

# Dr. Nida Chenagtsang: The Art of Retreat

In this conversation, Dr. Nida Chenagtsang shares his personal experience after undertaking an extended retreat in 2021 and offers profound advice for those seeking to embark on this path.

## ### Retreat Structure: From Technical to Free-flow

Dr. Nida's retreat was divided into two distinct phases, illustrating the natural evolution of a practitioner:

1. **First Phase (Technical and Traditional):** For the first three months, he followed a rigid, classical structure. This included strict schedules, mantra accumulations (such as finishing 100,000 in one week), preliminary practices (\*Ngöndro\*), Guru Yoga, and a perfectly organized altar. This phase serves to build a solid foundation and a connection with the lineage's blessing (\*Yuthok Nyingthig\*).
2. **Second Phase (Freestyle and Relaxation):** In this stage, Dr. Nida removed the rigid structure. He focused on "self-discovery" and deep relaxation. He stopped using a complex altar to focus on the fact that Buddha-nature resides within. Meditation was integrated into sleep, dreams, and daily activities.

## ### Internal Obstacles and the "Spiritual Capsule"

Dr. Nida warns against the danger of creating a "spiritual capsule" or an invisible ego that makes us feel special for being in retreat. The true success of a retreat is not to become an exclusive and solitary yogi, but to become more inclusive and human.

Even the sounds of his children at home, which were initially a discomfort, became part of the practice. Retreat should not be an escape from society, but a method to function better within it.

## ### Dharma and Mental Health

A critical point of the talk is the relationship between retreat and psychology:

- **Psychological Evaluation:** Dr. Nida suggests that it is vital to have a mental checkup before a long retreat. Isolation and the intensity of practices can exacerbate pre-existing issues such as psychosis, depression, or narcissistic disorders.

- **Sorlong (Wind Disorder):** Excessive concentration without relaxation can cause **Sorlong**, an energetic imbalance that produces symptoms similar to psychosis (hallucinations, extreme anxiety).
- **Spiritual Narcissism:** There is a risk that people with narcissistic tendencies use the retreat to inflate their ego and seek titles (such as "Lama" or "Guru"), demanding respect and offerings. Dharma should make us simpler and easier people, not more complicated.

### ### Advice for the Practitioner

- **Grounding (\*Ngöndro\*):** Preliminary practices are the foundation. Without them, "high" practices (such as **Tummo** or **Mahamudra**) can be dangerous or fuel the desire for "magic powers" to impress others.
- **Gradual Approach:** It is recommended to start with short retreats (one week, then three weeks) before attempting long periods.
- **Family Harmony:** It is essential to enter retreat with harmony in social and family relationships. If the retreat is an escape from unresolved problems (divorces, debts), the mind will be too disturbed to meditate clearly.

### ### Conclusion: Retreat in Daily Life

In conclusion, Dr. Nida emphasizes that the ultimate goal is to find the quality of retreat in daily life. Mindfulness should not be rigid or "disabling," but a relaxed and flexible presence. As **Patrul Rinpoche** taught: "If you liberate one emotion, you liberate them all." True mastery consists of being with oneself, with total awareness, regardless of the place or activity.