

CHOKLING TERSAR TIMES

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NEWSLETTER FOR THE AMERICAN SANGHA OF KYABJE TULKU URGYEN,
CHOKYI NYIMA RINPOCHE AND TSIKEY CHOKLING RINPOCHE

Dear friends...

Happy New Year! Welcome to the iron snake year. We hope this newsletter arrives to find you happy and healthy. This year the Chokling Tersar Foundation is getting ready for another summer of seminars and retreats. I hope that you will be able to visit us sometime this year.

Once again we are pleased to announce that Tsoknyi Rinpoche is coming, tentatively scheduled for June 19th-24th (the dates still could change). Eva and I were able to visit Rinpoche recently in Swayambhu. Rinpoche looked very well. He expressed his warmest regards to all his friends at CTF and looks forward to seeing everyone soon.

In August (11th - 15th), we are honored to have Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche visit Rangjung Yeshe Gomde. For the last three years, Rinpoche has been giving instructions on Ngondro practice with his commentary on Patrul Rinpoche's "Words of My Perfect Teacher." He will be leading a practice intensive for Ngondro students.

In September, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche will be spending 10 days teaching at Rangjung Yeshe Gomde. Rinpoche had a wonderful time at Gomde last September, constantly referring to it as his home in the USA. For those of you who have visited Rinpoche in Nepal, you know how overworked Rinpoche is. His endless efforts to help the nonstop stream of visitors that come to see him everyday, all while running the various Gompas and Dharma centers he has responsibility for and the shedra for westerners is truly inspir-

ing. As Rinpoche is able to really enjoy the land and relax, it is a special treat for students to be able to spend time with Rinpoche in California.

While Chokling Rinpoche won't be able to come this year, he wanted everyone to know that he had a great time at Rangjung Yeshe Gomde last summer. He is looking forward to coming in 2002.

In any case, you don't have to wait for a visit by one of our teachers. Rangjung Yeshe Gomde is open all year round for personal retreats. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche hopes that every one of his students will be able to spend some time in solo retreat at Rangjung Yeshe Gomde.

Of course, none of this year's plans can happen without the help of many friends. We have plane tickets to buy. We continue to raise money for the master plan. And we have the usual maintenance projects. And, perhaps most importantly, we want to begin to pay down the debt on the land. Our monthly pledges are very small, less than \$1000 per month. We depend on the generosity of many committed students. We are one year closer to fulfilling the dream of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, a seat for the Chokling Tersar in the United States. Please take a moment to fill out the donation form at the back of this newsletter. Thanks a lot and hopefully see you soon!

Erric and Eva Hopf Solomon



Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

Devotion and Compassion

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche Seminar 99,
Nagi Retreat November 26, 1999

Our main teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, compassionately and skillfully taught the three levels of vehicles. For example, when we study and practice the Vajra vehicle of secret Mantra then pure perception is especially important. But no matter which vehicle we are practising, certain qualities are indispensable. The first of these is disenchantment with samsara -- realizing that any samsaric state whatever always incorporates suffering.

Any sentient being who is under the control of ignorance, karmic actions and disturbing emotions, and in particular, the holding of duality continues to circle and spin within samara. In other words, the root cause of samsaric states is the unaware or ignorant attitude of clinging to a self, and as long as that attitude is maintained then karmic actions and negative emotions do not cease and samsaric suffering does not collapse. Therefore, samsara will last as long as the ignorant attitude of

clinging to a self is maintained resulting in continuous rebirth among the six realms with all the joys and sorrows that they entail. And even though there is pleasure and happiness, it is only superficial and never lasting.

The most difficult emotion to identify and free oneself of is the ignorant attitude of holding a self and without completely eliminating it there cannot be any liberation. There are many different practices and methods to reduce and eliminate it. Anything that works against such an attitude is called a 'conducive circumstance' or 'spiritual practice'. Don't the contemplation of the four mind changings, the ngondro, shamatha, as well as the practices of development and completion stages -- all have the single purpose of reducing and eliminating ego clinging?

It is said: "when practicing the Dharma, do so genuinely." In other words, when applying a method, it should be put to use so that one's Dharma practice becomes genuine or authentic. When we reflect upon the precious human body, the effect should be that we don't waste our time or let our life go to waste, when we reflect upon the impermanence of all things, the effect should be that we get down to practice without delay.

Being careful about karmic actions is one of the main responsibilities of a Dharma practitioner. We all know that if you smile at someone, they often smile back and if you frown at someone, then you usually get a frown in return. If you offend some-

body or hurt their feelings, then they will probably try to hurt you back. It's often like that. Karmic actions, in other words: whatever we do, will have some consequence that comes back to us.

But Karmic actions are basically a result of attitude. Whatever we grow used to, whatever we make into a habit is easier to repeat; you might say it is easy to become a repeat offender. Therefore, it is very important to be really mindful, really careful about all we say, do or think. If we are not truly stable in the view of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, then it's very important that we try to avoid always be overtaken by unwholesome thoughts. As long we're not free of ego-clinging and ignorance, we continuously create karma and emotions and therefore will never be beyond suffering.

There are different types of suffering -- the all-pervasive suffering of being conditioned, the suffering upon suffering and the suffering of change -- but one thing is certain: as long as we are in a physical body of flesh and blood, we are always susceptible to sickness, pain, hunger, and thirst. Also dualistic mind, by nature, is never satisfied, but always in a state of need. Why? Because by nature every thought is based on hope or fear and hope and fear in themselves are painful. Any thought in itself is either attachment, aversion, or close-mindedness. In short, samsara is thinking. Apart from a mental state karma does not arise -- there is no selfish emotion, no duality. Beyond mental states, there is no samsara.

Through our five senses we experience a variety of objects, and if you pay attention you will see that there's some reaction: either liking, disliking, or being indifferent. For instance, if you see something beautiful like a fresh flower, then there's a moment of liking it that just comes to mind; if it's something disgusting or dirty, then there's dislike; and when these emotions are allowed to grow they develop into strong attachment or intense dislike, or even fury or even hostility. When we see something neutral, then we kind of shut off and become close-minded, this is a dull, kind of stupid state of mind.

At every moment of sense experience there's an opportunity for the three poisons to gain a foothold. Karma is created by giving energy to the three poisons: the emotions of like, dislike, and indifference -- unless we train in such practices as Mahamudra or Dzogchen, in which case we recognize that the very identity of these thoughts, these three poisons, is dharmakaya or thought-free wakefulness. If we recognize that and we train in it as hard as Milarepa, it is possible to be totally liberated and Buddhahood is not that far away.

In the Buddhist sense, liberation usually refers to being free from samsara. But to make it simpler, it means being free from the deluded attitude of ego-clinging, or free from duality. Very simply put it means free of thinking, free of thoughts. But though we are supposed to be free of thinking, we actually don't really want to. Deep down we don't really want to be liberated from dualistic clinging. We have all kinds of excus-

es: we don't know how to or we don't dare to or we don't really feel like it. We continuously hold on to this dualistic setup of the perceiver (the mind) and the perceived (objects) which are like links in a chain. And as long as this chain is not broken, there is no liberation.

In order to be free of this clinging to duality and these obscurations, the Buddha has given us many methods, but the most effective remedy against dualistic clinging is what we call the view of emptiness. In order to recognize and realize it, some of the most conducive circumstances are called trust and devotion or loving kindness and compassion.

The accomplished masters of the past were first disenchanted with samsaric pursuits, especially with such futile aims as fame, material possessions or any kind of ego-oriented achievement. So they turned away from them and instead focused on something that had lasting value: the realization of the nature of all things. They focused their minds on it and practiced one-pointedly, and hence were able to attain complete liberation in a single lifetime. Many masters have said that their greatest aids were trust, devotion, compassion and loving kindness, for example "in the moment of love, the empty essence dawns nakedly," or one could phrase it, "in the moment of devotion, the empty essence dawns nakedly."

The great Gampopa said, "Being learned does not necessarily mean being realized. It is found through the path of the Guru's blessings.". In other words, just knowing a lot about the Dharma is not necessarily the

same as having realized the meaning of the teachings. When you connect with a true qualified master and receive the blessings, then it is possible to obtain realization. You see, devotion and compassion are extremely helpful as they facilitate the ability to recognize mind essence.

One's devotion should be directed towards the true view, what we call innate suchness, self-existing awareness or thought-free wakefulness. This is the ultimate guru of our innate nature that we want to connect with and realize in actuality. There are three external types of guru: (1) the guru who is the statement of the enlightened ones, that we can study and gain understanding from, (2) the guru who is the living lineage master, and from whom we can receive the pithy instructions on how to know, and (3) the guru who is our life experiences, from whom we learn that everything composite is impermanent, that samsaric states are painful, etc., so that we can develop the wish to be free and our disenchantment with samsara. These three external gurus, help to spur us on to have true devotion and sincerity to realize the ultimate nature of mind.

Some of the masters from the Kadampa lineage said that Buddhas and sentient beings are equally kind to us. It is thanks to the Buddha and his teachings that we are able to dissolve dualistic experience, but it is thanks to sentient beings that we can travel the bodhisattva path. The more we understand and appreciate the qualities of the Three Jewels -- the precious Buddha, the precious

Dharma and the precious Sangha -- the more sincere devotion we develop. Therefore, both buddhas and sentient beings bestow an equal kindness upon us.

In the teachings of the Buddha, there are a lot of instructions on how to develop the capacity for being loving and compassionate and there are various levels of compassion: compassion directed toward sentient beings, compassion directed toward the truth, and finally undirected and all-inclusive compassion. In short, we must learn how to saturate compassion with the view of emptiness, so that we no longer limit it, so that it can be totally free of prejudice, bias and partiality. Such compassion is said to be non-conceptual, undirected great compassion, free of focus, free of concept.

As it is easier to be kind to friends than to enemies, a good way of measuring our progress is when we become kind to both equally. But how should one go about this? First start with being more compassionate and loving to the people you already like and get along with. Next expand it to include strangers, those for whom you have no feelings at all, for example tourists. Then finally, include people you don't like, who have offended or hurt you, or with whom you don't get along. If we don't go this far, then our loving kindness and compassion aren't perfect and haven't really reached fullness. So we should check and see if we are able to be as kind and compassionate towards our enemies as we are to our friends.

Shantideva said that for people without devotion, the virtuous qualities

do not grow forth, just like nothing grows from a burned or spoiled seed. In other words, as Dharma practitioners, it is extremely important that we do all we can to develop devotion, trust, loving kindness and compassion.

Still, the real object of devotion is thought-free wakefulness, this is the ultimate guru of our innate nature -- your natural mind, your self-existing wakefulness, or natural awareness. This is the true view of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. So first we must recognize, then train in that recognition and attain stability. But remember, this recognition must be genuine and not some kind of personal concept we've made up. If we can train in genuine thought-free wakefulness, then it is possible to awaken to enlightenment fully and completely in this very lifetime, but it doesn't help much to just train in your own intellectualized version of the view, no matter how long you try. That is why it is said that Vajrayana can be very risky, but also has great advantages.

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Translated by Erik Pema Kunsang,
edited by Michael Tweed and transcribed by Joann Larson.*

A copy of this teaching in the unedited, uncut video version is available to New Life Members (2000-2001), contact Erric Solomon at pema@pacbell.net or (415) 643 2990



Dining with Indra Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche

*An excerpt from
As It Is Volume, 2*

Student: Are there some tricks practitioners can use to remember to be mindful in-between sessions, like when I'm caught up in my daily life activities, work and so on? Each time I remember to be mindful, I realize it has been such a long time since I was last aware. It's a little embarrassing for me. I wondered are there any tricks to apply for remembering.

Rinpoche: Okay, here's a question for you. When you see a little bird eating a piece of grain, it immediately looks up and does like this with its head (Rinpoche demonstrates a bird looking around while eating). It's doing this all the time. Why does it do that?

Student: It's afraid of the hawks flying overhead.

Rinpoche: Yes. We can easily spend our whole life in the 'black diffusion' of confused thinking, which is much more dangerous than those hawks. There is a much greater loss involved here than a bird's life. Just as the fear reminds the bird to look, look, let the fear of mindlessness remind you. If you dread that hawk of unaware dissipation and keep it acutely in mind, you will remind yourself repeatedly, just like the little bird. When reminding, immediately recognize mind essence. If you don't remind yourself, who else is going to do it? If you don't get yourself onto dry land, who else is going to get you



Tulku Uryen Rinpoche

out of the water? What is most important for you: the work you are carried away by in this life, or attaining liberation and enlightenment?

Student: Attaining liberation and enlightenment.

Rinpoche: What's the actual purpose of the work we do in this life? First, to hoard money; next, to protect it from disappearing; then, to increase the stockpile. Those are the three occupations of a worldly person: to gather wealth, to keep it, and to increase it. Our primary efforts in this life are to make money and to pursue the enjoyments we can buy with the money. People undertake an enormous amount of trouble in order to first gather money. Next, they must protect it from being stolen or otherwise disappearing. And we are

never happy with what we have; we need to have more and more and more. Our investment has to grow. Isn't it true that this activity only makes you continue in samsara? How ridiculous! No amount of capital can buy you enlightenment and liberation! Isn't that one hundred percent true?

What is most important to you? Is it more important to get rich, or to realize the innate nature through meditation and be totally free from suffering? Usually we are afraid of suffering and hope for pleasure. All this samsaric pleasure and pain, all this hope and fear - what can they do for us? Pleasure can help in this life, but not in the next life, or in future lives. The state of samadhi, the recognition of your innate nature and stability in that, can eradicate the pain of

suffering for all your future lives. You won't even hear the word 'suffering' in future lives; you will go from one happy state to the next. Which of these has the highest value, the greatest benefit?

Student: The latter.

Rinpoche: Samadhi, that's it! You do not have to hoard samadhi, you do not have to keep the state of samadhi, you do not have to increase it - you can totally let go of it at the moment of recognition. It's like Paltrul Rinpoche said: "Give up, give up everything; that is to work for the welfare of beings." Don't you have enough food and clothing right now? Your body is healthy, right? Realize that there is nothing more to hoard, nothing more to keep; there is nothing more to increase. Otherwise, you become a slave to your wealth and enjoyments. The outcome of that is more samsara, the three realms and the three miserable states.

Other than giving up hoarding and enlarging your amount of wealth, there is nothing to do, right? There is not much business involved in this. When you become stable in the unemployed state of mind essence, you automatically rise above the three realms of samsara, and even above Indra, king of the gods. You are more wide open, more carefree. It's like the famous saying: "Wherever you go, the sun of happiness shines. Whoever you are with, you are totally at ease." Isn't that an advantage, a good outcome? Do you want to take another rebirth in samsara, again die, then again be reborn? Is that what you want?

Student: No.

Rinpoche: I am teasing you.

Student: That was a true practitioner's trick.

Rinpoche: You understand - thank you very much!

Someone who understands this deserves to be called a practitioner. Such a person will rise above this world. You can sit next to Indra, the king of the gods, and share his meal. Wouldn't that be better than lunching next to the Lord of Death with his ox-headed and goat-headed minions, which is what one faces after death? The only thing you will worry about in that situation is, "Where are they going to take me after this!" It is much better to sit next to Indra and eat happily.

So, we have these two roads, and only one goes upward. I used Indra as an example, but he is still within samsara. There are even better places to go than that, like the nirmanakaya or sambhogakaya buddha-fields. The other road leads downwards. When the ox-headed and goat-headed henchmen of the Lord of Death put their ropes around you and drag you down into the hell of the incessant torment, what will that be like? Right now we are at the dividing point of these two roads. What are you going to choose?

Student: I want to go upwards!

Rinpoche: You have the choice right now. It is in your power to go up if you want, or to go down. Right now you are at the fork in the road. This is not my invention. This is how all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas teach it to be. The choice is yours. They also say that, "Alas, there is nothing more foolish than to ignore Dharma prac-

tice after having attained the precious human body." That would be like orchestrating one's own defeat, like sponsoring one's own poisoning. It would be like reaching the top of the mountain only to throw oneself into the abyss.

Please practice! As I said earlier, it is much better to dine next to the king of the gods. Yet Indra and the other kings of the gods are still in samsara. To compare Indra to the Buddha is like comparing the little finger with the thumb. There is a difference as wide as the sky. Indra is not enlightened. Through this instruction, we can be enlightened, and go beyond the state of Indra, the king of the gods. Bodhisattvas, like us, should aim at buddhahood. I am teasing you. Yet, while teasing, there is some meaning.

Please practice well! If you train well and become more stable, you will not have much trouble in this life. This life doesn't have to be that difficult. Be carefree. The aims, the tasks and projects in this life are like dreams, like illusions. An ordinary person gets overwhelmed and depressed when things go bad, and totally carried away by excitement when successful. We do not have to be like that. To be like an ordinary person is difficult, definitely. Poor people have the trouble of being poor, wealthy people have the problem of being rich. Nobody is happy. Nobody thinks they have enough, ever. Poor people suffer from not having enough. Rich people cannot stay together without being jealous of one another, they also are not happy. Rich people never feel "Now I have enough."

My uncle, Tersey Tulku, told me, "Never compare yourself with some-

one above you, because you will never be happy. There will always be someone richer or more powerful, better than you are. Much better to measure yourself against those below you. If you compare yourself with poor people you think, 'I'm well off, I am actually okay'. Other-wise you will never be content." My uncle often said, "Take a lower example. Then you are happier. Don't look at someone higher than yourself, you will never be happy." If you want to be happy in this life, compare yourself with beggars. They walk around with one stick and one back-pack begging for their food. If you compare yourself with someone like that, you are always content.

*Translated by Erik Pema Kunsang
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H. E. Chokling Rinpoche blessing the land at Rangjung Yeshe Gomde

News

This summer and fall, Chokling Tersar Foundation had the good fortune to be able to host seminars given by three of our spiritual teachers at our retreat center, Rangjung Yeshe Gomde.

In June, Tsoknyi Rinpoche offered an introductory seminar on the nature of mind, followed by a three day Dzogchen practice intensive. The reading transmission for Patrul Rinpoche's 'Three Words Striking the Vital Point' was given, followed by in-depth meditation instructions. The meditation sessions were held outside under a radiant blue sky with a touch of wind moving through the pines. It was a special opportunity for

those present to deepen their practice by meditating with Rinpoche.

In August, we were blessed with H.E. Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche, who led the five day Vajrayana Intensive as a traditional form of retreat known as Tsombu Tsokdrub, a group assembly practice. In this style of retreat, the sadhana practice is performed as a group. Our days were structured around four practice sessions. In the morning, we did a short form of ngondro, compiled by Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche from the Chokling Tersar, followed by a Padmasambhava sadhana and cleansing smoke offering. The after-

noon and evening sessions included a feast offering, a Dharma protector ritual and the guru sadhana of Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. Between practice sessions, Chokling Rinpoche would give clarifications, transmissions and empowerments (and share his delightful sense of humor and spontaneity). The women attending the retreat met together each afternoon with Sangyum Dechen, Rinpoche's wife, who taught us a beautiful Tibetan feast song. This was offered to Rinpoche during the tsok on the last morning of the retreat. Rinpoche and his wife were appeared to be very happy during their visit, enjoying bathing in the river and the natural beauty of the land. Chokling Rinpoche went almost to every corner of the land in order to bless and sanctify what we hope will be the future shedra, gompa and other special places. He left us with a beautiful image of the Buddha for our shrine.

September brought the long awaited return of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche to Gomde, USA. This was Rinpoche's first visit to his retreat center, Rangjung Yeshe Gomde USA, since the inaugural seminar two years ago. Rinpoche donated a special image of the Buddha that he commissioned. Made in the style of the rare and famous Nalanda style Buddha images, this statue graces the front of this newsletter.

Just as before, Rinpoche's students came from all across the country to spend some precious time with their teacher. Rinpoche was in a wonderful mood and enjoyed being back at Gomde. He gave a well-attended

talk in Garberville, the nearest big town to Gomde, making connections with many neighbors of the retreat land. This was followed by two seminars. The first seminar, about the Three Yanas, was a detailed outline of the whole Buddhist path. In the second seminar, Rinpoche gave special Dzogchen teachings to students who have made a deep commitment to Buddhist practice. Rinpoche's warmth and clear lucid instructions filled all present with the strong desire to put these powerful teachings into practice. It was an inspiring ten days, and left us all eagerly waiting for Rinpoche's return in 2001.



Calendar of Events 2001

Celebration of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's Parinirvana

Feb 17-19th at Gomde.

This has become a wonderful tradition on this beautiful retreat land that was Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche's dream. Come join us for three days of practice, tsok and a special video of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche.

Contact Hilda Goldman at hrgold@pacbell.net or call 510-528-3738 ext. #1.

Tsoknyi Rinpoche

The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

June 15-18,

Presented in the teaching style of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche, Drubwang Tsoknyi Rinpoche will unfold the entire Buddhist Path beginning with the basics all the way to the pinnacle, Dzogchen.

Threefold Sky Intensive

June 19-24,

Extensive and in depth meditation instruction & practice with Rinpoche. prerequisites: having attended 2 prior retreats with either Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

or Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche or be committed to finishing the preliminaries within a reasonable time period.

Retreat with H.E. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

August 11-15,

Practice Intensive
Check our website at www.schedrub.org
or call us after April 30, we will start registration in May or June

Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

Three Yanas Seminar

September 14-16th

Dzogchen Intensive

September 18-23rd

Prerequisites: having attended 2 prior retreats with either Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche or Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche or be committed to finishing the preliminaries within a reasonable time period.

Study and Practice Groups throughout the USA

Many of you who attended the retreats this summer have asked if there is a way to continue your practice and study during the year. With Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche's blessing, we are launching a practice and study group program throughout the USA. Our hope is to set up a series of teaching videos (along with readings) that groups can use as they gather for practice and study. The first series of videos is of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and will be made available in conjunction with his book *The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*.

If you are interested, please e-mail Hilda Goldman at hrgold@pacbell.net or call 510-528-3738, ext. # 1.

Study and Practice in Northern California

January - December

The Northern California Practice Group will continue to meet twice a month, alternating between meeting in the Bay Area and on the Rangjung Yeshe retreat land. If out of town sangha members are in northern California on one of those weekends, we would love to have you attend. We hope to have Bruce Newman, a long time student of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche's, leading a study /practice weekend in the Bay Area.

If you are interested, please e-mail Hilda Goldman at hrgold@pacbell.net or call 510-528-3738, ext. # 1.

E-mail list

If you would like to be on the e-mail list, please send your e-mail address and let me know what types of events would interested you. If you thought you were on the list but have not received e-mails in the last few months, please send me your e-mail address again.

Contact Hilda Goldman at hrgold@pacbell.net or call 510-528-3738 ext. # 1.

Individual Retreats at Rangjung Yeshe Gomde

Rangjung Yeshe Gomde offers facilities to practitioners who wish to do individual retreats. The beauty and blessings on this retreat land make it an especially auspicious place for a solitary retreat.

Kitchens are provided for retreatants to cook their own meals. Depending on the nature of the accommodations, prices range from \$15 to \$30 per day.

There are discounts for weekly rates, monthly rates and life members.

If you want more information or are interested in doing a retreat, please contact Rangjung Yeshe Gomde at (707) 925-0201.



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