

Drubdra

In the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, a *drubdra* (ལྷུང་ལྷ) is a religious centre dedicated to carrying out *drubpa* (ལྷུང་པ་), or meditation practice. Located in solitude and normally protected from worldly distractions and intrusions, the *drubdra* are places where people go into long-term religious retreat. These *drubdra* are also known as *drubde*, or practice groups, as the participants normally undertake group religious training under the guidance of a specific lama.

The practice of *drubpa* forms one of the two main activities of religious persons in the Himalayan Buddhist world, the other being *shepa* (ལེགས་པ་), or exposition. People who go through religious training in Bhutan often first undertake study through exposition and then engage in *drubpa* and practice at a *drubdra* centre. Drubpa practice in a *drubdra* in Bhutan normally include a long course of contemplation, visualisation, chanting and some yogic training which in many cases last for three years and three phases of the moon known as *losum choksum* (ལོ་གསུམ་ཚུགས་གསུམ་).

The *losum choksum* programme in a Bhutanese *drubdra* often begins with the preliminary practices of *ngöndro* followed by the recitation of the mantras of the three roots. The three roots are the lama or one's personal guru, *yidam* or the tutelary divinity and *khandro* or the spiritual catalytic agent. The course may also include training in the Buddhist practice of yoga, vital air and energy control. Although the exact curricula and procedures may differ between Buddhist traditions, in all sects training in *drubdra* normally prepares the candidate to be a good practitioner and a qualified officiant for religious ceremonies in that tradition.

Drubdra centres in Bhutan are generally affiliated with monastic schools and traditions but located in solitude in the mountains. They are built in or around holy sites and hidden lands as such locations are believed to make practice more efficacious. Monastic centres or private sponsors provide the resources for the retreatants, some of whom may remain in the centres practising meditation for their entire life. In general, the centres are marked by a border which neither the retreatants nor outsiders are allowed to cross. In most *drubdra*, a person is formally appointed to run errands on behalf the retreatants, and thus, allowed to enter the centre to bring food and

tend to other necessary matters. The people who are undergoing a retreat in such centres are guided by lamas. An important lama with spiritual authority would normally give the meditation instructions by either staying in the centre or visiting it when instructions need to be given.

Drubdra are seen as hubs for meditation and spiritual practice and therefore the main institutions which can uphold individuals' practice and experiential realization of the Buddhist teachings. Many people in Bhutan, in their old age, retire to *drubdra* to spend their lives in prayer and meditation.

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