

FAQ for the Five Year Yidam Retreat Program

Is the Five Year Yidam Retreat Program part of the Dharmadhara program?

The complete Five Year Yidam Retreat Program is not part of the Dharmadhara program, however sections of it can be taken as single courses that qualify for credits in the Dharmadhara Program. Please see the dharmadhara website for all the details www.dharmadhara.de

What commitments do I need to make?

In the first two years:

You must attend the yearly in person teachings in January for one week.

You must attend one weekly online zoom class and one monthly zoom support group.

You must commit to a daily practice of at least one hour per day.

You must do a solitary retreat of a minimum of 2 weeks.

In the last three years:

You must attend the yearly in person teachings in January for one week.

You must attend one weekly online zoom class and one monthly zoom support group.

You must commit to a daily practice of at least 90 minutes per day.

You must do a solitary retreat of a minimum of 4 weeks.

I have not taken refuge or the Bodhisattva vows or empowerments of these yidam deities can I join this program?

It is recommended to have taken refuge and the bodhisattva vows to join this program.

However if you are still in the process of thinking about taking them you can join the first two years of the program. However for the third year one needs to take refuge and Bodhisattva vows as well as have the empowerment of the yidam deity. Drupon Rachel will give the empowerment of Vajravarahi (Vajrayogini) in the end of the second year for those that will be following Vajravarahi as their yidam. For those that will follow Hevajra or Nairatmya they must already have the empowerment from His Holiness.

I am a beginner. Is this program suitable for me?

Generally this program is suitable for people who have some experience and understanding in Buddhist teachings and practice and who are ready to make a bigger commitment to practice in their daily lives and feel ready to do solitary retreat. It is not suitable for someone brand new who is looking to learn about Buddhism. In that case it would be better to study some Buddhist Philosophy and go to some basic teachings classes first before thinking of such a big commitment.

Is it possible to do the January in person teachings online?

No. You will not be able to attend these teachings online. If you miss these teachings due to illness or emergency you can contact Drupon Rachel and Giorgio and you may be able to make up some of the missed content in person.

Can I do the solitary retreat in sections of one week?

In the first two years you can do the solitary retreat in two sections of one week each, but it is better if you can do it in one section.

In the third year for the yidam deity retreat you must do 4 weeks consecutively. This is the advice of His Holiness Thinle Lhundrup (Chetsang).

What if I cannot practice everyday or miss one day?

It is possible to make a commitment to practice 5 days a week for longer periods. If you miss a day you can do a longer session the next day.

What if I cannot attend the online weekly zoom class?

It is best if you can attend live the weekly zoom class as this gives you continuity and support each week. However if you have to miss sometimes the classes will be recorded and sent to you. There will be teachings and practice so it is necessary that you watch them.

Are there numbers to accumulate in the Ngondro or yidam?

Yes one should do a minimum of 10, 000 of each Ngondro practice. His Holiness Thinle Lhundrup (Chetsang) has said we need to do at least one week on each of the 4 Ngondros in solitary retreat in order to practice the yidam deity. One should try to practice Vajrasattva as much as possible to reach 100,000. Although these numbers are recommended the main emphasis is on the actual experience in meditation and the capacity to cultivate certain mindstates and qualities in the practice.

The yidam deity one should accumulate at least 100, 000 mantras, best done in one continuous retreat.

If I have already completed Ngondro do I need to do the first two years?

His Holiness Thinle Lhundrup has said if you have already completed Ngondro you do not need to redo your Ngondro, however you must attend the teaching course in January as we will be giving a lot of practices such as yoga, breathing, ritual, tormas, retreat advice, emotional work that will be necessary for the last three years of the program. You will still be required to do the daily practice commitment and solitary retreat, but you will be given an individualized daily practice and individualized solitary retreat program based on your situation. You will also still be required to attend some online zoom classes as directed by Drupon Rachel and Giorgio.

Can I join the program in the later years?

No, one must follow the program from the beginning step by step. Everything builds on the previous step. Especially the work on the body and breath. One is already preparing for the more advanced practices of tummo even in year one by learning to feel one's prana and work with different types of breathing. One cannot bypass these steps. Only in a rare occasion such as someone who has completed a three year retreat, one may be authorized by Drupon Rachel and Giorgio to attend select years.

Do I have to commit and register for the five years at the beginning?

No. You can do the first two years without committing to the Five Year Program. In the third year you must commit to finish the program. The registration will be year by year for the first two years. In the third year you need to choose your yidam deity and then commit to the last 3 years of the five year program.

Do I have to do the solitary retreat at the Milarepa Retreat Center?

Yes, it is necessary to do your solitary retreat at the Milarepa Retreat Center. There you will have all the support and proper conditions that you need for a successful retreat and guidance from Drupon Rachel and Giorgio. In rare cases one may be allowed to do the retreat in other locations but this must be discussed in person with Drupon Rachel and Giorgio.

What is the procedure for the solitary retreat?

At the beginning of the year you should decide when you can do your solitary retreat and contact the Milarepa retreat center to make a reservation. Then the center will let Drupon Rachel and Giorgio know your dates and they will make an interview with you before that date to prepare for your retreat. Teachings about doing a solitary retreat will be given during the January teachings.

What if I have financial limitations?

Please speak directly to the Milarepa Retreat Center about any financial concerns.

Which yidams can I practice and when should I decided on my yidam?

This Five Year Program includes three yidam choices: Vajrayogini, Hevajra or Nairatmya. In the third year you must choose one of these yidams to practice and the last three years will be based on that yidam.

What do I do if I already have other practice commitments?

His Holiness Thinle Lhundrup explained that if one has a commitment to a daily practice then this qualifies as the commitment. Therefore during the first two years of the program if you are doing the Ngondro daily as your main practice this will cover your commitments.

If I already have chosen my yidam can I start practicing it already in the first year?

Yes if you have already one of the three yidams, you can practice that already. If you have not completed Ngondro then your main practice will be Ngondro during the first two years, but you can practice the short sadhana of the yidam each day and from time to time do the longer sadhana if you know how to do it. However, teachings will not be given on the longer yidam sadhanas until the third year.

Will Drupon Rachel and Giorgio guide my solitary retreat?

Yes before your solitary retreat you will have an interview in person or via zoom with Drupon Rachel and Giorgio to plan your retreat schedule and questions you may have. During your retreat you will have one interview to check in and discuss your progress and receive advice and support.

Will I have access to Drupon Rachel and Giorgio at other times during the program?

Yes. During the year you can contact Drupon Rachel and Giorgio via email if you have questions. There will be a zoom monthly support group for questions and review, and if necessary you can request an interview by donation.