

# **MSB STUDY & PRACTICE MANUAL**

*Revised December 6, 2009*

## **PHASE III: POST-SESSIONS MEDITATION**

Students in this phase of practice have received the Sessions teachings from Rinpoche. It is crucial to continue a daily practice according to the exact instructions and format given by Rinpoche at your Sessions teaching. Please note that the details regarding the structure and format of the Sessions practice may differ from year to year. Therefore an outline of the practice is not included in this manual. Students should rely on their own Sessions teaching notes and contact their meditation instructor to discuss how to structure their daily practice.

In addition to continuing the Sessions practice on a daily basis, Rinpoche asks that you listen to the five talks on egolessness from the *Guided Meditations on Relative and Absolute Bodhicitta CD*. Please Listen to these meditations in sequence. An outline of a typical egolessness meditation period is included below. These meditations alternate between analytical meditation involving thoughts, and placement meditation, which is resting in the nature of mind—the outcome of the final step in the Sessions teachings. Again, the Sessions practice is the essential daily practice and you can slowly circle through the five guided meditations in addition to that practice.

After doing this practice daily for at least six months, the next step is to complete a solitary retreat of at least two weeks focusing on the Sessions instructions. Before doing so, meet with your MI to discuss the retreat and read the Post-Sessions Retreat Letter included in this section of the manual. Following the solitary retreat, the next phase of the MSB path is the *lojong*, or mind training phase. After you complete your solitary retreat, download the Phase IV: Lojong section of the Study and Practice Manual to learn about this practice.

## EGOLESSNESS MEDITATION

### I. Preliminaries

- A. Recite the following:

#### **REFUGE AND BODHICITTA**

In the Buddha, the Dharma and the Supreme Assembly  
I take refuge until enlightenment.  
By the merit of generosity and so forth,  
May I attain buddhahood for the welfare of all beings.  
*(recite three times)*

#### **FOUR IMMEASURABLES**

May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness.  
May they be free from suffering and the root of suffering.  
May they not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.  
May they dwell in the great equanimity free from passion, aggression, and  
prejudice.  
*(recite three times)*

### II. Count 21 Breaths

- A. Count the breath 21 times before moving on to the four immeasurables practice.

### III. Four Immeasurables Contemplations

- A. Starting with equanimity, spend time sequentially contemplating on all four immeasurables.

### IV. Aspiration Bodhicitta

- A. Give birth to aspiration bodhicitta.

### V. Analytical Meditation

- A. As time allows, listen to all or part of the five guided meditations on egolessness on the *Guided Meditations on Relative and Absolute Bodhicitta* CD.
- B. You may pick up where you left off in the recording during your next meditation session.
- C. After practicing along with the recording at least ten times, you can start doing these meditations without the recording. You do not need to do all five meditations each session; you can choose one or more to do in a single session.

## V. Placement Meditation

- A. At the conclusion of the analytical meditation, go through each of the contemplations given in the Sessions teachings.
- B. Rest in the nature of mind according to the last stage of the Sessions instructions.
- C. Periodically recite three or more Seven Line Supplications as a devotional support to your nature of mind practice.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Recite the following:

### **GURU RINPOCHE SUPPLICATION**

E MA HO

On the magnificent Copper-colored Mountain—  
A place of great beauty and peace—  
Is a celestial palace of light.  
In this palace, seated upon a lion throne,  
Rests Mahaguru Pema Thötreng Tsal,  
Emanating from the kindness of all the buddhas of the three times.  
He is surrounded by one-hundred million vidyadharas,  
And possesses the youth and splendor of a boy in his prime.  
You who are free of birth, old age, death and decay,  
Consider me!

Having accrued little merit, the beings of this degenerate time,  
Have been born at the very decline of Noble Shakyamuni's teachings.  
Unlike the great disciples of the past who were able to see his face,  
We do not have the good fortune of liberating deluded mind  
Through the diligent study of the Three Baskets.  
But through the light rays of your compassion, which pervades all space,  
Having heard your name, I call upon you, Mahaguru,  
And with great longing and pure intent I supplicate.

For myself and others, from this life until enlightenment,  
With the support of your compassion,  
May I turn away from hindrances and diversions on the path.  
May all disturbing emotions, war, disease and poverty be pacified.  
May all outer, inner and secret obstacles be subdued.  
May I meet my own inner wisdom guru  
Through the essential practice of your guru yoga,  
And with loving-kindness show the path of benefit and happiness to all.  
May I become an excellent noble friend to all beings.

When the appearances of this life dissolve,  
May I, with ease and great happiness,  
Let go of all attachments to this life,  
As a son or daughter returning home.  
And at that time may you, Guru and Dakini, receive me,  
And guide me to the glorious Copper-colored Mountain.  
With great desire and single-pointed trust, I supplicate you.

*This supplication was written with one-pointed devotion by Kongtrül Jigmé while on the Mangala Shri Bhuti sangha pilgrimage in India (in 1993).*

### **DEDICATION OF MERIT**

By this merit, may all attain omniscience,  
May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing,  
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness and death,  
From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.  
(*recite once*)

Emulating the heroes Manjushri,  
Samantabhadra and all those with knowledge,  
I too make a perfect dedication  
Of all actions that are positive.  
(*recite three times*)

# POST-SESSIONS RETREAT INFORMATION

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION

- The post-sessions retreat is required before starting the lojong phase.
- The minimum time spent in retreat should be 14 full days, which means you should schedule for at least 16 days and 15 nights (starting the retreat with an afternoon/evening practice session on the day of arrival, and ending the retreat with a morning session on the day you come out).
- Of course, it's wonderful if one can do a retreat for longer than two weeks. If you'd like to do a retreat from 30 to 100 days in length, you can do it at Samten Ling, the MSB retreat center in Crestone, Colorado. For more information, write to [samtenlingcommittee@fairpoint.net](mailto:samtenlingcommittee@fairpoint.net). You can also do a retreat of two weeks or more at Pema Osel Do-Ngak Choling, the MSB center in Vermont. Contact [pemaosel@mangalashribhuti.org](mailto:pemaosel@mangalashribhuti.org).
- Please speak to your meditation instructor about the topic of retreat boundaries before doing the retreat. As a general rule, the boundary for this particular retreat should be set as tight as possible, which means not having any verbal or written contact with others and just focusing on the practice itself.
- The daily retreat schedule consists of four three-hour sessions, with one- to two-hour breaks. (Retreats at Samten Ling will also include a community work period).

For example:

5:00 - 8:00 a.m.	Session #1
8:00 - 9:30	Break
9:30 - 12:30	Session #2
12:30 - 2:30	Break
2:30 - 5:30	Session #3
5:30 - 7:00	Break
7:00 - 10:00 p.m.	Session #4

- Each practice session includes the following parts:
  1. Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer
  2. Four Immeasurables prayer
  3. Contemplation of the four immeasurables
  4. Arousing bodhicitta
  5. Sessions Practice and/or Egolessness Meditation (see pages 2 – 3)
  6. The session is punctuated every so often by reciting the Seven-Line Prayer.
  7. Conclude with the Guru Rinpoche Supplication and the dedication of merit.In addition, recite the full opening prayers before starting the first session of the day, and the full closing prayers to conclude the last session of the day.

- On breaks you can go for a walk or read.
- It's important to take a good stock of food, so that you don't develop a *lung* (wind) disorder.
- At all times have trust in Guru Rinpoche and the Seven-Line Prayer as a remedy for all.

## 2. READINGS

The emphasis in this retreat is to go deeper into the sessions practice itself, and to fully contemplate your notes taken during the sessions teachings. Therefore, please limit your reading to the following:

Personal notes taken during the sessions teachings with Rinpoche.

*The Practice of Dzogchen*, Longchen Rabjam (introduced, translated, and annotated by Tulku Thondup). Snow Lion Publications. Thregchod (p. 69-73); Naturally Liberated Mind, the Great Perfection (p. 316-354).

*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche. Shambhala Publications (p. 1 – 261).

*It's Up to You*, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. Shambhala.

*Light Comes Through*, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche. Shambhala.

*Bodhicitta: Guided Meditations on Relative and Absolute Bodhicitta CD*

## 3. POST-SESSIONS RETREAT TEACHING

Rinpoche gave this talk on June 1, 1994 at Phüntso Chöling to an assembly of seven students who had already received the sessions instruction and were preparing to do the two-week retreat. It has been revised slightly to reflect a few changes in the instructions.

Rinpoche: Having a shrine is very important. Have a nice seven-bowl shrine with a Padmasambhava picture. Open the shrine in the morning and close it in the evening. After opening it, sit down, and just get your mind settled.

At the start of each of the four sessions, take refuge. Really take refuge in the Three Jewels. Then, do the Four Immeasurables Prayer and contemplate the four immeasurables quite a bit, going through each one as you have done with the guided meditation on the scenarios. Then arouse bodhicitta.

Then do the Seven-Line Supplication, as many times as you want. Do it to receive inspiration and to invoke Padmasambhava's blessings. You could visualize

Padmasambhava above your head, or just have a sense of his presence. There is a tradition of doing 100,000 recitations of the Seven-Line Supplication before you do anything. You might not be able to do that many, but recite the prayer as much as you want, until you feel ready to go into the sessions practice.

Go through the whole process as instructed during the sessions teachings. And then, come to the nature of mind, and just do the nature of mind practice. In the end, do the Guru Rinpoche Supplication and dedicate the merit.

Sometimes during the practice, you may want to take a little break from the practice. At these times, you can do the Seven-Line Supplication, and then go back into practice. Don't take a break by going out, just take a break while continuing to practice.

Do every part listed above in each session. Between sessions take a break. You can have lunch, and then do some reading. In the evening, you can take a walk. It depends on what time of year you do it, since there's a lot more daylight in summer than in winter. Generally, people practice twelve hours a day: three hours before breakfast, three after breakfast, three in the afternoon, and three in the evening. Also, take a good stock of food. One person went on retreat with just tsampa and water and got very lungy.

Student: What should we bring to study?

Rinpoche: The book *The Practice of Dzogchen* has a nature of mind section that you could read. In *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the section on the outer preliminaries and the refuge and bodhicitta sections are also good to read. While you are in retreat, many different feelings may arise, but at all times you should just really trust from your heart in Guru Rinpoche and do the Seven-Line Supplication. That would be the remedy for all.

Student: What about teachings coming from you?

Rinpoche: You can take your notes on the sessions teachings, since that's the practice you're doing. [Rinpoche's books, *It's Up to You* and *Light Comes Through*, are also good to read during this retreat.]

Student: I have some fear of doing a two-week retreat and sitting twelve hours a day. What can I do to really prepare myself?

Rinpoche: The main thing is to develop a strong relationship with Guru Rinpoche. Develop trust, personal trust, in him—through your practice, through the Seven-Line Supplication, through keeping him in your mind at all times, especially in the crucial times that come in your life. That's how you develop a relationship with the deity.

To really trust people, and know that they are good, honest, and kind, you have to know them through different stages of your life. People may look kind, but that won't necessarily convince you that they are genuinely kind. But if you need help and someone is there for you, and is kind to you, then you come to trust that he or she is kind.

You can only know people are reliable if, when you need to rely on them, they are fully there to rely on. Just because someone is a “good friend” doesn’t mean he or she is reliable. But if friends are there when most needed, then you come to know they are reliable. People may act as if they are trustworthy, but you never know whether they are unless you find yourself really needing to trust them, and they come through in the way you had hoped and expected. Their behavior at those times becomes a reference point.

Making a relationship with the deity is similar. By supplicating him at all times, you develop the general relationship. Then, if you feel distressed or depressed, or caught in your confusion or your fear of something, and you supplicate genuinely from your heart, you will never be disappointed. And when there are no disappointments, you develop a strong trust, a real trust based on your experiences.

Student: I was brought up Catholic and prayed to God. But I read somewhere that this kind of prayer is not the same. Or is it?

Rinpoche: The way you approach it could be similar. The approach is to have devotion. When that devotion becomes personal, you really feel that you know it, without needing to rely on logic and reason.

I think your fear is due to seeing the potential instability of your mind. You may also have fear because you lack trust that you can “see through” by doing the nature of mind practice. And you don’t have enough trust in the deity to help you see through.

So you have to work on those two: developing trust in your practice to see through, and trust in the deity to help you see through. If you have trust in those two areas, then even if you see your mind’s potential to become unstable during long sessions of sitting in a lonely place by yourself, you will still have something to comfort you. Those two ways are the only ways you can feel solid, firm, and comforted. And I’m sure you will naturally come to that point. As the situation becomes intense, you will naturally seek the help that you even unconsciously know is to be sought.

The first trust is in your own nature of mind. The second is relying on the blessings of the lineage gurus, particularly Padmasambhava. When you supplicate Padmasambhava, you supplicate all the lineage gurus embodied in him. If you do it genuinely from your heart, applying devotion from the heart, it’s like pouring cold water on boiling water—immediately, the water will cool down. In the same way, all your distress and confusion will be cooled down by just thinking of the deity and doing just one Seven-Line Supplication.

But most of all, you have to trust your own practice. Often, with the practice, you can see through, and then just rest. But sometimes, even if you can do that, there’s still a feeling of being unsettled, or some continuing waves of disturbance. At those times, rely on the deity.

Student: I'm excited to do retreat, but I've had incredible fears in the past. I have this feeling that I'll really get a chance to work with them nicely. And that's good. I'm looking forward to seeing how actually I work...

Rinpoche: If it gets to be really difficult, then don't push it. Don't push yourself from your ego. Do you understand what I mean? For instance, don't think, "If I don't finish the two weeks, what is Rinpoche going to say?" or, "What is the sangha going to say?" or, "What are people going to think of me?" and then try to push it despite being unable to work with your practice at all. If it gets to that point, just close the retreat nicely with whatever you have been able to do, and come out of the retreat. What I'm saying is, don't challenge yourself in these ways. [Rinpoche asks another student] Do you fear going into retreat?

Student: Yes.

Rinpoche: Does everyone have fear here? Do you have fear?

Student: I don't think so.

Rinpoche: Do you?

Student: I don't have fear, but I have something else. I get doubtful. That's just me.

Rinpoche: That's worse than fear actually. But still, the nature of the practice is not discriminating between good and bad thoughts.

Student: The purpose of the retreat is to develop some confidence.

Rinpoche: The purpose of the retreat is to go in depth into the sessions practice.

Student: Is going through the complete sessions instruction something one should do at the beginning of every practice?

Rinpoche: That's important. Even though you might do it quickly, it's important because that way you'll never get lost. You'll always know how to establish yourself in the practice that you have.

Student: Do you have any advice on how to work with drowsiness?

Rinpoche: If you're feeling drowsy, let yourself feel drowsy. Don't resist it. Let yourself fall asleep. But when you wake up, you have to be right there. Also, you may sometimes have a blank state of mind. Just let that be. Don't resist it, but relax into it and then penetrate your awareness into it.

The possibility of ending the retreat before two weeks are over will comfort you all a lot. It might actually make the retreat successful.

Student: Is it okay to wait a while before going on retreat?

Rinpoche: It doesn't matter. You can do it whenever you want. Are you getting scared to go on retreat?

Student: No, actually, not at all.

Rinpoche: You can do it whenever you want. Then, if you're not ready to do the ngöndro practice, you could wait until the next post-sessions group becomes ready. That's over a year from now, and that really would be fine with me.

Student: Is there any last piece of advice that we should know?

Rinpoche: Don't be scared [laughs].

Student: It's not so much being scared, but wanting to truly benefit.

Rinpoche: Well, this will really make you grow up.