

## **The Garchen Institute**

### **General Guidelines for Retreatants**

His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche has said that one of the primary purposes of The Garchen Institute is to serve as a place for practitioners to do retreat. In order for a retreat to bear fruit, Rinpoche has instructed that participants must seclude body, speech, and mind, and the Institute is a most excellent place in which to do this.

*Seclusion of body* is accomplished by retreating in a solitary retreat hut or retreat cabin and coming into the common areas of the Institute (temple, stupa, kitchen, and bathrooms) only for designated activities.

In addition to one's hut or cabin, practice may be done in the temple or stupa when teaching events or rental groups are not in progress (except for those doing a 100-day retreat in preparation for 3-year retreat)

Retreatants engaged in some types of retreats may register to attend teachings with the Retreat Master's permission, but *silence must still be maintained*.

Retreatants should make any necessary purchase of retreat materials from the bookstore prior to going into retreat.

Retreatants staying in a simple hut come to the kitchen and dining room to prepare meals and to conduct essential communications via email and/or phone, spending as little time as possible on each of these activities. At Garchen Rinpoche's request, food shopping is done by the Institute staff or volunteers, so that retreatants may remain in seclusion and not leave the center except to receive urgent medical treatment.

*Seclusion of speech* is accomplished by observing silence at all times throughout one's retreat (with the exception of sadhana and mantra recitation in one's hut).

Except during teaching events and rental groups, in the central kitchen and dorm kitchen, the hours of 11 am – 12 pm and 4-5 pm are reserved for retreatants staying in simple huts, and silence is maintained. Anyone at the Institute may use the dining room during the silence hours, but they also will observe silence.

In order to keep one's samaya of silence, if any essential retreat support communication needs to be made during one's retreat (no other communications may be made), a note may be written and placed in the plastic sleeve on the office door for staff. Notes and food shopping lists should all begin with OM and end

with SVAHA to keep the communication within the stream of mantra, thereby maintaining one's samaya.

Phones and computer use are strongly discouraged, but if necessary, can be used in the last several weeks of one's retreat, only if the retreat is 100 days or longer, or there is an emergency situation.

Silence is also maintained by retreatants who attend teaching events.

*Seclusion of mind* is accomplished by practicing mindful awareness at all times.

Overall, Rinpoche has said that silence is one of the most important aspects of retreat practice. Lama Thubten Nima (Gape Lama) shares that according to the scriptures, it is far more beneficial to recite mantra for one day while observing silence than to recite mantra for an extended period of time while engaging in any form of ordinary speech. He said that when you engage in ordinary speech while in retreat practice, all of the virtue accumulated in your practice is minimized.

Lama Thubten Nima acknowledges that the practice of silence can sometimes be difficult, as practice often is, but silence must be observed in order to remain in retreat at the Institute. To help you prepare for the silent retreat environment, please contemplate the following instructions on "essential speech" from His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche:

"Have awareness of questioning yourself each time you are about to say something. Does this really have to be said? You should never engage in idle talk, harsh speech, or divisive speech. You should think twice when it comes to chatting about things that are not relevant, such as stories of things that happened in the past. Even if you start to speak about the future, you should ask: Is this relevant? If you are able to maintain such awareness, it will be to one's own advantage [at all times]."

The practice of silence is based in an orientation of inwardness, of solitude, of letting go of one's normal need for social acknowledgment and interaction. It is very rare to have an opportunity to do this, and the outcome can be profound.

The lamas of The Garchen Institute and the staff are here to support your retreat practice, and we welcome your suggestions.

For all retreats of two weeks or longer, retreatants are required to meet with the Short-Term Retreat Master, Khenpo Tenzin, prior to beginning their retreat. Khenpo Tenzin will discuss what you will practice in retreat (one must commit to at least four two-hour sessions of seated meditation/sadhana practice per day), the length of the sessions, the text to practice, etc., or discuss practice instructions brought from other lamas.

For retreats shorter than two weeks, retreatants may meet with the Retreat Master if they wish, but it is not required. All retreats, regardless of duration, must have structured sessions and be conducted in silence.

*May all be virtuous!*