

Report of the SMS Instructors Meeting at Dzamling Gar

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Photo by Ralf Plüschke

Just before Rinpoche's birthday on December 8th, 2019, the Santi Maha Sangha instructors met together for two days at Dzamlingar Gar from December 6th-7th, 2019. The topics for the meeting were divided into four sections: Transmission, Newcomers, Sangha Retreats and Collaboration. The initiative for this meeting principally arose as a follow-up to the previous SMS instructors meeting, which was held at Merigar West during August of this year. The general aim of these meetings is to exchange ideas and experiences, to get to know one another a little better and also to explore what Rinpoche specifically advised the SMS instructors to do: that is, to communicate and collaborate together and to look at "what goes well and what doesn't go well..." to use Rinpoche's own words.

There were eleven SMS instructors who attended the meeting in person, while a further thirteen connected online via zoom. Several other instructors who were not able to connect with the meeting directly also sent their comments on specific topics to be read out during the discussion. Although there was some prior expectation that the purpose of the meeting was to identify solutions to some of the issues facing the Dzogchen Community at this time, in fact the actual purpose of the meeting was to simply exchange different views and experiences on various topics, without trying to draw any conclusions.

The Santi Maha Sangha instructors have been getting together in different ways for quite some time by participating in small group discussions and especially since an online SMS Forum for

open communication was established a few years ago, as well as having regular zoom meetings. This has greatly improved collaboration within the group on a level platform and it is surely a sign of progress that everyone feels able to freely express their opinions in an open way, including presenting radically opposing views by putting different suggestions on the table.

Some of the issues that were discussed on the subject of transmission included: Does oral explanation constitute a 'type of transmission' or not? Does some form of transmission take place when experienced practitioners practice together? What precisely does lung-transmission mean? In organizing Sangha retreats, the following matters were addressed: The need to make a clear distinction between open courses which welcome new people and retreats which are just for those who already have transmission; how to provide guidance for those who wish to deepen their practice; and the proposal to identify a clear subject for each Sangha retreat and discuss beforehand what each person presents in a collaborative way so there is a greater sense of cohesion.

For the final session on the December 7th, representatives from the Atiyoga Foundation were invited to facilitate collaboration between the ATIF and SMS Instructors in order to help provide guidelines for the ATIF open courses. Regarding looking after new people, the following questions were posed: What is it good to do in open courses for new people? What parts of the SMS Base Level are open to new people? Can newcomers attend secondary practices like the Ganapuja without having transmission? Is it best if Gars and Lings have some kind of common guidelines on these matters?

Members of the International Gakyil were also invited to attend the final session, as it is clear that greater transparency and better communication between all the different groups, as well as with the Sangha at large, is something vital! This can be implemented via newsletters, The Mirror, online information, email groups and What's App ... to name but a few. Thanks to all who participated over these two days to pool ideas and brainstorm the best ways forward.

This period is an important time for the whole Dzogchen Community: it is a time for the entire Sangha to come together with trust in each other and in the spirit of collaboration in order to fulfill Rinpoche's vision for the future. Small seeds are beginning to grow in our mutual appreciation of each other, based on our different and diverse capacities. Traditionally, when a great Tibetan Master passes away, it is said to take at least three years to begin to come to terms with the new situation and to discover fresh potentialities. In the words of the Dzamling Gar Song:

*"Let's unite our strength and capacity ...
May all manifest auspiciously!
May our desires be fulfilled!
With fortune arising self-perfected.
May victory manifest in all directions!"*

The Santi Maha Sangha instructors