

Contemplation at the Red Sea Coast

Date : January 31, 2019



From the 19th till the 25th of January 2019 a contemplative retreat organised by the Israeli Dzogchen Community and guided by the 2nd level Santi Maha Sangha instructor Igor Berkhin took place at a beach resort called Aquasun in the Egyptian Sinai near Nuweiba. The topic for the retreat was “An Introduction to the Practice of Contemplation”, and it was a really precious opportunity to dive into this essential practice in a spacious and beautiful environment.

The language of the retreat was English and it was intended for those who had received direct introduction from Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. So 10 Israeli practitioners and 2 Russian ladies were happy to participate, not counting numerous local cats and dogs who also showed their interest in the teaching – not only for the extremely delicious and fresh local food which we enjoyed at the precise time of the “sessions of the main practice” as Igor called them half-jokingly.



There were 5 sessions per day during the whole week. We started at 8 in the morning with 1 hour sitting contemplative practice, then after the breakfast pause we had 2 hours of Igor's explanations concerning the essence of Dzogchen practice including important explanations of the typical deviations and obstacles related to the meditation of Dzogchen-Atiyoga. As was written in the retreat preview, in Dzogchen practice the crucial point is the transit from meditation that involves mind to contemplation beyond ordinary mind. It is related to the principle of "no-effort" or relaxation. Applying methods of shine, semdzins, and rushens, we can discover how to relax into our natural state going beyond ordinary mental activity.



And then before lunch we always had an outdoor individual session enjoying our time alone, simultaneously keeping in mind the particular task of our guide. For instance, the first one was dedicated to the practice of guruyoga and being in presence. And during these outdoor sessions we usually were free to move as we liked, to sit, to lie on the beach or to swim in the sea. Then after the lunch break we had a 2 hour session of harmonious breathing and yantra with a beautiful couple of Israeli Yantra Yoga instructors Level 1, Tigran and Revital. And at least another one hour of collective sitting practice of contemplation was on the line.



A bright final of each day was a dinner altogether under the cane roof of the open-air restaurant, sometimes with a perfect view of the full moon with its reflection in the sea water (just like a famous natural visualization describing of illusionary substance of phenomenon, unity of emptiness and appearances).

Our food taking process was always liberally spiced with pleasant talks and numerous anecdotes which made us sometimes laugh very loudly. The core of a subject was not to lose presence through all these variegated processes with accompanying vivid sensations during the whole day – anyway, we all tried to do our best 24x7.

Of course, I could tell you some anecdotes and funny situations from the retreat as it was full of joyful laughing, but it's just a level of ordinary mind, which is dealing with our interests. While being in instant presence has nothing special and is not interesting at all, as Igor teaches following the lineage. And that's why I prefer to stop here – observing all the memories in a short moment, letting them go to where they came from and maybe giving you a kind of inspiration to join our practice next year, if we accumulate enough merits to repeat it in this beautiful calm place with the view of the colorful waters of the Red Sea and the mountains of Saudi Arabia on the other shore of Akaba Bay.



With sincere gratitude to Igor Berkhin for the deep immersion into practice and clear explanation of the key points of the Dzogchen teaching and to the Dzogchen Community of Israel for their excellent organization of the event.

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