at the start of retreat that I needed to get, much of which was purchased with other donations given to help me). I received some supplementary food offerings from local friends at times. I also received a monthly offering of \$333. All in all my funds from Tsadra sponsorship and others will have been completely used up by mid January. (a random note here along the lines of health: it was hot of course in the summer, but bearable for me. I used a plug in fan to keep cool. I had much more than plenty solar power- 2 panels. I basically used power for lights, the fan, for my cd player and to recharge rechargeable batteries, and power tools. Rie took down once a week to the nearby river to go swimming,

to cool off, in the hot time of the summer. We have little efficient Yodel wood stoves to heat in winters , which do get cold. The cabin's are well insulated. I cook with propane. We have 500 gallon water collection tanks, and filter through a primary filter, then a British Berkfield filter. I am fairly conservative with water, and so my tank did not get very low , even in the times without rain. I have not virtually taken a shower or bath, but do sponge bath down. I have virtually done my own laundry by hand (but sent down a few times for blankets to be washed- things get mildew here from moisture)- and hang clothes on the line. I have had no cell phone, computer, or any electronic device other than a simple cd player for teachings only. This was a wonderful relief! Although I feel I make virtuous use of these communications technologies, they do complicate my life. There was a few months of adjustment needed. I kept my correspondences by mail to a very minimal. I quickly found that I was not going to be able to send thank you's for the various kind offerings from folks. Because of the dynamics of the 4 of us here on site we found it necessary to maintain some degree of talking (more later on this in my narrative). We attempted the recommended functional silence, but for many reasons this did not work. We had very challenging personal dynamics, some of which included a man who at first really needed to talk alot, and one woman who was very new whose keeping of silence made her too shut down. We have been using a 2 way radio in case of emergency. We have had a nurse nearby for most of the time if need be, and a maintenance man as well. We have a shared propane refrigerator and freezer. So all in all as far as the physical set up , it was quite "comfortable" (not a major hardship). We have seen a wonderful array of wildlife here: from Bear, fox, crow, big rattlesnakes, the ever present plentiful array of squirrels, flying squirrels, huge raccoon, possum, armadillo, even a big herd of razorback hogs (some were HUGE , like 450 pounds)- down in the adjacent ravine, a huge array of many insects in the spring, and spiders. A challenge for sure as they come out of the woodwork (ants, cockroaches, etc.) to not accidentally kill them in the cabin. I was aware why the Buddha established the rainy season retreat- we too have a huge volume of insect life at times.

## 2.PROGRAM OUTLINE FOR KATOG RITHROD DRUBGYU ATI-LING FOR 03/2015 to 01/2016

100 days of Lojong (from 03/06/2015 to 06/13/2015)

1. 10 days for the Freedom and advantages of this human life, how difficult they are to find, and once found, how ultimately meaningful.

2. 10 days for Impermanence.

3. 10 days for suffering/ the flaws of samsara.

4. 10 days for karma, cause and effect.

(Total: 40 days of lojong on the four thoughts)

5. 10 days of Refuge. Focusing on key points, accumulation of the refuge verse.

6. 50 days of Lojong in Bodhicitta as follows:

Lojong in Aspirational Bodhicitta

1. Lojong in the four immeasurables (5 days for each immeasurable, total of 20 days).

a. 5 days in immeasurable Equanimity/Equalness.

b. 5 days in Immeasurable Loving Kindness.

c. 5 days in Immeasurable Compassion.

d. 5 days in Immeasurable Joy.

2. Lojong in the following set of three (5 days for each one, total 15 days)

a. 5 days on equalizing self with others.

b. 5 days in exchanging self for others.

c. 5 days of cherishing others as most important.

Lojong in Action Bodhicitta- the six perfections/ paramitas (2 days for each of the first five paramitas, 5 days for the sixth paramita, total of 15 days.

1. 2 days of lojong in generosity/jin-pa
2. 2 days of lojong in ethical discipline/ tsul-trim
3. 2 days of lojong in patient forbearance/ zod-pa
4. 2 days of lojong in diligence/joyful effort/ tzon-dru
5. 2 days of lojong in meditate concentration/ samten
6. 5 days of lojong in wisdom/Sherab, or vipashyana practice.

This completes 100 days of mind training.

We used The Words of My Perfect Teacher by Patrul Rinpoche, the commentary on it by Khenpo Ngagchung, and recordings of teachings by our Retreat Lama Khentrul Lodro Thaye Rinpoche as our Guide.

We went step by step, slowly and deeply in the contemplative meditation. Reading, contemplating, meditating.

100 Days of Guru Yoga (06/14/2015 to 09/13/2015)

Accumulating 100,000 repetitions of 7 line prayer of Guru Rinpoche in the context of the Shower of Blessings text by Mipham Rinpoche.

135 Days of Shamatha and Vipashyana from Longchenpa's "Resting in Ease": The third positive Instruction: The secret teachings that are the fruition of the heart essence as the definitive meaning, the vehicle of unsurpassed great perfection. (09/14/2015 to 01/23/2016).

## OUTLINE

1. The succession of lineage lamas
2. The teachings that are the oral instructions



- 2.1 Determining the view.
- 2.2 Sustaining continuous meditation
- 2.3 Relinquishing hope and fear for a result

## 2.1 Determining the View

2.1.1. A demonstration of how there are no externally perceived objects.

2.1.1.1. (step #115) A teaching on the eight examples of illusoriness and reflections for how appearances lack inherent truth.

2.1.1.2. (116) A teaching on how, if you examine there is no object, they are empty.

2.1.2. A demonstration of how the inner perceiver is devoid of foundation or root.

2.1.2.1. (117) How cognition is inherently lucid and without an existent support.

2.1.2.2. (118) Demonstration for examining how emptiness is devoid of basis.

## 2.2. Sustaining Continuous Meditation

2.2.1. The general explanation of how to meditate according to the three capacities of beings.

2.2.1.1. Basic, First Level Capacity

2.2.1.1.a. Shamatha

1. (119) Taming conceptual thoughts.

2. (120-121) Holding the mind on sense objects and their mental impressions.

3 (122) Training in mental phenomena.

2.2.1.1.b. Vipashyana

1. (123) Resting in evenness like space, in the non-existence of externally apprehended objects.

2. (124) Demonstrating the perceiver to be devoid of root, empty.

#### 2.2.1.1.c. Unity of Shamatha and Vipashyana (125)

#### 2.2.1.2. Middling Capacity

2.2.1.2.a. (126) The method of meditating on emptiness that is like space.

2.2.1.2.b. (127) The method of meditating on clarity that is like a mirror.

2.2.1.2.c. (128) The method of meditating on the arising of that, which is like waves.

#### 2.2.1.3. (129) The Greatest capacity.

### 2.2.2. The specific instructions on the special path of skillful means.

#### 2.2.2.1. Shamatha

##### 2.2.2.1.a. Accomplishing

1. (130) Objects with appearances.

2. (131) Objects without appearances.

##### 2.2.2.1.b. (132) Enriching

#### 2.2.2.2. Vipashyana

##### 2.2.2.2.a. Developing/Cultivating

1. (133) Appearances

2. (134) Emptiness

##### 2.2.2.2.b. (135) Enriching.

#### 2.2.2.3. Unity of Shamatha and Vipashyana

##### 2.2.2.3.a. (136) The actual practice.

##### 2.2.2.3.b. (137) Enriching

#### 2.2.2.4. (138) Decisive Experience- Progress.

### 2.3. Relinquishing Hope and Fear for a Result.

2.3.1. (139) The basic space of the true nature of phenomena's own face/dharmata dharmadhatu.

- 2.3.2. (140) The nature of the manifestation of kayas as basic space.
- 2.3.3. (141) The display of timeless awareness.

The rhythm of the retreat is set up to alternate from more contemplative to more active (accumulations). Following this section of meditation will come the active phase of the lama practice, then meditation (such as dzog chen), yidam practice, more meditation, dakini practice, followed by meditation, and (I think) a practice of 3 roots combined.

### 3. Progress I feel I made and difficulties encountered.

One aspect of the retreat has been the closing down of my “ordinary life”. For over a year prior to the start of the retreat it was a dynamic process of closing down my life and preparing for the retreat. I have had to maintain a full time job in town, and had a good array of social contacts which I had to close out. It took several months, actually I would say 9 months for me to feel that I have energetically really closed out my worldly life. At first it was a little challenging to deal with the very restricted and limited time frame for correspondences. I noticed I had become habituated, by the much use of internet, to more instantaneous communications, so I was challenged. Sometimes it takes well over a month to complete a simple communication, everything is slowed way down. Now I am fully adjusted and am very glad to have these boundaries. My correspondences are at a very minimum. I also had to wean off of my habituation to having instant information (I have come to rely on search engine, Wikipedia, etc., for information to fill the gaps in my knowing). It took a bit of a process to get my mind fully focused on the retreat alone. I still maintain a kind of process in my mind to continue to close out my “ordinary life” including social relations. I am using this opportunity to make what I see as a lifelong switch to a “contemplative life”, so I am not intending to close out my ordinary life for just three year to then re-open it. My intent is to use this as a kind of watershed point. My style of shutting down the worldly has been a more intentional and gradual process of closing it down (versus a sudden cutting off). I feel confident I am very much disengaged now

and that I did so in a manner respectful of the usefulness that the world aspect has served (including friends and family). In other words I refrained from a pre-mature (to me) harsher severing, but have nevertheless aimed for a total close down. I have treated this like a gentle death, wherein I know I have 9 months left to live, time to gently close out, review my life, etc. I was much relieved as I was training in the lojong section to be actually free to “live the life” that is laid out in the Words of my Perfect Teacher (regarding solitude, renunciation). Up till now I was not able to do so. I am certain that book is written especially for those who are fortunate to be able to live this contemplative life. The first few months I had a distinct feeling of being just like a wild animal who having been trapped in a live trap (of the last 48 years) has just discovered the door open to the trap, and bolting as fast as he can away from the trap. I have been eager to repay any karmic debts that may pull me back to a life where I have to work out in the “world”, and to study over and over the reasons laid out for the life of solitude. My love for family and friends spurs me on towards the retreat lifestyle. So I feel I have made much progress in the area of renunciation. For such a life of solitude, the Words of my Perfect Teacher indicates repeatedly that one should cast away any attempt to work for purpose of food, shelter, etc. and not worry about starving to death, because the Buddha’s promise that sincere practitioners will not be total devoid of food and shelter. Also it says to sever ties with friends and family. For whatever karmic reason, this solitary life seems very hard to accomplish in America. Even though I am not (nor have been) afraid to suffer from lack of food or lack of relations, there are other forces at play that have kept me from this lifestyle. So it is a daily aspiration for me. While I sincerely commit to not to worry about food, etc. (not to work), or hold on to friends and family ties, I realistically am not having big expectations of being able to manifest it, as it seems there are many impediments blocking the way. My progress has been in my strengthening my resolve to do without work and relations, to at least have that renunciation attitude. I was not able to really accomplish it anyway before now, for lack of the proper training in how to maintain practice all day, every day without break. Now I am developing the habits necessary for a genuine sincere practitioner. I have been a gelong for 4 years and monk for 9 years, but this drubdra is the first time I have been free to live the actual life

of a monk. I have had to work a full time job in town these years, which I utilized for growth and service opportunity. I have patiently tried to create the conditions to break this perceived “barrier” that prevents me to live in accordance with the way laid out in the Words of My Perfect Teacher (which I admit is very idealistic for Americans, and very rarely attained). During the process I built (with my own funds) a small cabin on the rithrod land, which I can inhabit after this drubdra. I am resolving to do without car, phone, and other expenses, and not to worry about food. That part is easy for me, what remains to be seen if the Teacher and sangha are allowing ( I am developing my resolve at this point until it is strong before consulting with my Lama).

Though it sounds like I am preoccupied with the future, in fact I am attempting to share how this is a daily training for myself to establish daily the details of what renunciation looks like practically. Adding a training in resolve not to work for food and to sever with family and friends, in the context of living in solitude, gives a more tangible visualization of what renunciation looks like ideally on the outside. I do not know if I will be alive tomorrow, so I am not making plans for post drubdra, but rather planting seeds for future ripening of more conducive circumstances for a life of solitude. If I have to spend the rest of my life simply planting seeds, without much in the way of reaping (freedom from the “work obligation”), then I will keep sowing these seeds. As long as I had to work these last 30 years (even at age 18 I had strong aspirations to live this life of a renunciate), I felt it best to generate the positive aspects of , and to avoid cultivating an aversion to, work. I also generated attitude that as long as I had to work and was in the world, that it is best to generate activity of trying to be of (small) benefit /service. Even though I was careful not to slip into aversion to work while I had to work, I had been planning for a while to shift upon landing into retreat into an aversion mindset to work. What I mean to say, that it is my clear sense that the implications of living by the Words of my Perfect Teacher, is to actually develop an aversion to work and worldly relations in a life of solitude. There are many passages I could cite to show this. So I feel I have been faithful these last 30 years to maintain a positive view towards work even though it has been my aim these last 30 years to somehow cross over to the other side, called renunciation. So I am honestly reporting to you that I am consciously

cultivating an aversion to work based on Words of My Perfect Teacher. If my karma still brings me to the need to work, I plan to immediately switch back to a positive view of work (while keeping my aim to gain my freedom from work). The same with relations, if I end up back in the society of the rithrod, I will try to keep solitude, but will have to relax my intentional cultivation of aversion to all relation that I am now free to practice.

I feel I am progressing in my clarity of what the details of a renunciate life look's like (according to the Words of My Perfect Teacher) and strengthening my determination to live that life. I honestly do not see this current drubdra situation as the full actual living of this renunciate life, but rather as a possible intermediary step and training ground to get the necessary skills in place. Because of the kindness of Tsadra and my personal sponsors, I could practice in this drubdra, but I have not had to undergo the challenge of committing to not work while not knowing when or if food will come. I pretend daily that I am training for this next step. I try to endure slight discomforts to toughen my body and mind up. I have practiced stretching my tolerance for heat and cold before trying to remedy with fan or fire. We actually have the potential for comfort here that almost matches city life but I try to slowly expand my tolerance for less comfortable environment.

The very beginning of our teachings for this drubdra we were given a teaching from Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa's "A Wondrous Ocean of Advice for the Practice of Retreatants in Solitude". It gives his advice on how to do retreat tat was based exactly on how he did retreat himself. It was immediately clear that for us five retreatants it would be best to take this advice as aspirational for us, as his standards are vey high. He was in his twenties when he wrote it, but (for me) I think it would take me another few decades to attain that degree of strict retreat (outwardly, inwardly, and secretly stict). But this short teaching can serve for my lifelong standard as to what I am aiming for. I am confident that if I continue to develop the key points he lays out here in this manual, that I will realize my life's goal, and along the way will (these next 2 years) completely attain the purpose of the Tsadra scholarship. It is an unfailing guide (as to what to aspire for). I prefer to have a pithy writing to

focus my life's journey, and this little teaching of Jigme Lingpa's serves that function (with the Words of My Perfect Teacher as a commentary). Next year or my tsadra report, I hope to measure my accomplishments and difficulties by citing directly from this manual (it did not occur to me this time).

Please pardon, as I am not able to find the exact wording for the purpose of the scholarship" and have now no way to get it at this point. But my sense is that the purpose was to invest in me as a practitioner so that I could "go back out" and make a difference. I have had a strong "calling" since the retreat started to make aspirations that that "going back out" to make a difference be in the way of an example of a long term retreatant, one who has dedicated his remainder of his life to the retreat life. I do not claim that I am of any good quality of a practitioner, only that I have been inspired to aim that way. This might be a change from my interview with you, Lama Drubgyu ( I don't recall the exact details). I do not think I felt this "leading" at that time as strongly. So for me since the start the aim for me is to do very well in the retreat, to warrant a chance at continuing in this way (in addition to the general big scope of bodhicitta motivation). I feel I would make a difference by providing inspiration to others towards the retreat life. Already, of course, friends in the sangha are inspired and have pursued short-term retreats. Being an example of a long term retreatant would definitely make a difference in a big way I feel. Again I do not think I am a great practitioner by any means. If this does not unfold, then my aim is to "make a difference" by being an example to others around the rithrod, by trying to maintain a life more infused with short term retreat, and less involved in the outside world. My process leading up to this point has been to be involved in the world, as long as I had to be out in the world. I chose a few outlets for service such as prison visitation and other ways to be a presence out in the world. I feel I have made some investment in the surrounding community for good inter-dependence, which was my personal precondition to a retired life. My preference is to stay in retreat, but if I have to return to the rithrod life, this time I hope to be an example of a semi-retired lifestyle (meaning in any given month a good portion spent in practice , and the other portion spent in serving the needs of the rithrod, and earning money for basic expenses). To be an active part of the rithrod means

in itself to be working and earning money. A life free of work is a life free of the rithrod (in more solitude).

I am convinced of the teaching as laid out in Words of My Perfect Teacher that it best to avail myself of this opportunity to accomplish my own benefit (by practice) so I can truly be able to help others (for me, this is realistically meaning next lifetime). I would not be picking up social media practice (which was my way to make interdependent connections for dharma), nor owning a vehicle (if possible), or cell phone, and in all ways minimizing my involvement and expenditures. I would be committing to a limitation on my freedom to travel, and income etc. I will also be able to possibly mentor in a few technical aspects such as tormas making, sadhanas details, etc. (our sangha in general is “new” to this level of practice).

I feel I am making a lot of progress towards habituating to practicing all day long, and also accumulating mantra recitations. Also with the 4 activities, I am improving on mediating while in motion/activity. My challenges lie in being efficiently disciplined. I do not have the discipline to fully regiment my break time, for example, to accomplishing chore of cleaning, etc. My cabin has been messier than it should be, and it takes me the 2 hours of break to cook and exercise. I have a long way to go towards full efficiency.

The section I found the most engaging and which I feel the most progress in is this section on Longchenpa's steps for shamatha and vipashyana. I had received these teachings in 2011 with Khenrül Rinpoche and again in this drubdra. I feel I made a lot of progress in differentiating the subtle nuances of shamatha, vipashyana and their unity. I would like to have another opportunity to further delve into these practices. Later we will be receiving actual pointing out instructions. I feel the gradual steps have given me much more precise clarity as to how to cultivate the shamatha of one of the lesser faculties, having arrived at the view. Rinpoche's style of alternating sections of rest and activity has been very helpful. He advises us to not get stirred up during the more meditative sections. He wants us to have good shamatha and not come out of drubdra being always constantly needing to do activities. His



approach to the ritual arts is towards the lesser (or maybe least) elaborate ways, keeping all the key points of practice. He emphasizes keeping the various key points of mind training and shamatha/vipashyana with the ceremonial work. He does not give us lots of study also. For each sections so far are mainly have been the recordings of the drubdra teachings along with a few other recordings of his previous teachings. I have had the good fortune to accumulate a large number of shedra and other teachings from him, but he definitely has emphasized the drubdra as practice oriented. Because my breaks are so limited in time I have not had time to read much. This is good for me personally, it keeps me focused. I feel fortunate that I have had the chance to go through a gradual training these last 12 years with a single teacher. Looking back on the teachings he has given me, and the other blessings, I feel very fortunate. This is the first time I feel I am actually in the vajrayana practice. I have not practiced sadhanas before now (the next section). I realize Rinpoche has given me a thorough systematic and comprehensive training. I have a clearer sense of how the whole sum total of it all has always been actually dzog chen practice, from the ngondro, lojong on up. He has taken me to the ati-yoga, and then will constantly rotate back to the 4 thoughts, and lojong. I also have a clearer sense of how vital Guru Yoga is, how it is the heart of the path. I am relatively very new to the ritualistic part of the training, and have tried to get my skills up, from choponing, to the instruments, to umze, to offerings, to recitations, to mudras, to the four activities. My aim in learning these skills is for the purpose of a least elaborate way for personal practice in solitude. I am not as interested in these related to large group gatherings. My beard is quite long now, the first time I have grown it in full this life! My head hair I becoming longer. I LOOK the part of a yogi, and I joke with Rinpoche when he sees me (each time my beard longer and he says I look like a yogi) that I am training so as to have the MIND of a yogi. Being a yogi renunciate was actually always my aim as a youth rather than monastic renunciate. I am starting to learn more precisely what a yogi's mind and lifestyle is actually like (mostly by studying the vows). We have many wonderful small caves here on the land. I aspire to be strong enough to do more long term caves in them. One of them has been enclosed and a floor put in. To live a life in one of these caves as a sincere

practitioner of Vajrayana would fulfill all my deepest dreams I had as a teenager. It is the vision that spurs me on daily in the drubdra. I am prepared to keep doing whatever it takes, and for as long as it takes towards that. I am kind of partial to the beard and long hair and nails, as it somehow give me an extra inspiration towards that life. The backbone of that life for me is the vows (conduct along with the view and meditation).

One area where I am making progress in, that is not emphasized in the drubdra teachings is in educating myself in the tantric vows. I feel now is the time to have a good sense of the 3 Vows and how they integrate. My main text is “Perfect Conduct, a commentary by HH Dudjom Rinpoche on Ascertaining the 3 vows by Ngari Panchen, Pema Wangyal Gyalpo, and “Buddhist Ethics” by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye. The 6 Session Guru Yoga practice formulated by the current Dalai Lama for the Kalachakra is the practice guide for me. My pathway in ethics, through all the stages of pratimoksha, bodhichitta and now tantra has been towards the ethical practice of a “vajra holder”. From a beginner holder of the 3 vows, then gaining accomplishment in the development and completion stages to a good degree I would qualify as a “yogi”. So for me the solitude lifestyle (yogi lifestyle) is part of my ethical trajectory. The drubdra life has afforded me more freedom to delve into the tantric ethics (which for now is just to learn them). My aim for this drubdra regarding ethics is to accomplish a good awareness of the 3 vows. This would involve learning how to maintain tantric ethics “secretly” while dwelling in the midst of rithrod life as outwardly bodhisattva gelong. This kind of skillful integration and awareness takes study, so I aim to do so in little bits of my spare time. Ethics, especially Tantric ethics, is not discussed around here (for good reasons I am sure), so the study of ethics here is necessarily a very private study. I am convinced that it is a very necessary ingredient for success in the development and completion stage practices, and for me accomplish the purpose of the scholarship, as well as a core ingredient in Guru Yoga practice. This is now a strong emphasis of mine (to learn the 3 vows as a whole unit). Learning Tibetan is not a requirement of this drubdra. I have not endeavored to study the language in drubdra. My spare time is extremely limited. My personal approach has been to pick up Tibetan words to use in my mind, to build vocabulary. For example if doing Guru Yoga ,

receiving empowerment to think of kayas in Tibetan terms “choku, longku, trulku”). In this way, little by little, to at least build up my vocabulary. And my approach is to build vocabulary in the context of meditation practice (experientially so to say), rather than an intellectual language study approach.

I hope I have not deviated from the purpose of the scholarship in aiming to be genuinely qualified for a life of solitude. As this is very rare, and not yet seen in our sangha, I hold it as ideal, rather than a likely scenario. Aiming for that though, would improve, I feel, my ability of benefiting the rithrod should I end up there (a much more likely scenario). In that case I do not plan to relinquish my aim for solitude, I will just have to keep working to create the causes and conditions. At this point also I aim to pursue qualifications for receiving the one year “post drubdra” tsadra scholarship. I know it is still very early in this drubdra, and premature, but I want to acquaint you with the general trend in my mind. It seems as I read this that I come across as very pre-occupied with the future. For the most part I have not been at all. This report helps me step back and take a look at the journey. My focus has been on the practices at hand, and, as I say, assuming the mind set of what one who was free to live in solitude would ideally have as a way to cultivate neijong. I have endeavored to throw all I have into this “Fire” of drubdra, not much remains of my pre-drubdra life now both outwardly or inwardly. In a lot of ways it has felt like I was starting over as a youth. I have had to learn new skills such as torma making, etc, and have felt that distinct “lack of freedom”, like I don’t have much control over my life (like a child). That feeling was strong in the initial months, but now is not so much felt.

One big aspect of the drubdra has been the social dynamics. There is a lot I could say, but my report is already too long. We had four on site in four cabins and a fifth a mile away in her own house. The dynamics were very challenging. The other man came in very disturbed and unprepared to abide within the limitation established for the retreat. He clearly was degenerating quickly, was talking daily of leaving and needed help. I was faced with an ethical dilemma whether to help him and disturb my own retreat majorly or keep the silence and boundaries and leave him to cope on his own. I chose to

help him, which was indeed a big disruption for me. He was also in major conflict continually with one of the women here (and at times with me). She was a very beginner practitioner and had many fears. All I want to say here is that social dynamics make up a significant part of the retreat, determining how deep one can go, whether there is silence, and many other factors. A lot of the challenges were in trying to stabilize and maintain the boundaries when people were not all “onboard” with them. After many disruptive events, the other man chose to leave the retreat at about the 9 month marker.

The main difficulty for me over all in accomplishing the aims of the scholarship was definitely the social dynamics. While things are now very conducive to retreat, for about 9 months it has been very intensely disrupting dynamics. The reason for the change is that one person has left the retreat. There were times when it definitely compromised my ability to settle the mind. There was some crazy things that went on, and times of intense negativities. Once I fulfilled my sense of responsibility to get the man “over the hump” (when he was looking like he couldn’t make the transition), I was clear, very clear, that in this context of drubdra the most compassionate thing we can do is to keep our own boundaries and in a sense “mind our own business”, and dedicate merit to each other.

For me one of the main key points/lessons that I have extracted from the whole drubdra is a vivid sense of how the path to freedom for me lies in the establishing and abiding in ever more precise boundaries. That the limitations of boundaries can, with right use, become the path to a liberation from boundaries. While I was always onboard with the usefulness of boundaries, I was still very challenged at first to get myself into them. At some point, like month 5 or so I crested the hump, I felt, and began to strive to experience boundaries distinctly as my good friend. My aim has been to keep trying to expand my capacity to abide within ever more precise boundaries. I still have a long way to go even at the basic level, but there is now an eagerness to see how I can improve in my ability to abide in smaller boundaries with a relaxed mind set. So for me, in a nutshell, the main lesson has been “tsam” boundaries. In addition to seeing this as a “tsam”, boundaries of three years, I

have aimed to cultivate a view of it being a “tsam” of the start of this drubdra to the end of my life (whenever that shall be). A “tsam” marking the end of a 48 year phase, and beginning of the rest of my life. I am working diligently to make that “tsam” prove out to have been the marker at which point I crossed over to a truly renunciate life. Only time would tell, each day I just do my best. I apologize, Lama Drubgyu, that this has been a rambling report. My skills at report have deteriorated over recent years, and I am very short on time with this computer. This is a good time to pause for a retrospective, in the midst of Longchenpa’s shamatha and vipashyana. I am very glad to get to do this report, it helps me review the first year, and take a wider view of the process regarding aims. I do not know if I will be hearing from you, but I wish you well. I still see your smiling face in my mind’s eye, and shall continue to dedicate merit to you and the tsadra people. We soon will be launching into the development stage practice. I am very grateful for how well this drubdra is set up. Thanks for all you do to promote the “contemplative life”, I have found such support very, very rare in America, and so very needed. I pray that my efforts will serve as an inspiration to help expand the “contemplative life” particularly here in my home country of America.

With great appreciation,

Thubten Yeshe, at Katog Rithrod Drubgyu Atiling.