

## Outer Rushen in the Saratov Forest in Russia

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In summer 2017 I participated in an Outer Rushen retreat. It was my fourth retreat and this time I managed to dedicate the whole two weeks to this practice. The Rushen retreat took place for the sixth time over the last seven years since 2011, each time at the same location – in the secluded forest of Central Russia in the Saratov region. This special place for the practice was found thanks to the efforts and cooperation of communities of practitioners from Moscow, Saratov and Volgograd and thanks to the active involvement of Santi Maha Sangha instructor Gregory Mokhin.

More than one hundred people from all over Russia as well as from Latvia, Turkey and Ukraine could touch the very core of Dzogchen Teaching practicing in the most suitable and favorable way in this practice place. This beautiful and ecologically clean site corresponds fully to the words of Jigme Lingpa (Highest Wisdom), which Rinpoche refers to in his book “The Precious Vase”.

“So, to stop the actions of the body, speech and mind, generated by karma and its hidden tracks,

and also to prevent them in the future, (first of all) go to a place where there are no people and where you will be sure, that no one will see and hear you, so as not to violate the seventh tantric commandment about the non-disclosure of secret practices ... ”

During his visits to Russia Chögyal Namkai Norbu often talked about the importance of this practice for going beyond one's limitations. He also mentioned how challenging it might be to find a place where all the conditions suitable and favorable for this practice would be met. From all the Gars of the Dzogchen community, those conditions can only be found at Tsegyalgar West although even there it is not so easy to be completely alone and you can still be disturbed by local fauna.

Due to its remote location far away from any settlements, the forest in the Saratov Region proved to be an ideal place for holding the Outer Rushen practices. Quietness, favorable weather, breathtaking sunrises and sunsets allowed us to let go the busyness of the big cities and to surrender completely to nature and to the practice.



Following the responsive guidance of the retreat instructor, Gregory Mokhin, finding ourselves in the most suitable location for this practice, each of us managed to complete our Outer Rushen

practice as much in accordance with the words of our Precious Teacher as possible.

Referring to the Teaching, we realize that the Outer Rushen is one of the preliminary practices of Dzogchen which allows a practitioner to discover the Nature of the Mind by virtue of applying its perfected method. However, during the retreat itself we managed to ascertain that this kind of practice is the main practice as well. We all know that the path of Dzogchen is not a gradual path, and by obtaining the Base and by resting in it infinitely we also obtain the Fruit at once.

This year thirty-four participants took part in the retreat, some of them attending not for the first time. Following the tradition, in the very beginning of the retreat all participants talked a bit about themselves and shared the reasons that brought them repeatedly to the Outer Rushen practice in the Saratov Region. All of us felt in a similar way and this is what we wanted to share with all the other Dzogchen practitioners. Participation in the Outer Rushen retreat held in the forests of the Saratov Region is an unique opportunity to truly feel and to strengthen connection with our Teacher and to get real experience from the practice that can become (and for some already has become) the base for developing the state of Contemplation and for obtaining full Realization for the benefit of all sentient beings.

These two weeks deepened our understanding of what Guru Yoga and Dzogchen Teaching are and the Vajra connection between practitioners. Many participants observed that after the Outer Rushen retreat the circumstances of their lives had improved – there had been less tension in relationships, financial situations had improved and had become more favorable for the practice, and the practice itself had become more vivid. For all this, we are endlessly grateful to Rinpoche whose compassion is boundless.

We also must mention the retreat instructor, Gregory Mokhin. Thanks to his guidance, the participants managed to have valuable experiences and to discover their verity as well as to create the base for deepening the understanding of the Dzogchen Teaching. We are all truly thankful to Gregory for the most precious moments of our practice, which led to strengthening connection with our Teacher. Gregory's guidance, sincere attention to each participant, his devotion to the Teaching and our Teacher made the time spent at the retreat an invaluable gift for us all. We ask Gregory to continue holding these retreats in the future and we hope that all the circumstances will develop favorably. The practice of the Outer Rushen can be compared to a breath of fresh air. It fills our life in samsara with true understanding and appreciation of what our Teacher conveys. Having completed the retreat, we are taking away with us not only valuable experiences but also a significant base for our further practice – continuous connection with our Teacher.



The way we lived during these two weeks of the retreat is a jewel that is mostly unavailable to the citizens of the big cities. The conditions created for the retreat allowed us to immerse ourselves in practice to the fullest. We want to express our deepest gratitude to Marina Luzhina and Alexey Mizinov, members of the Dzogchen community in Saratov, whose altruistic activity helps to hold these retreats year after year with the maximum convenience for all the participants. Marina and Alexey take complete responsibility for preparing the site, for all the supplies, all the transfers to the site, and for organizing the meals. That allows the participants to devote themselves fully to the practice. Moreover, they demonstrate the most important qualities that we can all learn from them – dedication, humility, sincere desire to serve for the benefit of the Teaching and of all sentient beings, and their joy that accompanies everything they do. This approach supports and inspires all of us. A deep bow to you!

This is what Marina Luzhina says about organizing this retreat:

*“The Outer Rushen for me is a continuous connection with Rinpoche. I can sense his support in everything we do. I do it all for the benefit of all sentient beings and that makes me happier. Rushen inspires me a lot. When you put your soul into what you do and when it resonates in the hearts of other people it brings an enormous feeling of intrinsic value. Your soul opens up and that is the key for self-realization”.*

We would like to mention in this article a project carried out by Marina and Alexey – construction of a retreat center called Dechenling situated in Lopuhovka village. The center is designated mostly for dark retreats but also for any other retreats. Construction of the dark retreats house is expected

to be completed by 2018. A fund raising campaign for building the dark retreat house is currently running. You can find the details here:

on the website of the project <http://dechenling.ru/>  
and on a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/dechenlingrc/>

The story of finding this place is extraordinary in itself. Back in 2010 during the SMS Base Level retreat in Saratov, Gregory talked about the Outer Rushen practices and shared his own experience of this practice. One of the retreat participants suggested visiting his friends' apiary and checking whether the place is suitable for the Outer Rushen practice. It was decided to go. The owners of the apiary, whose son even received a direct introduction from Chögyal Namkai Norbu, sympathized with our idea to practice at their site. In August 2011 we held our first practice there with twenty-five practitioners. The day we arrived at the site it had just stopped raining and there was a big rainbow above the sunset. We considered it as a truly good sign. Despite the fact that it often rains in summer in Russia, during all the six retreats already held the weather has been very favorable for the practice. For the time of the retreats the rains would stop, the sun would shine during the day and the moon during the night and all that time the blessing of our Teacher would shine above us.

Our first outdoor Rushen retreats lasted for a week. We gained experience in organizing the retreats and living in Dzogchen camps. We realized, however, that one week is not sufficient for letting go of tensions of the big city life and for opening up to spontaneity beyond limitations. That is why the retreats of 2016 and 2017 lasted for two weeks and all the participants observed that it was the most appropriate time frame for such kind of practice. During these two weeks of intensive practice, we could not only have concrete profound experiences but also recognize ourselves as Vajra brothers and sisters united in our Teacher's mandala. This awareness is highly valuable and cannot be compared to anything else. We wish more of our Vajra brothers and sisters could get this precious experience by attending such retreats.



We hope that comments from the retreat participants will encourage others to attend.

Galina Surmina, Russia, Saransk

*“That was already my third Outer Rushen retreat and each of them was rich with memories and experiences. This year the retreat was no exception. It was so warm and joyful. At all times I felt the support and care of my Vajra brothers and sisters. It was truly inspiring. So was the relaxed manner in which tensions and emotions related to misunderstandings of the state of the mind dissolved. I am convinced that it would be impossible to appreciate truly the worth of Santi Maha Sangha simply by reading a book. When I got a real experience of this incredible connection among us, the Sangha, my faith in the Teaching with its inclusiveness and in our Teacher with his perpetual blessing became unshakable”.*

Victoria Zosimova, Ukraine, Kiev

*“It was a full fourteen days of Korde Rushen practice in the company of thirty-five yogis guided by Gregory Mokhin. Wonderful organization, secluded place, comfortable camping site, showers, WC, spring water and delicious food. And the most important thing was the professional guidance of an experienced instructor, which significantly shortened the path. There were so many nuances and hints, correctly placed accents and so much support. The group work enriched me greatly with experience of reciprocity, helped me to gain more clarity and awareness. That was a strong restart for the body, the speech and the mind. I will definitely be back! Back to my home, to my family. Thank you and see you again very soon!”*

With endless love and gratitude to our precious Teacher dwelling infinitely in our hearts.

*Anna Kobylchenko*

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