



International Sangha News ☐ ☐ ☐

Students Report From Around the World

Sharings From Retreatants at Serenity Ridge

From Oct. 6 to 10, 2010, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche taught at Serenity Ridge about “Sleep of Clear Light: The Practice of Sleep Yoga.” Students received instructions in how to bring more lucidity to both their waking and sleeping hours. A particularly memorable part of the instruction involved staying awake all one night and into the next day while continuing to engage in regular meditation practice. At day’s end, after finally drifting into a welcome deep sleep, practitioners were awoken twice in the night by designated sangha members who offered gentle assistance in the sleep yoga practice.

Below are a few sharings from retreatants in their own words and photographs.

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Serenity Ridge view. Photograph by Henry Kantel

I will always cherish the time I spent at Ligmincha last week. The teachings from Rinpoche, whose beautiful book inspired me years ago, and whose lucidity and love are continually inspiring. The interactions with other retreat-goers, wonderful seekers from all over the country, with so many profound experiences, questions, insights. The sweet little room, the awesome tea selection, the amazing food. Thank you!—

Henry K.

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Koi pond at Serenity Ridge. Photo by Rose Lettiere

Being at the retreat my sense of peace has expanded. The whole experience has been transformative and special. My deepest respect and gratitude to Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. —
Rose L.

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Photograph by Rose Lettiere

I have never heard a voice as beautiful as the voice I heard that night — twice! — when I was awakened from a deep sleep. The voice asked me if I had experienced the sleep of clear light. "No," I answered sleepily, without opening my eyes. I wanted only to hear that voice, the most ethereal and pure voice I ever remember hearing in all my life. My friends at the retreat laughed when I told them afterward that it was like the voice of an elvish princess from "The Lord of the Rings."

Then the owner of the voice asked me, "Are you having samsaric dreams?," and I said yes. She said "Okay! Then I will sing you the Guru Yoga prayer." And she sang those four Tibetan lines, and that's when I dared to open one eye, and all I saw was a profile. I heard a most sincere and excellent chanting of that prayer with which we'd begun every practice, all week long. And it just filled my heart with joy. It was like the goddess herself — the khandro! — was singing. And then I went back to sleep.

As we were practicing in the gompas the day before, I had felt like I was not a very good student, because whenever I tried to meditate in my exhausted state I just went off into dreams. But then I remembered something Marcy (our practice leader) had told us, about how she keeps her eyes open at half mast when she meditates, so that's what I did, and suddenly everything turned around! I saw that the physical exhaustion of staying up all night was my best friend because it offered only two choices: falling asleep or maintaining the intention to focus in meditation. I found an open space between those two contending forces and occupied it ... and that space is still with me, even after the retreat is over. I feel connected through that space to

Rinpoche, to his students, and to the lineage.

All my thanks go out to Rinpoche and Serenity Ridge and Marcy and to all the rest who made this thing possible. "May we swiftly achieve the complete buddhahood of the three bodies!" — *Joe S.*

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For me this retreat was a magical transformation from inner randomness to whole joy and comfort. It also brought me to another level of sensitivity of the inner channels and chakras. The power of practices and my intense personal experiences were so far beyond what I ever might have expected at the time of registering for the retreat. — *Serge M.*

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All of the Teachings are so precious and the entire time on retreat with Rinpoche is so magical it is difficult to pick just one thing to share to convey the precious magic ...

Perhaps the absolute sweetest thing to happen to me since coming to Bon generally was when the Dakini came into the room, rang a little bell, asked about dreams and sleep, then sang Guru Yoga before leaving. I was on the top bunk with my head towards the door and for some reason my little electric candle went out so the Dakini probably did not see me.

Sounding the conch before the teaching and/or practice sessions, closing out the kitchen at the end of the day, tending the fire all night, helping with the Webcast, I could go on and on ... not to mention the Teachings themselves — in particular the blue *HUNG* at the heart chakra, this story works better in person. — *Gerry H.*

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Ever since I first heard the refined, subtle, sublime and rarified Dream and Sleep Yoga teachings around 12 years ago I had relegated them to a future lifetime! My ability to visualize has never been up to my ideals and sleep has eluded me for most of my adult life! I felt that practices involving my dream and sleep worlds were not likely to be a part of my path through this life.

So it was with a somewhat casual attitude that I agreed with my wife that I should attend the 2010 Fall Retreat at Serenity Ridge only a couple of days before the retreat was to begin. Rinpoche's first teaching at this retreat significantly changed my regard for these teachings! When our guru stated that "the purpose of sleep yoga is self awareness" I knew that I could find a foothold and direct my attention and efforts toward that goal. The importance of establishing a practice relationship to my dream and sleep realms was also taught in that first session when Rinpoche stated "if we recognize the clear light in our sleep we increase the possibility of recognizing our true nature in the bardo." The sequence of falling asleep is the same sequence

of dissolution through which we pass in the process of dying.

One of the main themes presented in this teaching focused on our identity, who we think, feel and experience our “self” to be. Our suffering and pain become who we think we are. We enjoy sharing our pain-stories and find those of others equally fascinating. In the practice sessions at this retreat we were encouraged to locate and experience as clearly as possible our sense of self, our ego, and then to explore the process of clearing and releasing those knotted and tangled energies that compose the conglomeration we feel that we are.

Rinpoche taught us that what we really are is an infinite sphere of light and that changing our focus from our tightly held ego to a deeper, more relaxed, expansive and more basic focus is the practice. I wrote in my notes: “In sleep our ego is less active and the experience of clear light has a better chance of being recognized. It is possible to miss it. The experience of clear light is without location and very spacious. It can be frightening. Knowing that the clear light is our true nature is very important. We normally grasp our ego and cling to that identity. In grasping who we think that we are we miss our true nature.”

It was emphasized that we should strive to experience stillness of our body, silence of our energy and the space from which our thoughts arise and to which they return. We were warned that this can be difficult because stillness, silence and spaciousness do not include a sense-of-self. Ego is not nourished there. But we learned that the efforts we make toward establishing stillness, silence and spaciousness are well worth it because these are steps we can take toward the clear light. In the experience of clear light perfection is found as well as unshakable confidence.

At this retreat our teacher presented his expansive perspective on teachings which are profound and precious. The practices he presented are effective and inspiring. Our umdze did her usual excellent job, with gentle firmness guiding us toward deep stillness, silence and spaciousness. The gathering of students was a delightful bunch of colorful characters. It was fun for this old goat to be at Serenity Ridge with a few dear old friends and to meet many new ones as well!

In conclusion I must share that my life is now fulfilled since I finally experienced a lovely Serenity Ridge khandro serenading me with our precious Guru Yoga prayer as I lay in bed at 3 a.m.! What an uplifted, rarefied and amazing moment that was!

Please be sure to attend this teaching when it is offered again. You will be glad that you did!

With deep gratitude and sincere appreciation — *Bob A.*

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Overall this practice greatly expands my recognition of “presence” during the waking state and that is a very blessed thing. This aware spaciousness which appears as all these states. I wrote this poem about the retreat and would like to share it:

Being Sleep

*Sleep
And
Waking*

Being

— *Teala S.*

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Let's put it this way: Gazing at the sky is a whole different thing for me now. In five days it felt like I became a different man, more respectful and mindful of my nightly sacred sleep-time journey, and more consciously aware in the waking state. I was not prepared for the difficulty, subtlety, and nuance of the beautiful clear-light practices. I gained a lot from my five days of group practice and intensive learning, and I'm deeply grateful for my time at Serenity Ridge. Thank you teacher, assistants, staff, and fellow participants. I feel deep gratitude for the 17,000-year unbroken Bon tradition of teachings. New tools in hand, and with consistent home practice, I now have well-founded hope of a more joyful life and "lucid death process." Whether death comes a callin' later today, or fifty years from now, I'm ready to accept her consciously, and peacefully. I got what I came for, and much more. Call me "Giggling Buddha." —
Walter W.