

Mayra Rocha Sandoval Completes Three-Year Lam-rim Retreat in Mexico City

Although students of Lama Zopa Rinpoche have successfully completed three-year deity retreats, having a student finish a three-year lam-rim retreat is extremely rare. As Rinpoche emphasizes the lam-rim as the foundation for achieving enlightenment, Mandala rejoices in the accomplishment of long-time student Mayra Rocha Sandoval, who carried out a three-year lam-rim retreat on the advice of Rinpoche in her home in bustling Mexico City. Mayra wrapped up the retreat in March 2013.

Mandala: How did you come to decide to do a three-year lam-rim retreat? And how did your family and friends react?

Mayra: The decision to do the lam-rim retreat arose in April 2008 during our dear teacher Lama Zopa Rinpoche's visit to Mexico. In an interview, I asked Rinpoche to please help me make this life really meaningful. Rinpoche checked [by divination] and told me that it would be very good to do a three-year lam-rim retreat. When I asked him where to do it, he responded, "In Mexico, in your house." My house is right in the center of Mexico City, a rather noisy place and with many challenges. My family and friends were very surprised upon hearing the news.

Mandala: What preparations did you have to make before you began?

Mayra: In May 2009 during the 100 Million Mani Retreat at Institut Vajra Yogini in France, I received Rinpoche's instructions for the retreat. The main preparations indicated were some preliminary practices: 100,000 tsa-tsas and 30,000 Dorje Khadro fire pujas, which I completed at Nalanda Monastery that same year.

I returned to Mexico to set up my small gumpa and prepare the apartment for the retreat. A month before I planned to begin the retreat, however, I had a car accident on the road in Aguascalientes when I was going to some teachings. Fortunately, I had only minor injuries and a nervous breakdown that only delayed the beginning of the retreat a little.

Finally on April 14, 2010, I was able to begin the retreat, thanks to the extremely valuable support I received from Vens. Champa Shenpen, Paloma Alba, Nerea Basurto and Begoña Mendizabal. That support was incredibly useful for me before and during the retreat. I thank them with all my heart.

Mandala: During the retreat, what unexpected challenges and successes arose? How did you handle or solve your challenges?

Mayra: Studying and meditating on the lam-rim gave me much inspiration and happiness; I enjoyed it immensely. But as is to be expected, there were obstacles and unexpected events. The

strongest and most painful was receiving the news of our dear guru Lama Zopa Rinpoche's stroke [in 2011] during the retreat.

One significant challenge I had to resolve was the problem of water leaking into the gumpa that caused damage to the gumpa's ceiling. A good friend, Ovidio Lozano, for whom I'm profoundly thankful, offered me extraordinary help in the repairs. The other challenge was to learn to endure and work during the majority of the retreat with the famous *lung*. Also, experiencing several earthquakes was like receiving teachings on impermanence and death in action.

Mandala: What supported your practice or helped you get through difficult points during the three years?

Mayra: What helped me during the whole retreat to overcome difficulties was to offer everything that occurred to me to the complete recovery of our dear teacher Lama Zopa Rinpoche, everyday making prayers to be able to finish the retreat and to offer it up. This gave me the courage to continue forward. Also, remembering that the retreat would be beneficial to many beings, especially in Mexico in these difficult and violent times, helped me.

At the end, Rinpoche checked that the most suitable thing to close the retreat was to do a pacifying fire puja with Geshe Tenzin Loden at Institut Vajra Yogini in France. There were also obstacles to overcome at the end of the retreat: I had a lot of mental fatigue, lung and obstacles with the flights. But finally, and only by the blessings of the precious guru "who never abandons you," I arrived in France and carried out the fire puja with auspicious signs according to Geshe Loden.

Afterward, I was invited by my dear friend Isabel Arocena to rest at Centro de Retiros Tushita in Spain, where I received from all my dear vajra brothers and sisters support and affection that I am very, very thankful for.

The most important teaching during the whole retreat was the great importance of guru devotion and the experience of living in that devotion.

No, it wasn't an easy retreat, but it taught me a lot. I will value enormously the privilege to have met in this life a guru as qualified as our dear teacher Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who is a living buddha, and the blessed opportunity to study the holy Dharma



*Clockwise: Tibetan Bell by Sergemi;
Mayra Rocha Sandoval, Mexico City, July
2013; Mayra's gompal, where she completed
an in-house three-year lam-rim retreat.
Photos by Harald Molina.*

in these difficult times. The retreat also taught me that it is possible to overcome environmental conditions and difficulties using the tools that the guru offers us.

Mandala: How has the retreat changed your practice and daily life? What are your current plans?

Mayra: Well, now in my daily life I intend to make the most of my time in the best way, frequently remembering impermanence. Also,

I notice that I can perceive more easily when delusions arise in my mind and work with them.

I have the intention to continue studying and prepare myself to be able to guide some preliminary practices in the future and in this way be able to be of benefit to others.

Mayra Rocha Sandoval has studied Buddhism for over 20 years. Her gompal was once the meeting place for the former Jangchubling, FPMT's first study group in Mexico City.