

Voice of Clear Light

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Ligmincha's First Silent Retreat

A Positive Experience for All



Afternoon practice at Winter Retreat had ended a few minutes early, and everyone was lined up in the dining hall patiently awaiting the evening meal. One of the cooks came out of the kitchen to pronounce dinner ready, and she reminded everyone that one of the containers of mashed potatoes was for "vegans only, please." Everyone in the room heard her easily, because no one else was talking.

This winter, for the first time at Serenity Ridge, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche led a silent retreat. From the morning of Dec. 27 until New Year's Day, the 93 participants at the Winter Retreat were asked not to speak unless absolutely necessary.

"My feeling is that it's going very well," said Rinpoche on the next-to-last day of the retreat. "It's hard to tell exactly because everybody is in silence! But it looks like it's going well."

It was a sentiment that seemed to be largely shared by retreat participants, whose responses to a retreat survey indicated a 94 percent satisfaction rate. "I can't tell you how much I benefited," commented one participant.

Retreat participant John Swift echoed this sentiment. He said Rinpoche's teachings differed from other silent retreats he had attended in various Buddhist traditions. "The instruction I had received before was much simpler: come back to silence, come back to sensation," he said. Describing Rinpoche's way of teaching as "more thorough," Swift noted, "It makes possible right speech, right thought, right attention. There's much more ground for that."

Commenting on silent retreats in general, Rinpoche explained, "Sometime it looks wonderful; other times it looks kind of heavy—a little blocked and full of effort. If a person is not prepared well, silent practice can be difficult, but if a person is prepared well, silence is a very, very beautiful practice."

Rinpoche said the Winter Retreat was chosen as the first silent retreat because he believed many experienced students who had completed the five-year teaching cycle of the Experiential Transmission of the Zhang Zhung the previous winter would be returning. He also said there will "absolutely" be more silent retreats at Serenity Ridge. "We are going to figure out how to do it every year," he noted.

Planning has begun to incorporate silence into the three weeks of the 2014 Summer Retreat, with periods of silence during part of each week. Other future retreats also will incorporate silence. Comments and suggestions from this winter's end-of-retreat survey will be considered to help make future silence during retreats even more successful.

This article was written by Matthew Conover, an intern at Serenity Ridge.

