

## **How to create an online practice container**

(adapted from a document written by Acharya David Schneider, December 2007.)

Most offerings at Shambhala Online are considered a teaching situation, in the same way you would experience programs at a Shambhala Centre.

There are certain obstacles to hearing and contemplating the dharma built in to the nature of a webcast. We increasingly go to computer screens for work, correspondence, news, music, film, humor, shopping, and fantasy. The screen and the web behind it can encourage discursive mind. We can work with this tool so that it can be properly used to convey the dharma. The vision of delivering dharma in this way is to increase access to the teachings and reach people beyond geographical boundaries. This technology can help us do that, if we work with habits that we may have toward our computer and the internet.

Practical problems arise as well: computer screens are often not nice to look at. The image may need to be broadcast onto a wall in a darkened room, or people may have to crowd around a screen. The teacher may be framed with distracting logos, icons, and menus.

Despite these challenges, we believe that a real transmission of dharma is possible through this medium. Most crucial will be our - the audience's - conduct. Every dharma teaching is characterized by five situations - teacher, teaching, time, place and retinue (audience) - our manifestation, and the way we set up the teaching environment locally, will have a strong impact on the overall success or failure of the attempt to convey the dharma properly. What follows is mostly common sense.

Generally, whether participating from your home or as part of a group, regard the talk as a talk, not a television broadcast. Try to create an appropriate container within which to receive teachings. It would be fine to imagine that the teacher were actually in the room with you. Because of the live interactive nature of this technology, the teacher will indeed be in the same space with you, albeit in a virtual way.

Specifically:

- Be on time for the event, and dress for the talk- even if participating from home. Pins would be appropriate.
- Please eat and drink prior to the webcast, not during.
- If you are participating as a group, schedule an umdze for the event.
- Light the shrines if you are in a shrine room (main and protector) and refresh the offerings.
- Do at least the *Supplication to the Shambhala Lineage* chant before the broadcast; other chants could be done as time and circumstances allow.
- It would be excellent to sit in meditation for a few minutes before the broadcast. If the broadcast is delayed for some reason, continue to sit until it begins.
- Maintain an upright posture during the talk to stay awake and focused, and as a sign of respect.
- The teacher may (during some broadcasts) speak in a way that allows for translation. A pause would be a perfect time to check your notes, or to reflect on whether you heard or understood what the teacher just said, rather than a time to start a conversation with your neighbor.
- After the webcast, you may close the event with discussion, chants, and celebration.
- It is both traditional and personally helpful to make an offering, whenever one hears a dharma teaching. Please donate something, however modest, to the teacher before or after the talk. Teaching gifts may be submitted on our website.