



Sravasti Abbey
A Buddhist Monastery

**Retreat from Afar 2025:
1000-Arm Chenrezig
Buddha of Compassion**

Participant Manual

Last updated 11-25-24

Retreat from Afar

Every year during the winter, Sravasti Abbey residents enter a three-month silent retreat. Some people join us in person for the first month of retreat. For most people, however, that's not possible. So, we invite our friends to participate from afar for one, two, or all three months of retreat.

What does this mean? While the Abbey community meditates 4-5 sessions a day on a particular practice, you can do "Retreat from Afar" by committing to meditate for one or more sessions a day on the same practice. Many people find that one session a day for 1-3 months is totally doable within their existing routine of work, family life, and other activities.

1000-Arm Chenrezig, Buddha of Compassion

This Winter, we will be going on holiday with Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion. What are we going on holiday from? What are we retreating from? It's not about physically going somewhere, packing up, and leaving the city to go to a special place. Rather, we are retreating from the afflictions—our ignorance, anger, and attachment. We're trying to leave them behind and cultivate our relationships with the Buddhas who have all the wonderful, magnificent qualities. As Venerable Chodron says, in <https://thubtenchodron.org/books/cultivating-a-compassionate-heart/>,

Chenrezig is our best friend. Think about it: Could we have a better friend than the Great Compassionate One? Is there anyone who could care about us more or help us more? But as with all friendships, we have to cultivate the relationship. We can't just take it for granted. So our daily meditation on Chenrezig is like touching base with our best friend every day, and doing Chenrezig retreat is like going on vacation with the one we love the most. It's something we take delight in and appreciate.

Being on holiday with Chenrezig, we will take time to cultivate compassion for ourselves, sincerely wanting to be free from cyclic existence. Based on that understanding, we also cultivate compassion for others, sincerely wishing for others to be free as well. The Chenrezig meditation practice, combined with analytic meditation on the lamrim and thought transformation, shows us how to do this.

The weekly e-teachings will dive deeply into [Langri Tangpa's eight verses of thought transformation](#), part of the Chenrezig sadhana (meditation text). What's the relationship between Chenrezig, and the eight verses? As [Venerable Chodron says](#),

These verses tell us how Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion, views life, what Chenrezig thinks and feels. Thought training is about the two bodhicittas, which are Chenrezig's nature. The more we meditate on thought training, the closer we come to Chenrezig; the more we become like Chenrezig.

In [Approaching the Buddhist Path](#), the Dalai Lama describes mind training as "one of the practices I cherish and enjoy the most" (p. 155). The eight verses are a mind training text that he recites and reflects upon daily—and encourages his students to do the same.

Registration

If you have not yet registered, please fill out [this form](#). To help our resident community connect with our fellow retreatants (from afar), take part in our digital photo wall. **Title the photo with your name and country** and drag and drop it into [this folder](#).

Retreat Support

During retreat (January 4-March 22, 2025), Sravasti Abbey will send weekly emails to support your practice. These emails will include links to video teachings on the retreat topic, excerpts from books and talks, meditation outlines, and more.

We will post three short talks (Bodhisattva's Breakfast Corner) each week on the [Sravasti Abbey YouTube Channel](#), addressing the topic of retreat in general, and the Chenrezig practice in particular.

To meditate with a group, consider joining a group of Abbey friends who meditate together each day on Zoom. They will lead the practice of the retreat from Sunday through Friday each morning, and most evenings. Every Saturday morning, an Abbey monastic will lead the practice. Find out more [here](#).

If you would like to be in touch with other retreatants, please see the RFA Participant [Google Doc](#). You can add your contact information, opt-in to Facebook and/or Discussion Groups, and/or reach out to others who have shared their information. **Sravasti Abbey does not monitor this document and accepts no responsibility for the sharing of personal details on this page.**

Preparing for Retreat

It is helpful to prepare for retreat before it begins by familiarizing yourself with the practice. You can find the meditation outline [here](#). Before retreat, please [watch these 7 videos from the 2018 Chenrezig Retreat](#). In them, Venerable Chodron gives a clear commentary on the entire practice.

We also recommend that you prepare by reading Venerable Chodron's *[Open Heart, Clear Mind](#)* and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's *[Transforming Problems into Happiness](#)*. For a thorough grounding in the Chenrezig meditation practice, please read Venerable Chodron's *[Cultivating a Compassionate Heart: The Yoga Method of Chenrezig](#)*.

Other valuable resources

The entire Chenrezig Archives, with teachings by Venerable Thubten Chodron and Venerable Sangye Khadro, can be found [here](#).

- **Listen** to the [2006 week-long Chenrezig Retreat](#), including a [guided meditation on the Chenrezig practice](#).
- **Listen** to the [2007 Sadhana Teachings](#), including a [guided meditation on the Chenrezig Practice](#).
- **Watch** 5 teachings from the [2009 Chenrezig Retreat](#), including a [longer guided meditation](#) on the practice.
- **Watch** 11 teachings from the [2011 Chenrezig retreat](#), for a complete commentary on the 1000-arm Chenrezig practice.
- **Watch** 7 teachings from the [2018 Chenrezig Retreat](#), for a complete commentary on the 1000-arm Chenrezig practice.

For teachings on the eight verses of thought transformation:

- **Read** an overview of the eight verses [here](#).
- **Watch and read** [this series of 21 short talks](#) on the eight verses by Venerable Thubten Chodron.
- **Watch** this [series of 7 short talks](#) on the eight verses by Venerable Sangye Khadro.
- **Listen** to the Sravasti Abbey community chant the eight verses [here](#).
- **Watch** Venerable Chodron’s commentary on the eight verses, from [Approaching the Buddhist Path](#) here (#41, 45, & 46).
- **Find** a meditation outline for the eight verses [here](#).

For more teachings, take a look at our [YouTube Channel](#), and [ThubtenChodron.org](#).

Session Outline

We ask that you commit to meditating on the [1000-arm Chenrezig practice](#) daily. We recommend meditating first thing in the morning, as that is when the mind is most clear. We know that doesn’t work for everyone, so do what you can.

In each retreat session include:

- Begin with a few minutes of breathing meditation to settle the mind
- Set a bodhicitta motivation
- Follow the 1000-arm Chenrezig Meditation practice [here](#). Pause and do analytic meditation on the eight verses of mind training. You can also meditate on other lamrim topics after the mantra recitation, before the absorption.
- Dedicate the merit for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Consider joining the Lay Practitioner Practice Group to experience a guided meditation. They meet on Zoom daily at 5:30 am Pacific Time, and 6:00 pm Pacific Time Monday through Thursday and on Saturdays. Find out more [here](#).

Weekly E-Teachings

During retreat (January 4-March 22, 2024), Sravasti Abbey will send weekly emails to support your practice. These emails will include links to video teachings on the retreat topic, excerpts from books and other talks, meditation outlines, and more.

Please know that the content of the emails and suggested meditation topics are just a “hint” about how you can structure your retreat. You can tailor your study, reflection, and meditation to your own interests and needs.

For example, if you find yourself taken by a particular topic and wish to explore it more deeply, don’t feel like you need to “keep up” with the content of the weekly emails. Pursue what is bringing joy and understanding in your own practice—the resources shared can then be a useful tool for future study.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Does the Retreat from Afar cost anything to participate in?

A. All courses and teachings from Sravasti Abbey are offered freely, including the Retreat from Afar. The Abbey runs entirely on donations from our kind supporters, so if you would like to make an offering to the Abbey, that would be gratefully received. Offerings of all kinds (money, food, offering service) are welcome. You can find out more here: <https://sravastiabbey.org/giving/>

Q. I'm not sure I want to participate in three months of retreat. Is it okay if I only do one month?

A. Yes. You can choose to participate in the Retreat from Afar for either one, two, or three months. If you are unsure, it is good to set yourself an initial timeframe of one month and follow that through. Then, if you want to increase the length of your retreat, for another one or two months, you can do that. You don't need to tell us how long you plan to participate. We will send you the weekly emails for the full three months unless you request otherwise.

Q. I've never done a retreat before. Am I qualified to take part in this retreat?

A. Yes. You can structure your Retreat from Afar in a way that suits your level of practice. You can start with one session a day, for 30 minutes, and slowly get familiar with the practice text and the analytic meditations. There are many resources online to help you with this. As you get more familiar, you can increase the length of your sessions in small increments (e.g. 5 minutes) building up to 45-60 minutes if you wish.

Q. I have not taken empowerment. Can I still do the Chenrezig meditation?

A. Yes, anyone can do the front-generation Chenrezig meditation, which you can find [here](#) as well as in *Pearl of Wisdom II*.

If you have received the great empowerment into the Chenrezig mandala, you can find the self-generation practice text [here](#). Contact retreat@sravastiabbey.org for teachings on the self-generation practice.

Q. What time of day should I meditate?

A. We encourage people to meditate first thing in the morning, when the mind is most fresh and clear. Setting a strong motivation and spending some time in meditation in the morning really helps set the tone of the day, allowing love, compassion, and wisdom to guide your actions of body, speech and mind. However, we understand this is not possible for some people for various reasons. Please meditate when it fits best into your schedule, and where you can really settle the mind and focus on what you are doing.

Q. Is there a way to connect with other retreatants from afar? It would be nice to have a regular discussion group about the practice.

A. If you would like to be in touch with other retreatants, please see the RFA Participant [Google Doc](#). You can add your contact information, opt-in to Facebook and/or Discussion Groups, and/or reach out to others who have shared their information.

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Q. What happens if I have questions come up during retreat?

A. The Sravasti Abbey community will be in silent retreat, and not actively monitoring emails. However, you can write to us (retreat@sravastiabbey.org) with questions about the practice, which residents may answer in the short pre-lunch talks that are posted to the Sravasti Abbey YouTube channel. We hope the support and resources provided in the weekly emails will also answer many questions that may arise.

Q. What is the retreat schedule Abbey residents will follow? I want to use that as a model for my retreat and try to meditate at times when the Abbey monastics are meditating.

A. Below is the daily schedule of Sravasti Abbey residents during Winter Retreat. Keep in mind that the schedule changes when we have weekly teachings.

If you have not done long-retreat before, it is helpful to build up your meditation practice slowly. Start with a one-day retreat with four meditation sessions. After that, you could try a weekend retreat. It's important to not have a tight mind that is pushing yourself to do more than you are ready for. Rather, we build up our practice slowly and steadily, so that we can have a joyful mind that is happy and satisfied with what we have been able to do.

5:00 am	Wake up
5:30 – 7:00	Meditation Session 1
7:30	Breakfast
8:45 - 10:00	Meditation Session 2
10:30 – 11:45	Meditation Session 3
Noon	Lunch
2:45 - 4:00 pm	Meditation Session 4
4:00 – 6:00	Study time
6:00	Medicine meal
7:00 – 8:15	Meditation Session 5
8:15 – 10:00	Study time / rest

May this retreat bring great benefit to all beings!

Dedication for a Meaningful Life

Whatever actions I do—eating, walking, sitting, sleeping, working, and so forth—and whatever I experience in life—up or down, happiness or pain, healthy or sick, harmony or discord, success or failure, wealth or poverty, praise or criticism—whether I am living or dying, or even born in a horrible rebirth; whether I live long or not—may my life be beneficial for all sentient beings. The main purpose of my life is not simply to be rich, respected, famous, healthy, and happy. The meaning of my life is to benefit all sentient beings. Therefore, from now on, may whatever actions I do be beneficial for all beings. May whatever I experience in life—happiness or suffering—be dedicated to actualizing the path to awakening. May whatever I do, say, or think benefit all sentient beings and help them to attain full awakening quickly.

[Lama Zopa Rinpoche.](#)