

Shravasti Meditation

September 4 – 6, 2020, the International Drikung Kagyu Council Taiwan invited His Holiness Tinley Lhundup to host a 3-day **Shravasti Meditation** retreat for 117 participants. Each of the Drikung Kagyu centers in Taiwan selected 8 participants to attend this retreat.

During the 3-day retreat, retreatants woke up at 5am. At 6am, retreatants started their morning yoga practice under the guidance of His Holiness on the outside lawn. At 8:30am, the first mediation session started. Three 2 or 3-hour mediation sessions were hosted each day, with one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and one in the evening. All retreatants were required to remain in silence throughout the retreat and no meals were provided after lunch.

During the 3-day retreat, His Holiness provided answers to the five most commonly asked questions regarding **Shravasti Meditation**.

1. Why do we need **Shravasti Meditation**?

Among the three wisdom tools (i.e., listening, contemplation, and meditation) that the Buddha recommended, meditation is what we lack most. Many people dedicate their entire life studying Buddhism but fail to practice what the Buddha taught. There are many meditation approaches. For example, the common and uncommon preliminaries. During the traditional 3-year retreat, various approaches are also taught. However, most people mainly focus on reaching the required numbers while neglecting the essence of these practices: to keep our mind undisturbed.

Many of you likely have attended teachings on Dzogchen or Mahamudra. However, are you able to meditate with a single-pointed mind for 10 minutes? What about 5 minutes? Meditation is not easy. You should start with calm-abiding to stabilize your mind. So, you come to this retreat not to receive teachings, but to engage in meditation practice and increase your ability to stabilize your mind.

The **Shravasti Meditation** is an integrated meditation approach. It is based on the Anapanasati Sutta (Mindfulness of Breathing), which was taught directly by the Buddha. We should go directly to the source and study the Buddha's words. However, all lineages of Tibetan Buddhism favor Tengyur, the commentaries and treatises, over teachings that the Buddha directly presented.

1. Why is this approach called **Shravasti Meditation**?

First, the Anapanasati Sutta was taught in Shravasti, India. Our texts were directly translated from the Pali texts. Also, in the Vinaya section of the Kangyur, which contains the Buddha's earliest teachings, **Shravasti Meditation** approaches are mentioned. Second, I teach Dhammapada in Shravasti, India in winters. Meditation retreats are also hosted there.

1. Is **Shravasti Meditation** the same as Goenka's Vipassana?

Many people think that **Shravasti Meditation** and Goenka's Vipassana are similar. Although I have not personally attended Goenka's retreat, a few Khenpos and Western disciples attended it. I asked them in details regarding their experiences and learned that Goenka's Vipassana mainly focuses on the Mindfulness of Feelings. On the other hand, the Anapanasati Sutta includes practices on all Four Foundations of Mindfulness (i.e., body, feeling, mind and phenomena). Each of the applications consists of four exercises corresponding to the four levels of meditation.

4. What are the merits of practicing **Shravasti Meditation**?

The Anapanasati Sutta explicitly explains the merits of its proposed approaches, “Bhikkhus, this is how mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit...fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness...that is how the four foundations of mindfulness, developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven enlightenment factors...that is how the seven enlightenment factors, developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation.”

In addition, the Thirty-Seven Factors of Enlightenment also states that these practices are paths to liberation.

5. Is **Shravasti Meditation** a Theravada approach?

Scholars like to distinguish “this is a Theravada approach”, “that is a Mahayana approach”. However, as practitioners, we should not think like this. The Mahavaipulya Mahasamghata Sutra, which is a Mahayana sutra from the Kangyur, consists many explanations on how to practice the mindfulness of breathing. It also clearly states that these approaches are shared by both Theravada and Mahayana traditions. In fact, they are also part of the Vajrayana’s practice.

The Vajrayana tradition has many teachings on the practice of wind, chakras and channels. For example, when anger arises, wind is concentrated in the right channel; when desire arises, wind is concentrated in the left channel; and when ordinary people are in the state of ignorance, wind is concentrated in the central channel.

Each breath takes about 4 seconds. Every 24 hours, we breathe around 21600 times. In most of these breaths, we breathe in karma wind with thoughts. Every 32 breaths, we breathe in wisdom wind that goes directly into the central channel. The purpose of mediation is to transform karmic wind into wisdom wind and make wisdom wind flow into the central channel. In this way, the mind will stop wondering and suffering. As a result, liberation will be attained.

Phagmodrupa once asked Gampopa, “why are we in samsara?” Gampopa replied, “because our wind is not going to the central channel.” The Anapanasati Sutta is like a key in Samsara that opens the central channel, which leads to liberation. It is a key approach that is shared by all three traditions (i.e., Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana).

On September 6th, the last day of the retreat, His Holiness responded questions that retreatants encounter. The 3-day **Shravasti Meditation** retreat was fully accomplished.