

SUBDUING THE MIND, ACTUALIZING THE PATH

THE TIME FOR RETREAT IS NOW

If you want your retreat to be successful, you should have the right attitude toward it. ...You should feel joyful and fortunate that you have the chance to do something highly beneficial for yourself and others.

— LAMA YESHE, FROM *THE TANTRIC PATH OF PURIFICATION*



Lama Zopa Rinpoche (above) and Lama Yeshe meditating at Lawudo, Nepal, spring 1969.
Photo courtesy of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

FPMT has long demonstrated a commitment to providing opportunities for students to study the Dharma. With eight education programs, more than a hundred practice booklets, the FPMT Online Learning Center, the Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo Translator Programme, Maitripa College and regularly scheduled Dharma teachings given by qualified teachers in every FPMT center around the world, education clearly has been an organizational focus. But now, Lama Zopa Rinpoche is advising that the time has come for students to realize the truth of what they have been studying. In June 2010, he commented to Ven. Roger Kunsang, his long-time attendant and CEO of FPMT, “We are doing well studying the words. Now we need the students to experience the lam-rim.” The lived, integrated experience of Buddha’s teachings comes through practice and retreat. With this article, Mandala hopes to help inspire students towards achieving true realizations.

We need to have more retreat places to study the path. (FPMT) should have many around the world so it is easy for people and they don’t have to travel very far, and have full knowledge of how to build them, how to make them as perfect as possible for meditation. — LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THINKING RETREAT

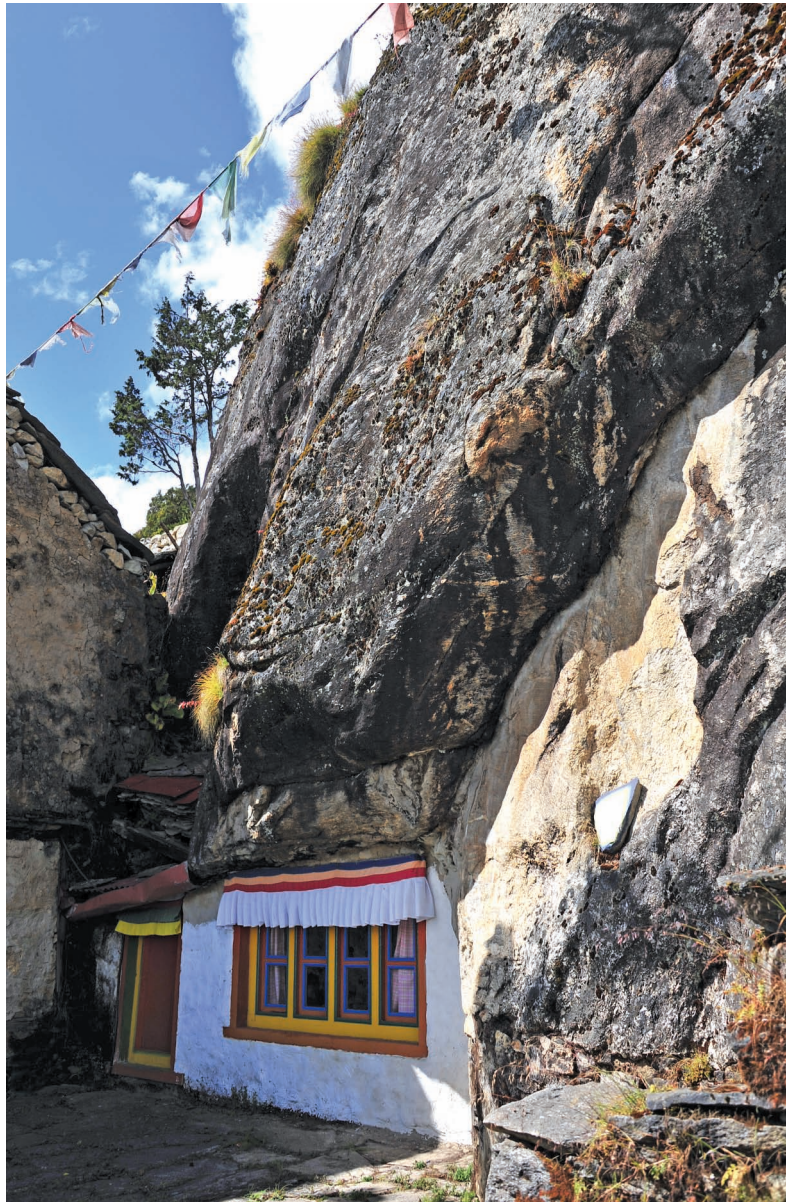
By Fabienne Pradelle

Over the past seven years that I've been at Vajrapani Institute, an FPMT retreat center in Northern California, I've watched people come in and out of retreat almost daily. As they leave, many of them appear light, relaxed, happy and clear. On the last day of a group retreat, the joy is contagious, almost giddy. Gratitude gushes out toward the teacher, fellow retreatants and Vajrapani staff. In fact, I don't recall a single last day of a group retreat that didn't have this elated atmosphere – that's out of an estimated 105.

Photographer Peter Seidler captured this effect beautifully on film in a series titled “Before and After.” His aim was to document the observable effects on practitioners after long periods of intense meditation. The photos of students' faces [see next page] were taken before and after a Shambhala *Dathün* (month-long) retreat lead by a senior teacher. In an interview with *Shambhala Times*, Peter explained, “Prior to the photograph, I asked each person to consider what they were looking for in the practice period ahead. This was on day number one. Then, at the end of the program, after approximately 30 days of retreat, I asked each participant in the project to sit in front of the same background and to consider what the experience of meditation retreat had been for them. The result is the series of photos. It's clear from the results that the person in every one of the portraits has undergone an important transformative experience.”¹

The changes in the students' faces present a compelling argument for why we'd want to do retreat. Who wouldn't want to experience these after effects? Who doesn't crave feeling light, spacious and loving? It builds up our motivation by creating a strong sense of “I want this.” This is very important because we need to be convinced.

We need convincing for (at least) two reasons: first, there are a lot of fears associated with retreat – fear of solitude, fear of not knowing what to do with oneself, fear of getting bored, fear of the unknown, misconceptions that retreat is only for advanced-yogis-and-who-am-I-to-do-retreat? and so forth.



The meditation cave of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's previous incarnation, Lawudo Lama Kunsang Yeshe, Lawudo, Nepal, September 2011.

Photo by Piero Sirianni.

Second, the busier our lives are, the harder it is to pry ourselves away. Not only is this the case in actuality – the myriad responsibilities we're juggling between our personal and work life – but also mentally because our plugged-in lifestyles and multi-tasking busyness can be sneakily addictive. If we go into retreat, isn't this like quitting cold turkey?

¹ <http://shambhalatimes.org/2011/10/20/before-and-after-portraits-from-dathun/>

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Three exemplary sets from "Before and After" by Peter Seidler (peterseidler@gmail.com)

These are powerful barriers that prevent us from seriously considering retreat as an option. Yet it is *now* that retreat is most needed for we are a culture of over-stressed, sleep-deprived beings with correspondingly tight minds.

The consequences are felt in the intimacy of our everyday lives: loss of joy, reactivity and defensiveness, inability to have perspective, feeling out of control, feeling like we're on autopilot. The Buddha talked about the vastness of our minds and yet if we can just take a moment to stop and notice, we'll see just how tight our minds have become. Lost in our churning and repetitive thoughts, we become increasingly oblivious to the feeling of breeze on our skin, the smell of spring in the air, the sound of birds above our heads, the smile of the barista making our coffee, the uplift of a co-worker cheerfully walking in the office, the squeeze of our child's hand crossing the street. All these things we miss every day from having a tight mind. Too tight to notice we are alive, with a beating heart and a precious human rebirth.

Having such tight minds is like being lost in the fog. All it takes is walking up the hill, just a bit, to get a little mental clarity. Retreat *is* the equivalent of walking up the hill just a bit. Without creating that outer space in our lives, it's really hard for the fog to dissipate, really

hard for the tight mind to loosen up and for inner space to dawn.

It doesn't take long at all for some of the inner space to dawn. It's surprising how little it takes to hear the birds and feel alive, to wake up and have the mental space to naturally take perspective. And from that space, the deeper work can begin. With pockets of outer space, we can have a vaster mind; we can get a step closer to our deepest inner nature. Without these pockets, with the lives that we lead, it's virtually impossible to rise above the fog.

Fabienne Pradelle is the director of Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California, USA.

Vajrapani Institute closes for one month each year so that staff have the opportunity to do retreat themselves. FPMT also recommends to all new and retiring center directors that they pause and do a brief retreat.

Being in long, solitary retreat is a completely different way of leading our life than what we're used to. In a nutshell, it's abandoning the eight worldly concerns (pain and pleasure, obscurity and fame, poverty and wealth, criticism and praise). When you abandon the eight worldly concerns all that's left is guidance from the guru.

If you're not worried about where your food's coming from, and you're not worried about where the money's coming from or what happens to you day to day, then all you do is wake up in the morning, do your sadhanas and guru-yoga practices, feel your guru in your heart, and then think, "Today I'm dedicating my life to benefit sentient beings."

— VEN. NYINGJE (VEN. PAULA CHICHESTER),
MANDALA MARCH 2001



Vajrapani Institute, California, USA



FINDING A QUIET SPACE AT FPMT RETREAT CENTERS

There are more than two dozen FPMT accommodations around the world where students can engage in personal or group retreat. We've compiled a representative list to help students find the conditions that will allow them to gain realizations.

Lawudo Retreat Centre, Nepal. Photo by Piero Sirianni.

Asia

INDIA

ROOT INSTITUTE is located near Mahabodhi Stupa in Bodhgaya, India, the site where the historical Buddha attained enlightenment. Retreatants benefit from the blessings of the region and of the many Buddhist masters that have meditated in the city. Group retreats are offered October to March. One may do solitary retreat at Root year round.

| www.rootinstitute.com

TUSHITA MEDITATION CENTRE sits in the forested hills above McLeod Ganj, India, the seat-in-exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Founded in 1972, Tushita is one of FPMT's oldest retreat centers, offering popular group retreats for both new and experienced students as well as hosting a pre-ordination course for those becoming ordained. Experienced meditators can also find a place at the center to do solitary retreat.

| www.tushita.info

NEPAL

GANDEN YIGA CHOZIN offers an alternative retreat option for those seeking something smaller than Kopan Monastery with simple accommodation. Located in Pokhara, Nepal, 200 kilometers (124 miles) west of Kathmandu, the center has daily meditation and yoga classes as well as weekend courses.

| www.pokharabuddhistcentre.com

KOPAN MONASTERY in Kathmandu, Nepal, is the mother center of FPMT and home to the famous one-month meditation course in November, initiated by Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and their first students in the early 1970s. Kopan offers group retreats with qualified teachers and visits from high lamas. Students at Kopan have the experience of being in an authentic Tibetan Buddhist

monastery while still receiving support from teachers and staff familiar with Western questions and concerns.

| www.kopanmonastery.com

LAWUDO RETREAT CENTRE, nestled into the side of a mountain in Solu Khumbu, Nepal, offers retreatants stunning views of the Himalayas and the opportunity to practice in a truly sacred location. Lawudo is where Lama Zopa Rinpoche's predecessor, Lawudo Lama Kunsang Yeshe, meditated and attained profound realizations. Retreatants to Lawudo need to be prepared for high-altitude and very simple living. It is an ideal location for those with a heart connection to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the region.

| www.lawudo.com

Europe

ENGLAND

LAND OF JOY is a retreat community being planned for the peaceful British countryside. The vision is to create a supportive environment for meditation and reflection with facilities for group and solitary retreat. Group retreats will be led by lamas and experienced practitioners.

| www.landofjoy.co.uk

FRANCE

CENTRE DE RETRAITE KALACHAKRA, in Saint-Cosme-en-Vairais, is less than two hours' drive from Paris. The pastoral location offers a peaceful environment for group retreats, which are scheduled throughout the year and lead by an experienced guide. Future plans include cottages for solitary retreat.

| www.centre-kalachakra.com

INSTITUT VAJRA YOGINI in Marzens, France, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Toulouse, offers a full program of

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teachings and group retreats with visiting teachers. Housed in the Château d'en Clausade, retreatants are supported by long-time practitioners and a resident geshe.

| www.institutvajrayogini.fr

NALANDA MONASTERY in Labastide-Saint-Georges, France, is FPMT's first Western monastery, offering regular study courses and pujas. A new accommodations building features a gumpa adorned with 1,000 statues of the Buddha. As this is a monastery, women are unable to sleep on Nalanda grounds, but are welcome to participate in offered events.

| www.nalanda-monastery.eu/nalanda/

THAKPA KACHOE RETREAT LAND is located in the Southern Alps of France at an altitude of 3,900 feet (1,188 meters) on 9 hectares (22 acres) of pasture and forest. The first meditation chalet is slated for completion in June 2012 and should be available for medium- and long-term retreats soon after. Thakpa Kachoe will partly support itself by growing lavender and other medicinal and aromatic plants.

| www.thakpakachoe.com



The view from Thakpa Kachoe Retreat Land, France

ITALY

ISTITUTO LAMA TZONG KHAPA (ILTK) in Pomaia, Italy, was founded in 1977. Housed in a castle close to the coast of the Ligurian Sea, ILTK hosts an annual group tantra retreat as well as offers short meditation and lam-rim retreats for students looking to complete the *Masters Program* and *Basic Program*.

| www.iltk.org

KUSHI LING RETREAT CENTRE is located in Lago di Garda in the Italian Alps and offers regular group retreats during holidays. The center also can accommodate a small number of students on solitary retreat.

| www.kushi-ling.com



Kushi Ling Retreat Centre, Italy

LATVIA

YIGA CHODZIN STUDY GROUP is located in rural Latvia and housed in a large renovated building that sits next to a lake. Yiga Chodzin offers two apartments for solitary retreat as well as space for group retreats.

| <http://xn--jigaodzin-ofb.lv>

NETHERLANDS

MAITREYA INSTITUUT EMST is in the process of leaving its country home and relocating to a former hotel in the village of Loenen. After renovations, the new location plans to open its doors to retreatants in autumn 2012.

| www.maitreya.nl

SPAIN

O.SEL.LING CENTRO DE RETIROS is situated in the Alpujarra mountains near Granada, Spain, far from villages and with magnificent views. The center offers a program of group retreats. There are also 10 small houses for solitary retreat.

| www.oseling.com

TUSHITA RETREAT CENTER in Arbúcies, Spain, is in the heart of the Parc Natural del Montseny, 85 kilometers (35 miles) from Barcelona. The center offers group retreats with qualified teachers.

| www.budismotibetano.net/tushita/

We beginners in retreat are travelers in a foreign land. We have the guide-book of the Dharma to tick-off our experiences, pleasant or unpleasant, according to the teachings, and we must then always move on, push further. Avoid thinking "I can't do this." You CAN do it and you MUST do it. You may not get another opportunity for many lifetimes.

— THUBTEN GYATSO (ADRIAN FELDMANN)

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The whole purpose of a retreat place is to subdue the mind and to actualize the lam-rim up to enlightenment. It is a place for a holiday from negative karma, a holiday from the three poisonous minds and the self-cherishing thought, a holiday from the self-grasping of the person and phenomena, a holiday from the wrong concepts: non-devotional thought towards the guru up to the subtle dual view of white, increasing, attainment. – LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Transcribed by Ven. Holly Ansett, very lightly edited by Claire Isitt, March 2007.

North America

MEXICO

SERLINGPA RETREAT CENTER in Zitácuaro, Mexico, is located near Monarch butterfly reserves. Serlingpa offers regular retreats and workshops.

| <http://calendarioretiroserlingpa.blogspot.com>

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BUDDHA AMITABHA PURE LAND, which sits on 447 acres (181 hectares) in rural Washington State, is being developed as a place for senior FPMT Sangha and long-time senior lay students to do long-term retreat or live in retirement with retreat conditions. Lama Zopa Rinpoche's personal retreat house is on part of the property, which was acquired in 2000. The land is near Riverside, Washington, 260 miles (418 kilometers) east of Seattle.

| www.buddha-amitabha-pure-land.org



Lama Zopa Rinpoche checking where to build his retreat house on his first visit to Buddha Amitabha Pure Land, Washington, USA, 2002. Photo by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

LAND OF CALM ABIDING rests among the remote hills and mountain streams of the Los Padres National Forest on the central coast of California. Simple retreat cabins, situated on the 485-acre (196-hectare) property, are available for seasoned spiritual practitioners interested in engaging in long retreat.

| <http://landofcalmabiding.org>

LAND OF MEDICINE BUDDHA (LMB) is situated on 108 acres (44 hectares) in Soquel, California, near Santa Cruz. LMB offers personal and group retreat opportunities, including a program of teachings and retreats with visiting teachers. The center, which was founded as an FPMT center in 1989, features many holy objects, including statues, traditional murals and large prayer wheels.

| www.landofmedicinebuddha.org

MILAREPA CENTER in Barnet, Vermont, occupies 273 acres (110 hectares) of land in the Green Mountains of northern Vermont. The center offers a program of group retreats throughout the year. Facilities include a converted barn, four private retreat cabins, flower and vegetable gardens, and acres of hiking trails.

| <http://milarepacenter.org>

VAJRAPANI INSTITUTE in Boulder Creek, California, was established in 1977. The retreat center sits on 75 acres (30 hectares) of redwood forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Vajrapani offers both private meditation cabins for solitary retreat and many opportunities for group retreat.

| www.vajrapani.org

Pacific Region

AUSTRALIA

ATISHA CENTRE, founded in 1981, is nestled in the quiet native bushlands of Eaglehawk, Victoria, near the site of the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, currently under construction, and Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery. The center offers private retreat rooms and a program of group retreats as well as regular teachings and pujas.

| www.atishacentre.org.au

CHENREZIG INSTITUTE is one of the oldest Tibetan Buddhist centers in the West, established in 1974 and located in Eudlo, Queensland, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) north of Brisbane. The center offers a full program of teachings, practices and group retreats as well as private retreat huts. Chenrezig is also the site of the Garden of Enlightenment, a lush tropical memorial garden featuring

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a large stupa approximately 33 feet (10 meters) high with seven other smaller stupas.

| www.chenrezig.com.au

DE-TONG LING RETREAT CENTRE is an isolated Buddhist retreat center situated on 1,300 acres (526 hectares) of wilderness at the western end of Kangaroo Island off the South Australian coast. The center primarily provides accommodations for solitary retreat, but also hosts an annual 10-day group retreat. The remote location offers spacious vistas over the bush and sea.

| www.detongling.org



Cabin at De-Tong Ling Retreat Centre, Kangaroo Island, Australia

KUNSANG YESHE RETREAT CENTRE is located in Australia's majestic Blue Mountains two hours west of Sydney. The center, named after Lama Zopa Rinpoche's previous incarnation, offers non-residential retreats, regular teachings, classes and events for all ages.

| www.kunsangyeshe.com.au

MALAYASIA

RINCHEN JANGSEM LING RETREAT CENTRE, established in 2005 and located on a high hilltop in Triang, Pahang, hosts individual and group retreats as well as regular teachings and pujas. The grounds feature a 25-foot (7.6-meter) Kuan Yin (Chenrezig) and 6-foot (1.8-meter) White Dzambhala statues in a beautifully landscaped garden.

| www.jangsemling.com

NEW ZEALAND

MAHAMUDRA CENTRE, established in 1981 in Colville Valley, sits on eight acres (three hectares) surrounded by meadows, woods and the imposing hills of New Zealand's Coromandel Range. The center hosts regular courses taught by visiting lamas and teachers, group retreats and solitary retreats.

| www.mahamudra.org.nz



Mahamudra Centre, New Zealand

RESOURCES FOR RETREAT

FROM FPMT EDUCATION SERVICES

Four Fundamental Retreats: A Teaching on the Essence of Retreat by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Heart Advice for Retreat by Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo and Lama Zopa Rinpoche

FPMT Retreat Prayer Book: Prayers and Practices for Retreat.

This 357-page spiral-bound book includes all of the daily practices advised by Lama Zopa Rinpoche for retreat and has been used during retreats with Rinpoche.

| These materials are available through the Foundation Store. Visit shop.fpmt.org.

FROM LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Online Advice Book has several examples of essential advice from Rinpoche regarding many aspects of retreat.

| Please go to www.lamayeshe.com and search, "Online Advice Book."

ACTUALIZATING THE LAM-RIM UP TO ENLIGHTENMENT



Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Atisha Centre,
Australia, April 2011. Photo by George Manos.

FPMT students have the opportunity to do retreat right now in over two dozen retreat facilities around the world. With Lama Zopa Rinpoche's increased emphasis on retreat and practice, the opportunities and the support are growing. In addition, advances in technology allow students at home and in their Dharma centers to receive instruction through FPMT's Online Learning Center with educational programs like *Living in the Path* and through innovative uses of steaming video, online discussion forums and teleconferencing. FPMT's sincere commitment to practice and retreat seeks to ensure that current and future generations of Dharma students will be able to understand Buddha's precious teachings in an experiential way and to transform their minds accordingly in order to be beneficial to all. ♦

Mandala's coverage of retreat continues online! We have created a retreat resource page at mandalamagazine.org/retreat where you can find complete interviews with Vens. Lhundup Nyingje, Thubten Gyatso and René Feusi about their experiences in retreat, insightful stories from retreat caretakers describing the crucial support they provide, and much more.

Also visit www.fpmt.org/centers/retreat.html, for a listing of retreat centers and upcoming retreats.



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