

VAJRAYOGINI RETREAT EXPLAINED

By Ven. Paula Chichester (Lhundup Nyingje)

Vajrayogini retreat is a meditation practice of Buddhism in the category of Highest Yoga Tantra. The practice comes to us from the Indian master Naropa who lived in the 11th century and was passed down to us in an unbroken lineage of enlightened beings. In Tantra, the concept we work with is called “taking the result into the path” which means we pretend or imagine to have the qualities we wish to develop in our being. This is considered the fastest way to manifest enlightenment. In Vajrayogini practice, we imagine the mind is total bliss and emptiness; the speech is mantra blessing all beings; the body is light like a rainbow hologram in the aspect of a beautiful young maiden. Our environment is transformed into a pure land; our activity is to make offerings to all beings and to cut through delusions of all unenlightened beings and establish them in the state of blissful emptiness blended with compassion and unconditional love for all beings.

While we go through the three weeks of this training, we can experience the cutting of our delusions, which can sometimes be somewhat painful as the ego does not easily let go of its destructive patterns.

But the good news is that this process alternates or co-exists with a very blissful mental and physical state that comes from refuge and faith in the lineage lamas combined with the blessing of reciting Vajrayogini's Mantra. It produces quite an extraordinary awareness of being; ordinary view of life drops away. The goal of so much practice is to be able to take this extraordinary self with us into the world, as an armor of bodhichitta light so we can transform all situations into the path to enlightenment.

When Ribur Rinpoche [1923 - 2006] was leaving the FPMT community in Santa Cruz, CA, he invited all of his students for his final teaching, which was a Vajrayogini initiation. He told us that he had lived amongst us now for some years and had observed how little time we actually have to meditate. Because of this, the way for us to attain enlightenment was to do the Vajrayogini practice. If we say this mantra as much as we can, and pray to be born in Vajrayogini's pure land, this is best.

When we do the “nearing” retreat, we sit in four sessions a day and do an extensive active imagination



Ven. Nyingje strums the guitar and sings from her songbook following the successful completion of the December Vajrayogini Retreat.

meditation followed by thirty to forty-five minutes of mantra recitation. The goal for this retreat is to complete 100,000 of these mantras. After we complete the mantras, we do an extensive ritual of offering substances to a fire to purify any mistakes we have made, and to create the cause for us to have realizations, good health, prosperity, etc. Then we are able to do a practice called self-initiation.

In the December 2006 Vajrayogini retreat, as many students as possible were encouraged to complete the 100,000 mantras and fire puja so they can be qualified to do this self-initiation practice. The reason for this is because in Highest Yoga Tantra, we must take an initiation or an empowerment before we can do the practice and during this initiation, we take vows and pledges of conduct. Being able to keep these vows and pledges pure is fastest path to enlightenment, so to be able to renew them on a daily basis is quite necessary, and we do this with the self-initiation practice. In this particular retreat, almost everyone completed the 100,000, even though this can be quite a challenge in only three weeks. It would be easier if there was more time, but in this day and age, even taking off three weeks from our lives is not easy! ☸

Ven. PAULA CHICHESTER has undertaken several long-term retreats, including two four-year Highest Yoga Tantra retreats. She is currently living near Vajrapani Institute, leading retreats, helping individuals with their practice, recording her retreat songs, learning BodyTalk and doing extensive daily sadhana practice.