
THE WIND HORSE



NEWSLETTER OF CHAGDUD GONPA

WINTER 2004

A Letter from Jigme Tromge Rinpoche

Dear Sangha,

I would like to share some points that came up in a talk I gave at Rigdzin Ling during the *Essence of Siddhi* drubchen in October. To ensure that the authentic traditions upheld by our root teacher, His Eminence Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, continue to flourish, I encourage you all to reflect regularly on the Four Thoughts, remembering as always to first establish pure bodhichitta intention. With every teaching we listen to, every action we take, every practice we do, whatever situation we find ourselves in, we should constantly refresh our bodhichitta.

Each of the Four Thoughts can stand independently, but they are also interconnected in a profound and beautiful manner. (*Words of My Perfect Teacher*, by Patrul Rinpoche, *Gates to Buddhist Practice*, by Chagdud Rinpoche, and the *Ngondro Commentary*, by Chagdud Khadro, are books that I recommend to students interested in working with the Four Thoughts.) Understanding the preciousness of our human birth inspires us to make greater use of this life; we apply ourselves properly and with great joy, moment by moment. Contemplating impermanence helps us to appreciate the preciousness of our life, while helping to break down our belief in the solidity of things. When we reflect on the ever-changing quality of phenomena, we no longer cling so intensely to everything. Our understanding of emptiness deepens. Contemplating karma prompts us to urgently reconsider how we think and behave, and motivates us to become better, more honest people. And finally, by contemplating and truly comprehending suffering, we give rise to compassion for other beings and see how meaningless



H.E. Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche

samsara is. With this understanding, we develop to some extent the desire to abandon samsaric thoughts and actions. That is what we mean by renunciation. But as I look around at others and at myself, I see somewhat “symbolic” Vajrayana or Mahayana practitioners. When we look at ourselves and examine our own practice, we see quite clearly how much we cherish samsaric things, how much we embrace and pursue them.

Practice takes root in the mind only when one has developed a certain degree of renunciation. Contemplating the Four Thoughts helps us to understand samsara. Without contemplating them in great depth, we go on and on living in a fantasy. We think we are practitioners of Vajrayana, we think we have finished ngondro and moved to some higher

level, but in fact we are not even close. Once in a blue moon we actually do contemplate the Four Thoughts, but we don't even consider some points, like death and impermanence, because we can't bear to apply them to our own lives. This shows how little we have really grasped the nature of samsara.

We are all quite attracted to Dzogchen practice, but many of us rush through the ngondro teachings just to get these higher teachings. Our intention is completely wrong. If we have that kind of motivation, what can we expect from the ngondro? Just accumulating the numbers. Without contemplation of the Four Thoughts, our ngondro and our path thereafter will not be any different from ordinary worldly activities. But we cannot be freed from samsara with samsaric methods. They won't bring us true freedom

or happiness, and have never taken us to a higher place, and yet we have been avidly pursuing samsaric ways for lifetimes. We are experts at engaging in them. We don't have to make much effort to think of samsaric things to do; we are naturally drawn to them. We talk about Dzogchen as effortless practice, but for us samsaric practice is effortless. Even when we are practicing, our mind goes off effortlessly. When we are supposed to be doing deity practice, our samsaric concepts come to us naturally, without any effort. See? We are that enmeshed in samsara; we have deeply imprinted habit patterns. If they were useful, we would have been freed a long time ago. But we are not yet free, and we sink deeper and deeper into the quicksand of samsara by continuing as we are. This is why we need to practice dharma purely and precisely, step by step, free of hopes and fears.

When people request teachings from me and ask to become my students, I teach them the Four Thoughts and let them work on contemplating them for a long time. After practicing in this way for eighteen months, someone said to me, "Rinpoche, if you give me more teachings, I'll be very happy; if you don't give me more teachings, I'll be very happy. There is a lifetime of practice in the contemplations you gave me. I'm completely happy to just do this practice and support your activity." That was the biggest and best news I had received since arriving in America. Mostly I hear, "I'm doing ngondro, I've almost finished half of it—can I attend the Dzogchen retreat?" That one person's understanding of the dharma fulfilled the purpose of my being here. For our lineage in the future, if we have two or three people like that, it will be like the sun and moon appearing together in the sky.

The point is, in approaching these contemplations, we cannot apply Western models of education, where everything is scheduled year by year, from kindergarten to graduation: "This year I'll do this, next year I'll do that." It doesn't work that way with dharma. You need to practice the Four Thoughts until you get the Four Thoughts—not just for one or two months, but until you get them.

Appreciating how meaningless samsara is and having genuine compassion for all beings are the most crucial points for a practitioner. Understanding samsara will give us strong compassion for others. Then, when we do practice, our body, speech, and mind will become very happy because we understand the power of that dharma environment. Recognizing the blessings of the dharma environment helps to completely loosen our body, relax our mind, and soften our speech. When we practice, there is the joy of practicing; when we sit, there is the joy of sitting; when we meditate, there is the joy of meditating.

As we move along the path of dharma, we have to re-

member to keep a balance between study and practice. Study is extremely important and meditation is also extremely important, but the two have to be integrated. Some people go to one extreme, focusing only on the intellectual or academic approach. They get so caught up in this that they don't like to meditate or do group practices. They believe that academic brilliance makes a great practitioner. But they simply don't understand the meaning of dharma. Some people go to the other extreme. They fail to see that studying texts gives them all the information and methods they need for approaching practice. Or it may be sheer laziness that prevents them from studying: memorizing a text is a very

effective way of reinforcing and expanding our comprehension of the dharma, but perhaps we think it is too much hard work. This is unfortunate.

Ideally, we first read or listen to teachings. Next, we meditate in order to perceive the oneness of phenomena, to move beyond an intellectual understanding of their nature. We don't see all phenomena, the whole of samsara and nirvana, as one. Instead, we see samsara as samsara and nirvana as nirvana. We see a demon as a demon, a deity as a deity. We don't see the equalness of the nature of the deity and the nature of the demon—we don't see their oneness. Until we go beyond this limited understanding, we need to train carefully in how we perceive

things. When we combine study and meditation, our meditation will take a leap. But if study only generates more arrogance, it's better to stick with meditation. We want to make sure that we don't get stuck in the intellectual. If a scholar hasn't tamed his mind, when obstacles arise, he won't recognize or know how to deal with them properly. So if you don't know how to integrate study and practice, just practice simply.

Our teacher Chagdud Rinpoche, a highly realized master, a mahasiddha, gave us many instructions on how to practice. We should take advantage of what we received from him. Even those of you who did not meet him have his blessings and his teachings, which are carried by his senior students. And hopefully all of us will see him again soon! When I was in Tibet this year, I went to see Khenpo Ngaga, whom I had previously asked to help find Rinpoche's reincarnation. Khenpo was in strict retreat, so we could not meet but I made the request again, and he indicated that he will look for signs. In the meantime, let us continue to pray for Rinpoche's swift rebirth under the most auspicious conditions, while maintaining whatever practices he blessed us with. Along with that, to keep our foundation and path pure, let us return again and again to the Four Thoughts, just as Rinpoche and all great masters have always done.



Jigme Tromge Rinpoche

With very best wishes to you all,
Jigme Tromge Rinpoche

A Teaching on Live Release

by Venerable Lama Gyatso Nubpa

For years Venerable Lama Gyatso Nubpa, resident lama of Thondup Ling, has been dedicated to saving sentient beings that are destined to die. Many of his “live releases” have involved saving baitfish along the coastal areas of southern California. As an increasing number of our sangha members have become inspired to release beings, we thought it would be beneficial to ask Lama Gyatso to explain how and why we undertake this simple, yet profound practice. This teaching took place during an interview with Veronica Miller on December 29, 2004.

Q: Why perform a live release?

A: It is imperative that any positive karma or virtue that we accumulate be characterized by the three supremes. The three supremes are virtue in the beginning, virtue in the middle, and virtue in the end. Virtue in the beginning corresponds to the right motivation. The essence of right motivation is that we be free of self-interest. The essence of the second supreme is that our mind be free of fixation (the duality of subject and object). The essence of the third supreme is that we dedicate whatever merit we accumulate to the benefit of countless mother sentient beings. Any positive karma we create that has these three qualities has a great degree of merit.

Although as sentient beings we will have some sort of selfish motivation (and it is okay to have such motivation), our primary intention should be to benefit other sentient beings, particularly those who are helpless, those who are completely gripped by ignorance and face an endless chain of suffering. The number of such beings, unfortunately, is inconceivable. With such motivation preceding our actions, any karma we create has great virtue.

Until we recognize the true nature of mind—suchness—all the merit we accumulate can be exhausted. Of all the exhaustible forms of merit, the most supreme is the generosity of relieving others of the fear of losing their lives. From that standpoint, freeing live beings is the most supreme practice of virtue, and hence the fruition is inconceivable. From a relative point of view, our connection to the beings we release is that of observers to some baitfish; as they are not near and dear ones, an aspect of the natural foundation of self-interest is eliminated. Releasing these beings that are destined to die (and are most likely to become the cause of death of other beings as well) is a spontaneous expression of sheer kindness and compassion.

Imagine that we ourselves are one of these baitfish. We would experience all of the aspects of our senses, minus some human faculties. Now imagine that we are pulled out of our natural environment. The process of being captured itself involves the great suffering of feeling suffocated. Then imagine that while we are still alive, a sharp stainless-steel



Dzatrul Rinpoche and Lama Gyatso blessing the fish

fishhook pierces our body. Imagine the suffering and pain this would cause us. At that time, our only wish is for a swift death. But that does not happen. Finally, when the hook has impaled us, we are thrown backward while the line is cast. Often, we faint from the extreme suffering of pain, and then somehow, due to sheer karma, we again try to get free. But instead, we now become the very cause of the loss of a bigger being's life. Sometimes, if we are fortunate, those bigger beings bite only half of our body and miss the hook, which makes the fisherman furious. He then rips our body apart even while we are still alive and either feeds us to his pets or throws us back into the ocean. Either way, we'll be eaten and there goes the final phase of our life, causing even more beings to take on the karma of having ended our life.

In addition, we can imagine that we are one of countless baitfish that have been captured and are now swimming in a tank. Finally, after we have undergone great suffering, a generous and compassionate person comes along and buys a scoop of bait to set free from the fisherman's net. In this way, we have the good fortune to be released back into the freedom of the water. Imagine the great happiness we experience by being back in the ocean. Out of great joy, we might even jump. Why not—we've been given a new life!

Similarly, imagine that we somehow get trapped behind bars, either on genuine or on flimsy grounds. After we have spent a long time in prison, the judge and jury pass judgment and our sentence is pronounced: capital punishment. We and our supporters try every means possible to stay the execution. To have the sentence revoked, we will do almost anything, even fabricate stories, but it is all to no avail. Now imagine that the president, who has suddenly aroused genuine kindness and compassion, has granted us amnesty. Imagine the happiness we and our loved ones would experience. It would be beyond words.

(continued)

The Ransom and Release of Animals

by H.H. Chadrak Sangye Dorje Rinpoche

To the spiritual master, Buddha of Infinite Life, Amitayus,
And to his bodhisattva disciples, I bow.

I will now briefly explain the benefits
Of ransoming and releasing animals.

To ransom and release animals
Constitutes a flawless practice
To be done with pure motivation and applied
By all of Shakyamuni's followers.

The benefits of this practice have been described
extensively
In many sutras, tantras and treatises.
Oceanlike gatherings of learned and accomplished masters
of India and Tibet

Have considered this an important way to aid beings.
For those of the Hinayana,
This practice represents the abandoning of harming others;
For those who have entered the mind of awakening of
the Mahayana,
It represents the training itself;
And for practitioners of the Secret Mantra,
It represents the principal tantric commitment of the
Jewel buddha family.

The reason for this is that in the world,
Nothing is more precious than life itself
And no negative act more serious than taking life.

Therefore, among composite forms of the roots of virtue,
None has greater benefit
Than the ransom and release of animals.
If you wish for happiness and good fortune,
Be diligent on this supreme path.

The authenticity of this practice is proven
By the authority of scripture and by logic.
It is a path without obstacle or error.
Thinking of your own body as an example,
Through this practice, give up harming others.

Don't take life.
Instead, release birds, fish, wild animals,
Farm animals doomed to be slaughtered,
And also small creatures such as ants and bees.
Be diligent in giving them refuge from fear.

The benefits of this are inconceivable:
It is the supreme practice for longevity,
And there is no higher practice for nurturing good health
Or for dedicating virtue to the dead.
It is my main practice to help beings.

It clears away misfortune that arises due to outer and
inner obstacles
And creates harmonious circumstances effortlessly
and spontaneously.

Similar to the benefit created by the president granting amnesty is the benefit of conducting live releases. The only difference is that fish have no one to plead their case. Fortunately, we are not baitfish, nor are we on death row. We have this precious vessel of our human body, and as human beings we have the ability to offer captive beings the chance for freedom.

In the Buddhist scriptures, we find that countless eons ago, when human beings were perfecting the two accumulations (merit and wisdom), and specifically avoiding causing harm to other beings as well as protecting others' lives, they lived for up to eighty thousand years. It is believed that the degeneration of the life force that has since occurred in humans is caused by the accumulation of nonvirtue; particularly as a result of taking the lives of other beings or being the cause of their death. It is said that in the future, when the human life span is a mere ten years and when the human race is nearing extinction, an emanation of Buddha Maitreya (the future buddha) will manifest. That emanation will live much longer, be taller, and have all the qualities of a supreme being. At that time, when other human beings ask the reason for his qualities, he will say that he is reaping the fruit of the karma of not taking the lives of others but rather saving others' lives. It is said that eventually human beings will stop harming other beings, and their life span will increase from ten to twenty years, and ultimately

to eighty thousand years. From this alone, we can understand the magnitude of the merit of freeing beings that are destined to be brutally killed.

Q: How can we do a live release on our own?

A: First and foremost, recite the prayers of refuge and bodhichitta (great compassion). After that, instantly visualize yourself as any wrathful deity for which you have received empowerment. Within that state of original purity, the state of suchness, avert all the causes of obstacles and hindrances, thereby demarcating the boundary; also instantly visualize the wisdom protection circle, with all the beings to be released within it.

After that, practice a brief purification of these beings, so that their two obscurations (negative emotions and conceptual obscurations) and habit patterns are completely purified. To do this, you may recite any purification mantra, primarily the Vajrasattva or Akshobhya mantra, with the understanding that these beings' karma and obscurations have been purified. If you have any consecrated water, sprinkle it onto the beings destined for release.

Then, instantly visualize in the space in front the Three Jewels: the Buddha, dharma, and sangha; the three kayas: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya; the Three Roots: lama, deity, and dakini; and the lineage masters—that is, all the sources of refuge—appearing like the reflec-

When it is guided by positive motivation
And concluded with pure dedication and aspirations,
Its effect is that you will reach perfect enlightenment
And accomplish the two goals—benefit for yourself
and for others.
Have no doubt of this!

Those who are endowed with merit and a virtuous attitude
Should prevent the practice of hunting in mountains
and valleys.

In particular, during autumn and spring,
When flocks of cranes and other birds
Are compelled by their karma to fly south or north,
They must move their wings with great effort
And soar through space.
Yet sometimes they must come to earth
With anxiety, fear and an uneasy mind.

Don't hit such beings with stones or weapons.
Don't kill or harm them.

Protect them and help them continue their migration
in comfort.

"To help with loving-kindness
Destitute beings without protection
Has merit equal to that of
Meditating on the essence of compassion and emptiness."
Thus said the glorious master Atisha.

Lamas, masters, monks, nuns and lay people, both women
and men,

Should each in your own domain
Energetically perform as much ransom and release
of animals as you are able.
And encourage others to do the same.

By doing so,
You will pacify sickness and disaster
Among humans and farm animals in your region.
Harvests will be plentiful, crops will increase, life will
be long
And perfect happiness will dawn.
The time of death will be free of pain and confusion.
In the next life, you will attain an excellent body in
a pleasant realm,
And eventually you will easily attain the supreme state
of perfect awakening.
Have no doubt of this!

I, the one known as Chadral Sangye Dorje,
Am always devoted to the activity of ransoming
and releasing life.

By the virtue of these words,
May all beings enter the way of the bodhisattvas.
Mama Koling Samanta.

H.H. Chadral Rinpoche, one of the foremost living masters of the Nyingma tradition, teaches by his own example the importance of saving lives. This teaching was given specifically for Sacred Voices of the Nyingma Masters, by Sandra Scales (Padma Publishing, 2004). All royalties from the book will be used to sponsor the ransom and release of animals.

tion of the stars in the ocean. They are gazing straight at you with compassion. Instantly, call upon the sources of refuge, requesting that the benefactor and everyone directly or indirectly connected to this meritorious live release, including yourself, perfect the two accumulations and purify the two obscurations and all habit patterns. Recite, "I offer this supreme generosity of giving life to the sources of refuge so that all beings (whether directly and indirectly connected) may receive the blessings of longevity and all the qualities of enrichment and wisdom. And also by the truth of the blessings of the sources of refuge and the truth of suchness and the truth of the infallible law of karma, bestow the blessings of the qualities that increase longevity and wisdom and seal them in the life force of these beings that are going to be saved."

At this point, recite all the mantras of longevity that you know and any other precious mantras that liberate upon hearing—for example, the Seven-Line Prayer, Vajra Guru mantra, the Shi-tro mantra (OM AH HUNG BODHICITTA MAHA SUKHA JNANA DHATU AH OM RULU RULU HUNG JHYO HUNG), or the mantra of Akshobhya, Vajrasattva, or Tara. While reciting these mantras, if you have any precious substances (that liberate upon taste) such as amrita, dilute them with water and sprinkle them over the beings to be released. If you don't have such substances, recite mantras and blow onto a container of clean water and then sprinkle this on

the beings. If you are ransoming a bigger being, like a cow or chicken, you can put the substance directly into its mouth. At the conclusion, recite any aspiration and dedication prayers that you know.

Those who are not experienced Vajrayana practitioners can perform live releases by focusing on the generosity of giving life to captive beings, by dedicating the merit to loved ones, for their health and for the removal of their obstacles and hindrances, or by dedicating the merit to those who have passed away. They can also reflect on the preciousness of life and rejoice in the celebratory feeling of giving life to many. In this way, they spontaneously accomplish the state of motherhood like a successful delivery and celebration of the birth.

Q: Are there auspicious times to perform a live release?

A: Every moment, 12 months a year, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, is a good and auspicious time to accumulate virtue. Specific days that are more beneficial include the first-quarter moon (Tara and Medicine Buddha day), full moon (Amitabha day), new moon (Buddha Shakyamuni day), Guru Rinpoche and Dakini days, and all the multiplication days of the enlightened activities of the Buddha. These days are precious because of the multiplication of merit that occurs.

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If you are doing a live release for someone who has passed away, you can do so even if he or she passed away decades before. Conducting a live release within 49 days, or, especially, within the first 28 days, after a person's death is tremendously beneficial. The merit becomes like a Mapquest for the deceased, helping guide and support them in the bardo.

Some Logistics of Live Release

by Linnea Nan

T'hondup Ling has been releasing live bait for as long as we have been a Los Angeles center. Our first major release took place in 1993 when the contents of a huge fishing boat were ransomed in Marina Del Rey. The ceremony, led by Chagdud Rinpoche on behalf of the T'hondup Ling sangha, was attended by Chagdud Khadro, Lama Gyatso, many other Chagdud Gonpa lamas, and sangha members. In the 1990s, we conducted releases about twice a year, often when Rinpoche visited. In the past three years, however, Lama Gyatso has increased the number of releases to about two per month, or sometimes more, particularly on auspicious occasions or in times of tragedy, such as the recent tsunamis.

Our release schedule is seldom posted on our website, as we work very hard not to alert the fishermen and bait stands of our intended releases. If they know there is going to be a release, they will overfish and hence no true benefit will accrue: if you are ransoming fish that may never have been caught in the first place while the bait you actually wish to save sits waiting to be picked up by sporting fishermen, you have defeated the purpose of a release.

Many people wish to contribute financially to our releases, and often call us to find out the cost of ransoming a given number of fish. We cannot give a definite answer, since certain variables come into play: the season, the size and type of fish, supply and demand, the fisherman's temperament, and the amount of money available to spend. In addition to financial contributions, participation in a release creates great merit. Driving lamas, offering lunch, delivering bottled water, or helping out on the dock are ways of helping with the ceremony, which can last as long as six or seven hours.

Over the years, millions and millions of lives have been saved. More than that, many a mind has turned to the dharma. During online chat room discussions with about thirty fishermen on the topic "Just what the heck were those Buddhist monks doing in King's Harbor letting the fish go?" the fishermen demonstrated a genuine interest in the philosophy behind live release. Occasionally, some bait sellers have offered to match our purchase for the day, and they have even offered to close their bait stand early.

If you wish to be notified of our live releases, please add

your name to T'hondup Ling's e-mail distribution; you can e-mail us at <thondup_ling@juno.com> or call us at 323-953-0755. If you wish to make a pledge toward a live release, no amount is too small. We can't guarantee which day your offering will be used (unless you schedule a private ceremony), as we are at the mercy of the docks. You may send your donation either to us or to Rigdzin Ling. Beginning sometime in March, we will post the number of fish released on our website www.thondupling.org, so that you can check the status of your contribution.

If you wish to conduct your own live release, here are a few helpful hints from the deck hands at T'hondup Ling. *Never* call a fisherman or dock to schedule a live release. We assure you that they will fish in advance. A call an hour or so ahead of time just to see if the bait stand is open will generally do the trick. If you need further information, don't tell the bait keeper you are Buddhist. These people

are on to us! It's better just to show up. Releasing one scoop of imprisoned fish is better than releasing two tanks of fish captured on your behalf. If you are scooping with a net, be very gentle and go slowly. Dip the fish into the water and let them swim out; if handled hastily, they will lose many scales. Also beware of predators; most docks have a hose nearby so that you can spray pelicans and gulls with water to keep them from feasting on your fleeing fish.



Pregnant squid being released with their tens of thousands of eggs

Impermanence

Impermanence is like an unexpected visitor.

It doesn't announce when it will come.

It also doesn't say when it will leave.

It simply comes into our lives.

We cannot send it away or ask it to stay
a little longer.

Our karma is its clock.

The best advice that it gives us is:

Don't be attached to anything,

'Cause at any moment I can take it with me.

Don't have aversion to anything,

'Cause during another visit I might bring it to you.

While you have this chance,

Perceive the illusory quality of everything

And realize the immutable before the

Lord of Death accompanies you.

Carlos Alberto Schewenger

Carlos was a Khadro Ling sangha member who died in a motorcycle accident in June 2004, six months after completing a three-year retreat. He wrote this poem during retreat.

A Touch of Inspiration

A Letter by Lama Drimed Norbu

Dear noble Sangha,

It is amazing and a great joy to me to see Rinpoche's dharma activities flourishing everywhere. Best wishes to all of you in your endeavors.

Because Rinpoche has been so kind and Lama Chökyi Nyima and the translation committee have worked so hard to produce Longchenpa's great Seven Treasuries, please study them. Since the *Chöying Dzöd*, including its commentary, has come into print, I have been captivated by, devoted to, and supported by it. That such texts are appearing in English is our unbelievable good fortune. When I began searching for the dharma in the early seventies, I was only able to find books like *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*. Wow, if the Treasuries had been available then! And what a wonder that some of them are here now for young people searching for the dharma in the West.

Ideally, before even opening the *Chöying Dzöd*, you would have completed the preliminary practices, or *ngondro*, and received a Great Perfection empowerment, pointing-out instructions into the nature of mind, oral transmission of the text, and teachings on the text from a realized master. Then you would study it on your own, returning to your teacher to clarify difficult points. Going about this in the appropriate way is like tilling the earth deeply, cultivating the soil, planting at the appropriate time, and tending the crops properly. In these fast-paced times, many precious texts are circulating freely. Some people read them too casually and make quick judgments about their contents, thinking they've understood the minds of the buddhas. Then the next week they get lost in some melodrama and wonder what happened to their great realization. Inadequate preparation is like scratching the surface of a patch of crusty ground with an old rake, tossing out a handful of seeds, and hoping for a bountiful harvest.

It is difficult at first to enter into the deep meaning of the words while you're in the midst of life's activities. In any case, don't read the text casually, like a novel, or go over it with your critical mind, finding fault with Longchenpa and the tantras. You won't get far that way. Occasionally I will ask someone, "Have you read the *Chöying Dzöd*?" and they will say, "Oh, yeah, I read it," as though they're talking about last year's best-seller. It seems they didn't quite get it. Some say to me, "There are so many words. Awareness is so simple. Why does Longchenpa make it so complicated?" Well, if it's so simple, have you stabilized your recognition of awareness so that you never lose it during the entire day and night? Are you free of fixation?

One reason there are so many words is that we have so many ways of misunderstanding what is so simple. The view of the Great Perfection is spacious, the meditation is natural, the conduct is effortless, and the fruition is such-

ness itself. However, our view tends toward extremes, our meditation is flawed by our effort, our conduct is rigid because of our acceptance and rejection, and we miss the fruition altogether. So it was out of compassion for all the ways we err that Longchenpa wrote so extensively. Think of all the hardships he endured to gain the realization that enabled him to compose this book. At the very least, have enough patience to learn some of the unique language of the Great Perfection so that you can enter the deep meaning. Scholars study for years in order to fathom such a text, and yogis meditate for years to experience the meaning of the words. We in the West, who lack years of both study and meditation, tend to be too quick to judge such profound writings.

Ideally, you should ask your lama if it is a good time for you to read the text. Reading it at the wrong time can confuse you; reading it at the right time will support and enhance your practice. Jigme Lingpa was so inspired by Longchenpa's writings and felt such unshakable faith in and devotion for Longchenpa that when he prayed fervently to him, Longchenpa appeared and granted him the empowerments and teachings of the *Longchen Nyingtik* cycle, which includes the *Tiglei Gyachen* guru sadhana that we practice today.

When you do read the book, approach it as if you were going to Longchenpa for teachings. Reflect on how, currently, your mind is lost in the dream of this life, ceaselessly riding the waves of hope and fear, of joy and suffering, so preoccupied with countless variations of self-clinging that you are barely able to truly help others. Pray to Longchenpa, inseparable from your own kind root guru, "Please correct my wrong views, explain the unerring path of meditation, and advise me on authentic conduct, so that the fruition which is beyond attainment becomes evident."

If you feel drawn to the practice of guru yoga and meditation, and you truly have glimpses of awareness, you will find this book to be like medicine that cures the illness of wrong view, shattering your concepts and freeing your small-mindedness. Longchenpa will point out flaws in your ideas about Great Perfection meditation and advise you on the key points, so that your practice will be renewed. He will tell you what is meant by conduct, or activity, that will free you from pretense, and will show the nature and benefit of the goal-less goal, should you choose to follow such a path. When you feel stuck in your practice or burned out by your karma, he will lighten your heart and bring you back to what truly has meaning.

When you are gripped by the five poisons, he will expose their weakness, showing how they are naturally free, so that you won't waste time toying with antidotes. When you are feeling like a know-it-all and puffed up over your

own experiences, you will be humbled by the grandeur of Longchenpa's vast knowledge and realization. When you realize that your own understanding and experience are relatively insignificant, deep admiration and respect will arise. When you doubt your own experience, Longchenpa will encourage you and advise you on how to proceed. When you feel bereft, he will, like a kind parent, make you feel cared for and nurtured. Once you become familiar with the entire text, it will become a kind of transcendent map that will enable you to find your bearings and know where you are on the path.

I could write for pages praising just this one text, but you might as well read Paltrul Rinpoche's praise at the back of the book; it's far superior to my fumbling words.

Traditionally, out of respect for their sacred content and origins, the holy texts of the dharma are covered with cloth, so make a lovely cover or case for the *Chöying Dzöd*. Also keep it in a high place. The words of a buddha are the relics of the dharmakaya, and to honor their preciousness, texts are often put on a shelf above the statues on a shrine. In that way, you can make offerings to the statues as representations of enlightened form, as well as to Longchenpa's enlightened speech and that of all buddhas. Making offerings increases your merit and deepens your awareness, which will help you to understand the text. Alternatively, you may place the book somewhere over your bed, so that Longchenpa's blessings are above the crown of your head when you sleep. I remember Rinpoche having me build him a shelf during a retreat so that his texts could be above his crown at night. Longchenpa himself said, "To those of you fortunate enough to have a devoted interest in this sublime spiritual approach, my earnest advice is: this text will serve as your eyes, so treat it with the highest respect."

But of course the book is not meant to be read once and then beautifully covered and left on top of your shrine for the next ten years. It seems to be a Western habit to read a book once, be done with it, put it on a shelf, and get another. Some people amass amazing libraries of dharma books that way! If you have a particular sadhana practice that you are devoted to, think of how many times you've turned those pages and read those same words—ideally until you've memorized them and have realized that you and the deity are inseparable. It's the same with the *Chöying Dzöd*. You should read it again and again, year after year. The great Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, who was Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche's previous incarnation, said that one should devote whatever intelligence one has to reading

these texts over and over, for they are the repositories of the dakinis' secrets and are beyond compare.

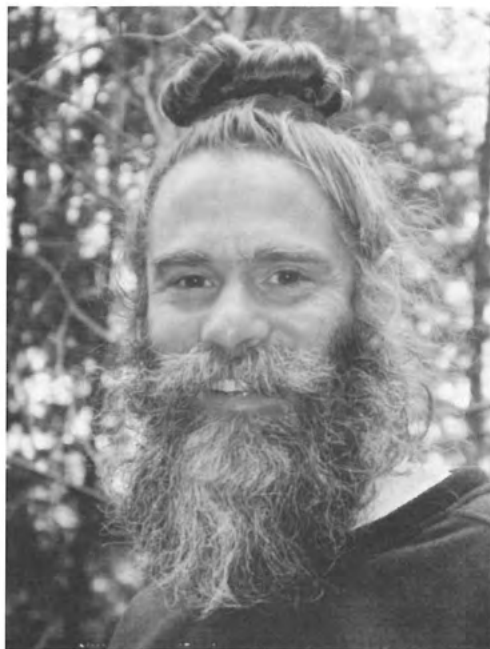
Whenever you read the text, you can formulate your own prayers based on your heart's wishes and devotion, or you can recite the "Prayers before Teachings" while visualizing Longchenpa, inseparable from your root guru, in front of you. After a session of reading, dedicate the merit to all beings, using the "Prayers after Teachings" or any other that you wish, praying that they might awaken to their inherent buddha nature.

It would be excellent if you could go into retreat, for a short time or a long period, setting aside everything else and focusing your mind by studying the *Chöying Dzöd*, practicing the *Tiglei Gyachen* guru sadhana, and meditating. These are all aspects of guru yoga practice, and they support each other. Guru yoga is the simplest and most expedient way to free the ordinary mind from its self-created delusions, which are rooted in dualistic fixation. To visualize and meditate on yourself as Longchenpa is to rely on his enlightened form; to read the *Chöying Dzöd* is to rely on his enlightened speech; and to rest in the recognition of awareness is to rely on his enlightened mind. By practicing in this way, you will come to directly perceive that the ineffable, spontaneously present nature of all forms

that you see, sounds that you hear, and thoughts that arise are no different from the guru's enlightened form, speech, and mind. This is what it means to "see everything as the display of the guru." Then you will rely on this pure vision as the path.

When you actually study the *Chöying Dzöd*, including its commentary, read it through once to get an overview. As you read, keep notes on the pages and sections that inspire you, so that you can find them easily and go back to them later. As your meditation practice deepens, so will your understanding of the text. Over time, you will find certain passages that are especially helpful to you—write these down. Memorize some of them, so that you can bring them to mind at any time or place. Some great practitioners memorize whole sections or the entire root text. Reading the *Chöying Dzöd* is very similar to reciting mantra; it protects the mind by guiding it in a positive way. Think of all the mantras you recite mindlessly every day while thinking of other things; you might be better off reciting a passage from the book mindfully, with devotion, and meditating on the meaning.

After reading through the whole text once, go back to Chapter 10 (the root text with its commentary) and take that as the core of your study for a while—particularly the four



Lama Drimed Norbu, Winter 2004

ways of settling. It's not enough to just read about them. To develop confidence, you need to devote a lot of time to formal practice. There are a number of key points or pith instructions, advice that Longchenpa gives you directly. Use these one by one as they appear in Chapter 10, memorizing those that are most helpful. Work with just one for a number of days or weeks, until you feel that it has really taken effect—you are one with the meaning and you can place your mind in that way at will, whenever you want. Then go on to the next, and so on. In this way, you will begin to take the words to heart, going beyond intellectual understanding.

Once you have gone through Chapter 10 in this way, put the book on your shrine and don't read it for a while. Just practice guru yoga and formal trekchö, and see now where your practice is at, what you've really got. To support your meditation, you may refer to the passages you have written down or memorized, but for the most part, let go of words and rely more on the essence of awareness, which is totally free of concepts.

After a time, you may feel you've hit the limits of your practice, thinking, "Longchenpa help me!" Or you may come to doubt your experience, thinking, "Longchenpa save me!" In some way, your own efforts will fall short. At that point, read the book from the beginning again, more slowly this time, really contemplating each passage. Continue to intuitively weave the three aspects of guru yoga, study, and meditation together so that your practice doesn't become mindless, but is always fresh.

You may bring your questions to your teacher, but you may not always find that a verbal answer will resolve them. If your guru yoga is working, then just being in your teacher's presence can answer questions and open your mind, but if you have doubts and are critical of your teacher, the door to understanding will be blocked.

As great as the *Chöying Dzöd* is, never make the mistake of thinking that it can replace your guru yoga practice with a living teacher. In an instant, with a gesture or a few words—at any time and in any place—the guru can show you awareness, your own true face, and that moment will be forever imprinted in your mind. You need to have that initial experience through the guru's grace in order to practice authentically, and you can't get it from a book, no matter how profound the book is. This direct experience is like the master key that unlocks all doors. Once you have had it, you will find that the entire *Chöying Dzöd* relates to that experience, helping to nurture it and filling out your understanding.

Once, when we were in the early phases of construction at Rigdzin Ling, I was deep in the trenches, literally, working on the main plumbing lines going across what we call moonland. I had a question about some building details, so I rode my bicycle to the mechanics' shop to talk to Rinpoche. When I got there, he was sitting on the floor with a few people, sculpting in cement. The building wasn't fully enclosed, so I just straddled the bicycle while I asked Rinpoche my question. He was spooning cement into a bowl as he

answered me, and didn't bother to look up. As I looked at him, listening to his answer, there was something about seeing his gesture of moving the cement—my ordinary mind's fixation on everything fell away, and awareness became evident. Nothing changed, but everything was like a reflection on water. I hadn't come to ask about practice, and he didn't say, "Okay, everyone, stop joking around; put down your tools and sit up straight. I'm going to give pointing-out instructions on the nature of your minds." He just was the view, he was meditation, and he was conduct. There was total transmission in this ordinary instant. It was so utterly simple and so mind-shatteringly profound, I was speechless. So I simply thanked him for the "answer" and went back to plumbing with a literally opened mind. He was always transmitting the meaning of the Great Perfection like that, in the shrine room or wherever else he was, to anyone who was open to him.

Now that Rinpoche has left his body, how can you continue to connect with him, your precious root teacher? An excellent way is to pray to him, meditate that you are receiving the four empowerments, and blend your mind with his every day, using the guru yoga in your ngondro practice. You may also have realized that he is inseparable from Tara, Tröma, Vajrakilaya, or whoever your chosen deity is, and that to rely on your deity practice is to rely on him. When compassion, the foundation of the path, leads you to benefit others, you may remember that it is because of Rinpoche that bodhichitta has arisen in your mindstream and you will feel connected to his heart-mind. And when the recognition of awareness dawns within your mind, you will see that on that level there is no coming together or going apart, only the magical display of the teacher–student relationship as the radiance of awareness itself.

Whether he has a human form or not, his blessings are always with us, but it is essential that we hold dearly all his dharma advice and practice persistently to make it and our lives one and the same.

Best wishes for your study,
contemplation, and meditation.

Love, Lama Drimed

Afflictive emotions, karma, and habitual patterns
have no support
within this vast expanse, but are the playing out
of magical games of illusion.
You must be liberated from this, so please come
to a decisive experience of causality.
As a means of doing so, there is nothing superior
to this approach.
Therefore, it is crucial not to stray from the
enlightened intent of the true nature of
phenomena.
This is the expanse of my profound and heartfelt
advice.

—Longchenpa, *Chöying Dzöd*

Pilgrimage to Tibet: 2004

This summer Jigme Rinpoche led a group of about fourteen on a monthlong pilgrimage to eastern and central Tibet. Distilled from e-mails and pieces written later, the following is an account of their trip.



Jigme Rinpoche and Trinley Wangmo in Tibet

After a dramatic drive through the wooded gorges rising up from Chengdu, China, we reached Nyarong, in eastern Tibet. We spent two days at remote Chagdud Gonpa, where we were able to walk and enjoy the view from the windblown mountaintop. One of the highlights of our visit was offering prayers in the ancient cliff-edge temple built by the first Chagdud Rinpoche, which houses a statue of Sherab Gyaltsen with a beautifully engaging face.

Next we went to Tromge Gonpa, which, after eight days, felt to many of us like home. Once we had adjusted to the altitude, we livened up, and one glorious evening, a group of joyful Tromge lamas led us up the hill to the hut where Tulku Arik (one of Chagdud Rinpoche's root teachers) had done retreat. At the monastery, Dechen Tromge Rinpoche offered empowerments for the four-armed and thousand-armed forms of Chenrezig, as well as for Vajrakilaya and Hayagriva. At the end of our stay, we joined the community for a one-day Chenrezig puja.

From Tromge Gonpa, we drove a few hours to Khenpo Ngakchung's place, only to discover that he had been in retreat since January. Despite our disappointment, we found the area rich with the energy of practice. Khenpo's attendant told us that Khenpo, who was very sorry not to be able to see Rinpoche, was sending along a set of his clothes, as well as a text and some holy substance. We climbed to a field above the gonpa where many masters had meditated and taught, saw the marks and mantras they had left in the cliffs, and did prostrations outside Khenpo's retreat house.

In Ganze we met Chagdud Rinpoche's sister, the indefatigable Trinley Wangmo. She cried and cried when she

saw Jigme Rinpoche again, but after a short time the tears subsided. Everyone felt privileged to meet her and do some pujas with her—a true dakini. One day, she was given an Atkins Advantage bar and was utterly taken with it! She was then offered a whole bagful, which she accepted and quickly tucked inside her voluminous coat. When we suggested bringing her some Brazilian stones the next time we visited her, she said she would like egg-shaped ones, ranging in color from red to maroon, preferably with flecks or streaks of gold.

The *monlam* (aspiration prayer ceremony) at Katok Monastery was an amazing experience. As we approached, the monks meeting our car signaled across the valley, and minutes later a stream of monks, including Tulku Loga Rinpoche (who had visited Rigdzin Ling) and the young head tulku, came running down the mountain with kataks. Then, as we slowly drove up to the main area around the Zangdok Palri palace, hundreds of people approached Jigme Rinpoche's car to receive his blessings.

In the ensuing days, we meditated in the shrine rooms of the Zangdok Palri and circumambulated, slightly dazed, around the stupas and temples. It seemed that wherever we went, we were met by very friendly (although somewhat surprised) faces. The atmosphere was so electrifying that many of us could barely sleep. Physically, things became very uncomfortable due to a lack of sanitary conditions, but in all other respects we felt incredibly fortunate and joyful. Our small guest rooms had large windows facing the main temples and the palace. It was absolutely beautiful watching the sky turn pink in the mornings and the moon over the mountains at night. We did Tara puja together in front of statues of the twenty-one Taras and Vajrasattva, and *Shower of Blessings* practice in our rooms.

On the last day, everyone in the group who was healthy enough circumambulated the valley, which took about four hours, and came back glowing. A small girl befriended Lama Thubten, and they walked together casting flowers at each stupa. Lama Padma marched along looking like Gandhi with his shawl and walking stick. The same day, some monks performed lama dances without costumes. We watched entranced for hours. Some aspects were familiar from the dances done at Chagdud Gonpa, but there were many new dances to marvel at.

In the afternoon, we made final offerings to Moktza Rinpoche (with whom many of us had made a connection during Chagdud Rinpoche's cremation ceremonies in Nepal); he had been extremely kind during our visit, and gave us books and dutzi when we left. We then went to say farewell to Shinzhong Rinpoche, the head of Katok Monastery, whose striking presence reduced us to awed silence and tears. Sitting in his chair before the window, he talked to us for a long time about Katok and its history, and how Chagdud Rinpoche's blessings had brought us there. When

we tried to make offerings, he declared that he only accepts offerings of one yuan, so we all had to scramble to find the appropriate note, much to his amusement. We also made offerings to H.H. Nyoshul Lungtok Rinpoche and several other lamas.

The Katok experience—blissful, unfathomable, and intense in every way—ran deep for us all. It seemed to saturate us with blessings. We returned to Tromge Gonpa and a tenth-day *Shower of Blessings* tsok in the main temple.

From Tromge, we drove to Khenpo Achuk's place, where we sat with him for some time. We also met the three young tulkus under his care: the reincarnation of Tulku Arik, the reincarnation of Tulku Jigme Namgyal (a Tromge lama who had been close to Chagdud Rinpoche and is mentioned in Rinpoche's autobiography, *Lord of the Dance*), and Sera Yangtrul, the reincarnation of a lama who walked on the lake near Tromge and was offered a purba by a naga—a purba that Jigme Rinpoche now has.

The next day, not without sadness, all of us holding gifts of *men-drup* (consecrated medicine), we left Tromge Gonpa for H.H. Jigme Phuntsok's place at Sertar, despite having been warned that it was still impossible for foreigners to enter. Sure enough, we foreigners were met with blank refusal, whereas Rinpoche was accepted as a local despite his New Balance sports shoes. He was able to meet with Ani Muntzo, His Holiness' niece and spiritual heir. Rinpoche told us that she was well, but lonely. Dharma activity is still flourishing there under her guidance and with the blessings of His Holiness.

While in eastern Tibet, we also met the tulku of Dawa Drolma (Chagdud Rinpoche's mother in her former life), who is unfortunately in poor health. Jigme Rinpoche requested that the lamas and sanghas of various gonpas pray for her good health and longevity, and asked that all of us join in these prayers so that she may continue to benefit beings.

After a brief sojourn in Chengdu, we left for Lhasa. There we made offerings at the Jowo statue, Tibet's holiest statue, in the Jokhang temple and visited Yumbu Lhakang, the fortress where dharma made its first incursion into Tibet. It is said that at one time a sacred text and crystal stupa fell from the sky onto the roof.

From the top of a steep hill, we could see mountain ranges beyond the green plain, with the famous Crystal Cave below one ridge. On another day, we saw the exquisite Guru Rinpoche statue that came from the cave, made by

the translator Vairochana and known as the Shedra Guru, now housed in Tradruk Monastery. Tradruk was the first Buddhist temple built in Tibet, and some of the oldest parts have survived intact. Its most sacred possessions are the Guru Rinpoche statue and a tangka of Chenrezig.

While Tradruk, located inconspicuously on a dusty roadside, feels small, Samyé Monastery and the surrounding valleys form a giant mandala. Set in a vast river valley with sand dunes abutting mountainsides full of caves, most of the monastery has been reconstructed, except for two floors where some of Tibet's most holy relics are kept, including Abbot Shantarakshita's gilded skull and Guru Rinpoche's gau.

We spent a day in the Yerpa Valley, the sacred site of Guru Rinpoche's Dawapuk (Moon Cave) and Songsten Gampo's cave. The twenty-five disciples practiced here, in some of the 108 caves, and Atisha later visited and taught extensively. The remains of his teaching throne, and that of the great fifth Dalai Lama, can still be seen on the slopes, draped with kataks. We also visited Tsering Jong (now a nunnery), the seat of Jigme Lingpa after he returned from Samye.

Perhaps one of the most unforgettable places we visited was Longchenpa's cave, high up at Gangri Tökar. According to the colophon of the *Chöying Dzöd*, this is where the Seven Treasures were written. Getting there required a perilous drive through rivers and over washed-out roads, a

fearsome walk, and then a climb of several hundred meters, to an altitude of almost 4,000 meters. But the experience of sitting in the cave where Longchenpa wrote his texts and looking out across miles of sweeping mountain valleys was indescribable. Being there was particularly moving considering the fact that it is due to the kindness of Chagdud Rinpoche, who made the strong aspiration and sustained efforts to have the Seven Treasures translated into English, that they are becoming accessible to us now.

What made the pilgrimage so special was connecting directly with the places and masters we had so often heard or read about. Although difficulties arose on the trip, we felt Chagdud Rinpoche's presence as surely as if he'd been riding in the car with us.

We are grateful to Jigme Rinpoche for his kindness, generosity, and patience in sharing this journey with us, as well as all the others in Tibet and China who guided us along the way.



Lama Padma receiving Chenrezig transmission from Dechen Tromge Rinpoche

Sangha News

Brazil

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and Jigme Rinpoche at Khadro Ling

In late October, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche taught the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicharyavatara* (*The Way of the Bodhisattva*) at Khadro Ling. The teachings were attended by 250 students, who were riveted by Rinpoche's clear explanations and by his brilliant, illuminating mind. Many people at the event experienced a tremendous surge of faith and confidence in the dharma.

Khyentse Rinpoche selected four Bhutanese artists, along with the head artist's talented wife, to create the artwork for the palace of Padmasambhava's pure realm, known as Zangdok Palri. They have now completed magnificent statues of the four kings who guard the four entrances to the building. A new website for the palace will soon be up. Many individuals and sanghas are sponsoring the creation of specific statues with the aspiration to generate interdependence with the special qualities of the awareness holder or deity depicted.

This has been a dramatic year at Khadro Ling, with the fatal motorcycle accident of one of our three-year retreatants, the birth of Brazil's first Bhutanese baby, an unsuccessful robbery by eight intruders, the construction of the lovely flared roofs of Zangdok Palri, and progress on many publishing projects, including the Portuguese translation of *Buddhahood Without Meditation*. Now a number of senior students will enter strict retreat, and the dramas will be allowed to find their own dreamlike dissolution.

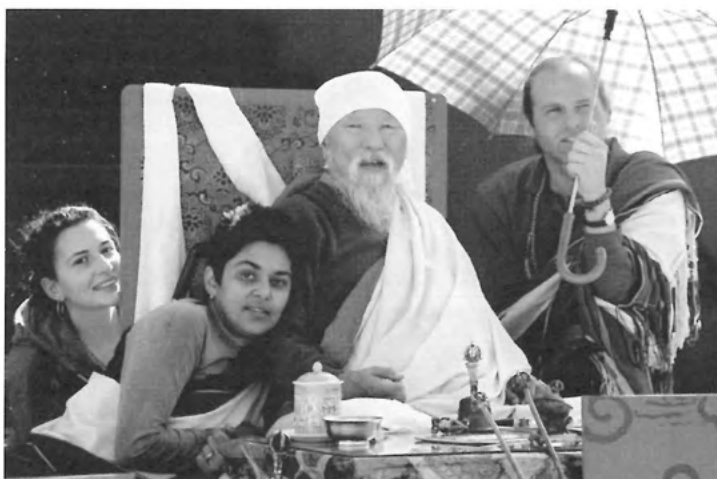
We look forward to the January Dzogchen retreat led by Jigme Rinpoche, which will again involve the sadhana practice of the *Rigdzin Düpa* and the transmission of the *Longchen Nyینگtik* cycle.

Stupa and Temple at Refugio near São Paulo

In August Chagdud Khadro, Lama Chemed, and Lama Oser were invited to the Odsal Ling country retreat center (Refugio) to join Lama Tsering and Lama Norbu in the weeklong consecration ceremonies for Chagdud Rinpoche's relic stupa. The consecration was the culmination of many

months of effort on the part of the sangha, who assembled and lovingly prepared all the mantra rolls, sacred items, and precious substances. In addition to Chagdud Rinpoche's relics and the relic pills of many great masters of our lineage, a mandala of extraordinary offerings was consecrated and carefully arranged inside the stupa. The eight-foot-high stupa was designed so that it can be moved into the temple when the building is completed, and it will become the focal point of the shrine room. Construction of the temple has now begun. Peace vases were recently set into the forty-foot-deep foundation pillars of the temple, and we anticipate that the basic structure will be finished by April 2005. Jigme Rinpoche and Chagdud Khadro have both been very generous, offering their time and effort to the pujas needed for the preparation of the stupa and temple site.

In addition to these projects, Lama Tsering and Lama Norbu have kept up busy teaching schedules, with Lama Tsering touring northern Brazil soon after returning from a six-week U.S. tour.



Chagdud Rinpoche performing a fire puja at Khadro Ling

Saving Lives

During 2004, Dordje Ling in Curitiba worked on a project in conjunction with the centers in Garopaba, Florianópolis, and Matinhos to save 100,000 lives. This project will continue into the new year. Anyone who wishes to contribute by making a monetary donation or by saving lives can contact us at <dordjeling@onda.com.br>. These centers are also engaged in a fund-raising campaign to sponsor the Padmasambhava statue in the Zangdok Palri palace being constructed at Khadro Ling.

Rigjed Ling in Florianópolis has undergone a major renovation, with traditional Buddhist artwork being painted on the walls of the new shrine room. Children's activities are being offered on a monthly basis, and a donated television was raffled to raise funds for Jigme Rinpoche's Padmasambhava Peace Institute.

Parinirvana

In the early morning of the anniversary of Chagdud Rinpoche's parinirvana, the sangha of Khadro Ling gathered and lit more than 2,000 butter lamps. With the long rows of golden flames, the granite tiers of the shrine looked like a great, luminous ocean liner sailing into a sea of darkness. On the top tier, overseeing the ceremony, were the three statues—Guru Rinpoche, Tara, and Dzambala—that Rinpoche had sculpted in his living room. We chanted the Lamp Aspiration Prayer from Padgyal Lingpa's Red Vajra-

sattva sadhana, first accompanied by a tape of Lama Dri-med's retreatants, Ingrid, and Pema Tenzin, then finally on our own.

Rigdzin Ling

During the month of September, Rigdzin Ling had the great fortune to host Khentrul Rinpoche and about 75 guests for shedra. Khentrul Rinpoche gave teachings on *Ösel Nyingpo*, Mipam Rinpoche's overview of the *Guhya-garbha* tantra. Lama Chökyi Nyima translated, and Paloma Lopez and Oliver Boldizar helped out by teaching Tibetan language classes.

In November Dzatrul Rinpoche (an old friend of Chagdud Rinpoche's) taught for two days on the six bardos. The sangha was greatly inspired by his erudition and joyful enthusiasm.

The sangha has begun making preparations for the stupa that will house some of Chagdud Rinpoche's relics. Lama Padma Dorje organized the construction of the copper stupa in Nepal, which is now at Rigdzin Ling waiting to be filled and consecrated. The surface will be covered with gold leaf and ornamented with precious gems. The central channel, made of cedar, was carved by Lama Padma Dorje. Mantras were placed in the hollow core of the channel and then it was sealed. Taylor Dybvig carved a stupa on the top end of the channel and a vajra at the bottom. Taylor also carved a beautiful throne for the stupa (modeled after the throne for the stupa containing the relics of H.H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche) using a fine wood known as "blood wood."

Michael McLaughlin has expanded the Tara House shrine room, creating an alcove directly opposite the front doors that will house the stupa. The alcove will have a marble floor (with room for circumambulation), high shelves for texts, and a shrine.

T'hondup Ling

At T'hondup Ling, we have done our best to keep pace with the dharma activities of our precious Lama Chodak Gyatso Nubpa, who never rests in his efforts to benefit beings. Lama Gyatso conducts the release of live fish at least two times a month. This year more than one million baitfish destined for the hooks of fishermen have been released into their natural environment in Marina del Rey.

We are very fortunate to have Lama Ludrub and Lama Rabjoer to assist Lama Gyatso and lead events when Lama Gyatso is away. Lama Ludrub, a fully ordained monk with years of ceremonial training and an extensive knowledge of

statue consecration, comes from Thupten Chöling, H.H. Trulshik Rinpoche's monastery in Nepal. He spent thirteen years in solitary retreat in the foothills of Mt. Everest. With the assistance of these two lamas, we are able to offer statue consecration on an ongoing basis. (Please contact the center for more information.)

Lama Thogme, another ordained monk from Thupten Chöling and a master at creating sand mandalas, also stayed with us for several months this year. In April the three lamas created a Shi-tro sand mandala in Hollywood that was open to the public for viewing.

In March the eminent Tibetan physician Dr. Tsering Chösang came for several months, seeing patients, tending to herbs in the center garden, participating in practice, and offering teachings. In April we were honored to welcome Chagdud Khadro for teachings in Los Angeles and a p'howa retreat at Ari Bhod in Tehachapi. And in May Tertön Kunzang Dechen Lingpa gave teachings on the meaning of Zangdok Palri, Guru Rinpoche's Copper-Colored Mountain, at the Los Angeles center.

In June Lama Gyatso left for a monthlong pilgrimage to Tibet, his first visit to his native land in 45 years. He and several students practiced and offered tsok in many caves, temples, and holy sites blessed by Guru Rinpoche, Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, Pa Dampa Sangyé, Milarepa, and other great masters. The group

spent several nights in the cave where Longchenpa wrote the Seven Treasuries, a place of indescribable blessings. Lama Gyatso also visited his monastery in western Tibet, which has been largely rebuilt and houses twelve monks. While they were there, Lama Gyatso and the sangha sponsored much-needed new robes for all the monks. There were many bittersweet moments throughout the trip, as relatives and friends tearfully greeted Lama Gyatso after being apart from him for so many years. The pilgrims who traveled with him had the good fortune to meet and make dharma connections with some of the more renowned Nyingma lineage holders in Tibet.

Shortly after his return to Los Angeles in July, Lama Gyatso led the annual ngondro retreat at Ari Bhod. In September we sponsored the tenth annual Tröma drubchod, led by the Venerable Dzatrul Rinpoche. Also in September His Eminence Khamtrul Rinpoche visited T'hondup Ling and Ari Bhod, offering an empowerment and a teaching on the nature of mind. Khamtrul Rinpoche also conducted a live release and tsok practice.

In October we held our second annual Yeshe Tsogyal



Stupa that will house Chagdud Rinpoche's relics at Rigdzin Ling

retreat at Ari Bhod, honoring our commitment to H.E. Namkha Drimed Rinpoche to conduct this retreat every year. For His Eminence's health, we also sponsored a live release and tsok. In November we did two days of Red Vajrasattva practice and a fish release for the anniversary of Chagdud Rinpoche's parinirvana. And in December Lama Gyatso conducted a *Heart Sutra* retreat and an Orgyen Dzambhala retreat. Anyone wishing to be informed by e-mail of T'hondup Ling events can send an e-mail to <thondup_ling@juno.com>.

Amrita

The Amrita sangha began the Tibetan new year with its annual Chenrezig *nyung-nay* fasting retreat. The *nyung-nay* is part of the larger Kusum Gongdu practice that is the basis of our Chenrezig drubchen. We also wrapped and enshrined the texts of the Kangyur, the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, which are part of the Jewel of Dharma project. This project, which now includes 600 Tibetan dharma texts, was initiated by Lama Padma, who collected these texts during his travels in Asia. It is his aspiration that they be used for study and teaching and as a practice support for the Seattle-area sangha. Also on Losar, we released more than 1,100 worms.

In the spring, Chagdud Khadro gave Guru Rinpoche, Vajrakilaya, and Amitabha empowerments and p'howa teachings. Tulku Jigme Rinpoche bestowed Manjushri and Tröma empowerments, and later visited Chokdrup Ling—Land of Sublime Accomplishment—240 acres of retreat land in southwestern Colorado that Lama Padma and his wife, Susan, acquired in the late 1990s and where they spend a portion of each year.

Lama Padma, Susan, and four Amrita sangha members traveled to Tibet with Jigme Rinpoche this summer. Lama Padma made the journey primarily to meet Dechen Tromge Rinpoche, the incarnation of Tromge Khakyod Wangpo, the tertön who revealed the Tromge Kusum Gongdu cycle. Dechen Rinpoche gave the empowerments and scriptural transmissions for the entire cycle at Tromge Gonpa in eastern Tibet, and expressed his happiness that the Chenrezig practice is flourishing in the West. He entrusted Lama Padma with the responsibility of holding this cycle of the Great Compassionate One. We felt that because of our connection with the practice, our bond with Tromge Gonpa is extremely strong.

The fall began with a visit by Lama Tsering, who gave a public talk and a Red Tara empowerment to initiate our annual Red Tara retreat. Jigme Rinpoche returned to lead two evenings of ngondro practice and to practice with the sangha at the Washington State Reformatory. Lama Padma has been working with prisoners there on a regular basis since 1998.

In October, during a weekend of Chenrezig practice and teaching led by Lama Padma, we again released more than 1,100 worms. Also in the fall, Khenpo Lodro Thaye

Rinpoche taught the Seven Line Prayer and conducted a *Shower of Blessings* tsok offering.

Other recent sangha activities included a six-week meditation class by Lama Padma, as well as six tsok practices per month and an open Monday evening practice. Three babies were born into the sangha this summer and fall: Maya, Ryder, and Sophia. And now, as winter sets in, we begin preparations for our third Chenrezig drubchen, which will take place April 9–17, 2005.

Padma Ling

In October we hosted Khenrül Lodro Thaye Rinpoche for teachings and the consecration of our newly completed Stupa of Reconciliation, which is located on the grounds of our center in Spokane. Khenrül Rinpoche, together with Lama Inge, Lama Yontan, and the sangha of Padma Ling, performed the consecration ceremony. Khenrül Rinpoche also offered teachings on Madhyamika (the Middle Way) during his weekend visit.

Padma Ling has opened its doors as an urban retreat center. Although we have been at our present location, functioning as a practice and meditation center for fifteen years, we have not until now had any retreat facilities. In addition to our main shrine room, we have a meditation room for retreatants and three bed-and-breakfast rooms. The new stupa, located in the back yard, provides an ideal focus for outdoor practice. For practitioners whose physical problems prevent them from doing prostrations, circumambulating a stupa is the best alternative. (For copies of the Buddha's teaching on the benefits of circumambulating a stupa, contact Padma Ling.)

It is widely believed that one can do retreat only in the country, because the environment is quiet. But with planes flying overhead, traffic, chainsaws, and the sounds of animals, it can be far from peaceful. Another difficulty of doing retreat in the country is the challenge of acquiring provisions. Padma Ling is just three blocks from an organic food store, with other grocery stores, medical care, and pharmacies nearby.

A resident lama is usually available for counsel and advice on practice. Retreat rooms are available at daily, weekly, or monthly rates. Inquiries should be directed to Lama Inge Zangmo at Padma Ling.

Dechhen Ling

As winter settles in on the southern end of the Willamette Valley and the rains become more regular, our sangha reflects back on a busy year. We were blessed by visits from Chagdud Khadro, Lama Tsering, Jigme Tromge Rinpoche, Khenrül Lodro Thaye Rinpoche, and Lama Jamie, who offered a variety of teachings, empowerments, and transmissions and gave us the precious opportunity to practice with them.

In the fall, Lama Jigme Lode led a two-day *cham* (ritual

dance) intensive that was attended by many of the Rigdzin Ling dancers. It seemed natural for this to happen at Dechhen Ling, where Lama Sonam—who initially instructed Chagdud Gonpa dancers—sat for some years. We are most appreciative of Lama Jigme's generosity, expertise, and patience and aspire to host similar workshops in the future.

In addition to daily Red Tara practice and monthly Tara, *Shower of Blessings*, Tröma, and *Essence of Siddhi* tsoks, we hold weekly Akshobhya and sitting meditation practices. Sunday morning puja is followed by either a teaching or question-and-answer session with Lama Dorje or Lama Trinley. A Tibetan language study group has started to meet regularly as well.

Yeshe Ling

This summer at Yeshe Ling, Jigme Rinpoche conducted a wonderful Tröma retreat, and in the autumn, Lama Tsering led a lovely dream yoga retreat. Both events were well attended and revitalized the connection between the sangha and our precious lamas.

The new Guru Rinpoche statue is a magnificent addition to Yeshe Ling. Its presence is palpable, and gazing at Guru Rinpoche's face is a very moving experience. Thanks to many generous offerings, we have nearly enough funds to complete the statue. Glenn Sandvoss is working on the last bit of cement sculpting and is applying the cement plaques to the base of the throne. Jigme Rinpoche will come soon to perform ceremonies for filling parts of the statue with mantras and sacred substances. Then in the spring-time, when warm, dry weather returns, Glenn and others will paint the Guru.

Aspiration upon Receiving the *Chöying Dzöd*

As an adornment of the basic space of phenomena,
An emanation of the Lama's care and compassion
Arises as a gold-embossed book.

The Lama's heart emanates a ray
Igniting a flame of gratitude
In the dried husk of my own heart.

Remembered by the Lama
We remember ourselves
As free to aspire:

May this flame pervade the six realms and three times—
A beacon for self-conceived separateness
Seeking resolution.

An illumination of all appearance as complete equality—
A timeless perfection resolving everything
As the basic space of phenomena.

Bob Tajima



Bruce and Sophia Darby and Pema McLaughlin

A Children's Weekend

Early in August, almost a dozen sangha children gathered at Rigdzin Ling for a long weekend. Bruce Darby and Nancy Barton had begun to plan for the gathering back in the spring and were delighted when Glenn Sandvoss agreed to participate.

Glenn had only to bring out a bag of clay for the children to be instantly intrigued; in no time at all, myriad images began to appear. Bruce helped the children make drums, and Nancy showed them how to fashion a simple kite from a paper bag. Some tried their hand at juggling; others tried walking on stilts. They climbed trees, played tag, and ran with our many dogs. The number one fun activity, however, was water play: the pond provided hours and hours of fun, sometimes rowdy, sometimes calm.

On Saturday the children were introduced to various ritual instruments in the shrine room and, without much ado, began playing together vigorously. The sounds they made filled the room like a powerful, spontaneous puja. Later, upstairs in the costume room, they had a chance to try on a few of the masks that are used in lama dancing. In the kitchen, several children helped make pizzas, which were then fired in our new brick oven.

As Saturday came to a close, the children could be seen zigzagging across the Gonpa, engrossed in the challenges of a treasure hunt. It was heartwarming to watch the group working together, older ones carrying little ones in order to keep up with the rest. Once they had claimed their booty—ingredients for "s'mores"—they gathered around a fire to roast marshmallows.

The children's time together came to an end on Sunday as they put away their craft supplies and released worms in the flower gardens near the pond. We warmly thank all those who made this weekend possible and look forward to next year's children's retreat.

PRACTICE BY THE DAYS OF THE MOON

The phases of the moon correspond to the subtle male and female energies of the body and increase the benefit of practice on certain days of the lunar month. Specific practices shown are done at Chagdud Gonpa centers, but other practices are appropriate as well. Even keeping a mantra commitment on these days creates great virtue. (Note: *Eclipse of the sun; practice is multiplied 10,000 times; **eclipse of the moon; practice is multiplied 1,000 times.)

January

- 3 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 5 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 10 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 16 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 18 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 25 Full Moon: P'howa

February

- 1 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 3 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 8 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 9 Losar: Wood Bird Year
- 15 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 17 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 23 Full Moon: P'howa

March

- 3 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 5 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 10 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 17 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 19 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 25 Full Moon: P'howa

April

- 1 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 3 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 8 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 16 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 18 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 24** Full Moon: P'howa
- 30 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day

May

- 2 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 8 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 16 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 18 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 23 Full Moon: P'howa
- 30 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day

June

- 1 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day
- 6 New Moon: Vajrasattva
- 14 First Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 16 Tenth Day: Guru Rinpoche Day
- 21 Full Moon: P'howa
- 28 Last Quarter Moon: Tara Day
- 30 Twenty-fifth Day: Dakini Day

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