

Chanting

Chanting in the morning and evening helps to provide a sense of twenty-four-hour practice. The events of the day and the night are sandwiched between periods of practice. In the morning, the chants provide the first spark of connection to the lineage, the teachings, and to our discipline. In the evening, they can provide a sense of summing up and recalling the entire day in the context of dharmic activity.

Chanting should be considered as a practice in itself. It is important to be present and mindful of what one is doing. We can cultivate awareness of the words we are chanting as well as an awareness of their meaning. Chanting is a proclamation of the teachings themselves. We are not mouthing meaningless words; we can have a sense of their meaning. In this way, hearing, contemplating, and meditating can occur.

The Vidyadhara introduced the monosyllabic style of chanting after hearing a tape of the monks at the Soto Zen monastery of Eheiiji chanting the Heart Sutra. The monosyllabic rhythm is to be used only for the *Supplication to the Takpo Kagyüs*, *The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge*, and the protector chants. Our use of a drum was inspired by both the Japanese and Tibetan buddhist traditions. It is used only with the Heart Sutra and protector chants.

Although the traditional Tibetan style of chanting includes the use of different melodies, the Vidyadhara did not encourage this style. The only specific melodies he introduced were for chanting the five precepts and for two short sections of the Vajrayogini Sadhana. In general, however, he did not prefer the monosyllabic chanting style for use in vajrayana practice. In the context of other vajrayana liturgies, the *Lineage Supplication*, *Heart Sutra*, and protector chants are not done monosyllabically; he encouraged a more fluid, undulated tone.

It is worthwhile for students to understand the meaning of the chants and shrine hall symbolism. To facilitate this, each center could periodically present a series of talks on the chants for new members. It is also good for new students to simply encounter the daily chants as they participate at your center. There is no need for them to receive such presentations right at the beginning of their involvement with practice. Allow some natural curiosity to develop. In general we have been instructed to pay attention to the meaning of the words of the chants and to be aware of the atmosphere, but not specifically to visualize the protectors. *The Supplication to the Takpo Kagyü*, *The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge*, the protector chants, and shrine hall symbolism could each be the subject of an entire class. *The Sadhana of Mahamudra* deserves several classes in itself.

Since many tantric issues come up, presentations should be given by experienced vajrayana teachers whenever possible. Explanations should be presented simply and clearly. Try to clarify basic questions without trying to explain everything in detail.