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Contemplative Scholarship Report – Drime Shiwa
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The third phase of the Three Year Retreat at Söpa Chöling started for me on August 25, 2016 with arrival day at Gampo Abbey on August 23. I spend the first 3 weeks in solitary retreat in a cabin on the Abbey land where I mainly practiced Mahamudra (4 sessions a day) and Vajrayogini (1 session a day). I kept the retreat schedule of 4 sessions a day starting at 5 am. Then on September 11, I moved to Söpa Chöling and we started group retreat. The first six months of this third phase of retreat we practice the 6 Dharmas of Naropa. This started with 3 weeks of ngöndro, followed by Chandali practice combined with Trülkhor. On December 22 we will start with Illusory Form and Dream Yoga. The 6 Dharmas of Naropa will continue until March 10 and will be followed by two more practices (Jinasagara and Mahakala). 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. For the 6 Dharmas all 4 thüns are practiced in our room and daily Mahakala practice is a group practice. From 1-2 PM is a work period where we do house-jobs and often have torma making practice. We also practice 3 feasts a month: Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara and Mahakala, which are all group practices. And we observe the bi-weekly Sojong ceremony on the full and new moon days.

As for the progress made. The 6 Dharmas are very profound and fruitional practices and Chandali has deepened my understanding of bliss-emptiness / clarity-emptiness. And as always, group retreat is an excellent way of finding out about progress made with regards to the afflictive obscurations. Practicing patience and loving kindness have proven to be great tools and there are many situations and levels on which they can be practiced. I've noticed that not just me, but the whole core group of retreatants has become softer, kinder and more helpful and patient with each other. We have moved from correcting people to accepting people more as they are.

The main difficulty I encountered in this phase so far has been tiredness. I am not sure if it is the practice that brings it out, since I have heard that several people are dealing with the same issue. I also still have migraines, although less frequent than before. So I do my best to practice all sessions, but do also need to take some extra rest on a regular basis, which I often do during part of T1 after doing a shortened session.

On October 11, 2016 one of our Elders, Ani Migme Chödrön, passed away after 4 months of intensive care at home. I had been one of the caregivers before going in retreat and our druppön, Nancy Huszagh, allowed me to go to the wake and funeral in Halifax. Because of that I missed 4 days of retreat, this included travel time. Fortunately there was a strong practice environment during the wake which included morning chants at 6 am followed by two sessions of Chakrasamvara practice. On the funeral day there was a Sadhana of Mahamudra Feast. It was a powerful way of bringing an intensive year of

caring for Ani Migme to a closure with those who had been involved. And I expect that the experience will be of benefit when doing some of the practices to come in the 6 Dharmas of Naropa, like Illusory Form and Bardo.

You probably also have heard about the decision made by our druppön to move the gate opening of this last phase of retreat from August 25 to August 20, 2017. This was a decision solely made by her and we were informed about it only a couple of weeks ago. I hope this does not influence the amount of the scholarship that was granted to us here at Söpa Chöling.

I am very grateful for the support that Tsadra Foundation is giving me to enable me to do the Three Year Retreat. It is a very precious opportunity to work deeply with our minds and bodies in order to awaken the innate natural state and hopefully will enable us retreatants to be of benefit to other sentient beings.

With kind regards,

Drime Shiwa