

# DOG-TIRED AT A NYUNG-NÄ

By Ven. Jangchup Phelgyal

In mid-June 2008, in celebration of Saka Dawa, thirteen men and women (plus a floppy-eared sausage dog named Bodhi) settled into the gompa at Vajrapani Institute, California, for a six-day nyung-nä retreat. The gompa glowed from the light of dozens of votive candles while the air was sweetened with the fragrance of bunches of fresh-cut flowers. Ven. Sarah Thresher, a veteran of more than forty nyung-näs, led the retreat, explaining that the practice offered three degrees of arduousness.

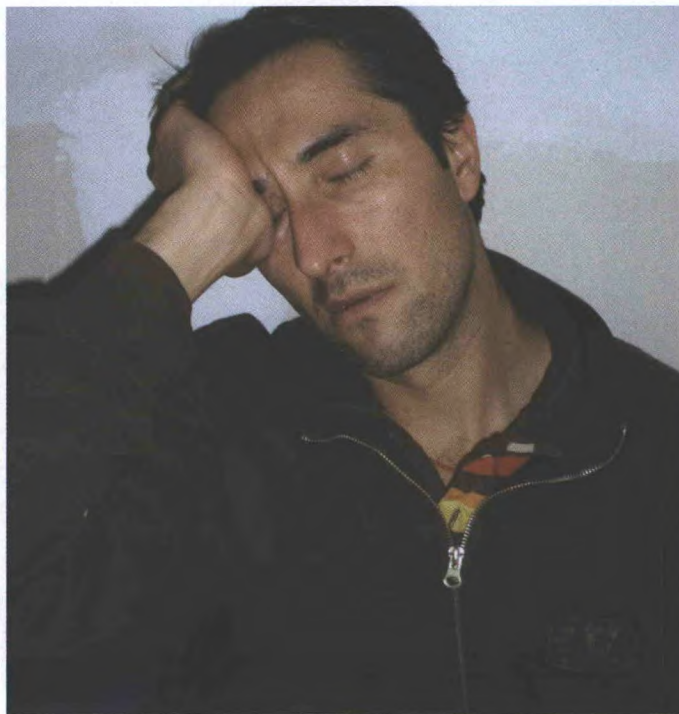
“And I’ve chosen the middle way. Not too easy,” she said in lilting English accents, “but certainly not too difficult.”

The month before, more than one hundred and twenty people had jammed inside the gompa to hear Choden Rinpoche. Now, however, a mere baker’s dozen found barely the space to do the full-length prostrations. And afterwards, when we collapsed onto cushions set around the altar, there was little room to stretch out and relieve tired, aching muscles without intruding on a neighbor’s private space.

The three nyung-näs were given in two-day sets. Each nyung-nä included dawn precepts, fasting for up to forty-two hours, long periods of silence, and absolutely no liquid intake for what was to be a period of thirty hours. The practice itself included chanting and mandala offerings, mudras, and what amounted to thousands of prostrations and recitations of mantras. Our sixteen-hour days began as early as 3:15A.M. and ended as late as 9:00P.M. It was grueling.

Tempers grew short and moods darkened. Only Bodhi, the Dachshund, seemed oblivious. Her sleeping habits, after all, had remained as unchanged as her diet. Indeed, on that last day she awoke from her afternoon nap and, as was her habit, sidled over to her water bowl where her slurping of that utterly delectable stuff sent a shiver of unholy laughter through the group. Later, that last night, our group might still have been in silence but the glances we threw at each other spoke volumes.

An exhausted Rafael Gandhi, Vajrapani’s new spiritual program coordinator, falls asleep at the end of the nyung-nä retreat.



A little whacky with discomfort and exhaustion, we were adrift, after all, in the celebrated nyung-nä purification. And yet just hours later, at dawn the next morning and the close of Saka Dawa, we broke our fast, found our voices, and heard ourselves singing praises for Ven. Sarah’s fine leadership and for the retreat itself. Nyung-nä purification may be tough, but the pay-off is sweet indeed.

“Offer another set,” we begged Ven. Sarah, “and we’ll be there!” 🌀

Ven. Jangchup Phelgyal is a member of the International Mahayana Institute (IMI), the community of monks and nuns of the FPMT. Your support of the Sangha through the Lama Yeshe Sangha Fund ensures that Buddha’s teachings are available for future generations. For further information on the programs and activities of IMI please visit [www.imisangha.org](http://www.imisangha.org)