

RECONCILIATION:

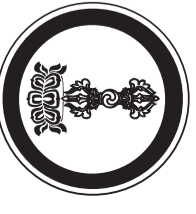
A Practice of Communication



RIGPA

www.rigpa.org

*On account of the prayers it contains, this booklet should be treated with respect.
If you should wish to dispose of it, please burn it rather than throw it away.*



RIGPA

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Running-order for confession practice

Facilitator welcomes, reminds of the purpose of the practice, and of the 1st Noble Principle; a moment's quiet contemplation of this follows.

Motivation prayer

Invoking the Lama

Taking Refuge (from LNN) 3x

Prostrations 21x

Generation of Bodhicitta (from LNN) 3x

Silent or guided Mahayana practice (usually 'exchanging self & others' or 'self-tonglen')

Generation of Bodhicitta 3x

Open Vajrasattva

100 syl 21x

6 syl 100x

Facilitator reminds everyone of 2nd or 3rd Noble Principles & 4 powers for purification

Appreciation (*group practices loving-kindness during*)

Confession (*group practices tonglen during each*)

after each confession:-

Confession prayer (individual)

100-syll. mantra 1x (group)

after all confessions completed:-

Confession prayer (group)

Purification prayer from the heart of Vajrasattva, or simply

100 syll. mantra 3x if time is short (group)

Dam Drip Nyepa Kunsel 3x, last line 21x (group)

close Vajrasattva

Tea!

Resolution

Dedication & SR long-life prayer

RECONCILIATION: *A Practice of Communication*

BACKGROUND

Any community living and/or working together will experience tensions due to miscommunication. Sometimes people imagine that spiritual communities will somehow be immune from this; in fact, they are *particularly* prone. Or people worry that such problems arising means that the teachings are not authentic, or the students are not applying them. The latter is often the case but not always, since it is characteristic of the deep healing process of authentic practice, and especially of Vajrayana & Dzogchen practice, that it causes all our samsaric patterns to be exposed ever more nakedly. Just as what distinguishes a practitioner is how they react to experiences, what characterises a genuine spiritual community is, rather, how such problems are dealt with.

If not recognised and worked with, these tensions can block both the work of the group and the spiritual progress of the individuals concerned. As more and more energy becomes 'locked up' in unskilful attempts to 'resolve' the situation - usually in terms of ourselves 'winning'/'being 'right' and someone else 'losing'/'being 'wrong' - a fertile ground for further aggression & territoriality, projection, grasping, confusion, & exhaustion is generated; a classic samsaric pattern that continuously feeds back upon itself, leading nowhere.

However, if recognised, acknowledged and worked with, such situations can become a powerful basis for students to work with their own patterns of self-centredness and lack of authentic self-confidence - a fertile ground for transformation.

Buddhist communities, particularly monastic communities, have always recognised the inevitability of such situations arising, and their potential for both confusion and transformation. Over time, a tradition of how to work skilfully with such situations was developed which continues to be applied, refined and developed in lay and monastic Buddhist communities all over the world.

Such skills are perhaps particularly necessary for Buddhist communities trying to integrate the teachings in a Western context. The encounter between this great living wisdom-tradition and a society characterised by speed and aggression is bound to produce tensions and misunderstandings. As a generalisation, it could perhaps also be said that Westerners tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships much more than do practitioners coming from an Oriental culture. It is therefore foreseeable that we might more tend to play out our confusions in the context of our relationships.

This practice is closely modelled on those used for community-building and conflict-resolution in the earliest Buddhist monasteries, and still in use today. It was developed through research into the practices used in a number of contemporary western Buddhist communities, of which the work done in Thich Nhat Hanh's and Chagdud Tulku's, and at Amaravati (a Theravadin monastery in Britain) proved particularly valuable. Some tools were also adapted from the Native American tradition of tribal group-meetings, from Quaker practice, and from the 'circle-work' developed at the Family Life Center in California.

This model has now been used weekly by students in Rigpa's one-year retreat at Dzogchen Beara for the last 3 years, during which time it has been further refined and structured. It has rapidly developed into one of the richest and most important practices in the retreat. Through its use weekly, students have found their confidence in themselves and the teachings deepened, and a real sense growing of the community as both a supportive environment for their personal development, and a powerful working context in which to practice integrating the teachings into their lives & relationships - an authentic taste of why 'Sangha' is one of the Three Jewels in which we take refuge.

Dam drip nyepa kunsel

(Mantra for the removal of all defilements of samaya)

om

**utsitaya torya torya soha
uta mitaya torya torya soha
mönta krotaya torya torya soha
ako krotaya torya torya soha
abhu krotaya torya torya soha
uta shataya torya torya soha
eling etaya torya torya soha
lamön taya torya torya soha
ené piné taya torya torya soha**

**om bhurkur maha pranaye bhurtsi bhurku
bimalé**

utsukma krodha hung phat torya torya soha

Confession Prayer

(from 'Knowing One Liberates All', by Jamgön Kongtrul Lödro Thaye)

ho
tham ché dorje ché dang chamdral te
dewar sheg pé lob mar dam no mé
kun kyang thun par kyö pé damtsig la
nyam nyi dang lé ne nye yerme kyang
lu ngag nam par dag pé tsul tsam du
zhung lé nyam shing thug dang gal wa nam
nam dag sam pé ni né tsig di shag
dzin mé ngang du zö par shé dzö la
rangshin dag pé tsang pa tsal du sol
ah ah ah

All of us are vajra-brothers and sisters,

And have taken the samaya oath as disciples of the Sugatas.

We all moreover have made a commitment to behave
harmoniously.

There is no distinction of excellence or fault within the context
of equanimity;

Yet in regard to fundamental manners of pure body and pure
speech

I have fallen from the traditional ideals and upset your minds.

To the extent that I have not remained within a completely
pure state of mind,

I confess with these words.

Please accept this with forbearance, not holding onto
anything,

And grant absolution by pure self-nature, I pray!

Sogyal Rinpoche now feels that this practice is ready to be applied in all contexts and communities within the Rigpa mandala - beginning with National Management teams & 'practicing sangha' groups. The practice will certainly need adjusting to respond to the particular challenges faced by people living busy ordinary lives in cities, so we would like to first explore those challenges for a trial period with these two groupings. Later this practice will be shared with local management teams, instructor groups & other Rigpa teams.

Rinpoche's hope is that, particularly for those working in Rigpa, this practice, combined with the establishment of regular daily practice-sessions attended by all staff, could effect a deep shift in working relationships and help transform Rigpa centres into real 'sacred spaces' imbued with a powerfully transformative atmosphere of practice.

VIEW

Responsibility, not guilt

When we speak of 'confession', it is vital to understand that we are not using that term in the way that it is so often interpreted in the contemporary Judaeo-Christian context, where it is connected with a sense of personal unworthiness & guilt. As Sogyal Rinpoche has so often reminded us, guilt is one of the subtlest and most powerful control mechanisms of egocentric perception. He has called it "the other side of the coin of self-indulgence" and "a particularly seductive part of our personal soap-opera", allowing us to continue our old patterns by reinforcing the message that we are powerless to change.

Real confession is about releasing, purifying, 'making a clean breast of things'. We can release because, as Rinpoche says, "We are not our confusion". We're not a hopeless case, we're fundamentally sane, awake, pure. Arousing a deep confidence in that, we can face, work with and finally liberate our difficult aspects with lucidity, humour and courage. Guilt is passive, self-indulgent and disempowering; responsibility is active, rigorous, liberating and transformative.

Central to the practice of confession is a willingness to be an 'insider' - to have the courage, clarity and inspiration to look inside at the sources of our difficulties, rather than project them outwards onto parents, society, government, school, lovers, bosses - or 'Rigpa' or our vajra-brothers and sisters. We have to be willing to take responsibility for our own arisings.

This is concretely embodied in one of the most important ground-rules of this practice - all statements made must begin with "I..." e.g. "I feel not respected by you..." instead of "You don't respect me..."; "I need more time and space to express myself in meetings; please allow me them..." instead of "You never give me any time or space in meetings..."; "I really want to try to work through this blockage we're having..." instead of "Stop blocking me...!"

This could, of course, be mere hypocritical window-dressing, using 'Buddhist-speak' to sound sweet, open and reasonable whilst actually being as stubborn as ever. But even then, at least our speech is beginning to be positive even if our mind is not, and experience has shown that this does really help people to begin to take responsibility for their actions.

It can also lead us, sometimes in the very midst of an intense or painful situation, to suddenly experience a momentary questioning, "Who is this 'I' that I'm so involved with?" - a tiny glimpse of shunyata. It is very difficult to cling as tightly as ever to our agendas and grievances once this happens.

The Three Noble Principles

Just as with any other practice, the power and authenticity of confession are directly dependent upon the extent to which we are able to apply 'good in the beginning, good in the middle, & good at the end'.

First, what is our motivation for taking this time to practice? Do we really wish to resolve and release situations, or do we want to 'win' or 'prove our point'? How are we relating to

Prayer for the Long Life of Sogyal Rinpoche

om swasti

Om svasti!

sönam yéshé tsok nyi chu ter lé

merit wisdom accumulation two water treasury from

This supreme and noble being is born like a stream of nectar from the ocean of merit and wisdom.

lek trung dampé kyé chok düdtsi ter

well born noble being supreme nectar treasury

Like an opening water lily he radiates benefit and well-being

ten drö pen dei kumü shyé pa yi

teachings beings benefit happiness water lily blossoming

For the Dharma and for all beings and upholds the victory-banner of Buddha's teaching:

tupten gyaltsen dzin shyin shyap ten sol

Buddha's teaching victory-banner hold feet firm I pray

May his life be secure and long!

"Written by the old man Mangala in response to many enthusiastic requests. May its meaning be truly realized!"

This long life prayer for Tertön Sogyal Rinpoche, "Gathering of Clouds of Blessings", was composed by Padmasambhava's successor, the great Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, during the empowerments of the Rinchen Terdzö, which he conferred at Mindroling Monastery in India in the Earth Horse year of the sixteenth cycle.

* *swasti* = *peace, happiness and well-being.*

The Dedication of Merit

sönam di yi tamché zik pa nyi

Through this merit, may all beings attain the omniscient state
of enlightenment,

top né nyé pé dra nam pam jé shing

And conquer the enemy of faults and delusion,

kyé ga na chi ba long trukpa yi

May they all be liberated from this ocean of samsara

si pé tso lé drowa drolwar shok

And from its pounding waves of birth, old age, sickness and death!

Dedication from ‘Samantabhadra’s Aspiration’

jampal pawo jitar khyen pa dang

Just as the bodhisattva Manjushri attained omniscience

kuntuzangpo dé yang dé shyin té

And Samantabhadra too,

de dak kun gyi jé su dak lob ching

All these merits now I dedicate

géwa di dak tamché rab tu ngo

To train and follow in their footsteps!

dü sum shek pé gyalwa tamché kyi

As all the victorious buddhas of past, present and future

ngo wa gang la chok tu ngak pa té

Praise dedication as supreme,

dak gi gé wé tsawa di kun kyang

So now I too dedicate all these sources of merit of mine,

zangpo chö chir rab tu ngo war gyi

For all beings to perfect ‘Good Actions’.*

** These two famous verses come from Samantabhadra’s ‘Aspiration to Good Actions—
the King of Aspiration Prayers’, the Arya Bhadracarya Pranihama Raja, which is the
final part of the Gandavyuha Sutra, the last section of the Avatamsaka Sutra.*

ourselves; do we have any confidence in our own Buddha-nature? Are we really trying to live it? How are we relating to the rest of the group; as trainee Bodhisattvas, people genuinely trying to work with their fears and limitations, to return to their own fundamental pure nature? Or as a collection of friends, enemies and ‘neutrals’, each requiring a particular strategy to manipulate them?

Are we taking into account the full vastness of our situation; the intimacy of our karmic connection with the group, the inescapable power of our actions, our responsibility to work on ourselves in order to be richer, more open, & more courageous so that we have more to give to more and more beings? Or are we petty-minded, pre-occupied with this week’s crisis, this month’s power-struggle, this life’s ‘success’ and ‘failure’? Are our actions governed by the ‘eight worldly dharmas’, or by the values we have learnt in the teachings? Are we aware as we act that we might die today?

Then, as we enter into the practice, we try as much as possible to drop our usual limited patterns of thought. Arousing some awareness of shunyata and our own limitless bodhicitta nature, we are more able to release any tendency to want to have a particular experience in the practice; to see ourselves as ‘winner’ or ‘loser’, or even to be seen as a ‘good Buddhist’ by our fellow group-members. Whatever experiences we go through in the practice, we do not cling to them with attachment and aversion, developing all sorts of concepts and judgments. Rather, we simply, fully taste them, and then allow them to settle in the spaciousness of our joyful confidence in our own limitless ‘empty’ nature.

At the end, whatever experiences we have had - liberating, stressful, joyful, frustrating, - we render fruitful by offering them to the Buddhas and all beings, deeply aspiring that through them we may grow more and more, become more and more open, and have more and more to offer our world. In this way, we both release our experiences and put them to the best possible use for ourselves and others.

The Four Powers

As in any practice of purification, traditionally four 'powers' are spoken of as being essential for the practice to work:-

The Power of Regret

We have to genuinely wish to let go; to release and resolve this pattern, whether it manifests inwardly as tension & blockage, or outwardly as conflict & misunderstanding, or both. If we do not, no practice will work.

Characteristic of the absence of this power is a continuing need to justify ourselves, usually based on fear and lack of self-confidence; a conviction that we must be right and must prove it, usually by proving others wrong. This can manifest as an inability to receive criticism, a lack of any humour or sense of proportion about the situation, or a tendency to seek to explain to others what their problem is rather than taking responsibility for our own arisings.

It can even manifest as attempts to give 'teachings' to others, using Buddhist 'jargon' & personal interpretations of ego-edited extracts from Rinpoche's teachings to justify our position and attack theirs. This can sometimes be accompanied by a retreat into a fake 'absolutism' where we stuffily refuse to deal honestly with our relative confusions and limitations - "Oh, it's all empty anyway!"

The Power of the Object

If we can invoke the presence of an embodiment of truth in our practice it will be much more powerfully purifying. Externally, this source of purification is the Buddhas, Guru Rinpoche and especially our teacher, the presence of all of whom we strongly invoke at the beginning of the practice. Internally, the source of purification is our own fundamental pure Buddha-nature, which the Buddhas & our teacher embody and reflect.

Strongly evoking and arousing confidence in that, we immediately create the ground for genuinely beginning to let go of our fears, confusions and fixed positions. Both aspects

sattva མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
Sattva! Now that the time has elapsed for impairments to become faults,

lé kyi nyer dzin dorjé khandro yi མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
And causes for the harsh retribution commanded by

ka yi ché pa drakpö gyur gyur pé མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
The vajra dakinis, whose stern task it is,

di chii drip gyur nyal chen gyu sak shak མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
I confess having obscured this life and the next, by accumulating the causes of the great hells!

hung མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
Hung! 'King of Passion', the great primordial Vajra,

mik su mé ching nyam dang shak pa tral མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
Free from any conceptual reference, beyond all impairment or confession,

kuntuzangpo yé dzok rig pé long མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
Is Samantabhadra, always perfect, the vast expanse of rigpa,

du dral mépa chö ying long du ah མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ མཚན་སྲུང་གི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་
Ever present as the space of dharmadhatu: AH

This king of all confessions, three vajra words,

Will empty samsara from its depths,

Like the philosopher's stone turns iron into gold.

This is an oral instruction which protects those

Who have fallen prey to ignorance and impaired their samayas.

It burst from the wisdom mind of Samantabhadra,

And I Padma set it down in symbolic code for the sake of future generations.

May it meet with my emanation, my own heart's son!

SAMAYA BUDHYA SHUBHAM

*It was deciphered by Traktung Lékyi Pawo, Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje.
Virtue! Virtue! Virtue!*

The Heart of Vajrasattva

om ཨོ **shyi tok dangpö sangyé kuntu zang** ཨོ

Om! Primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, the Ground of being:

dorjé sempa dorjé dé shyin shek ཨོ

O Vajrasattva, Vajra Tathagatha,

pawo chenpo drowa kyop pé gön ཨོ

Great hero, lord and protector of beings:

dak la tser gong yeshé chen gyi zik ཨོ

Turn your love towards us; gaze on us with eyes of wisdom!

ah ཨོ **dö né ma kyé yé né nam dak kyang** ཨོ

Ah! All is from the beginning unborn and primordially pure,

trul ngor lowur sharwé kun tok lé ཨོ

Yet conceptual thoughts, arising momentarily in our deluded minds,

ma rik zung dzin kyen nang nyam chak kun ཨོ

Cause ignorance, dualistic perception, impairments and breakages,

dak chen chö ying yum gyi long du shak ཨོ

Which we confess now in the expanse of the dharmadhātu mother, utter purity!

vajra ཨོ **sang wé dakpo dorjéi dam drak pa** ཨོ

Vajra! Lord of Secrets, Vajrapani, who declared the vajra decree,

ku sung tuk sang samaya bum gyi ཨོ

Of all the hundred thousand secret samayas

dam lé nyam shing tsik lé gal wa gang ཨོ

Of body, speech and mind; whichever vows we have impaired or pledges we have broken

rap tu nong shing gyö pé tol lo shak ཨོ

With deepest remorse and regret, we acknowledge and confess them!

of this also powerfully emphasise how much we have in common with the rest of the group, including those we relate to as problematic. We all share the same Buddha-nature and participate in the same basic process of confusion and limitation; we all moreover find inspiration in the same teachings & teacher. Our karmas are intricately interconnected. This again helps to create a sane perspective on the triviality of the differences we perceive and are so involved in. It also arouses a deep sense of our responsibility to ourselves and to our teacher not to allow our personal limitations & emotional patterns to block our work. This is particularly important for all of us who have the privilege of being in positions of responsibility within the Rigpa mandala.

The Power of the Practice

If we really enter into it confidently, we can discover for ourselves how purifying, nourishing and liberating this practice can be. This usually takes time however, which is one of the reasons why this practice should be done regularly rather than just in ‘emergencies’. Just as in tonglen practice, by building trust and confidence through sharing non-problematic situations, we nourish ourselves and the group to deal honestly and thoroughly with difficulties when they come up. If we only begin the process when there’s an obvious problem, the ground of trust will not have been laid.

As with any practice, we get out of it what we put in. If we are willing to be honest, to take risks, to share our ‘weaknesses’ and difficulties, this practice can act as a powerful catalyst for transformation. If not, it will not. At the same time, it is important to respect our own and others’ limitations & fears; each person participates as much as, and as deeply as, they feel able to. Over time, if the group creates a ‘safe space’, even the most hesitant of us will open up.

Even if we resist letting go, if we can acknowledge that to the Buddhas, to ourselves and to the group as being part of the problem, and strongly aspire that we might change, change will begin to come. That is part of the magically empowering quality of becoming a ‘nangpa’.

The Power of Resolution

At the end of the practice, we strongly resolve not to get caught up again in the same pattern. This too is very connected with the empowering quality of aspiration. If we wholeheartedly aspire not to fall into the same old 'holes', slowly we will find ourselves more and more able to recognise the situations that provoke our problematic responses, and more and more able instead to work constructively with them, or even transform both situations and responses.

An inability to invoke this power is often connected with deep feelings of guilt, personal unworthiness or hopelessness, and characterised by language laden with expectation, doubt and failure - "should", "ought", "Well I'll try, but...", "can't". We just know we're going to fall into the same old patterns, so we give up on ourselves; we may even become cynical about the practice. As Rinpoche says, "I will never ever give up on you. The Buddha will never ever give up on you. Your own Buddha-nature will never ever give up on you. So who the hell are you to give up on yourself?"

Three Aspects of Transformation

Like any other practice, this one begins with the preliminaries - arousing the motivation and establishing the ground through a formal practice of contemplation, refuge, prostrations, generating bodhicitta and opening Vajrasattva. The whole practice can then be seen as a healing & purification within the context of Vajrasattva.

The main part has three aspects - appreciation, confession and resolution. The purpose of these three is broadly parallel to that of the three offerings we make during tsok practice; those for offering, for confession and for liberation respectively. Like them, if wholeheartedly applied, they can have a deeply transformative effect on the quality of communication

The practice then closes with dedication and long-life prayers. The whole practice is in fact one of the most powerful long-life offerings we could make for Rinpoche and his vision, since its purpose is to help remove all the personal and inter-personal blockages which inhibit our ability to be in tune with and of service to that vision.

The Meditation and Recitation of Vajrasattva which Purifies Obscurations

from the Dudjom Tersar Ngöndro

With oneself in an ordinary form

chi wor lama dor sem yer mé pé ཨོ

Above my head is the Lama, inseparable from Vajrasattva.

ku lé dü tsi gyun bap drip chang gyur ཨོ

From his body flows a stream of nectar that purifies all our negative karma, destructive emotions, illnesses, destructive influences (*negativity*), and blockages due to digpa (*neurotic crimes*) and dripa (*obscurations*).

The Hundred Syllable Mantra

Recite the Hundred Syllable Mantra visualizing the descending stream of purifying nectar.

The Six Syllable Mantra

om vajra sattva hung

Recite the six syllable mantra as much as possible. To finish:

ö shyu dak nang dang dré ro chik gyur ཨོ

Lama Vajrasattva, dissolves into light and becomes one with me.

Rest in meditation with Vajrasattva gathered into oneself.

Taking Refuge

from the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro

kön chok sum ngö dé shek tsawa sum ཨོ

In the Three Jewels, and their essence, the sugatas,

In the three roots: lama, yidam and khandro,

tsa lung tikléi rang shyin chang chup sem ཨོ

In the channels, inner air and tiklés, and their nature, the
bodhichitta,

ngo wo rang shyin tuk jéi kyilkhor la ཨོ

In the mandala of essence, nature and compassion,

chang chup nyingpö bardu kyap su chi ཨོ

I take refuge, until enlightenment is fully realized.

(three times)

The Generation of Bodhichitta: the Heart of the Awakened Mind

from the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro

ho ཨོ

Ho!

na tsok nang wa chu dé dzun ri kyi ཨོ

Mesmerized by the sheer variety of perceptions, which are like
the illusory reflections of the moon in water,

khor wa lu gu gyü du khyam pé dro ཨོ

Beings wander endlessly astray in samsara's vicious cycle.

rang rik ö sal ying su ngal sö chir ཨོ

In order that they may find comfort and ease in the luminosity
and all-pervading space of the true nature of their minds,

tsé mé shyi yi ngang né sem kyé do ཨོ

I generate the immeasurable love, compassion, joy and
equanimity of the awakened mind, the heart of bodhichitta.

(three times)

THE PRACTICE

Purpose

To appreciate, encourage and nourish each other and
ourselves, and to learn more about communication.

To share our insights, report our progress & understand our
own and others' strengths and weaknesses better.

To share the difficulties we experience in practice, in working
for the Dharma, and in coping with our own patterns.

To let go of and apologise for anything we have DONE which
has disturbed the harmony of the group or any individual.
Here it is important to realise that, even if we find ourselves
still holding onto it, to express our regret anyhow may help
the other people involved in the situation to come to terms
with it, take responsibility for their part and not waste their
energy blaming & projecting onto themselves or others.

To let go of and apologise for anything we have SAID which
has disturbed the harmony of the group or any individual.
Even if it was just a casually derogatory 'joke', or the result
of our busyness, tension or moodiness, we consciously take
responsibility for any hurt we have caused.

Even if we feel that it was 'justified' by someone else's
conduct, we should acknowledge the destructive and
inappropriate quality of our response. This creates the space
for the other person to take responsibility for their action too.

To let go of and apologise for anything we have THOUGHT
- grudges, blame, aggression, attachment or aversion,
judgements or criticism - particularly towards the teacher, the
teaching or a fellow sangha-member.

We may not relate to attachment to a particular person within
the group as a problem, but we should recognise that it in
fact itself creates the basis for aversion to arise, either towards
others at that time or towards the object of our attachment
later. It can also send a strong message of exclusion to all
the other group-members, creating a ground for all sorts of
projections and unhelpful reactions.

Often too, we somehow imagine that our thoughts have no consequences; that provided we don't express them we can indulge in whatever attitudes we like and no-one else will know. In retreat it becomes quite obvious how much our thoughts affect us and others, and how they create an atmosphere between people even when not expressed. Even if the busyness and mindlessness of our ordinary lives blinds us to this, we should acknowledge the power of thoughts and practice taking responsibility for them.

What is shared, and the depth of sharing, changes greatly over time as the group meets regularly. Each person will probably have one or two points or patterns that will keep coming up, but even these will evolve as they are acknowledged and worked with.

PRACTICE TEXTS

Invoking the Lama

from the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro

Call out in ardent longing and devotion:

lama khyen ཨོ

O lama, care for me!

nying ü dé pé gesar shyé par né ཨོ

From the blossoming lotus of devotion at the centre of my heart,

kyab chik drin chen lama yar la shyeng ཨོ

Rise up, O compassionate lama, my only refuge!

lé dang nyön mong drag pö zir wa yi ཨོ

I am plagued by past actions and turbulent emotions.

kal pa ngen pa dak la kyob pé chir ཨོ

To protect me in my misfortune,

chi wor dé chen khor lö gyen du shyuk ཨོ

Remain as the jewel ornament on the crown of my head, the chakra of great bliss,

dren dang shé shyin kun kyang shyang su sol ཨོ

Arousing all my mindfulness and awareness, I pray!

If for some reason - lack of facilitation or communication skills, or lack of a genuine wish to resolve situations - this resolution phase of the practice does not function to deepen peoples' understanding of each other or the resolution of situations, it should be dropped from future sessions, and the practice continued with just the first 2 elements, 'appreciation' and 'confession'.

On the other hand, this section of the practice often provides an empowering space to clarify issues, or at least deepen mutual understanding even if we're not able to immediately resolve a situation. It is important not to feel that we have to get everything 'resolved' - neatly tied up and packaged - by the end of the meeting. Not all situations can be resolved immediately. More important is to realise that all situations are workable if we are willing to surrender territoriality and embrace openness.

Here again the continuity of the group meeting is very important. Knowing that we will soon meet again relieves any pressure to rush to an inauthentic 'resolution'; we can leave things to settle, digest new insights or understanding that may have come during the meeting, work on ourselves between meetings.

When the meeting has naturally come to a point of closure, the facilitator should remind participants of their commitment to confidentiality, announce the time and venue of the next confession practice, and close the practice by leading the group in dedication.

Ground Rules

- **Practice regularly**

It is strongly recommended that this practice be done every two weeks; in the one-year retreat it happens every week. In this way, we have an opportunity to clean up any difficulties before they become rooted, to regularly refresh our appreciation of each other as vajra-brothers and sisters, and to build a basis of trust and communication that will feed into our work together.

The 10th and 25th Tibetan days, or any other tsok day, are particularly appropriate, since confession & purification are so central to tsok practice, but outside the retreat setting it may be easier to organise and ensure continuity by setting a fixed day of the week for the practice. It is usually difficult to arrange to do a full confession within the tsok, and it is not always appropriate since not all members of a group may yet have been introduced to tsok.. Equally, not all participants in a tsok may be part of a 'confession-group'. So it is usually better to do confession say in the afternoon or early evening before a tsok,, rather than afterwards since that is often an important time for the sangha to socialise and continue the spirit of celebration that is also part of tsok.

'Sojong' days (which are indicated in the Rigpa calendar) are also traditional occasions within Buddhist monastic communities when confession is practiced. These days occur approximately every new & full moon.

- **Always attend**

All members of a confession group need to make a shared commitment at the first meeting to attend the practice every time unless unavoidably absent, and to inform other group-members in advance if unavailable and why.

Be particularly attentive to any tendency to fall into one of the old Rigpa work-habits - that of saying "I'm too busy / important / stressed / close to Rinpoche to practice"! Group-members have a responsibility to each other to gently point out this kind of 'escape-clause' whenever it arises.

A tendency to resort to this is often a sign that someone is in the midst of some difficulty they are trying to avoid looking at, which may still however be affecting their work & colleagues. Even if we are very busy or stressed, we have a responsibility to respect and participate in the group's process. We could also usefully reflect on what message such statements send to other group-members, to say nothing of newer students.

- **No 'cross-talk'**

No-one may 'cross-talk' while another is speaking; we cannot interrupt or comment on another's statements. We just listen openly, non-judgmentally.

During both appreciation & confession phases of the practice, participants not speaking should also be careful to avoid any 'commentary' in the form of non-verbal communication - passing notes, eye-contact, facial expressions, physical movements or other body-language, etc.

- **All statements to begin with 'I'.**

- **No-one is obliged to speak unless they wish to.**

- **Commitment to confidentiality**

The group should also make a commitment to confidentiality - nothing that emerges in a confession may be shared with anyone outside the group, including Rinpoche, unless the group gives its permission. This is crucial to creating a 'safe space'. Within the group, issues that arise in confession practice should generally not be talked of outside that context.

The size of the group is important. It is very difficult to have a sense of intimacy if more than 10 or 12 people are involved; 6-8 is better. If 6 people are participating, allow about one-and-a-half hours for the practice; if 12, about two-and-a-half hours.

The group should nominate one member beforehand to take responsibility for facilitating the meeting, including establishing an inspiring environment. At first, this could always be the same person - perhaps someone particularly

At the end, the person says the confession prayer once in their native language, or the language best understood by the group. Then the whole group chants 'Heart of Vajrasattva' once together. Everyone bows once and the person returns to their seat. The process then continues until everyone who wishes has spoken. Then the group says the confession prayer together aloud again once in the agreed language, then the 100-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva three times, then Dam Drip Nyepa Kunsel three times, followed by the last two lines repeated 21 times.

It is usually best to then have a short tea/pee-break, in silence, for about 10 minutes. The group then gathers again in the shrine-room. It is very important during this break to maintain the atmosphere.

'Resolution'

The group now sits in a circle. Again, anyone who wishes may speak - to check if something was not clear or clarify further what they or someone else said; to make helpful comments; to express how a situation looks from their point-of-view. All statements must begin with 'I', and no-one may interrupt or talk across anyone else.

Since the prior elements of the practice often take up a lot of time, it may only be possible at this point to simply identify areas remaining to be clarified, and to ensure that the people involved have made an firm appointment to meet to discuss it further, whether they wish a third party to be there, if so who, etc. It is always preferable to go to resolution within the formal framework of the practice, so having this happen outside that can be a 'weak point'. But often by the end of the practice, a simple agreement to meet to resolve outstanding items is all that is necessary.

This section of the practice requires active facilitation, and a shared commitment to resolve situations honestly and harmoniously. It also requires great delicacy, as many people may see any comment by someone else as invasive if it is about a sensitive issue they have just aired. Loving silence may be the greatest support. Each person should reflect carefully on their motivation before they speak.

The other person simply sits quietly and receives appreciation without commentary, jokes, explanations, protests, funny faces... The group simply sits, without eye-contact, body language or other comment, and focusses on creating an immaculately clean vessel within which this exchange can take place with utter simplicity & authenticity; loving kindness practice

would be an excellent practice to do at this time. When the appreciation is finished, both bow again to each other & return to their seats. The one who has just received appreciation may not immediately go on to appreciate someone else - something we sometimes do when we don't know how to receive. They should just quietly sit and digest the appreciation they have received.

The group then again sits quietly until someone else feels moved to appreciate someone. This continues until the facilitator senses that this part of the practice is drawing naturally to a close. This usually takes about 15 minutes, though it can sometimes go on much longer once started. In this case the facilitator should after some time point out gently that time is passing and ask the group if they are ready to move on. Occasionally - as for example in the final confession practice of a long retreat - it may be appropriate to allow the appreciation to go on until it is completed even if that takes much longer than 15 minutes.

'Confession'

The group sits in silence once again until someone feels moved to get up and go to the 'confession cushion'. They do three prostrations to the shrine and sangha, and sit down. In their own time, they talk about whatever it is they wish to share - perhaps several things. They are essentially simply 'talking to Guru Rinpoche' (practicing whilst looking at the shrine helps keep an awareness of this), with the rest of their sangha creating a silently supportive and immaculately non-judgemental vessel. No-one may interrupt or comment. The person takes as much time as they need, without any sense of having to rush. The rest of the group practice tonglen silently, taking on suffering and giving love, support and non-judgmental appreciation.

familiar with the practice, or respected as impartial. If no-one in the group is familiar with the practice, you can of course invite someone from outside the group to facilitate the first meeting, or the first few. Once established, however, it is good for the group to be 'closed' and for each person to have the opportunity to facilitate confession practice.

Environment

The physical environment should be as inspiring as possible. If possible we do the practice in the shrine-room; ideally in front of our teacher. A clean, beautifully-arranged environment is an offering expressive of and therefore inspiring both dignity & mindfulness. Having an element of formality in both the environment and the structure of the practice likewise stimulates people to give of their 'best selves'. It also reminds us that this is a practice, not 'group therapy'; this is very helpful in maintaining an atmosphere of mindfulness, dignity, gentleness, responsibility and compassion.

The best seating arrangement for the first two stages of the practice is:-

SHRINE

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'Confession cushion'

There should be a low table or tray placed to the right of the 'confession cushion', with a copy of the confession prayer, a glass and jug of water, a box of tissues and perhaps a beautiful flower in a vase, elegantly arranged. There is usually a 'tea-break' in the middle of the practice (see below); again, for this to be thoughtfully-arranged and delicious is an act of generosity and respect. It is the responsibility of the practice-facilitator to arrange all this beforehand.

It is also their responsibility to get agreement beforehand from the group what language will be used for practices; this is obviously particularly important with a group of mixed nationalities. Once the practice starts, the facilitator participates fully, as well as monitoring and structuring the practice and pointing out when any ground-rule is not being applied.

Preliminaries

The group enters, each person doing three prostrations to the shrine and then taking a seat in the two rows of cushions, facing each other. There is no special order of seating; in fact it is better if people do not always take the same seat. Each person brings with them their own copy of the confession prayer, Heart of Vajrasattva and Dam Drip Nyepa Kunsel (see below). The practice-facilitator reminds the group what we are here for, and says a few words about the correct attitude to cultivate; this is a practice, so the Three Noble Principles are crucially important here.

The facilitator then leads a short practice, usually including sitting, Invoking the Lama (in our native language, with or without Tibetan) & chanting the Vajra Guru mantra, Refuge & Bodhicitta and a brief guided tonglen practice (the one-year retreatants have found 3 practices particularly helpful at this point - 'exchanging self & other', 'self-tonglen' and 'tonglen in a living situation'). If there is time this can be followed by Narak Kong Shak.

'Appreciation'

The practice then continues with 'appreciation' for about 15 minutes. This has proved to be an extremely important part of the whole practice, creating a ground of warmth, trust & mutual respect that is crucial to a positive atmosphere for productive, honest confession. Without it, because of our egocentric tendency to always focus on our own and others' 'faults', confession practice can quickly become stuck in a guilt-ridden or accusatory stance, or we simply fail to create the sense of respect and safety that will allow people to open.

Appreciation practice (and we should never forget that it is a practice) is a powerful reinforcement on the relative level of the message we receive on the absolute level when we arouse confidence in our Buddha-nature - the message that we are worthy.

The group sits in silence until someone feels moved to 'appreciate' another. They stand, move to the centre of the group, between the two rows of cushions, and invite the person they wish to appreciate to join them there. They sit facing each other, bow to each other and the first person simply tells the second what it is that they appreciate about them. We can also appreciate several people simultaneously, or the whole group; in which case everyone just stays seated where they are, obviously.

Appreciation can be about anything - how someone makes cups of tea for everyone, that they never make other people wait for them, how they clean up after themselves and others, their silly jokes that relieve the atmosphere when it's tense... Or it may be much deeper. We should never think that something is too small to be appreciated. Firstly this is an outward confirmation of recognition that this is something positive, and as the Buddha said many times, NO positive act is too small or trivial to be worth doing. Secondly (and much more importantly), it can easily be that people who do not know each other, or who have a difficult past relationship, may need to start by focussing on small positive aspects of themselves or each other before they can begin to shift their attitudes on more important areas.