**Message to the Sangha from Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche**

This message from Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche was read to the sangha by Sangye Khandro on the last day of the 2005 Vajrakilaya retreat at Tashi Choling. Rinpoche did not attend the retreat as he was preparing for a month-long trip to China to visit his sisters, whom he had not seen since leaving Tibet 55 years ago.

I am so grateful to Lingtrul Rinpoche and Pema Tenzin. They always come to our ceremonies, especially to Vajrasattva and Vajrakilaya. Their kindness cannot be repaid. I hope that both of them will always bless us with their presence during these ceremonies in the future.

I am also grateful that Lama Yönten participated in our Vajrakilaya practice this year. Lama Yönten is a direct disciple of Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche. He lived with H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche and his family and learned in the Tersar monasteries in Bhutan and Nepal. While he was here, he taught the students at Tashi Choling how to play the instruments and just how to be good practitioners. In the future, I am hoping that Lama Yönten will continue to be one of our teachers and to help us as he did this year.

To the entire sangha, including the geku Nick O’Connor and the chopons, I would like to say: please continue to increase your knowledge, your skilful means, your incisive knowledge and your loving kindness so that you will always uphold the Buddha’s doctrine in a very pure way.

All disciples should know that we are not here practicing dharma just to dispel obstacles, even though dispelling obstacles is one of the functions of Kilaya practice. The main function of dharma practice is to completely tame and control one’s own mind. If we can do that, we will be able to achieve siddhis. It’s as simple as that. Everything that we hope to achieve in order to accomplish our own
purpose and the purpose of others is completely dependent upon taming our own minds. Everyone should always be considering this. In order to become Buddha, to clear all obstructions and increase all indwelling noble qualities, we must tame our minds.

Everything is dependent upon refuge. I always repeat this. I want to drive the point home again and again, because people still do not get it. Refuge is the single most important practice. The worst obstacle is not knowing refuge. The proof that refuge is not being understood is that people are not progressing rapidly on the path, because dharma’s methods produce rapid results when they are practiced correctly. A lack of true faith in the objects of refuge comes from not understanding the qualities of the objects of refuge. It’s extremely important to come to know their qualities very well. Then your path will be meaningful.

If you keep your refuge vows, then all three vows—pratimoksha, bodhisattva and vajrayana—are subsumed there. Refuge vows contain all three kayas; they contain Buddha’s enlightened body, speech and mind. Generation and completion stage are subsumed in refuge. Refuge also includes the result of all of our efforts to receive empowerment, transmission and upadesha instruction.

As for the children, you children are my special little fresh sprouts. That’s because your seed is your own little Buddhanature. You must not allow your sprout to be ruined or burned. Parents are responsible for this. Children need to learn dharma as much as possible. They need to cultivate the three wisdoms of listening, contemplating and meditating and parents must be responsible for giving them this opportunity. The rest of the sangha must be responsible to help ensure that the children are learning. In that way everyone will be harmonious.

For myself, this is the future. When these children become tulkus, khenpos, translators or lamas, they should never be arrogant or boastful. Everyone must always work to tame his or her own mind. And once again, that’s dependent on how well we hold the vows of refuge. These days it’s a very sad time because many people are given dharma names like ‘tulku.’ Then right away they pop up, but they are empty of qualities. There’s nothing more sad than that. So please don’t follow this empty tulku tradition where the demon of godliness is cultivated. That demon of godliness is meant to be eradicated, not encouraged. Therefore, all disciples must keep samaya.

Keeping samaya vows doesn’t mean looking at one another and pointing to see if others are keeping them or not, saying he or she is good, he or she is bad. Of course, all beings are having a hard time keeping samaya, just as you are. That’s because they are wandering in samsara. So rather than faulting and judging them, we must have compassion and love for them continuously. Tulkus can really destroy the doctrine, especially these days when they compete with each other for positions, like who sits on the highest seat in the shrine room. It’s a sign of not knowing the dharma at all. Whoever sits on
the lowest seat in the shrine room is the one who has the highest qualities.

For example, it’s a well-known fact that there’s no owner of the Ganden Tri, the throne of the Ganden. Whoever has the qualities takes the seat on that throne. But these days, lamas and tulkus are fighting over positions. That’s the tradition of kings; it’s not the dharma tradition. Buddha Shakyamuni never worried about a throne. Guru Rinpoche never worried about a throne. Our root guru, Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche, never worried about a throne and in the history of his lineage there’s never any history of anyone fighting over who held the throne or competition about how many tulkus there may be. This has never existed in Dudjom Lingpa and Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche’s lineage. Usually there are 5 tulkus for body, speech, mind, qualities and enlightened activities. All of these tulkus are busy increasing the doctrine. They’re not thinking, “My monastery’s the seat,” or “I’m the only throne holder.” So don’t take the pure dharma and bless it with demon’s views.

Think about the future and about keeping the lineage pure. It doesn’t matter if you’re a monk or a ngakpa. You should tame your own mind. That is the main responsibility of dharma practice. And also not breaking samaya. No matter how scholarly you may become, if you don’t have pure samaya, your mind will become like a poisonous snake and you’ll never be a good practitioner. You will only be a reflection.

In the future, always remember it doesn’t matter what you look like with your dharma clothes on, whether you appear to be handsome, pretty, powerful, even if someone is always praising you. You need to understand that all these ways of thinking about dharma are detrimental because they don’t help you to tame your mind and cultivate compassion for others. So just work on taming your mind and don’t worry about the rest of the stuff. Stay happy with who you are whatever status you have. However much you can tame your mind, that will bring you more happiness. Have excellent thoughts toward others and give offerings as much as you can without being proud or boasting.

These days people do one good thing and right away they want to tell everyone, pretending they’re so great. There’s never any reason to tell anyone anything when you do something good. They will notice it. It will be conspicuous. Remembering that all parent sentient beings are equal to space we should always have love for them and whatever happens, we should always attribute that to the kindness of our root guru and our parents. This is very important, to think that whatever qualities you have are because of your guru’s kindness, not because of yourself.

For example, for me, I know that I don’t have any qualities, but because of the kindness of my gurus, I have been able to do something meaningful in my life. I do have confidence in that. But I have never thought that I did this myself. I always thought that it was because of their kindness and their kindness alone that I had this opportunity. That makes me special. That makes me someone who can give the gift of dharma. When I think about myself doing something good, I attribute all the credit to my root gurus. So if you are my friends, then you should do the same. I would expect that of you. As for this name tulku, a dog can be called a snow lion. The tulku lineage does not matter any more. Just tame your own minds. That’s the real tulku.

We’ve worked hard to create this little gompa of Tashi Choling. It’s filled with blessings of body, speech and mind; it’s been blessed by the greatest gurus of our time. So take care of it for the rest of your lives, and take care of one another. And when the lamas die, as they will, for example myself, my corpse, I don’t want anyone making a big deal about my corpse. I don’t want a stupa. I would prefer cremation or giving my body to the birds. Or you could throw it in a river. I really don’t care. Milarepa didn’t care what happened to his body. I would like to be like him. He didn’t need a stupa. A pure Buddhist doesn’t care what happens to the body after death. So please keep that in mind and don’t forget my words.

Also, I wanted to say that ordinary dharma practitioners should not have stupas for their bodies.
Many of you misinterpret what to do with people when they die. You put ordinary practitioners’ pictures on the altar and then make offerings to their pictures. This is really incorrect. You should learn from lamas like Pema Tenzin what should be done when people die. Do not put their pictures on altars. This is not the way. That would cause the deceased person to go to the lower realms. Keep things in the proper context. If I die, please don’t do that. And don’t blow the trumpets either.

This is different from Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche. You may say, “Well his students did that for him, shouldn’t we do that for you, Rinpoche?” But Chagdud Tulku and I are very different. Don’t forget that his mother was a great dakini and she would actually pretend to pass away and go into the realms and liberate thousands of beings from the bardo. And Chagdud Tulku’s sister did the same. Chagdud Tulku came from an amazing lineage and he himself was an amazing guru. So of course the way he was treated by his disciples was entirely appropriate. We don’t have to say these things. Everyone knows that.

Please listen carefully. If we follow Buddha Shakyamuni’s tradition, even though Buddha Shakyamuni lived two thousand five hundred years ago, we don’t need to worry about eight worldly dharma concerns and we can always only practice pure dharma. You shouldn’t boast about visions. There are many of these so-called western tulkus and lamas who are busy boasting to their disciples that they had this vision and that vision trying to impress their disciples. This is just worldly concern. I hope none of you will ever do that. Why should you boast? If you’re my friends, in the future you won’t do that. Just be harmonious with each other and do your very best and follow the pure tradition, not “my way.” Don’t follow the highway of “my way,” that’s very shameful. That will cover up the pure Buddhist doctrine. And don’t mix the tradition with other things, with your own ideas and your own cultures. Don’t follow cultures for that matter. You don’t need to follow any culture, just the pure Buddhist dharma, and nothing ever needs to be changed. It’s so sad when people think they need to adjust Buddha’s speech, like pouring blood into pure milk.

As for the translators, especially the future translators as I mentioned before, translators are the second lama and all of you really need to respect this. Translators are not just like the postman delivering letters, handing it over. You shouldn’t think like that. In order to become a true translator—and I know many of you are aspiring to do that—you really must accomplish the dharma as a practitioner through listening, contemplating and meditating. Then when you serve, you are really serving. You must be tireless. You shouldn’t be a complainer saying I’m too tired, I’m so busy and ruining your merit. So many westerners are always ruining their merit by complaining right after they do something good. It doesn’t make sense. Why do you always have to complain? Just be tireless. For myself, and I don’t mean to boast, the only reason why I went to Arizona was to keep samaya. I didn’t want to go. I went there because I had some samaya commitment that I should go there. It was hard for me to go but I tried to keep that commitment. Like that, all of you should always try to keep your samaya no matter how difficult it is. You’re not keeping samaya just for the lama, you’re keeping samaya only for yourself. So please keep this in mind.

What would we have done if the 25 disciples in Tibet including Beirotsana had not gone through all their hardships to bring the dharma into a language that the Tibetan people could understand? We wouldn’t have the dharma. So you see the importance of this work of bringing dharma now into the English language. It’s entirely dependent upon how the translator can realize that information and present it accurately and correctly. Translating is a skill that must be perfected. It is not just some ordinary job. You can’t just think, I’m going to be a translator, and think that it will be easy to learn to read, or that you can just learn some words and all of a sudden you will start translating. It’s really not quite like that. As a translator, you’re becoming a major servant of the doctrine, spreading the doctrine in a most potent way by bringing it into a language that people can understand. So be very careful and keep your samaya. Otherwise you will be just like a postman. It’s important for all students to respect
translators and those who are training to be translators. Encourage one another.

The sponsors of the dharma should always rejoice if in this lifetime they have an opportunity to be generous. They should try their best to offer with purest intention, skillful means and prajna wisdom.

I’m sorry I wasn’t able to come to Kilaya this year. I really had every intention of coming. As you know, I always like to come. And in the future, I’ll be there next time to bug you guys again, especially the children, my children, who are the future seeds, and my shedra students, who better not be hanging out or trying to be slick. I want them all to be like Shashi and Ila and to guard the doctrine. I love those girls and I love these students. They are supporting my life more than anyone.

I’ll see you all soon when I come back from China and maybe Taiwan. My final word is to keep samaya with the guru. Everyone has that responsibility. Watch yourself and see whether you have pure samaya. Whether someone else is a god or a demon, it really doesn’t matter. Just watch yourself.

The Chela’s Prayer

You came to us as if from dreams for years you have remained. You welcome us into your heart where we are safe, a blessing of infinite grace as you hold the vow to lead all beings from suffering. We can never repay this, but our love for you, like a mountain, is unmoving. You are the voice of the enlightened revealing the essence of our minds. You have offered us everything. There is nothing more sacred in this world. We witness your flawless example, seeing the truth of equanimity in your body, speech and mind the unerring motivation. Most Supreme Teacher of perfect faith, your selfless love has changed us. Please stay, remain within seated firmly in our hearts, closer than breath your wisdom and compassion always present, always guiding us.

—Julie Rogers

Sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this issue.
Rinpoche’s Journey to China
by Sangye Khandro

Dear Vajra Friends,

This message comes with warmest wishes for the New Year ahead. May we all enjoy the benefits of our present lifetime in the dharma, good health and great joy in our commitment to work for others’ welfare.

At the end of 2005 Gyatrul Rinpoche finally made his long-anticipated journey back to China to reunite with family, friends and disciples after 55 years. In 1987 Rinpoche and I did go to Tibet with Kyabje Penor Rinpoche. However, Gyatrul Rinpoche was unable to visit with his family at that time. Once again I had the good fortune to accompany Rinpoche on this trip and will share with you some of the highlights.

This trip came at a time when Rinpoche’s health was weak. Yet because of positive divinations performed by Kyabje Penor Rinpoche, Kyabje Dodrubchen Rinpoche and Dudjom Sangyum Kusho, Rinpoche felt confident that he could make the trip. Therefore, on December 7th, Rinpoche arrived in Beijing with that big smile on his face that we all know so well!

This was Rinpoche’s first visit to Beijing and it all went very well. We stayed in the lovely home of James and Teresa Chin. The weather was very cold, but Rinpoche was determined to pay respects to the actual tooth relic of Lord Buddha enshrined in a temple in Beijing, where it has remained for some six hundred years after being returned from Burma. This is one of four holy relics of the Buddha’s actual body still left in this world. Due to the efforts of Kris Yang and our new local friends we had a rare private viewing of the relic. Rinpoche also visited the Forbidden City. He gave a well-received dharma teaching on the last day; many new students learned the importance of refuge. Finally the day came to fly to Chengdu. Rinpoche and all of us were warmly greeted by Khenpo Lobsang Chophel (Rinpoche’s cousin, who is one of the main teachers at Khenpo Jigphun’s Gar in Golog Serta), as well as lamas and monks (all relatives), nephews and their children.

Rinpoche had instructed his two sisters, Kunga and Lotsima, not to come for several days after he arrived so that he could have a chance to rest. Dr. Kris Yang made all the arrangements for Rinpoche and the rest of us (Jigmed, Chonam, Tendar, David and Kris) to stay together in a very nice apartment on the outskirts of town. We settled in and began receiving the constant flow of visitors. The challenge quickly became trying to allow Rinpoche ample time to rest while not disappointing the anxious visitors.
After resting, Rinpoche arranged to treat his entire extended entourage of family, monks and nuns to a three-day pilgrimage for which Kris Yang made all the preparations. We visited all the important Buddhist sites around the Chengdu area including the great Buddha of Leshan, Mount Ermei and the holy shrine of Manjushri. Everyone gathered at that shrine and offered many prayers while Rinpoche blessed us with a teaching.

The day we arrived, the mountain was shrouded in mist so we could only catch glimpses of bamboo forests, jutting peaks, perfectly manicured gardens and monkeys jumping from tree to tree. In order to get to the upper temple one either had to take the chair lift or walk straight up for one and a half hours. Guess what we did? This was very fun since most of the pilgrims in our group had never been on a chair lift before. It was fun to see how they clamored to grab the seat before being whisked off into space. During this time Rinpoche made everyone feel joyful as he continued to make jokes and lighten up every situation. His loving care and kindness shown to his sisters was extremely heartwarming to observe. By the way, they both look a lot like their brother!

After the pilgrimage Rinpoche was quite busy seeing many visitors including a delegation from Dhomang, relatives of Rinpoche’s root guru Tulku Natsog Rangdrol. In this group, there were two older lamas who knew Rinpoche before he left and younger ones meeting him for the first time. There were also some very traditional Tibetans who looked like American Indians with large tall bodies and long wavy black hair. This group came every day until finally Rinpoche told them it was time for them to return home.

Rinpoche spent time with both of his sisters, showering them with gifts and lots of advice. The younger sister Kunga is quite ill so she returned home early while the older sister Lotsima stayed to see Rinpoche off along with all the lamas from Khenpo Jigphun’s Gar.

Rinpoche spent hours every day just talking to them along with giving blessings and much advice. One day Rinpoche gave a scripture empowerment and taught for several hours. Rinpoche’s health remained very good throughout this trip but he decided that it was too much to make the trip to Taiwan and Hawaii at this time. Therefore we rearranged things so that Rinpoche could fly back to Beijing and then San Francisco.

This has been a most wonderful and meaningful trip for Rinpoche as well as everyone and I will tell you that Rinpoche is telling his family that he hopes to see them again in a few years!!!
HEART NECTAR OF THE SAINTS
A Prayer of Aspiration
That Condenses the Essence of the Oral Teachings

His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche
Jigdral Yeshe Dorje

Sole unfailing and unchanging
Refuge, Lord of the
Mandala, most precious and kind
Root Guru, hold me
with compassion when I squander
the freedoms and
endowments, ignoring death,
providing only for this life.

This fleeting human life, like a
dream,
if it’s happy that’s all right, if it’s
unhappy that’s all right.
Without concern for happiness or
sorrow,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This mortal existence, like a
candle in the wind,
if it’s long that’s all right, if it’s
short that’s all right.
Without intensifying the tight grip
of the ego,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

These intellectual judgments, like
the lure of a mirage,
If they’re suitable that’s all right, if
they’re not that’s all right.
Discarding, like hay, talk that
carries the eight worldly concerns,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This entourage, like a flock of
birds in a tree,
If it’s assembled that’s all right, if
it’s scattered that’s all right.
Without letting others lead me by
the nose,
May I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This illusory body, like a hundred-
year-old house,
if it survives that’s all right, if it
collapses that’s all right.
Without becoming entangled
with obsessions for food,
clothes, and medicine,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This religious position, like a
child’s game,
if it’s kept up that’s all right, if
it’s dropped that’s all right.
Without deceiving myself with
numerous diversions,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

These gods and demons, like
reflections in a mirror,
if they’re helpful that’s all right,
if they’re harmful that’s
all right.
Without perceiving my own
hallucinations as the enemy,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This delusive talk, like a
trackless echo,
if it’s pleasing that’s all right, if
it’s unpleasing that’s all right.
Taking the Three Jewels and
my own mind as witness,
May I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

That which is useless at the
time of need, like the antlers of a
deer,
if it’s known that’s all right, if
it’s unknown that’s all right.
Without simply relying on the
various sciences,
May I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

These religious possessions, like
virulent poisons,
if they’re acquired that’s all
right, if they’re not that’s all
right.
Without devoting my life to
sinful, unwholesome means of
survival,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This form of greatness, like dog
shit wrapped in brocade,
if it’s obtained that’s all right, if
it’s not that’s all right.
Having smelled the rottenness
of my own head,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

These relationships, like
gatherings on a market day,
if they’re loving that’s all right, if
they’re spiteful that’s all right.
Cutting the ties of passionate
attachment from deep
within the heart,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This material wealth, like
what’s found in a dream,
if it’s acquired that’s all right, if
it’s not that’s all right.
Without deceiving others by
flattery and assent,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This rank, like a little bird
perched in a tree,
if it’s high that’s all right, if it’s
low that’s all right.
Without concentrating on that
which actually brings sorrow,
may I constantly practice the
Supreme Teaching.

This is an excerpt from Heart Essence of the Saints. This prayer was
originally published in 1980 by the New York Yeshe Nyingpo center. It will
soon be republished by Mirror of Wisdom.
Voice of the Young

Conversation with Keith LaCoste
by Julie Rogers

Keith LaCoste, the son of Mark and Lisbeth LaCoste, was raised with the dharma. His mother has been associated with Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche since the “old days” when Rinpoche first arrived in California. Now twenty years old, Keith is a full-time student in Tashi Choling’s Educational Program and also serves as the lead chanter for several monthly pujas. He lives with his family down the road from the temple.

I still remember the day you were born. At that time your parents lived on a property adjoining Tashi Choling. Do you have any memories of that time? He is quiet for a long moment, then says “I don’t know if it’s true or not, but there’s one memory of a lama that looked a lot like Dudjom Rinpoche sitting up on the throne, teaching. That is the only memory I have before I was four. It could have even been a dream, or some mystical experience in my mother’s womb, or it could just be a picture I’ve seen somewhere.”

What are your first memories of Gyatrul Rinpoche? He speaks without hesitation, “My first memory was driving up in the car to the statue garden, even before there was a fence around it. We parked in the field. Later, I helped set up a tent where we were to stay at Philip’s. We came for an empowerment. That was the first time I remember seeing Rinpoche. I remember seeing him on the throne, his hands pressed together, and I remember his voice as we repeated after him.”

How old were you when you came back from Seattle to live in Ashland? Did you have any idea of your future as a dharma student then? He thinks back, “I was in seventh grade, about thirteen. One of the reasons we moved back here was to be close to the temple. I did start practicing ngondro at eight. My mom and Rinpoche encouraged me to practice then, so I was going along, but I also had interest. I had no clue I would be a dharma student. Feeling like a student really started for me at the tsalung retreat three years ago.”

What inspired you to practice when you were younger? He’s quiet, and then replies, “It was kind of a natural inclination. I was slowly being integrated into the dharma. Once Rinpoche said, “Ha ha, you’re going to chip in.” That’s what I thought he meant--help out around the temple or something. Later I found out he meant chopon. My first chopon teacher was Brian Carstens, during Vajrakilaya, and Trish was also involved with that. But my first real memory of chopping was with Brian, showing me what to do.”

How do you like living in the Colestine Valley? He offers, “It’s great because it’s easier to get to the temple.” I wonder, “Do you like the quiet?” Keith shrugs. “It’s always been quiet where I live.”

Keith has studied music for years and is a fine pianist. When I asked
him whether he thought that his musical training helped him as he began to lead pujas, he agreed that it did. Keith attracted notice as a potential omzed during the tsalung retreat.

“During tsalung, Lopon Rechungpa had each of us lead the chanting, and some thought then that I had some kind of voice. Someone decided I should start practicing, probably Nick. Rinpoche also had some prophesy for me.” “What was that?” I ask. Keith repeats Rinpoche’s words, “First chopon, then omzed, then geku, then lama. I guess since I’d already been chopon for a bit, it was time to move on to being an omzed, and I started leading the Guru Rinpoche puja.”

You have taken part in the Educational Program since its beginnings. Could you talk about your experience in the program? Keith replies with some enthusiasm, “We were first taught the Bodhicaryavatara by Khenpo Orgyen Thinley with Michael Lewis translating. I don’t remember that much about the text but did get an idea about what a Bodhisattva is. This was taught again later by Lopon Rechungpa. But when Khenpo Lodro Thaye taught the Jewel Ornament of Liberation - at that point I felt I knew something, like the Eight Freedoms and Ten Endowments and the Twelve Interdependent Links of Origination, all these different points and enumerations of dharma.” I wonder, “Was that a turning point for you?” He replies confidently, “I was able to begin integrating the teachings into my mind. It gave me a good foundation for receiving the Guyagharba teachings.”

Is there an area of dharma study that inspires you most, that you really love and thrive on more than others? Keith says with feeling, “I really like getting teachings that I can actually integrate into my daily life, and teachings that explain how to do the practices, like what tsalung is all about for instance - learning the meanings, the foundations of the higher teachings.”

You’re saying that you want to know why things happen in the dharma – right? “Yes, and it’s really satisfying when there is a question and I get an answer that explains the meaning.”

When you consider your life now Keith, when are your happiest times? He pauses and thinks. “Well, there’s times when I’m doing something like being omzed, or chanting along with everyone when Pema Tenzin is leading, when I become aware that I am actually doing something that is in accord with what is happening. Like, I’m not doing things because everyone wants me to do it right. It’s when everything is happening as it should, spontaneously. It doesn’t have to be in a dharma context either. Like if I were in a crowd, I can just sit back and watch what is happening, and I already know that what I am doing is normal. I don’t have to pay attention to what other people are thinking about me. It’s basically just knowing that you are right, knowing that whatever happens, whatever anybody else says, you’re doing something you know is right.”

“Just one last question. Do you continue to enjoy video games?” Without hesitation Keith asserts, “Yes!”
In order to write this article, I asked various sangha members about Les Collins. Of course, each of them had something to say. One told me excitedly, “Oh, he has lived an absolutely fantastic life!” Another said, “Have you seen his place? It’s so full of art it’s like a museum!” Yet another assured me, “He’s done everything. He’s been a football player, a jazz musician, a world traveler, a healer and an art collector. He even lived in a witch’s village for a year.”

“He’s an odd character, both sensitive and macho,” one person reported in an affectionate tone of voice, while another quietly added, “He’s a classical person. Everything has to be 14th century.” By the time I finished making the rounds, I thought that Les Collins would have been better off writing his own Vintage Sangha article. At least he could have depicted himself as he would prefer to appear. But then again, since we are all so transparent to each other, this method is also effective.

Monk Nick O’Connor met Les Collins 25 years ago when he went to Les for healing work, and the two of them have been friends ever since. “Les is an incredibly loyal person, one of the most loyal people I’ve ever met,” Nick says. “He has amazing karma with lamas, and he has brought a lot of people into the Dharma. I came to Tashi Choling through Les. The Dharma is his love. He is very dedicated,” Nick said.

Samantha Cheney also met Les through his healing work. After a course of treatment that she describes as physically and emotionally transformative, Samantha went on to take meditation classes with Les. “He’s one of the more compassionate, loving people I’ve met,” she said. “He’s funny, witty, and quite the character. He can be challenging too, but generally he is out to help people learn and to be of benefit to others. When I started his meditation class at Orgyen Dorje Den two years ago, it made a huge change in my life,” she stated.

Born and raised in Canada, Les was quite an athlete, and it looked as if he was heading for a professional career in either hockey or football. When he was 18, however, a bad car accident laid him up for three years and changed the course of his life. By the time he recovered, Les was ready for new vistas: “I wanted to get away from my conditioned environment and learn about myself.” That first trip and others that followed represent some serious traveling. “I’ve been around the world a half dozen times. Europe, eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, everywhere,” he reported.

Les first encountered Tibetan Buddhism in Toronto in the late 60s when he met Kalu Rinpoche and then Namgyal Rinpoche. Not long after, he traveled to North Africa to participate in a program...
of dharma therapy with Namgyal Rinpoche. “There was nothing else like it then. It combined mandala practice with Jungian therapy. After I went through it with the first group, I led a group of 22-23 people through it. It really made you confront your conditioning,” he said.

In 1970, Les decided to hitchhike from Europe to India. “I wanted to experience the old Silk Route, and I wanted to do it slowly,” he explained. “It took me three months. On that journey, I came to see a lot of myself that I hadn’t dealt with.”

On his travels, he met and studied with many lamas and yogis. In Rajpur, Les met H.H. Sakya Trizin and received teachings from him over a period of several months. He went to Dharamsala and received private teachings from H.H. the Dalai Lama. He met H.H. Penor Rinpoche and H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche. He traveled to Rumtek, the seat of the H.H. the Karmapa, and took refuge with the Karmapa. “I knew when I went to Rumtek and met His Holiness the Karmapa that I had come home.”

When you listen to Les talk about his various journeys, it all becomes an impressionistic blur—stories of going through India to Bombay, hitchhiking in Africa to Cape Town, doing retreat in Australia and New Zealand, visiting Fiji, going through Central America, spending some time with Lama Govinda on a boat in Africa, studying healing with a doctor in a Thai monastery...quite an odyssey.

In 1974, back in the Toronto area, Les met Gyatrul Rinpoche for the first time. On a teaching tour, the Karmapa visited a Dharma center near Toronto to bless a stupa and Gyatrul Rinpoche was with him. When Les saw Gyatrul Rinpoche, he felt very concerned. “Rinpoche was very thin. He did not look well. So I immediately went up to him and asked him, ‘Do you need some help?’ Rinpoche’s response has stuck with me ever since. ‘I’m not the one who needs help,’ he told me.” Les laughed as he told the story. It was over 10 years before Les connected with Rinpoche again.

Les began to do healing work around 1975. That year, he was invited to join a long-established osteopathic-naturopathic clinic in Columbus, Ohio. First he went to Crete to do retreat, then moved to Columbus where he worked at the clinic for 3 years. He also helped to start a Kagyu center in Columbus with Khenpo Khatar Rinpoche. Then he moved to Cape Cod for a year and worked with mentally retarded people. “I’ve always thought I was mentally retarded, so I thought I could learn something about myself,” he joked. Chicago was his next home. He lived there for 2 years, traveling to many cities doing healing work. He started another dharma center in Chicago and was in that city at the time of the Karmapa’s death. After that, Les moved to Joshua Tree, a place near Palm Springs, where he did 3 years of retreat.

Santa Monica was the next stop on his journey. As fortune had it, Gyatrul Rinpoche came to Santa Monica and gave teachings at the house where Les was living. “Rinpoche looked much different, much healthier. He invited me to come to Tashi Choling and I did. I stayed on the land and took part in the tsalung retreat and in the Nam Cho teachings,” Les reported.

“I’ve never met a more profound being than Gyatrul Rinpoche. I totally love him. I have no need to look further in terms of a teacher. The most profound experiences I’ve had have been with Gyatrul Rinpoche,” Les continued. “He is a living Buddha.”

At present, the world traveler resides in the San Francisco Bay area with Lindy Steele, his partner of 18 years. Les leads classes and retreats based upon Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche’s book Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava’s Teachings on the Six Bar dos at both Orgyen Dorje Den and Tashi Choling.
In last year’s issue of this newsletter, marking the Tibetan year of the wood rooster, Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche spoke at length about the significance of Mirror of Wisdom and the Buddha’s speech, pointing to how we as his students have great opportunity as well as responsibility to serve as stewards of the teachings. Here is a brief excerpt:

In my opinion, there is no greater way to serve the doctrine or sentient beings than through the dharma of scripture and transmission. This is, in fact, the life of the dharma. Mirror of Wisdom is the structure and support for this because it preserves all the great teachings given to us by the greatest teachers of our time.

Rinpoche has often spoken of a wish to see more of his students offer to help Mirror of Wisdom. Often we need help in specific areas, and we encourage you to inquire with us at any time. You will find more details as you read on.

Last year several capable and dedicated people volunteered their time and skills. Without them we would not have been able to function, let alone improve our operation. While our intention is certainly not to blow our own horn, it is here that we want to thank each of those individuals for helping us clear some of our cobwebs and carry us to fresh places. We also remember and want to acknowledge those people who have helped continually over many years; to mention all your names and list what you’ve done would entail a separate and lengthy story in itself, so instead we hope you’ll each accept this big thank you, even though it’s not personalized.

But first, we wish to offer our ongoing gratitude to our sublime teacher, Ven. Gyatral Rinpoche, who continues to guide us in infinite ways. Without the compassion of H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche and Gyatrul Rinpoche, Mirror of Wisdom would never have manifested. Similarly, we extend our appreciation to the many lamas who have taught us as a result of Rinpoche’s kindness. It is our continuing aspiration to help serve and fulfill their vision for Mirror of Wisdom to the best of our abilities.

Without Sangye Khandro’s ever-increasing skill and generosity as translator, we would not have heard the quality and vastness of teachings given over decades. Thank you for an outstanding job, Sangye! Also in our immediate family our gratitude goes to B. Alan Wallace, and finally to the other translators who have served us over the years with work that has resulted in many of our publications.

We’ve made several changes in 2005 that will enable us to grow more effective. We hope that updating you with the following details about current personnel and what we are up to will serve to inspire your interest about participating in some way, if not now, perhaps in the future.

We changed our board membership slightly in 2005. Current board members include Mimi Hohenberg, Janis Feichtmeir, Lisbeth LaCoste, Willlie Korman, and Christine Moen. We thank Stephanie Lain for her past service on the board, her ongoing role as advisor and her continuing work with several committees. We welcome our new board member, Christine Moen, who is a longtime student of Gyatrul Rinpoche and Tulku Sang-ngag Rinpoche.

In 2005, the board concentrated its focus on overseeing and streamlining of financial operations, an assessment of needs and development of management and procedural policies for office and bookstore operations, and enlistment, training and management of new and existing personnel. This
year we wish to extend a particular thank you to our Mirror of Wisdom Treasurer and board member, Jan Feichtmeir, who also serves on the Bookstore and Office Management committees. Jan has devoted countless productive hours to all the above activities. Thank you for your attentive endeavor, Jan!

To facilitate the standardization, preservation, archiving and accessibility of our entire inventory of written and audio archives, we recently acquired upgraded computer and new digitizing equipment at our Tashi Chöling location. As we gain funding necessary to purchase the same state-of-the-art equipment for Mirror of Wisdom in Alameda, the digital archive now being created at Tashi Chöling will also become available in Alameda. Efforts are also underway to create digital archives of our videos. Besides needing volunteers in other areas (see below), we’re currently in need of sangha volunteers to oversee digitizing projects and manage equipment, particularly at our Alameda facility.

As most of you may know, our website has been undergoing construction for some time, and will soon be activated. It will feature a catalog of our inventory together with ordering information. (We appreciate your continued patience, and please do stay tuned for us at www.mirrorofwisdom.org) We wish to thank Stephanie Lain, who spearheaded this effort, and Trish DeMers, who volunteered her design skills for the site and also created standardized cover templates we’ll eventually use with all our in-house Oral Commentary Series publications.

We are pleased to announce the projected publication and release in the first half of 2006 of our second self-published book, *Path of the Bodhisattva*. This will be a convenient pocket-size volume compiled with a prayer by Gyatrul Rinpoche, a commentary by H.H. Penor Rinpoche, and translation by Sangye Khandro. We wish to thank the editors and many others who participated in this project in various ways over the past several years, and, more recently, Willie Korman and Deborah Borin, who are overseeing the manuscript through production and distribution. Excerpts from the book are included in this issue of the newsletter.

Another forthcoming title we are now revising and plan to republish in book format in 2006 is *Buddha in the Palm of the Hand*, adapted from an extensive teaching given by Gyatrul Rinpoche on ngöndro according to the corresponding *Intermediate Commentary* by the Vidyadhara Kunzang Sherab of the Palyul lineage.

Those working on our Oral Commentary Series committee have begun taking an in-depth look at that portion of the archive with the intention of editing and publishing new work as well as revising outdated material. Some forthcoming releases in this series will include Dudjom Rinpoche’s aspiration prayer known as *Heart Nectar of the Saints* (please see excerpts in this issue of the newsletter), and also a detailed teaching on chöd according to the lineage of Dorje Dechen Lingpa, given by the Venerable Yangthang Rinpoche.

We’ve broadened the inventory in both our Tashi Chöling and Alameda bookstore outlets and are stocking some enticing titles, as well as many sadhanas and practices, and a variety of dharma and photographs. Our thanks to Lee Furman who has run the Tashi Chöling store with great success for the past two summer and fall seasons, and Brian Flaherty, who moved from his former role as office manager to his current position as bookstore manager in Alameda. Thank you also to Ani Chödran, who worked as office manager until her recent departure to serve dharma projects outside the immediate local sangha, and to Anne Lau for serving as interim office manager until we found a permanent employee to fill the position. We’re pleased to welcome and announce the recent hiring of Dixie Raile, our new office manager at Mirror of Wisdom headquarters in Alameda. Dixie is also a new live-in resident at Orgyen Dorje Den.

We value our volunteers and look forward to continued work together. With the recent restructuring of some of our functions, we have a particular need for volunteers in the Alameda bookstore as well as with digitizing the audio and video operations there. To offer volunteer assistance in these areas, to inquire about other areas, or to
offer comments or suggestions concerning current inventory items or items we might consider making available in the future, we encourage you to contact us at our email address or through the other options we’ve listed below.

We are indebted to Sangye Khandro and more recently Lama Chönam for their crucial work in the translation and production of sadhanas and practice materials. The Mirror of Wisdom committee involved with this ongoing project is working in collaboration with the educational program students at Tashi Chöling to edit and compile these items for publication. These groups are also working together with the Digital Archives committee to create master copies of all sadhanas, prayers, and practice materials. We thank everyone for their service in these areas.

Longtime members of both the Video Archive committee and the Audio Archive committee are beginning to work with the Digital Archives committee to create video and audio archives in digital format. The Photo Archive committee continues to maintain inventory and produce photos to fill orders. We thank all the dedicated people who continue to serve on these committees.

The Pecha Production committee is busy producing copies of pechas to fill orders. Thanks go to Jigme Lama and Scott Globus who have continued to manage and maintain this inventory for years. We need more volunteers on this committee! The Newsletter committee continues to compose, produce, and publish this annual publication. Our thanks to the people involved, and particularly to the editor, Gaea Yudron.

Mirror of Wisdom wishes to offer support to all Pacific Region Yeshe Nyingpo-affiliated sanghas who invite Rinpoche to teach. In order that we might effectively assist you should Rinpoche be scheduled to teach or perform ceremonies in your area, we ask that if possible you please contact Mirror of Wisdom at least three weeks before the event begins. We will need to know the topics of Rinpoche’s teachings and any ceremonies planned so that we can supply you with the relevant Mirror of Wisdom materials such as texts and books, opening and closing prayers, and photos. In addition, if your group records any of Rinpoche’s teachings or other activities while he visits, please be certain to send a copy of the cassette tapes, MP3s, and/or DVD or video files to Mirror of Wisdom for archival purposes.

We really appreciate your patronage of the Mirror of Wisdom bookstores and related services. In fact, we rely on you. When you purchase dharma books and supplies through Mirror of Wisdom, sales profits help fund our publishing and archival projects. We also offer special order services. Visit us in Alameda or at Tashi Chöling; email us at mirrorofwisdom@sbcglobal.net; or telephone our headquarters and main bookstore in Alameda at 510-521-9641; 866-647-7672 (866 mirror 2, toll free); fax 510-647-7426.

We invite your financial contributions to help further our many projects that serve to preserve and disseminate the dharma. We are grateful for any amount we receive.

We dedicate all our effort and whatever merit we might accrue to the ultimate benefit of all sentient beings.

Best Wishes for the New Year of the Fire Dog!
Path of the Bodhisattva

Because of favorable conditions, you have attained this extraordinary human body, which is like a great sailing ship. Thus, while this opportunity is at hand, one should cross the deep and dangerous ocean of samsara by listening, contemplating and meditating day and night on the teachings of the Bodhisattva path. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

By attachment to relatives and friends you are trapped as in a whirlpool and you cannot get out. Hatred for your enemy rages like a blazing fire. Lacking mindfulness, you forget what to accept and what to reject and remain in the darkness of ignorance. For these reasons, renounce your homeland. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

By avoiding that which stimulates the five senses and gives rise to anger, desire, jealousy, pride and ignorance, your conflicting emotions gradually fade away. Without these many distractions, virtuous deeds also spontaneously increase. As your mind is clear and free from confusion, you will have an unwavering trust in the Buddhadharma. Therefore, one should live in a hermitage, in a remote and distant place, far from these disturbing influences. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

Close friends who have long been together will separate. Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will be left behind. Consciousness, like a guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body. Sacrifice these worldly comforts in order to practice the dharma thoroughly. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

Bad friends increase your emotions and cause doubt about the dharma, diminishing your study and meditation. Their influence obscures your loving kindness and compassion. Therefore, you should avoid such companions. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

How can worldly gods save us when they themselves are still bound to samsara? You should therefore take refuge in the Three Jewels, who will never fail you, and can save you from the dangers of samsara. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

The Buddha has said that the unbearable sufferings of the lower realms are the result of sinful deeds. Therefore, even at the cost of your own life, refrain from doing harmful deeds. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

The happiness of the three realms is like the dew on the grass, which may vanish at any moment. The happiness of liberation is unchanging. You should seek this permanent happiness by being courageous when facing hardships on the path. This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

Since all beings have at one time been your very own mother, you should think like this: ‘If all my mothers, who have loved me since beginningless time, continue to suffer, what is the use of my own happiness?’ Then, with the aim of liberating countless sentient beings, generate true bodhicitta (vowing to become enlightened). This is the way of Bodhisattva practice.

This excerpt is from Path of the Bodhisattva, a book soon to be published by Mirror of Wisdom.
Contortionist of the Bardo

Must stop exercising this idea of self, this personification, the favorite label, “me” we worship, we blame. False god, poor girl, she has had it! All her life tangled up in the racket of what should be. Thinks she is certain of herself but can’t find a hammer big enough to nail down the image she thinks is stuck in her head, or heart, or mirror, or maybe just a phantom come and gone. Try to capture who you think she is! She will disappear disguised as sleep but she might wake you up if you can see she is a dream.

—Julie Rogers

Three Dreams

1. Just as I was about to be beheaded a man rushed up and threw himself at my feet professing love.

moving along together, sure of the goal no matter what a mess it may look like from the outside.

2. On a steep hill crowded with cut trees and big boulders the sangha was pushing boulders uphill. People were having a good time. “Yes, this is really the Dharma!” one insisted enthusiastically. It’s our kind of party. Pressed into service,

3. On the full moon night I dreamed of a beautiful little cottage in the forest its roof covered with a thick layer of snow. White snow covered everything in sight. I was in retreat inside. How peaceful to wake on this holy day so far from the world and its turmoil.

—Gaea Yudron
My ten-year old daughter recently said, “I really like the sound when Rebecca cuts cabbage with her knife. Is there any cabbage I can chop?” You may wonder what something as simple as a cabbage and a sharp knife might have to do with dharma. According to sangha member Rebecca Wood, there’s a big correlation.

Rebecca, a longtime food professional, is the author of several books including *The Splendid Grain*, winner of both the Julia Child and James Beard Cookbook Awards. I got to know Rebecca during Marig Munsel, a four-year program we participated in at Tashi Choling. I have also enjoyed the delicious food she prepares during various Tashi Choling retreats.

Recently my family took a five-week cooking class with Rebecca in her compact kitchen. While cooking, she lavished us with tasty morsels, inviting us to use all our senses to experience the vibrant qualities of fresh produce and whole grains. She inspired us to enjoy new foods, to investigate and taste with awareness and to be mindful of how what we eat makes us feel.

I asked her how food connects to dharma. She answered, “We have a precious human birth and it behooves us to skillfully care for our health. Diet is one effective way to do so. In the past all food was good. It had been grown purely on rich land without chemicals. It was vibrant, alive and not highly processed. People knew the medicinal properties of food and they prepared and ate accordingly.”

“When I take good care of myself,” she continued, “this supports both my daily practice and my post meditation practice. Eating well impacts me directly. If I feel off kilter from skipping a meal or from eating shoddy food, then it’s harder for me to recollect myself.”

“In terms of saving lives, favoring organic foods make a significant and positive impact on insects, birds and farm laborers,” she continued. “Also, eating sustainably grown and processed foods supports the local economy and our neighbors. Eating well, eating organic and sustainably grown food is a compassionate thing to do for ourselves and others.”

What Rebecca offers sounds good. But I couldn’t help but wonder, given our busy lives and divergent tastes, could my children and I really implement her ideas? Since studying with Rebecca, I noticed that my children and I are more open to and appreciative of new foods. For breakfast, rather than reaching for the usual toast we find that a bowl of hot quinoa is satisfying and a nice change. My seventeen year-old son, while still not sold on sauerkraut—homemade or otherwise—enjoys grinding up sesame seeds and sprinkling them on almost everything. Now, when I shop and cook, I experience more satisfaction and joy. As a family, upgrading our food awareness and habits supports our balance and togetherness.

In our fragmented and speedy world, experiencing the joy of chopping cabbage and eating a good breakfast can indeed be an expression of the dharma.

Rebecca Wood freely posts supportive information and many recipes at www.RebeccaWood.com
As we approached year end, our center completed its study of Jamgon Kongtrol’s classic text *The Great Path of Awakening* under the guidance of Lama Bruce Newman, and we began once again a weekly meditation practice on Sunday mornings at 11 AM. We continue to benefit from our connection to Tashi Choling. Clark Hansen was able to attend the Vajrakilaya retreat in November.

Our small center is composed of people who often have heavy work loads and coming together is difficult. Nonetheless, we have persisted in doing the best we can. We have been enormously helped by Lama Bruce’s willingness to join us every other month here in Portland for a weekend of instruction, both on meditation practice and, in the case of this past year, on *The Great Path of Awakening*. Lama Bruce’s patience and kindness towards us has made the teachings a most important part of our lives, as his instruction often focuses on the kitchen sink level.

Our group members have developed a mutual respect for one another that has allowed for a great deal of honest sharing about the difficulties we face in making the teachings a living reality. The main text of *The Great Path of Awakening*, while only 50 pages, nevertheless took us seven weekends to cover. While its slogans were quite clear and succinct, they were very challenging. For example, “Drive all blame into oneself,” is quite contrary to the way the world around me works, and when I first encountered this slogan I thought, “Boy, my enemies would love to have me adopt this practice!”

And yet as I occasionally attempt to practice this slogan I have found it enormously useful in getting people to relax about failure and to focus on accomplishing the task at hand.

As Bruce so often reminds us, even a partial and imperfect attempt at practicing the teachings will bring benefit to us. Such benefit also encourages us to keep trying and to keep trying to do better.

Bruce is also very gifted at leading discussions and getting us to clarify our thinking. One of his favorite stratagems is to ask us to explain a Buddhist principle to our mother, a task we role play with each other, under the assumption that our mother is not a Buddhist. Several sessions ago the task was to explain ultimate bodhichitta to our mother. Wow! Such an effort is not only very humbling, but increases one’s appreciation of those teachers who can make such difficult concepts understandable.

In the coming year our group will either study *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* or the 37 *Practices of the Bodhisattva* under Bruce’s guidance.
Center Reports

Orgyen Dorje Den 2005: The Blessings Continue
by Scott Globus

Thanks to Rinpoche’s patient guidance and our consistent collective effort, the temple is developing nicely. New students are recognizing the opportunity to learn and older students are settling down in the practices and beginning to receive the blessings of the lineage. In short, the students from Orgyen Dorje Den are continuing to practice the dharma and working to tame our minds and be of service to others.

We continue to have the merit to receive teachings and empowerments with Gyatrul Rinpoche, both in person and via the phone link. This past year Rinpoche gave a series of empowerments at ODD and we listened to teachings broadcast from afar. Rinpoche frequently stopped in to check on building projects and connect with the monks and students. Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche continued teaching on the Guhyagarbha Tantra in a month long retreat and promised to return to complete the cycle as well as continue with additional material. Lama Drimed Lodro started living at ODD and gave many teachings and led several short retreats and monthly fish release ceremonies in 2005. Since he has been teaching in Chinese, with Benson Young translating to English, we’ve welcomed many new additions to our Sangha from the Chinese community. This past year Trinley Dorje, a monk who has been living at ODD for the past few years, started teaching on Words of My Perfect Teacher. This program has been very meaningful for the cluster of students who are taking the time to hear these teachings, delivered carefully line by line. Les Collins has been continuing a bi-weekly sitting meditation program based on Rinpoche’s text Natural Liberation and many enthusiastic students have started coming to ODD as a result of this program. Finally, we continue to have the good fortune to receive teachings from visiting lamas. This year we received teachings from the Khenpo brothers and Chokling Rinpoche. Needless to say, we maintain tsog practices on Guru Rinpoche and Dakini days, and practice on Losar and other auspicious days. A group of dedicated students have been continuing the practice of Vajrasattva on a nearly weekly basis. We are making various improvements to the temple and thanks to a generous donor, we just completed painting the ceiling and installed a new bamboo floor in the shrine room. Last, but not least, we maintain the basic functioning of ODD: keeping the place clean, paying the bills and communicating with the sangha.

In summary, we hope that all the work and practice that we’ve been engaged in will continue and that we’ll be able to share the fruit of this meritorious activity with many. We hope you will come and join us in this effort to support the dharma unfolding in America and participate in some of the activities at Orgyen Dorje Den.
Center Reports

The Educational Program, Marig Munsel and the Childrens’ Sunday School Program are three projects that take place at Tashi Choling in addition to our ongoing puja and retreat schedule. Here several sangha members offer reports and perspectives on these programs.

A Dharma Feast: Tashi Choling’s Educational Program Viewed from the Kitchen
by Shashi Reitz

The Tashi Choling Educational Program enjoyed a hearty and nourishing repast in 2005. Tibetan language study was our main course; it also appeared as a side dish with everything that was offered. Our language study had a smooth, robust dharma flavor that lingers on the palate...and with any luck it will linger a long, long time! Lama Chonam, culinary artist par excellence, led us through our Tibetan language courses. He taught us to slice and dice verbs, sauté them with nouns and particles and even the rudiments of how to arrange them for serving. We sampled the quick snacks of slang phrases and the gourmet delicacies of verses of poetry.

Our year included a variety of activities. In spring, at the Dorsem retreat at Orgyen Dorje Den in Alameda, we enjoyed a paté of practice and ritual study under the guidance of Pema Tenzin. This prepared us for the month-long Guhyagarbha teachings which followed. Keith LaCoste served as sous chef to Pema Tenzin at both Dorsem and Kilaya retreats, soaking up umze tips and occasionally leading sessions himself. Our most junior cook, Sean Thomas, joining our kitchen for the first time this year, learned the workings of the chopon scullery under senior cook Ila Reitz’s supervision.

Samantha Cheney was a godsend. She arrived from Napa Valley in August and set the East Wing in order, in addition to attending classes whenever possible and studying chopon techniques, which she took to with the confidence of a pro. In addition to her studies, Lee Furbeck watered the grounds around the temple, helped in the Mirror of Wisdom bookstore and sewed beautiful clothing for Rinpoche and others. Omnipresent, Ani Baba seemed to spend all her time in the kitchen when she wasn’t ringing the dinner bell for the protectors; Antal Toth joined us as he could, dropping in with adjectives pre-julienned and ready for the pot. Sean and Keith researched the purchase of our new, all-purpose, high-powered, 100 GB word processor for translation and archiving purposes. Then they began to convert teaching archives from cassette to mp3 format. This was just one of many activities that students kept track of between classes.

We embarked on the marathon of editing, standardizing and entering the long Dudjom ngondro into the computer. This proceeded with what felt like excruciating slowness, but Lama Chonam seemed pleased with our detailed discussions of nuance and word usage. “It was a wonderful year,” Lama Chonam summed up. “It was very beautiful the way that everyone worked so hard and studied so hard together—I think each person learned a lot: grammar and sentences, poetry, translation and everything.”

The kitchen really warmed up when translator Jules Levinson came to visit for a weekend, donning his apron and sharing his time-tested grammatical recipes with us. It was wonderful to watch Jules, Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam making short work of passages that would have taken us days to chop our way through. Disproving the old adage that too many cooks spoil the broth, the results were an inspiration for our own efforts.
Center Reports

The Reitz sisters arranged the logistics of visiting teachers. In the fall, Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso stayed with us for two weeks, finishing his presentation of *Ascertaining the Three Vows*. 

He was very pleased to see our studies continuing and promised to return whenever his schedule permitted. After Khenpo departed, we turned with eager anticipation to preparation of the final soup course of the year, the sharp, spicy Kilaya retreat.

At this point, however, the stupa project commenced—a sort of post-prandial chef’s surprise. For several weeks Philip Thomas, Derek Ridler and Brad Boucher reigned as short-order cooks, producing literally tons of concrete, rock, rebar and gravel with the speed and efficiency of a drive-thru and shaping the base of a stupa on the hill above the Amitabha shrine. Yohei and Iridea, who visited us from Ensenada for several months, helped to carve the *sok shing*, pour concrete and scrub the scullery again and yet again. We received lists of sacred substances and instructions for their assembly. The east wing was filled with fabric and incense sauces and heaps of jewel garnishes. With a little luck, we will entice Tulku Sang-Ngag Rinpoche to take charge of our kitchen next spring to show us how to properly prepare the stupa feast.

Pema Tenzin returned in November to serve as umze for the Vajrakilaya retreat and oversee torma production. He was joined by Lama Yönten who seasoned our chopon methods to give them a more authentic Tersar flavor. He also taught us how to mix *gyaling*, long horn, *kangling* and other musical ingredients to enhance their combined texture.

Now, on the far side of Kilaya, we stand up from the table, content for the moment but never satisfied. We will treat ourselves to a final syllabub of syllables, singing with Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche in Ashland for two days in December, and we are already ravishly planning the menu for the time when Khenpo Tenzin Norgey lends his expertise on Madhyamaka in January. Our many thanks to all of those who brought such life and warmth to our kitchen throughout the year! Can anyone say “four stars”? 
Two Takes On Marig Munsel

Take One
by Suzanne Ducharmes

When I first heard that there was going to be a four-year class on Buddhism offered by Lama Bruce Newman, it was like a huge opportunity that I had to take advantage of. I admit I was also intimidated. Attending different pujas over the years, I had so many unanswered questions concerning the practices, right etiquette, etc. This class would provide a safe place to ask questions and learn something invaluable regarding Tibetan Buddhism. It also meant an opportunity to spend more time at Tashi Choling and to meet more of the sangha.

Bruce was an impeccable teacher, staying with the Dharma as our lineage teaches it, never compromising, never westernizing. When our four years were drawing to a close, I knew I had not had enough. Even though Lama Bruce wanted all new students for his second Marig Munsel group, our wonderful Rinpoche somehow convinced him that there were some that really needed to take it again. I am one who is repeating Marig Munsel, and very happy about it. Thank you, Bruce. Thank you, Rinpoche.

Take Two
by Barbara Caselli

A couple of years into Marig Munsel, I had an aha! moment one morning. It hit me suddenly: This is my field of experience. This is what I have to work with. Not some other kind of life. Not some other right kind of body or place or family or language. Just this, now.

Maybe that sounds more like a well, duh moment, but when you really get it that it’s just you you’re working with, you can drop a lot of hope and fear and stop wasting so much time procrastinating and posturing. What Marig Munsel had to do with bringing me to that small moment is summed up by Lama Bruce’s own posture. Bruce has no pretense or show or anything. All you ever get is just the human being, Bruce. When you work with someone who persists in being ordinary and real, who suffers and fails, delights and cares, who “doesn’t cover up his shit like a cat” ever and whose compassion, wisdom, passion for the dharma and devotion to his teachers is also real and displayed without contrivance, then you see the value of a life lived like that. And you start to think, “If it’s possible for Bruce, who started out like me, then maybe I can do that too.”

Everything about Marig Munsel had Gyatrul Rinpoche’s blessing in Bruce’s style. Though Bruce is kind, he won’t let you get away with mushy thinking. For four years we looked into what we thought, what we felt, what we knew, and what we thought we felt we knew. He was patient but rigorous in trying to get us to have some clarity of understanding and purpose, whether through academic study, through contemplations and discussions on how current events or personal situations would be viewed from a Buddhist perspective, or through mindfulness and insight meditation.

But the rigor was always in an atmosphere of complete freedom. Because of Bruce’s lack of pretense, because of his honesty about his own experiences with dharma, his own history with confusion and contradictions, we felt free to voice our confusions and questions, from the mundane to the sublime. When you can ask, “What is it that people are doing when they seem to be chanting mantra faster than humanly possible?” and, in the same class, explore on which side of the wisdom/faith divide you are erring, then you know you are engaging with the real deal, dharma in this human life as it is.
At the end of our four-year commitment, the first Marig Munsel mandala dissolved and we returned each to his or her own place. Bruce had said at the beginning that one of his goals was to give us a foundation sufficient to successfully complete a three-year retreat. At the last class, he said that he felt he had achieved that goal. I think he did, too. I don’t know if I have assembled the causes and conditions for a three-year retreat, but I do feel a lot more confident and a lot less alienated, anxious and awkward about dharma in this, my field of experience, otherwise known as a life.

Don’t Be a Fish!
by Erin Del Carlo

“Don’t be a fish!” That was the teaching given by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche to a small group of curious children, parents and sangha members one warm fall afternoon, sitting in the grass near the Klamath River.

The lesson had begun earlier that day at the Iron Gate Fish Hatchery, as a combination dharma/science field trip. The group first took a tour of the hatchery facilities. The children buzzed about the strolling adults, observing young salmon growing in holding pools and spawning salmon struggling up the fish ladder.

In the shallow creek, fresh new salmon eggs were being laid alongside the remains of mature salmon, dead from exhaustion. Some scientific facts were shared about the short and harsh life cycle of the salmon and many questions were answered. Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, with insightful wisdom and compassion, kept repeating, “What karma! What karma!” and shook his head from side to side.

Afterwards, everyone met at a nearby campground nestled against the rolling river. It was there, relaxing and sharing a snack, that Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche shared his thoughts on the meaning of the experience. He brought attention to the undesirable aspects of such an existence and urged those present to ask themselves what behavior had led to that life and how to avoid that circumstance. He reminded each person, young and old, to think about their actions and their consequences everyday.

He advised the development of compassion towards all beings. What Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche accomplished was to transform what would have been an ordinary field trip into a walloping example of the truth of dharma. He was able to awaken each person’s senses to the presence of dharma flowering before them in a seemingly ordinary occurrence.

The following weekend, some of the children and participants from the field trip gathered at Tashi Choling to make fish prints and review the teaching “Don’t be a fish!” under the careful guidance of Lama Chonam. Later, the
children shared their fish prints with Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche.

One thing I have come to understand is that one of the best ways I can help children connect with dharma is to involve them in finding it in everyday mundane happenings, interact alongside with them in recognizing it in their world, and allow them to share it in their own way with all beings.

Center Reports

Children's Sunday School Program

by Tara Thomas-Boucher

This year the Sunday school program at Tashi Choling benefited from Lama Chonam’s guidance and the spirited participation of both Ila and Shashi Reitz. Rinpoche gave teachings to the children and their parents. Tibetan language instruction was provided by Lama Chonam and the Reitz sisters, and various sangha members contributed stories, games, and other activities. A truly wonderful environment has been created, where the children have a way to make the temple, and all it manifests, their own. For the New Year our goals include expanding the types of activities to include more children and their families and development of some summer day camps. The rhythm and opportunity for connection has been a beautiful thing for sangha of all ages; another wonderful example of how “Tashi Choling is like a family.”

I was a single mother living with my 9-year old son in the Oakland “hood” when I discovered dharma. I decided that during this lifetime I wanted to see the Dalai Lama in person. I also wanted to go to Nepal and see the Buddha relics. I wanted to find my guru and discover answers to all of my unanswered questions about dharma. I felt like I had all the time in the world.

Then I had the good fortune to see the Dalai Lama and receive the Medicine Buddha empowerment. What a blessing. But the following year, I was diagnosed with a very rare and aggressive form of breast cancer. I was truly devastated. Who would take care of my son, not to mention our two cats and two dogs?

I hate to admit it, but I was feeling very sorry for myself. I remember thinking, oh great, now I’m going to die without having found my guru. Who would do phowa for me? Would I be lucky enough to connect with the dharma in my next life, or would I have to wait 43 years like I did in this lifetime? All of these thoughts weighed heavily on my mind.

I had chemotherapy for three months. One day my son came bursting into my bedroom excitedly. “Mom, guess what? The Buddha relics are in Alameda. We have to go see them tomorrow because they’re leaving in two days.”

I remember thinking that even if I could get out of bed I shouldn’t go. I was so sick. What if I threw up while I was seeing the relics? How embarrassing would that have been? My son wouldn’t take no for an answer. He kept insisting that I go no matter what, saying it would be such a blessing for me. He gave me the push I needed, and how could I deny my son this wonderful opportunity?

The next afternoon I mustered up enough strength to travel to Alameda. The minute I walked into the shrine room I knew that I needed to be there, even before I saw the relics. It was so powerful. I knew that if I survived breast cancer, I wanted to move to Alameda to be closer to ODD. I even wrote this prayer on paper when I got home and put it under my Buddha statue on my altar.

That day, a monk began placing the relics over peoples’ heads as a blessing. While I received the blessing, this really nasty electrical energy came darting out of my eyes. It was so strong that the monk and I both nodded our
During the spring of 2004, several families talked about Rinpoche’s wish for a children’s school. Coincidentally, Lama Chonam also had a wish and a vision of a comprehensive children’s program. It seemed that the time was ripe to act on this wonderful idea. All that was required was some committed families, willing to explore the potential. So a few of us, willing to work together and explore the potential for a children’s school, decided to make an effort to make this a reality.

In July 2004, on a day chosen because of its astrological auspiciousness, we made a formal request to Gyatrul Rinpoche to give the children’s school a name and to bless it. Rinpoche named the program “Youthful Garden of Awakening.” Since that time he has provided encouragement and support. That summer, we started with a small core group of children and met 3 or 4 days a week. Thanks to Lama Chonam’s commitment to oversee and direct day-to-day activities, and Shashi and Ila’s weekly language classes we were able to begin in an excellent way.

In December 2004, when I attended the Three Roots Empowerment at ODD, I had no idea who Gyatral Rinpoche was, but within five minutes of sitting in his presence I knew I had finally found my guru. Discovering that Rinpoche is the head of ODD was like finding a hidden treasure in my back yard. Rinpoche, thank you so much for everything you do for all of us. I am trying my best to be a good student, but there is no way I could ever repay you for all of your kindness. I am grateful to be alive to write this and grateful that I have found my guru, who means everything to me.

--A.B.
with morning prayers (Manjushri, Tersar Ngundro), then had Dharma instruction and Tibetan language with Lama Chonam. The children also explored reading, writing, math and science. We went on weekly field trips to the library, science museum and participated in YMCA fall soccer. The children have been attending tsok pujas and have assisted in some chopon duties. They also received special teachings from Gyatrul Rinpoché, Tulkū Sang Ngak Rinpoché and Khenpo Tsewang Gyato. Both Susie Strong and Drusilla Lopez have been generous in contributing their expertise in teaching children. We have had a wonderful first year. In many ways it has all occurred magically. There were so many blessings, teachings and new friends.

Now as we head into 2006, we recognize the need for some growth and long-term stability. With Rinpoché’s blessing, we have applied to form a non-profit corporation for the school. We continue to work closely with Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro and we remain on the look-out for additional Western-trained teachers. We invite and encourage the participation of any one interested in helping us to manifest the goal of blending the rich Buddhist tradition with a suitable Western educational model. Our aspiration is to eventually develop a program that meets the educational needs of children K-12 in accord with our stated mission “to provide a rich, well-rounded learning environment that is focused on offering the teachings of the Buddhadharma, Tibetan language, as well as the arts, sciences and disciplines of sustainable culture.” Some of these students may choose to attend the Tashi Choling Educational Program, other may choose to attend Western universities. Our intention is to prepare the students with the methods and sensibilities for living a meaningful life in whatever forms that may take. Most important is that we begin now to create a supportive Buddhist environment for our children, and future children, and to provide them with a foundation that will support and benefit them in this and future lives.

**Precious Human Body**

To obtain a human body is extremely difficult, so it is foolish to ignore the dharma upon having found it. Only the dharma can help you; everything else is worldly beguilement.

—Padmasambhava

**Letting Be**

All your thinking is conceptual mind, so give up the doings of this mind and rest. And as “rest” is also just a word, give up holding onto words and let be.

—Songtsen Gampo, the first Dharma king of Tibet

**Verse of Auspiciousness**

May there be the auspiciousness of true awakening indivisible from the spontaneous wakefulness, the permanent and firm vajra abode of the changeless innate nature.

—Padmasambhava

*These three quotes are taken from A Tibetan Buddhist Companion, compiled and translated by Erik Pema Kunsang, published by Shambhala in 2003.*
Tashi Choling  
P.O. Box 64  
Ashland, OR 97520  
www.tashicholing.org

Orgyen Dorje Den  
2244 Santa Clara Ave.  
Alameda, CA 94501  
www.orgyendorjeden.org

Norbu Samphel Ling  
Austin, Texas  
thab@thab.us  
http://www.thab.us

Mexico Yeshe Nyingpo  
PO Box 431740  
San Ysidro, CA 92143-1740  
Loreto Romero (52-646-176-7848)  
Norma Bocanegra (52-646-175-9137)  
dharma@ensenada.net

Portland Yeshe Nyingpo  
Clark Hansen  
3200 Skyline Blvd.  
Portland, Oregon 97229  
503-292-4004  
clark@clarkhansen.com

Non Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Ashland, OR 97520  
Permit No. 130

Yeshe Nyingpo  
P.O. Box 124  
Ashland, OR 97520  

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