

Sarina Straussner
3-Year Retreat at Kagyu Thubten Choling
Under the guidance of Ven. Lama Norlha Rinpoche

Tsadra Final Report After Completion of the 3-Year Retreat

It has been around one month since I completed my 3-year retreat, and due to the kindness of Lama Norlha Rinpoche was granted the title of "Lama" upon graduating the program. To be quite honest, I was fairly apprehensive about coming out of retreat, and was unsure as to how I would perceive my surroundings, and how everyone would perceive me as well. Initially, after seeing my relatives and speaking with them, it was clear that they were equally apprehensive about seeing me, and were very curious as to what if any changes I had made. Although, it was a very joyous reunion to see my family, it was also clear that I had gone through something that they would never be able to completely relate to, and that that was okay.

Since I have been out of retreat, I really see how lucky I was to have had the opportunity to temporarily remove myself from ordinary samsaric living, and go into a retreat setting. When his Holiness the 17th Karmapa came to our retreat house to visit just months before retreat was over, we asked him "how can we be of benefit to others?" He responded that right now where we are in terms of the path, it is actually still very difficult to benefit others, and that we need to continue persevering in our own personal practices before we can truly be of benefit to others. This has become more and more clear since I left retreat, and although I do feel that I worked hard in my retreat, I still am just at the start of my life as a Dharma practitioner, and am still trying to understand how to balance my daily commitments to my practices, with my obligations to my family and to the KTC community as I have chosen to stay at the monastery and keep my vows.

In retrospect, I actually feel very grateful to having encountered a variety of challenges on my retreat, including physical illness and some interpersonal difficulties. I felt at times I was constantly in a "sink or swim" situation, coming up against my own demons trying to tear me down, replaying the same storylines I had been telling myself for years, but due to the nature of retreat and spending so much time in solitude, I was forced to meet those demons face-to-face and continue to push through them. This was at times both my biggest strength, and also my biggest weakness. I constantly struggled with (and continue to struggle with) finding the balance between pushing too hard, and not pushing hard enough. I also still struggle to understand how to take some of the teachings that seem to speak to the ultimate truth, and incorporate them into everyday relative experience. These are areas where although I feel Lama Norlha Rinpoche addressed them, I need to do more work myself to understand how I relate to the teachings, and where I need more guidance, so I can ask appropriate questions.

I found retreat to be the perfect stepping stone to introduce me to the Dharma, and help me see the benefits of really engaging in Dharma practice. Through my engagement in the retreat I feel that I am in a better position to potentially be of benefit to others. Most importantly, I realized that the best way to

help others is to continue working through my own confusion, and am beyond grateful that I now have the tools and very profound methods to help me in that process. KTC has also recently formed a “teachers training program” specifically geared at post-retreat graduates who are interested in teaching, and providing them with additional mentorship and training programs to help assist them as they start to teach, which I think will also be useful for myself and others.

Overall, my retreat helped me to have a better understanding of what direction I want my life to take, what my priorities are, areas where I still need to do some interpersonal work, and it gave me more inner confidence that I can face challenges in order to peruse my practice, and that every situation is workable. I still have a lot of work left to do, but I feel more grounded, patient, and equipped to travel that path so that hopefully one day in the future I may truly be of benefit to the Buddhas teachings and to all sentient beings.

Thank you all again so much for providing me with the necessary funds in order to participate in the retreat, and all funding was used explicitly for retreat purposes.

Additional Practices at the end of retreat included:

White Tara

Bernachen

Amitabha

Mahakala

Gyu De Nga

La Shi

Chod Tsok

Daily Druptop/Tsenerating/Gusuls (which we do once a month in the Lhakong)

Gyalwa Gyamtso

Thank you again.

With sincere gratitude and appreciation,

Sarina Straussner/Sherab Drolkar

Daily Schedule

4am-5:35 am: Early Thun
6am-8:00am: Morning Tskopa
8:00-8:20am: Breakfast
8:20am-10:55am: 5 minutes of shinay followed by Thun 1
10:55-11:45pm: Tung Shak followed by Kalu Rinpoche's Monlam and short Nang pe yoga session in room
12pm-12:25pm: Lunch
12:25pm-2pm: Free time and/or work period
2pm-4:30pm: 5 minute Shinay followed by Thun 2
4:30-5pm: Tung Shak followed by Mahamudra Monlam
5pm: Evening Tsokpa
6:15pm-6:30pm: Dinner
6:30-8:25pm: 5 minute shinay followed by Dorje Purba gyuncher then Thun 3
8:25pm-9:30pm: Room tsok/Demchok chanting, Tung Shak, Chod, Dewachen Monlam
9:30pm: Quiet study time in room
10pm: Lights out

Additional Practices:

Drustop (including once a month Gusul)
Chiblu
Tsendreng (including once a month Gusul)
Geluk Thrungpa
Gonkor
Serno
Chod (daily)
Dangwai Naljor (daily)
Dorje Purba (daily)
Chutor (daily)
Trulkur (daily)
Ngondro (daily)
6 Yogas of Naropa (daily)
Dorje Pagmo (daily)
Short Demchok (daily)
Short Gyalwa Gyamtso (daily)
La Shi (daily)
White Tara (daily)
Mahakala (daily)
Gyu De Nga (daily)
La Shi (daily)