

YESHE MELONG
“Mirror of Wisdom”
NEWSLETTER
Summer 1999

Rinpoche’s Message to the Sangha

Even though we’re well into the new year, I’d love to wish everyone Happy New Year, *tashi deleg*, and offer my prayers and good wishes that in this new year you will all be able to accomplish your spiritual goals and aims as well as your worldly goals and aims. Speaking of our Dharma center, or any Dharma center, “center” means a place where things come together, a gathering. Dharma, of course, means spiritual, not worldly. So it would be a center of spiritual activities or gathering for increasing the spiritual life and that means increasing merit. Otherwise, there are all kinds of gatherings where non-virtue increases and then gatherings where virtue is increasing, like a Dharma center. These places or centers that uphold the Dharma have existed from the time of Buddha Shakyamuni until now and are places where followers of sutra and mantra come together in such a way that they are committed to maintain and sustain the teachings of Buddha, to see to the flourishing of the doctrine and to prevent his teachings from diminishing or dispersing. The nature of such a place is that, as a Dharma center, it’s a place free from non-virtue and the root causes of non-virtue which are the three poisons: attachment, aversion and delusion. It’s a place where the wisdoms of hearing, contemplation and meditation are being cultivated, sustained and developed, so that people who gather there are inspired to continue their Dharma practice in this way.

There are many different distinctions of Dharma centers and of Buddhism also, of course, according to the different vehicles of practice. There are Dharma centers where Hinayana Buddhism is sustained, is practiced and is increasing, and there are those, of course, which sustain Mahayana, Vajrayana, outer tantra, inner tantra and also *dzogpachenpo*, the Great Perfection. Since there are 84,000 categories of Dharma teachings, then there will be that many centers plus more. The one thing they all have in common is that, if they’re Dharma centers, they’re all places where virtue is established and where negativity is being purified. The reason for Dharma centers is so that beings can find the path that leads to liberation through hearing, contemplating and meditating. The reason for establishing a gathering of spiritual activity is to benefit self and all others according to the capacities of practitioners. Based on causes and contributing circumstances, all sentient beings have an opportunity to be able to begin to free themselves from the entanglement of karma that keeps them bound to cyclic existence and suffering. Establishing a Dharma center is something very meaningful. In fact, the purpose is very great. Because it’s so hard for beings to separate themselves from their ordinary worldly concerns and their ordinary lives and many people are not able to do this, if they have a place where they can relate to and that helps them begin to stabilize their spiritual lives, rather than always producing negative results in their lives they can begin to produce positive results. And all positive results are definitely, eventually leading to liberation.

Buddhism first came into India, then later spread to Tibet and now from Tibet it has come here. After over two thousand years, because of the enlightened activities of the Buddhas and their manifestations which are inconceivable, we still have the Dharma in this world. The fact that we can share in this is also inconceivable, and that’s why we are here. It’s always useful to think about your first intention when you first got involved with Dharma and became a member of a Dharma center. Human beings always have intentions because human beings are extremely intelligent. As human beings we have a capacity to produce almost anything that we intend because of our mental abilities. Definitely everyone had strong personal intentions for choosing this path. It’s not as though you all fell from some high cliff

and arrived here for no reason. You're here because you want to help yourself and you want to help all other beings achieve liberation. It's very useful to think about what it was that initially motivated you, because it was definitely to be free from negativity and suffering and that's why you've become involved here. It's also to connect with the lineage of fully enlightened beings who are manifestations of the Buddha such as H.H. the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, Dudjom Rinpoche, Dodrupchen Rinpoche and so forth, these great teachers who were predicted by enlightened beings who came before them, who establish, maintain and propagate the Dharma throughout the world and whose blessings are with us now. These are the blessings, the teachings and the practices that we're connecting with, not something that has been written by some new American Buddhist who wants to sell a book. Though Americans have freedom of speech and writing, that gives them more freedom for causes to take lower rebirth too. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is. I'm trying to make a point that you've connected with an inconceivable lineage of thousands of years of enlightened masters from Guru Rinpoche until now. These are the teachings and practices you're connecting with, and you should understand the difference and be very proud of what you've connected to.

Then there are these Dharma photographs that are printed or these different objects placed in different places, and there are some who speak nicely about them and write nice things about their qualities and

others who may not understand and may disparage and write bad things. It almost doesn't matter because the whole point is to temporarily make money for temporary benefit of oneself. Is that something that we should do? Probably instead we should take a picture of our own mind instead of outer pictures and start working more on eliminating non-virtue and increasing virtue. As Buddhists at this stage where many of you are upholders of the basic Hinayana rules of discipline, bodhisattva training and most certainly words of honor of Secret Mantra of the Unsurpassed, *dzogchen* practitioners, at this point in time your words of honor should be more precious to you than your own life. You should keep them like you would cherish your eyes, actually more so. If you go blind you're still not necessarily going to fall to the lower realms, but if you lose your Secret Mantra words of honor, you do. It's something that everyone has to take great care to maintain. You are the ones who have promised to keep these commitments. Because you are the ones who came and requested empowerments and teachings, you're the ones who are now required to keep your promises. This is something that you had your own freedom to decide in the beginning. It's not okay to still think you don't need to keep Hinayana vows and disciplines or bodhisattva training or Secret Mantra words of honor and that you can just continue to do what you want without showing any sign of discipline. It's not okay to continue on like that even though you still think you can because you're an American and you have freedom to do what you want. Even if you think that way, you still don't have freedom because of karma. Karma is going to bring you its results no matter what, even though you may think you can get away with doing what you want now. There's no sentient being in the three realms who can avoid karma, so from that point of view we don't have freedom. In dependence upon Dharma, there's no point to accumulate negative karma for taking lower rebirth. Why should one bother doing that? Wouldn't it have been better to just forget about getting involved with Dharma in the beginning?

This applies to teachers also. If someone is going to be a Dharma teacher, that means they're responsible for representing the lineage. The lineage is very pure, so the teacher must also be pure. If you are going to be a teacher, you have to be a pure representative and the best example that you can be. All of those who have really followed in the footsteps of the Buddha have followed in this way. Those who are teaching the Dharma need to be true followers and the best examples. This is not just true for Buddhism. In the world this is also how order is maintained and chaos is avoided. This is how the world functions spiritually and even materially or worldly. So, please, everyone try to be more aware of this

and become part of the discipline that the center should be abiding by. As Buddhists we're supposed to internalize and notice our own faults and improve ourselves, rather than trying to find the faults in others by pointing fingers at their faults as though you are self-righteous. None of the Buddhas of the past ever did like this. They give guidelines, but then practitioners are supposed to point the finger at their own faces. Was there ever any Dharma book where it mentioned about great teachers who got enlightened because they were finding faults in everyone else? No, there wasn't. The point is that discipline must be maintained, but it's maintained by each practitioner being responsible for themselves and not trying to avoid their own responsibility by always finding faults in other practitioners. To find faults in others and try to cover your own faults is the way that the doctrine is really destroyed. When practitioners of the doctrine are finding faults in others and not working on their own faults, this is what really undermines it in a deep sense and is really the greatest display of disrespect. Why? Breaking one's own discipline from the beginning discipline of the Hinayana, then all the other disciplines cannot be sustained and one is already opposing the basic teachings of Buddhism, and all the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' efforts are being ignored. One becomes a vow corrupter, and the fortune for progressing on the spiritual path, the life force of spiritual development, is cut or severed. For countless lifetimes, one remains suffering indefinitely without making any progress whatsoever and, in fact, going backwards.

Generally, when it comes to the blessings of the Buddhas' doctrine, as long as there's karma for them to remain in the world, they will remain in the world, like the way the sun and moon are in the sky and as long as there are pools of water on the earth, the sun and moon's reflections will be reflected there. But, if the pools of water evaporate, there's no place for a reflection. This is dependent upon the karma and fortune of sentient beings. If their merit is exhausted, then that means, for that period of time, the blessings of the doctrine cannot reach them. But as long as merit is there in the world systems for the blessings to reach beings who possess merit, then the blessings will be there. And no matter how someone tries to destroy the doctrine, it can't be destroyed in terms of the merit of individuals who have the fortune to sustain it. My point is that, really so much—in fact almost everything—is dependent upon our accumulations of merit. So we should know what takes away from that accumulation and what produces it. Right now, for all of you, your situation is filled with merit in hearing the teachings and thinking about them. Hopefully, the result of all this will bring you freedom from samsara. So when you're in a meritorious situation where teachers come and give profound teachings, please don't waste it by undermining it in ordinary ways. Receiving empowerments, receiving liberating commentaries and getting worse is a cycle that needs to stop now. Especially in a Dharma gathering, finding faults in others is the worst method that you could employ. Of all methods that are negative, it's the worst one. Because the result is the result of lower rebirth. It is the cause that produces the worst result and is the most shameful disgrace when one is involved with other Sangha members in a spiritual community. Because the point is that this is a gathering where practitioners are trying to produce causes that bring liberation and so that means producing virtuous causes. So everyone please try to make this your practice by following this advice.

I also wanted to say we shouldn't think the Dharma center is only run by the leaders. It should be run by all members of the community. Everyone should help each other: men, women, children. Everyone should find a way that they can participate and be responsible and helpful to one another. This is the way the Dharma center grows up, when leaders are good practitioners and examples and when all members of the center are helpful. Rather than being without any dignity, both leaders and members of the community should have the dignity to help one another. Before when we were beginning out here and started building the Vajrasattva statue we didn't have any special leaders necessarily. We had Jamie and a lot of humble people who just wanted to help do something positive. And likewise when we started to build this temple, there weren't any particular leaders. But there was some kind of inconceivable blessing when people felt equal and just inspired to accomplish virtue. Since that time we built the temple and then so many great teachers have come here. So, people worked really hard. They

were just workers: Philip, Bucko, Yamantaka, and not to forget Richard. Richard was running here and there and always offering money when he didn't have much to offer and it was amazing all of the service that he rendered in those beginning years. And Ron has also been incredibly valuable over the years. And also, of course, Chris and Matthew have been working for many years, working away, plugging away on the East Wing. Which is now almost becoming a five-star hotel. But, we still need more help. Actually, all joking aside I really feel that so many of you think that it's just a few people who are responsible for finishing over there. It makes me feel bad because it's not the attitude that we used to have here where everyone as a community would pitch in. Now people come with fancy ideas and no action and no eagerness. And so I was just wondering, "Why?" Why can't people come like before with open hearts and just pitch in and work and get this job done, instead of coming here with pride and opinions? Chris doesn't need any more babies to baby-sit. He has a job he's trying to be responsible for doing and everyone else should join in and help finish this job. I would like to see this East Wing finished this year. I would like to see the Mani prayer wheel finished this year. I would like to see the Amitabha shrine go up and get finished. I want to see these projects finished. This is what I'm waiting for, I'm looking for. I'm looking to see that students will show the enthusiasm to earn the merit that they used to have. You can also help Sonam Tsering and Jigmed who's here. There's a great artist here that you can learn from, Sonam Tsering. And all the many different jobs and ways of participating. Actually, if it doesn't happen. I myself will still plug along, and wait, and slowly I know it's going to finish. But I was hoping that there would be more of an attitude of wanting to accumulate merit like the old days, where we used to share and not worry about money so much. Because money comes. The reason money isn't coming is because the attitude is not there to pitch in and share and do this in the way that it's meant to be done. So if people come and work, the money is definitely going to be there, that's not the obstacle. Was the Buddha's doctrine built based on money? Or is it built based on merit? Take a look and see. Wherever the doctrine is flourishing it's because the people who are allowing it to flourish there have the merit to do that, not the money.

Then another one, Nick O'Connor is our disciplinarian. *Geku* is the name for this in Tibetan. It means the one who keeps virtue in a Dharma center, in a spiritual community. This is a status, a station that is part of the tradition of Buddhism from the beginning. It was in Tibet with all four lineages. That's why we've established this here, because it is necessary. It became very necessary and it will be necessary always, into the future. The disciplinarian has the same status as the spiritual teacher and is to be respected accordingly. If one goes against the disciplinarian one goes against the spiritual teacher and the Sangha and the Dharma. I chose Nick O'Connor to have this position for specific reasons. He is worthy of this position and he will keep this position until he dies as far as I'm concerned. I will never change him from this position. I'm not joking either because I could have chosen anyone else, but they were not worthy like he is. I want you all to respect him and his position because that's his authority, and this is something that, as long as I have the power to make sure that he will be in this position, he will be for the rest of his life. I chose him because he's a man of dignity. He doesn't use his own ideas with selfish intentions. He doesn't have personal desire pockets. Instead he thinks about what he can do to be skillful to help others and create harmony. So he makes all of your rough horns smoother. He has many good qualities. He has dignity and he knows how to create harmony in the Sangha.

Then, at the end of May we have our annual Vajrasattva practice. Through her kindness, Mimi will again be the patron for this practice as she has been. Also I don't think people should just think Mimi will be responsible for everything. It's not okay to always have that attitude. She's just a small little girl. And expecting her to watch everything and do everything is not practical either. And then in the fall we have our Vajrakilaya annual practice. And probably Nick Doherty will continue to be the patron to sponsor that event through his kindness. It seems like it would be good if you started thinking about putting your money in the bank so that you can be a sponsor yourself for the Vajrasattva and the Vajrakilaya or any other practices. Each person can plan until they themselves become a patron. Please,

please, time to wake up, give up, go into the pure path, stage by stage. So, anyway we have to be careful. Then Sangha, help each other, please. We need to stand up. We need to walk. Until we die we need to help each other, because after we die then we don't have freedom any more. Isn't it better to create your own path and your own direction while you have the freedom to do so? Buddha said, "I can show you the path," but we all have to follow the path. He shows the path, but we alone must tread the path. So please keep these words of advice in your minds. So I just wanted to wish everyone *tashi deleg*.. Try your best to practice and have excellent thoughts for one another and the best of intentions to practice purely.

The Teacher/Student Relationship

by Sangye Khandro

The teacher-student relationship on the path of Buddhism is of utmost importance from the time of meeting with the path until liberation from the round of confusion occurs. The basis of such a relationship is faith. The result of all paths is the attainment of the state of Buddha Vajradhara or absolute wisdom; however, it is necessary to have faith in order to achieve this goal. Since the breakdown in the teacher-student relationship is due to lack of faith, it is important to understand what faith is and how it works. The nature of faith is to trust in sublime beings in order to receive the blessing of wisdom energy that benefits self and others. True faith stimulates and creates the vast love of compassion that touches countless beings. If the mind experiences faith, then there is the opening through which blessings are received. When blessings are received, the causes for confusion and suffering can be identified and eliminated while the indwelling wisdom Buddha nature is able to blossom and begin to be sustained. Faith is, therefore, the most important quality necessary to possess in order to practice Buddhism in such a way that there will be actual, everlasting results.

. . .A true wisdom teacher who cares only about the liberation of others can assume any aspect that will bring benefit to sentient beings. In fact, such teachers will engage in whatever means are necessary to help tame the minds of beings in accordance with their faculties, elements and circumstances. In the west many people are expecting to hear only kind, sweet words of praise from their teachers, so if the teacher points out their faults directly, they will react with disappointment, resentment and anger. How can there be truth if one is only aspiring to cultivate a superficial relationship with a teacher?

Furthermore, no one teaching or circumstance is ever going to be exactly the same for everyone. The kindest teacher of all is the one who selflessly and fearlessly reveals the faults and shortcomings of the disciple. At times when wisdom teachers criticize a disciple, it is to reveal discerning wisdom, humility, selflessness and other enlightened qualities to the disciple. Other times when the teacher agrees with the student, it is to reveal the wisdom of equanimity. The conduct of the teacher will be in accord with the needs of the disciple which may not be obvious or tangible. However, the effects of whatever the teacher says or does are dependent upon how it is understood by the student. It is through one's own personal positive phenomena that the natural indwelling qualities of the awareness mind of the teacher can be understood. Through the great fortune of connecting with a spiritual teacher who can correctly introduce and reflect the nature of mind, a disciple with pure view can use whatever occurs within this precious connection to be led **to enlightenment**.

Excerpt of an article to be printed in the Shambhala Sun

Ron's Letter

March 26, 1999

Dear Sangha,

I'd like to thank everyone for their help and kindness towards Michelle and myself, especially during the Guhyagarbha. To begin with, I'm sure that most of you have heard some version or another about what Michelle and I are going through. I have numerous tumors in my lungs and a tumor the size of an orange on my heart. The tumor on my heart is inoperable and the doctors have no idea how long I have, but when I pressed them, they gave me somewhere between one month and one year. I told the head of cardiology at U.C. Davis that, if I'm alive in two years, I'd look him up. He said, "If you're alive in two years, we're going to want some of your blood to see what's going on with your immune system." Basically, unless the doctors come up with some cutting edge ideas, western medicine has done as much as they can for me.

After discussing the situation with Rinpoche and Sangye, I have decided to go into retreat with Michelle. My intention is to heal myself and to be my own physician and, if I don't have the juice to pull this off, then it's my intention to die well with Michelle and to a certain extent, my immediate family.

Melanie tried to facilitate my going to the Bay Area to see a very well-respected Chinese doctor but, because time does not allow me the flexibility of doing so at present, Melanie has graciously and generously offered to bring a doctor to me. Thank you, Melanie, and my apologies if this acknowledgment embarrasses you. Michelle and I are very fortunate to have very supportive family and close friends.

There are a few things that I would like to ask you. Please, no letters or phone calls. We know that we are in your hearts, minds and prayers. Probably the one thing that some, if not all of you, can do that would bring about some merit for us is if you would look closely at our situation, youth, time, money and, now, impermanence. Use this to help motivate yourself to practice with more diligence. Also, remember there are members of our Sangha that need your help and support far more than Michelle and I. Two come to mind—Sarah Rose and another Vajra sister who wishes to remain anonymous.

Try to be kind to one another. I realize we're a bunch of crusty characters but we're also serious practitioners who down inside have good hearts. Why else would we be here? The way I see it, if we take care of the temple and grounds and care for and help one another, the Lamas will come. There aren't many places on earth that are like Tashi Chöling. Please take care of the place and one another. I plan on coming back and would like to practice here again.

Two more requests. Keep your fingers crossed that we will pull off a minor miracle. And one last request—if you smoke, please stop. If you could only experience the discomfort that I've experienced, I swear to you, you'd quit, and my suffering isn't even due to smoking, but the experiences are very similar.

I'd like to leave you with a few personal thoughts before I end this letter. When the doctors told us the situation, one suggested that, if there were some part of the world that I wanted to see, we should max out the credit cards and go. I pointed to Michelle and told the doctor that what I wanted was to go home with her and hang out with our dogs and cat because I don't need to go anywhere, I already have my own little slice of Heaven. Since that doctor's visit, on a number of occasions when I think about leaving Michelle and those who are close to me, I can't help but think of Dorothy leaving OZ to go back to Kansas. As a final thought, I'd like to leave you with the first Dharma teaching that I recall hearing. . .

*Row, row, row your boat
gently down the stream,
merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
life is but a dream.*

Michelle's Letter

Dear Sangha,

I was asked if I wanted to write a few words for the "big" newsletter. At first I thought I really didn't know what else to say, but as I was driving home I realized I did have two more things to share.

First about the Guhyagarbha retreat. There are not words to describe how happy Ron was during this time. I truly have not seen him that happy before. When I came up at Losar, he would point out everyone and say something nice about them, like he was showing me prized possessions. It filled me with such happiness to see him like that. Even now it still makes me smile. Thank you so much for tucking him under your wings. He had come home to his Lama and Dharma family.

The second thing is Ron told me he hoped that his experience and death would affect the Sangha enough that we would carry in our hearts the fragile opportunity we have. He felt the merit would continue to benefit him and bring the Sangha together.

With Rinpoche's O.K., a video I attempted to make will be cleaned up and made available through the Archives, telling the story of Ron's death. I hope it is of benefit. Together may our faith and compassion grow until it fills our hearts and minds completely, and may we all have time to practice.

Sincerely,
Michelle Fidler

The Wake of Dreaming

by Julie Rogers

All night
my teacher dreams
inside me. I sleep
loving the miracle
of his heart in mine.

He lives
in the whispering half light
of mind beginning
to undo itself,
where who I know of me

will die. In that sky
he rises, the world shrinks
and I can only weep.
My tears are prayers
to wake inside him.

Update on the East Wing Project

In case you haven't seen or heard about the largest building project since the building of the temple itself, we are excited to tell you about the East Wing of the Tashi Chöling Temple and how you can help us bring it to completion.

As part of the original vision of the temple facility, initial construction on the East Wing began over 10 years ago; however the project was delayed due to complications in obtaining a special land use permit. Through the result of many prayers and good legal advice, we did eventually obtain the permit and building resumed three years ago. Now we are able to make plans to accommodate the increasing

number of students wishing to engage in deeper Dharma study. Up until the present, visiting students have not had the comfort of basic facilities to make use of during retreats with the exception of a few rooms at the guest house. While Dharma activity expands, so too must our roof.

The East Wing building is adjacent to the existing temple and will appear similar in the style of a traditional Tibetan monastery. On the main floor we will install a commercial kitchen and dining hall, enabling us to provide meals and allowing visitors more precious time to focus on study and practice. The upstairs will house an archival library and study areas. The main floor will have public bathrooms, a laundry room and offices in addition to the dining facility.

To date, the building has windows, partial interior framing, metal roof and stucco exterior. We will continue in stages with the electrical and plumbing and septic system, and more excavation is required to stabilize the site. We need to raise another \$200,000 to finish. We have actively sought donations the last few years, and people have responded with large and small contributions and many have made pledge commitments to sponsor doors, windows and roof panels. We are still in need of everyone's participation at this juncture to donate to the general building fund or to sponsor the remaining windows and doors. Donations of time and materials are also welcome. Please find a way you can join us in bringing the East Wing to completion.

Mimi Hohenberg, Corporate Treasurer

EAST WING LIST OF SPONSORS with many thanks to you!

Major Donations of Labor: Chris McKinnies, Matthew Small, Alan Coghlan, Joseph Bellomo, Tony Reitz, Philip Thomas, Richard Schwindt.

Donations of \$10,000 and more: Nicholas Doherty, Mimi Hohenberg, Kenneth Hui, the Tides Foundation, the Hohenberg Foundation.

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Donations of \$500-\$5000: Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, Scott Globus, Joel and Joanne Shefflin, Mark and Lena Shefflin, Robin and Denise Lai, Sevyn Galambos, Sarah Rose, Jacquelin Leary, Keiki Lani, Namdroling, Kris Yang, the Reitz Family, Ani Ariana, the Dannels Family, Lisa Cho, Dr. and Mrs. John Potts, Sondra Bennet, Jacquelin Bruni, Wei Yang, Scott Scheiman, Diane Turner, David Gordon, Benson Young, Jonathan Altman, Dominique Shelton, Naomi and Marvin Mattis, James Kalfas.

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WOMANMIND. . . .a column by Julie Rogers

I was recently leafing through some contemporary writings about Dharma and paused to read this:

“We all have to have a *lived* practice. For example, if we see a female who is powerful yet humble, we can learn about the kind of humility that is empowering, and about a form of surrender that does not diminish one’s agency. . . .A central problem for women is that you can’t give up the ego and the self if you haven’t established a sense of yourself as subject.”

bell hooks

*from Contemplation and Transformation ~
Buddhist Women on the Edge*

Quite a statement—it made me stop to consider. One of the many qualities in Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche that I hold in highest regard is his humility, and over the years he has plunged this teaching into my heart with the skill of a warrior. I am learning what humility is, and for a long time this contemplation has revealed my own confusion. I came to this path feeling psychologically barren and have lived through my karma in and out of situations supporting a diminished sense of “self”. The “self” I defended earlier in life reflected a profound lack of confidence and fear of rejection. We all know the scenarios that can support our defeated identities (and our inflated ones). I had no clue of any meaningful qualities. What did I embody that could support and exemplify the Dharma? The skills I had were diminished or unrecognized, and talents remained hidden. When I did something “right,” it went to my head so quickly I was dizzy with pride. What in me was worthy or able to develop devotion?

Later I recognized the see-saw of “low self-esteem” and arrogance, two sides of the same coin of pride. Now I have begun to recognize pride as self-clinging, the attachment to one’s desires and identity, one way we separate ourselves from each other. I recall Padmasambhava’s words, “samsara is the tendency to find fault in others.” This fault-finding is a deluded way to trick myself into feeling better about my own shortcomings, a false proof that I am “OK”. The truth begins at home. My first obsession is the attachment to my own faults. To see them is good—how else can I change? But to cling to them is crippling. Oh, I get it.

Many women I’ve talked to have swung on the pendulum between self-loathing and self-exaggeration, men too. We walk the fine line between simple acknowledgment, pride and humility, and self-effacement. The teaching on the Eight Worldly Concerns points out gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and disgrace and how the attraction and aversion thing is our undoing. Fine then, I can see that this does not lead to surrender and service to the Three Jewels and all sentient beings. But before I can even approach the idea of humility, I have to become a more emotionally independent person, with some sense of confidence in what I even have to offer. It has become clear that my “peace of mind” has been governed by contributing circumstances and a crazy-making dependency with accompanying reactions to the phenomena of the external world. Its goings on have dictated “how I am.” This attachment is a problem. Having been influenced and/or controlled by society, parents, men, friends and offspring, I am having to develop inside myself, establish contact with the Dharma and a larger truth. Still unable to purely follow my lama even now, I play between devotion and rebellion, humility and pride. Yet, the opportunities Rinpoche provides help me to take stock of qualities, faults and how to stop holding on to them, and I discover it is service that offers the meaning I need to live fully.

The passage by bell hooks that brought me to contemplate a “humility that is empowering” dropped into my lap like my own child. This humility cannot be based in “I”. Her words, “... you can’t give up the ego and the self if you haven’t established a sense of yourself as subject” show me that, due to the attachment I and many of my friends have had to feeling unworthy, there has been no room for our qualities, our offering, and ultimately the empty nature of it all remains unrecognized. None of this can be possessed. So how do I relate to “a humility that is empowering?” There is a place of ease in the heart

where one acts from a certainty of goodness that is not weighed by external considerations. It is spontaneous, carefree and doesn't judge itself in the eyes of peers. It has nothing to do with reputation, merit or fear. Sometimes one simply knows what the right thing to do is, and does it, without fanfare. Sometimes one does the wrong thing, recognizes this, confesses remorse, and gets on with doing right. Simple, to the point. The spaciousness in this kind of living is on the path that frees us from the boundaries of ego. These are experiences that empower ourselves and others, taking us off the hook of our ideas, attitudes, self-absorption, our worldly concerns. So what if someone knows our faults and qualities? So what if someone doesn't? We know, and in the end, who are we anyway?

Tashi Chöling, Ashland, Oregon

Greetings from Tashi Chöling at this most beautiful time of year. With Gyatrul Rinpoche here in residence and the prospect of *bardo* teachings in the offing, we are indeed an "auspicious place of Dharma." We just completed the annual *Vajrasattva/Dor Sem Lama Chodpa* retreat with a long-life ceremony for Rinpoche on Sagadawa. The practice intensive went quite well with the active participation of members and an energetic complement of practitioners from San Francisco, Montana and elsewhere. It was a true pleasure and very educational to have Lama Sonam here as *dorje lupon*. Sincere thanks to Lama Sonam.

This retreat follows a year of Dharma activities, highlighted by the "Essence of Luminosity" commentary on the Guhyagarbha Tantra taught by Khenpo Namdrol in February and March of 1999 and the *Nei Luk Rang Jung* teachings which we received from Gyatrul Rinpoche by phone hook-up in the summer of 1998. Contact us for our upcoming practice/retreat/teaching schedule at P.O. Box 64, Ashland, OR 97520 or 541-482-2399.

With the fond hope that all of you who read this will have the good fortune to be here practicing Dharma during this coming year, we wish you well.

Portland Yeshe Nyingpo

When Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche visited us last November, he suggested that we simplify our schedule and be consistent in our meetings. This move has benefited us and better suits the needs of our Sangha. We've been following a cycle of practices that repeat each month with individual members providing information on the meaning and methods of doing each practice in an informal, worship-like setting. Towards the end of each session, we do the practice and continue with the instruction the following month. We've found that our little Sangha has been energized by this because it not only passes information along to those who may be unfamiliar with the practice but also provides a means for those leading the sessions to go deeper into their understanding of the practice. Currently, we've been focusing on the *Khandro Tuk Tig* and *Tso Kye Tuk Tig* cycles.

Tulku Sang Ngag gave those empowerments here last summer, and he will return August 10-23, 1999 to continue those teachings, assisted by Tulku Yeshe Nyima. Tulku Sang Ngag's upcoming teachings will also focus on Red Vajrasattva and Longchen Nyingtig. Sangye Khandro will return to Portland in August and September to continue teachings and practice instruction of the cycle of Tröma. We're also looking forward to visits by Choegyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche in the fall. Contact Clark Hansen, 503-292-4004, for information.

Namdroling, Montana

This spring the blessings we've received from Gyatrul Rinpoche are ripening. The greenhouse is full of food, and the outside gardens are being planted. We have a sound system and a new *gyaltsen* or victory banner—the first of four being made by Sangha members—in the shrine room.

In the last year the Sangha has come together for many teachings and practices. We have had the great fortune to have been blessed by a two-week visit and teachings from Rinpoche and Mimi with guest appearances by Ani Rioh and Bea, a retreat with Naomi Mattis—"Making the Dharma Part of Daily Life," a beautiful Losar celebration, a benefit concert with folk and bluegrass legend Peter Rowan (who happens to be a Vajrayana practitioner), two direct phone hook-ups for teachings with Rinpoche, three new babies and a couple of deaths that touched the Sangha.

At Rinpoche's request, our next scheduled retreat is June 25-27 with Naomi Mattis, "Expanding Your View, Deepening Your Practice." Our near future plans include a visit with Nam Chö teachings from H.H. Penor Rinpoche, tormas making and more from Rigdzin Nyima, and hopefully Gyatrul Rinpoche will return in the fall.

The Dharma is surely alive and well in Montana! For more information, either stop by, call 406-587-2907 or write Namdroling, P.O. Box 8, Bozeman, MT 59771.

For Nick

The monk in red robes, this nice man, is for real.
When working with him, there's always a straight deal.
Once Rinpoche's shadow, his health's now a mess.
Flat on his back with spinal disks quite amiss,
To the doctor he went to see why the restriction.
An MRI picture will see all of the friction,
With hours of traction and lying in bed,
You may get better with rest, the wise doctor said.
He can't even work or go to the Temple.
His bills pile up, we can't let him go mental.
He doesn't complain, not even words of frustration.
So, we ask for your help, please send a donation.

Seriously, we want to help Nick O'Connor who has given so much time, energy and love to the Dharma, but is without medical insurance. Please send your donation to Tashi Chöling, P.O. Box 64, Ashland, OR 97520. All donations are tax-deductible. We take VISA and MC if you wish to charge it. Any money that is over and above Nick's medical needs will be kept in a fund to aid the robed Sangha's medical expenses.

Orgyen Dorje Den/Bay Area Yeshe Nyingpo

We're now well into our second year in our downtown Oakland Chinatown Dharma Center, and we are very happy. The space is proving to be very comfortable and conducive to Dharma practice, and we have been very fortunate to receive numerous teachings and empowerments over the past year. Last summer we held a two-week *bardo* retreat which was attended daily by over 20 students. Rinpoche gave essential teachings, and some days Rigdzin Nyima helped lead the practice; but overall we followed the text *Natural Liberation*, applied what we've been taught in the past and practiced well together.

In January 1999 we invited Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Dongyal Rinpoche to bestow the empowerment of the Guhyagarbha Tantra which was attended by more than 125 people.

Everything went very smoothly and beautifully, and we hope to invite the Khenpo's again in the future. Once again this year, we enjoyed three days of practice at Losar with Lingtrul Rinpoche and other lamas and monks. These evening practices were well attended and very enjoyable.

After the Guhyagarbha teachings were completed at Tashi Chöling, we hosted Khnepo Namdrol in the Bay Area where he bestowed the empowerment and gave teachings on Vajrakilaya. His teachings were very detailed and penetrating and, coupled with Sangye Khandro's translation, had the effect of truly increasing our understanding. In early May we invited Tulku Yeshe Nyima to lead a weekend retreat on the Lake Born Vajra/*Tso Kye Tuk Tig* practice. Yeshe gave a lot of practical advice and all present gained more confidence in this core practice from the Dudjom Tersar tradition. We hope to sponsor a more extensive retreat on this practice later in the year? Interested?

We continue to do *tsok* practice on the 10th and 25th and are also practicing the *Dor Sem Lama Chodpa* sadhana on Thursday evenings. For activities and schedule info about Orgyen Dorje Den, please call the center message machine at 510-839-3136. Other questions can be directed to Scott Globus by email @ sglobus@well.com.

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