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Cover Photo: Tamera Weikel.

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Winter 2010, Volume 23, #4



Contemplating Peace in 2011

As Buddha Shakyamuni taught in the Dhammapada:

Do no harm,
Cultivate benefit,
Tame one's mind;
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.
—Anandattherapanha Vatthu, verse 183

These fundamental teachings are as relevant today in the Pacific Northwest of North America as they were 2,500 years ago in northern India.

The streams of practice and transformation that have flowed from this font of wisdom and compassion have spread throughout the world, and now commingle here in our region in the myriad traditions and sanghas of practitioners who endeavor to manifest the central truth of the Buddhadharma: awakeness.



Prison Dharma Conference, 2008 Photo: Caterina De Re.

On the spiritual journey, peace can relate to the

ground, path and the goal. It is said to be our basic nature. We train in nourishing it in ourselves and our world and it is also the fruition of our waking up to the ultimate reality. The cultivation of peace is as much a personal inward journey of discovery as it is a socially engaged activity in the world. How this looks is different for every practitioner, but we all stand to benefit from acknowledging, celebrating, and participating mindfully and compassionately in our interdependent world.

Because all Buddhist traditions espouse the cultivation of peace, and since it is so needed in our day and age, the Northwest Dharma Association has decided to make peace the theme for our activities in 2011. This will include events, conversations, action, and celebration of all the diverse traditions together. Join us as we explore the profundity and joy of living in harmony in our world.

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Bringing Peace into Our World & Our Lives

For many of us, the words "religious" and "hatred" don't belong in the same sentence. Yet these days anger and accusations between religious groups fill the airwaves and make front page news.

People who cherish peacefulness know it's more important than ever that humans overcome our differences, talk to each other, find our common ground, and honor our shared values.

Northwest Dharma Association has been promoting that kind of harmony for over twenty years, encouraging cross-tradition collaboration among Buddhist groups of every description. We've helped to bring mindfulness and compassion into the mainstream by supporting the organizations that teach them in Alaska, Yukon, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

We *can* bring peace into our own lives and into our world, but one Buddhist alone can't do it. One Dharma center alone can't do it either. But many centers and groups working together *definitely* have an impact on our society that is of benefit now and will create causes for tremendous benefit in the future.

That's why we're inviting your support for Northwest Dharma Association. Your offering helps NWDA support Buddhist teachings and community in the Northwest through an informative website and an up-to-date directory of Dharma groups and activities. We share our stories through the quarterly NW Dharma News and sponsor events that help Buddhists of multiple traditions bring the Dharma alive in our daily lives.

Please join us to help foster peace and harmony in our region. You gain many personal benefits by becoming an individual member and you help support Dharma values with your tax-deductible offering. You can make your gift safely on-line or send a check by mail.

May the fruits of your generous offering be dedicated to ending all hatred forever!

The Northwest Dharma Association is deeply grateful to those who have already given to our annual appeal.

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NWDA Receives Tides Foundation Grant

The Northwest Dharma Association was surprised and delighted to receive notice recently of the award of a \$2,000 grant from a Donor Advised Fund administered by the Tides Foundation.

Completely unanticipated, this recognition warms the hearts of those who have worked hard to build NWDA.

Founded in 1976 to support organizations working for positive social change, the Tides Foundation administers funds and awards grants in a variety of areas, including peace advocacy, human rights, environmental education, sustainability, and spirituality.

The announcement of the unrestricted grant did not single out a specific activity among NWDA's programs for recognition. In recent years, the Association has sponsored events and featured articles in the *NW Dharma News* concerning Buddhism and the environment, prison practice, family life and the arts, among others.

The grant undoubtedly rewards the broader work of the Association in encouraging communication among Buddhist communities and in supporting the values of kindness, compassion, and non-violence in the world at large.

The Northwest Dharma Association is honored and grateful for this recognition of its efforts!

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Mark Your Calendars for the NWDA Annual Gathering:

"Making Peace: Perspectives on Conflict Resolution"

February 26, 2011 in Portland, Oregon

The board of the Northwest Dharma Association has designated "Peace" as the theme of NWDA's work in 2011. In keeping with this intention, the focus of the NWDA 2011 Annual Gathering will be on resolving conflict. The venue and presenters are still in the works, but please plan on joining us. This event is open to everyone. Check back for registration information soon.

"Making Peace: Perspectives on Conflict Resolution" will be held in Portland on Saturday, February 26, 2011.



NWDA Annual Gathering 2010 at Sakya Monastery, Seattle, Washington. Photo: Caterina De Re.

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Mahasangha



Northwest Presence at 2010 Tibetan Buddhist Conference

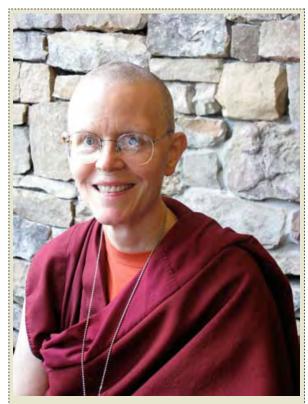
The Pacific Northwest had a strong presence and showing of participants at the 2010 International Conference on Tibetan Buddhism, held October 18-20 in Atlanta, Georgia.

The conference was hosted by Emory University and co-sponsored by The Office of Tibet, New York and The Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture, Washington, DC, with support from Drepung Loseling Monastery in Atlanta.

The opening morning talk to the 300 in attendance was given by HH Dalai Lama, a Presidential Professor at Emory University. In his opening remarks the Dalai Lama encouraged everyone to seek the teachings of the Buddha from the 'root trunk'. He emphasized seeking true teachings of Dharma through root texts and cautioned that too many people pay too much attention to the branches of Buddhism, but we must remember that the branch is there to strengthen the root. The branches can't survive without the root.



Yangsi Rinpoche, President of Maitripa College in Portland, Oregon was one of the presenters at the 2010 International Conference on Tibetan Buddhism. On his left is Jacqueline Mandell, guiding teacher of sangha Samden Ling in Portland.



Ven. Thubten Tarpa of Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington, participated in the event.

The Dalai Lama urged everyone to come together like the trunk of the tree of Buddhism. He emphasized harmony in Buddhism and declared that this conference had the potential to bring about individual responsibility. With that in mind, he urged everyone to get to know one another, then have friendly, responsible exchanges and discussions so that humanity could be well served and suffering could be dispelled.

The conference program included morning and afternoon panels and discussions. The tenor was one of respectful listening, inquiry, informational exchange, and a search for the best way to be of benefit to society. Topics included: Tibetan Buddhism's encounter with modern science, Tibetan Buddhism and social engagement, translating the Dharma, Tibetan Buddhism and the modern academy, Tibetan Buddhism in modern western culture, and surviving modernity in traditional Tibetan Buddhist regions.

Yangsi Rinpoche, a Geshe who is President of Maitripa Institute in Portland, Oregon was a presenter on the "Modern Academy" panel. He emphasized the traditional importance of taking time with major texts to digest the material rather than hurrying on to the next topic. He said that academic understanding can bring up the practice level. To serve humanity we need more than the motivation to do so. We need the philosophy along with the meditation to create a deeper source of strength from which to serve.

At the "Social Engagement" panel summary there was mention of the need for Buddhist networking for social engagement, especially in the field of prison dharma. Jacqueline Mandell, a Northwest Dharma Association board member, mentioned the Association's multi-tradition work in that field and referred panelists to the NWDA website and NW Dharma News.

Teachers and monastics who attended from the Northwest, in addition to Yangsi Rinpoche, included Tulku Yeshe Gyatso Rinpoche and Khenpo Jampa Tenphel of Sakya Monastery in Seattle; Ven. Thubten Tarpa of Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington; Ven. Dhammadinna and Tenzin Jesse of Bodhiheart Sangha, Seattle; and Jacqueline Mandell of Samden Ling, Portland. A number of lay sangha members also made the trip from the Seattle and Portland areas, including Diego Gonzalez, Vanessa Bradley, and Mary Lynne Evans.

Attendees met each other at lunch and dinner to continue discussions and to get to know one another. There was a great spirit of camaraderie and pulling together as strong as a tree trunk!

> Contributor: Jacqueline Mandell. Photos: Jacqueline Mandell.

Green Dharma



The Dharma that Reconnects: Bodhisattva Training with Joanna Macy

Joanna Macy came to Seattle on November 5th and 6th. Saturday night Macy addressed a large audience gathered at St. Mark's Cathedral to honor "The Tree of Life at the Time of the Great Turning". The next day at Nalanda West, Joanna led a capacity-full shrine room in "The Dharma that Reconnects".

Belinda Griswold from Great Turnings Northwest introduced Joanna. Straightaway, in her open and personable way, Joanna shared her excitement at being at Nalanda. Although her root practice is Insight or Vipassana, she experienced abroad early heart-opening teaching from the Kagyu, including a special connection to the previous Karmapa. She said, "The strong tree of Buddhism is beyond any sectarian approach."

Often called an eco-philosopher and/or a Buddhist scholar, Joanna Macy is perhaps primarily an activist, a fine and follow-able example of the beliefs she advocates.

For many years now Joanna has been articulating a system theory which she and now others like David Korten call "The Great Turning". The world is surely in great trouble, and there is a Great Turning—the other side of the story—one that Macy is telling:



Featured speaker Joanna Macy at "The Tree of Life in the Time of the Great Turning" event, St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, November 5, 2010.

(Photo courtesy of Jeffry W. Myers.)

"The most remarkable feature of this historical moment on Earth is not that we are on the way to destroying the world—we've actually been on the way for quite a while. It is that we are beginning to wake up, as from a millennia-long sleep, to a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves and each other."

After sharing information about herself and the framework of The Great Turning, Joanna led right into guided meditation and personal interactions. This experiential and practical side of The Great Turning she calls "The Work That Reconnects". Joanna helped us see, as Buddhists here in America, how it's truly the Dharma that reconnects us—to our deepest selves, to each other, and to our world. To the world of nature and yes, even to our era's "end stage of the industrial growth society".

Joanna doesn't sugarcoat the suffering involved in awareness: "to clearly see what's going on, without going crazy". She told us that The Work That Reconnects is Bodhisattva training: "Compassion literally means to feel with, to suffer with. Everyone is capable of compassion, and yet everyone tends to avoid it because it's uncomfortable. And the avoidance produces psychic numbing—resistance to experiencing our pain for the world and other beings."



Participants in Joanna Macy's program "The Dharma that

However, reconnecting work can be joyful and transformative because we are not doing it, as individuals or even as groups, by ourselves. Whatever they are calling it, many people right now are doing this reconnecting work in our neighborhoods and all around the world. In fact we are naturally "released into action" by dependent arising, the "radical interdependence of all life forms". According to Macy, "We can let life work through us, enlisting all our strength, wisdom, and courage, so that life itself can continue... If the world is to be healed...it will be by...people whose love for this life is even greater than their fear."

Macy talked about three kinds of important dependent co-arising activities/actions for all beings. One involves ways of trying to hold back or correct the system, another consciously creating and participating in Gaia Structures, new ways of being inside and outside the "shriveling" shell of the old. The third is changing consciousness:

"Earth is what we are! No more projecting the sacred, but experiencing it in daily lives, in each other, ourselves..." Addressing us as stream/s of being, Joanna said, "Self is a neural assembly in the web of life—with intention in it, there's no place for fear... The Four Abodes are verbs—when you do them you are in heaven."

Reconnects" practice in pairs at Nalanda West.

In addition to meditation, the afternoon's program included partner and small group discussions. We experienced guided meditation directed to the four directions (to the South, for example, we honored pain, letting go of impatience and powerlessness); expressed thanksgiving ("the words that come before all else") for the gifts from Nature, humanity, and self; and practiced using open sentences to deal with avoidance of difficult feelings.

For hope and trust amidst the seeming dissolution of everything, Buddhism truly comes in handy, Joanna emphasized, because "there is no way to tell", no certainty. We don't know whether or not "this Great Turning is going to happen fast enough or fully enough to stop the unraveling of the systems supporting complex, conscious life forms on this planet. It's not clear yet whether we're going to pull it off. There's no guarantee."

And we need to "make peace with that", not constantly brace against bad news while "working up hopefulness." After all, she said, "There's a certain equanimity and moral economy when you're not continually trying to evaluate your chances of success."

Our dear Dharma sister counseled us to keep on keeping on, "without dependence on seeing the results. Just hang in there a little bit. Huge evolutionary forces are at work. Life wants to go on."

Approaching the end of our time together, Joanna almost called out: "Gratitude is not dependent on external circumstances—especially when things are not going well! Open your eyes, open your heart. Now!"

"...Gratitude is a revolutionary act. Buddha didn't say everything is fine, perfect as it is. There is dukkha. Is it this world you want to find redemption in? Is it this world? Then...suffering." At this point I realized I had a huge smile on my face and tears in my eyes.

For more information about The Great Turning, please visit: www.transformativegroups.com or www.joannamacy.net.

To learn about events related to The Great Turning in the Northwest, email Belinda or Gretchen at: greatturningnorthwest@gmail.com.

> Contributor: Rick Harlan. Photos: Jeffry W. Myers; Nick Vail.

Prison Dharma



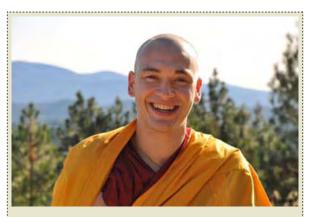
Reflections on an Execution

Transforming every situation we face into the path of practice is one of the key teachings of the Buddha. However, very few of us have the opportunity to do this work with a death row inmate in his last few weeks of life.

In October, Venerable Thubten Jampel from Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington traveled to Oklahoma City to act as spiritual advisor to Donald Ray Wackerly, a death row inmate and student of Venerable Thubten Chodron since 2006.

Ven. Jampel had previously spoken at Don's clemency hearing in September, then spent a week visiting him each day until his execution on October 14. According to Ven. Jampel, it was obvious from Don's videotaped statement to the clemency hearing that he had been practicing the Dharma.

"Don didn't get caught up in his own personal distress," Ven. Jampel said. "He maintained his innocence, but he didn't go into self-pity, which can often be a fallback position for many of us.



Venerable Thubten Jampel, spiritual advisor to condemned prisoner Donald Ray Wackerly. Wackerly was executed at the Oklahoma State Prison on October 14, 2010.

"When the Board denied clemency, this outcome actually gave Don an incredible opportunity to practice Dharma. He had solitude, relative quiet, and a date for his death. That's something the rest of us won't get.

"In meditation, we intentionally think about what it would be like to die in a week or in a month. Don had that part of the meditation done for him. What he needed to do was draw out the beneficial aspects, energy to practice, a clear focus, and allow all the small things to drop by the wayside."

However, it was Don's dealings with the prison authorities that had the most impact on Ven. Jampel.

Of the prison staff, Ven. Jampel said, "The most powerful experience I had was being able to see people who, through the choices they made in their lives and their previous karma, were in the position of being accessories to murder.

"My interactions with the decision-makers around Don's execution made me realize they were good-hearted people. Even though this situation was very different from a murder committed on the street, it is so easy for us to see all those who kill others as horrible people.

"The people I met sincerely believed they were serving justice and society's wishes. They took jobs and made decisions that got them into this situation with a genuine desire to serve. That, in turn, led them to making life and death decisions; they will have to bear the burden of those actions and decisions.

"I particularly remember one woman on the clemency board. It was very obvious to me she felt the need to vote in a way that fulfilled her duties as a public servant. It looked like the decision was very painful for her. She winced. Her duty was one thing, but her moral beliefs were something else.

"Later when I went to speak with her, she looked as if I had cornered her in a dark alley; she was cringing and cowering as if she was waiting for my anger. I had no anger; all I wanted to do was offer my condolences that she had to make such a choice. I would rather have been in Don's place than hers. She might have felt the same."

Ven. Jampel was able to see first-hand how Don's practice of Dharma had changed the way he was thinking and behaving.

"When I arrived at the prison a week prior to Don's execution, he was already in a good, peaceful place. He had let go of most of his anger.

"Because his own personal suffering was so clear to him, it was not difficult for him to expand that to the suffering of all those around him and cultivate compassion. If you can die with compassion in your heart, you can't go to the lower realms."

Don's situation also touched the hearts of many around the world. Sravasti Abbey received news that thousands of people, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and monks, nuns and students from Buddhist centers in the US, the UK, Nepal, India, Singapore and Australia, were making prayers for him to take a precious human rebirth.

In his last hours, Don continued to practice, renewing his refuge in the Three Jewels and retaking the five precepts just before his death. In lieu of a final statement, Don smiled at his supporters, generated compassion for all sentient beings and recited om mani padme hum, the mantra of great compassion, until he could no longer speak.

A letter from one of Don's lawyers noted the effect the Dharma had on Don's final outlook.

"The teachings transformed Don's life, and he died in a manner which I would be delighted to emulate when my time comes," he said.

Another of his lawyers noted that every local news report about the execution mentioned Don's chanting and the prayers made for him by Geshe Dorji, Ven. Jampel, and others in the observation area.



At Sravasti Abbey in Newport, Washington, a puja offering after Don Wackerly's death. Photos of Don are at right.

According to Ven. Jampel, the unusual nature of Don's last statement and his having Buddhist monastics around him as he died had a positive impact on many people. "At the very least, people I met had to rethink their beliefs and deeply ingrained assumptions about death and what it means," he said.

"During all my time with Don, I had to keep a mind that recognized his suffering and the causes of suffering that were being created by those involved in his execution, but to look at that only within the context of samsara. I needed to keep a broader perspective, one in which the dreadful action of killing a human being can also result in our moving away from suffering and towards kindness and compassion.

"We can use the circumstances around Don's death to increase our compassion and widen our view of the world. This perspective, in turn, can lead to all our deaths being more peaceful, our minds more calm, and our hearts more open. It can help us in general to have a more meaningful life."

The Dharma helped everyone concerned. Don's practice had enabled him to let go of a lot of anger and reconcile with his sisters several months before his death.

His sister wrote to the Abbey, "Our family had been so broken and so hurt. I don't know that we would have healed had Donnie not found you and your teachings. It is so sad to lose a loved one, but to lose them with anger in your heart would have been devastating."

She also commented, "I found it truly amazing that as he was facing his final hours, there was no anger or bitterness, only love and compassion. His concern was not for himself but for his two sisters. He was totally at peace as he faced his death."

For more information about Sravasti Abbey, please visit: www.sravasti.org. A mainstream media account of the execution from the Tulsa [OK] World can be viewed at: www.tulsaworld.com.

Contributor: Lisa Perry. Photos: Courtesy of Sravasti Abbey.

Dharma & Science



Crossroads of the Future: A Symposium on Buddhism & Science

Newcomers to the Dharma tend to resonate quite rapidly with it. This seeming natural identification of human nature with Buddhist psychology has perked interest among scholars, scientists and lay practitioners as to whether Western science and medicine can explain why Eastern philosophy "works", and whether there are fruitful secular applications of aspects of Buddhism, without immersion in the entire Buddhist culture.

These were some of the broader questions addressed at a recent symposium hosted by Maitripa College, an accredited Buddhist university in Portland, Oregon. Held the weekend of December 4th and 5th, the symposium was entitled "Crossroads of the Future: Buddhism & Science." It featured nine leading researchers and practitioners from universities across the US.

The opening session of the conference offered an overview of the history and future of the encounter between Buddhism and science. Attempts to bridge science and Buddhism began in the 19th century, however contemporary science is more interested in understanding how Buddhist practices may benefit individuals and society, versus trying to "prove" Buddhism through scientific rigor. Scientists focus instead on understanding the mind, what leads to human suffering, and what helps to relieve it. For example they recognize there is much to be learned about the long term impact of meditation on the mind, body, relief of suffering and enhancement of the human condition.

Broad areas of study include: transformation of the mind and neuroplasticity, the fact that experiences such as meditation can change the brain via the continuous production of neurons; the elimination of suffering, which looks at mechanisms of mind-brain-body functions; and first-person expertise involving the study of the neural counterpart of subjectivity.

Contributing to this discussion were Yangsi Rinpoche, Geshe, President of Maitripa College; James Blumenthal, PhD, Associate Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Oregon State University and of Buddhist Studies at Maitripa; Antoine Lutz, PhD, Associate Scientist at the U. of Wisconsin-Madison; and John Dunne, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Religion at Emory University.



Dr. Antoine Lutz of the Waisman Lab for Brain-Imaging and Behavior, University of Wisonsin-Madison, presented research from his on-going study of novice and expert meditators.

Later in the program Dr. Lutz and Helane Wahbeh, ND, MCR, Assistant Professor of Neurology at Oregon Health & Science University, shared information about current research on the neuroscience of meditation while Yangsi Rinpoche offered insights into meditation's "inner science".

Lutz discussed rapidly developing areas in the practical application of Buddhist practices. These include a variety of mindfulness-based theoretical orientations. For example, mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT) is finding that contemplative techniques are reducing relapse into depression, given the 70% rate of relapse in controls once antidepressants are stopped.

According to Wahbeh, studies involving war veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder have produced encouraging indications that mindfulness training slows reactivity, decreases the secretion of cortisol, and helps regulate emotions and the autonomic nervous system. Related research findings indicate that meditation training can also increase attention span and reduce inflammation, suggesting an impact on health.

Further discussion revealed, however, that despite these promising research findings, when it comes to understanding brain function, the effects of meditation practices on the brain are inconclusive. When experienced meditators are studied, powerful differences emerge in the brain rhythms or oscillations for most subjects, yet some



Dr. Helane Wahbeh, ND, professor of neurology at Oregon Health Sciences University, shared results from her work using mindfulness training with war veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

still show little difference from controls. One possible explanation is that some people are "pre-wired" to enjoy meditation and this may influence the outcome, as opposed to the effect of the meditation itself. If one does not have a desire to meditate versus meditating for some other reason, it is unlikely one will experience the joy and accumulating benefits of an established meditation practice.

In keeping with the Buddhist emphasis on practice, the symposium gave special attention to applications of current research in the real world.

Dan Rubin, PsyD, Visiting Professor of Psychology at Maitripa College and a practicing psychologist, joined Drs. Dunne and Lutz in a discussion of the science of Buddhist psychology and Dr. Mark Unno, PhD, Associate Professor in Religious Studies, U. of Oregon, addressed aspects of Buddhism and psychotherapy.

Within the realm of psychotherapy, Unno described how Buddhist practices promote balance in emotions, insight, and transformation in behavior and personality. Cultivation of a regular practice of mindfulness techniques can provide therapy clients with the calm and awareness to self-manage their lives without ongoing reliance on a therapist or medication.

Roeser suggests that ideally, contemplative practices should be introduced to people at a young age so they can benefit from them longer. Neuroplasticity of the brain and developmental windows throughout the lifespan offer ongoing opportunities for enhancing clear minds, emotional calm, compassionate hearts, a sense of interconnectedness and responsibility for others.

Key to educating youth in mindfulness is training teachers first so that children can learn through observation. Teachers participating in various studies report that mindfulness techniques help them cope better, leave the job at work, be less reactive, experience reduced burnout as well as decreased anxiety and depression. To date there are no results available on whether such teacher training also helps students so this is an area where more research is needed.

Steven Vannoy, PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences at the U. of Washington and visiting faculty member at Maitripa College, spoke on his experience applying Buddhist techniques in prison settings. His work with incarcerated adults involved research on meditation-based enhancement of social health through anger reduction and expanded possibilities for love, per the Buddhist conceptualization of love as having more to do with awareness of how others may be made happy.

The symposium raised interesting questions for both panelists and audience members

One area for further discussion and clarity is whether the attempt to split out and secularize certain aspects of Buddhism actually makes sense, or whether when removed from their context, aspects of Buddhist practice may ultimately have questionable effectiveness. There are many meditation styles and practices, and meditation is not necessarily suitable for everyone. Separated from its tradition of service to others and the world, even meditation may lose its point and attractiveness, and without an intentional desire to practice, benefits may be slight or elusive. In

extreme circumstances a person may even become psychotic in the hands of an inexperienced practitioner.

While Buddhism and science have some shared principles such as the ability to observe phenomena, make inferences, and engage a multi-life perspective—one through reincarnation, the other through gene hosts—attempts at the conflation of Buddhism and science present some problems. Buddhism cannot prove the existence of things through belief and scripture. Science *can* prove some things *false*, but it *can't* prove some things *true*, such as the trans-empirical continuation of consciousness. From the point of view of science, if it is unobservable, it doesn't exist.

At best then scientists and Buddhist practitioners can try to guard against the potential pitfalls within their fields, such as the temptation to withdraw entirely into the empirical world of science to the exclusion of other possibilities, or into fundamentalism by not examining what does exist in preference for settling on one inflexible "truth". There is always the temptation of trying to prove Buddhism with science. The Dalai Lama affirms that Buddhist teachings should be updated when supported empirically.

Buddhism and science do have the shared goals of relieving suffering and enhancing our humanity, which surely provide the best focus for our future and that of our planet.



A thoroughly engaged audience at one of the sessions of the Buddhism & Science symposium at Maitripa College, Portland, Oregon. At right center is Dr. Steven Vannoy of the University of Washington, a symposium presenter.

Sangha News



The "Rebel Buddha" Tour Rolls to a Close in Seattle

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, a resident of Seattle and founder of the Nalandabodhi sangha and Nalanda West Center for American Buddhism, returned to the city December 5th on the final leg of an international tour. A large audience gathered at downtown Seattle's ACT Theater to hear him discuss his new book, "Rebel Buddha". The book is an engaging and provocative investigation of culture, practice, and the genuine essence of the dharma to America.

Rinpoche began with the tale of his own rebellious journey. During what he humorously referred to as his 'avatar-in-training' years, Rinpoche engaged in traditional Tibetan Buddhist education in rituals and cultural orientation, but without much questioning. Soon he found "it became an empty form" and curiosity arose. What he was doing? Why was he doing it? His inner rebel voice challenged the status quo of his monastic life, and Rinpoche found his answers "right within the question".



Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche of Nalanda West discusses his recent book, "Rebel Buddha", at Seattle's ACT theater in early December.

"Sometimes," he said, "you find that the answer is the question."

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche also found answers by looking at the life of the historic Buddha Shakyamuni. He recognized Prince Siddhartha as a rebel: someone who questioned the status quo of his palace life; someone who chose to look deeper, beyond blindly believing in the superficial, outer aspects of his culture. Without blame, Siddhartha turned inward, encouraged by his rebel voice to discover his own awakened heart, the universal qualities of wisdom and love.

That freedom, that genuine heart of awakening, lives within all of us all the time. To peals of laughter Rinpoche asked, "Have you ever seen a child born asleep?"



The "Rebel Buddha" event included a panel discussion moderated by John Tarrant Roshi, far left. In addition to Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (center), the other panelists were Mitra Tyler Dewar and Joan Sutherland Roshi (far right).

He continued, "No, they arrive fully awake. In the same way, our mind is born awake right from the beginning, but like the child who learns how to sleep, our mind does the same."

"The good news," said Rinpoche, "is that if we are capable of learning how to sleep, we are capable of learning how to wake up. That is the path, that is the journey . . . If we look deeper into our mind, that's where we discover truth and awakening . . . Mind is always awake and free."

Rinpoche closed his talk with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi: "You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind."

The afternoon session of the event opened with a talk by Mitra Tyler Dewar. Tyler described how his own rebel buddha journey got a jump-start after a time of great dread and uncertainty. This sense of dread actually helped him look inward to find ways to loosen up the suffering and find kindness to himself, which he explained, eventually travels outward as compassion for others. A musician raised on old school hip-hop, Tyler quoted lyrics from "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash to talk about connecting with personal suffering as a reason to begin practice on the path ("Don't push me 'cuz I'm close to the edge / I'm trying not to lose my head"). Tyler took a number of questions from members of the audience, who clearly resonated with feelings of dread and uncertainty and were looking for answers in their own lives

Then came a lively discussion with the panelists John Tarrant Roshi, Joan Sutherland Roshi, Mitra Tyler Dewar, and Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche. Moderator John Tarrant Roshi opened the discussion by asking for a definition of Buddhism in the 21st century, explaining that the dharma came to the West as a beautifully wrapped package, but that our job now is to sort the wrapping paper (the cultural trappings) from the package (the essence of the dharma). He asked, "What are the crucial practices that need to remain?"

For John, it is the koans of the Zen tradition. For Tyler, a list ranged from calm, insight and compassion meditation to the path of study. For Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche, "it all goes back to the Buddha and his desire to share his awakening, something not dependent upon cultural form." Joan said that, for her, "the qualities of kindness, courage, and wisdom created in people become the barometer," adding with a laugh, "I believe with all my heart that the dharma will survive our best efforts!"

John's final question, "What is one thing – in 140 characters or less – that you can offer as a helpful take-away?" left the audience with these concluding insights:

Tyler: Take a look at your mind. It's not all that bad.

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche: Relax!

John: Enjoy the show!

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Sangha News

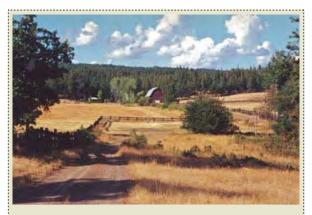


VIEW PHOTO GALLERY FOR THIS ARTICLE

A Time of Transformation: Ser Chö Ösel Ling Retreat Center

In late 2000, after more than a year of searching, the Board of Directors of Kagyu Changchub Chuling (KCC) and a band of informal consultants set out to assess a parcel of land at the foot of Simcoe Mountain near Goldendale, Washington.

Just inside the front gate the forest opened, and we found ourselves in the middle of a 50 acre meadow, surrounded by remnants of volcanic bluffs covered with pine and oak. We were in the heart of a special place. As we approached the center of the meadow, a neighbor who knew about land in the area whispered conspiratorially, "Don't let this one slip through your fingers".



Entrance to the land purchased for Ser Chö Ösel Ling Retreat Center in Goldendale, Washington. CLICK ON IMAGE TO VIEW PHOTO GALLERY

We didn't.

Thanks to a generous gift of nearly \$500,000, the 240 acre parcel was purchased outright, and in the year 2001, KCC began the process of bringing the Ser Chö Ösel Ling ("Land of the Clear Light Golden Dharma") Retreat Center to life.

The long-range plan for Ser Chö Ösel Ling includes building facilities for short-term group and self-contained individual retreats, but the core of the program is the creation of a facility for multi-year cloistered retreats. The intention to support long retreats is deeply rooted in a sense of responsibility for making the heart of our tradition available to future generations. That has been our first priority.



Under a capacious tent, Lama Michael Conklin leads a retreat for Kagyu Changchub Chuling members at Ser Chö Ösel Ling.

Founded in Portland, Oregon in 1976 by the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche, Kagyu Changchub Chuling is a Vajrayana Buddhist center in the Karma and Shangpa Kagyu lineages. In the Kagyu tradition, the masters of the past typically engaged in many years of intensive meditation practice, frequently alone in the wilds of Tibet. Kalu Rinpoche himself was renowned for his years spent meditating in isolated places.

In the early 1970's when he was first invited to teach in the West, Kalu Rinpoche began by presenting foundational teachings and practices. Later, in order to allow committed students to experience the complete range of Kagyu practices, he gave the requisite empowerments and began the first traditional three-year retreats for westerners.

Lama Michael Conklin, a graduate of one of the last three-year retreats conducted under the direction of Kalu Rinpoche, moved to Portland in 1993 and became Kagyu Changchub Chuling's resident teacher after the retirement of Lama Thinley Drupa in 1991.

Under Lama Michael's guidance the community engaged in more retreats and several members undertook retreats of six months to a year. This provided a deeper shared appreciation within the community for the benefits of extended retreat. It became clear that if future generations were going to have access to qualified and inspiring teachers, those future teachers would need the opportunity to do extended retreat. It also became clear that if we did not have our own retreat facility it would be very difficult to provide the necessary stability and continuity for this intensive training.

After much discussion the vision for the retreat center emerged and following a wideranging search we found ourselves in Goldendale. A small house, a basically sturdy barn and a stellar well provided a good base for operations as we settled into our work in 2001.

The development of facilities has been a slow but steady process governed by the availability of donations. To date over \$2.4 million have been raised with donations from approximately 500 people. This is a remarkable achievement but the great determination on

the part of those who persisted through more than a decade of trials and uncertainty is perhaps at least as remarkable.

It was edifying (and somewhat mortifying) to find out that it would take two years just to complete the basic infrastructure, a water system with a 30,000 gallon tank and a half mile of 6-inch water main and 720 volt under ground power line. Work on the retreat cloister itself did not start until 2004.

The cloister for long-term retreats is located along the crest of a gentle ridge and has separate wings for men and women, each with eight cabins, a dining room, a meditation hall and a yoga hall. The two wings are joined by a central building with a commercial-grade kitchen. This central section was built largely by volunteers in 2004 – 2005.

Volunteer work permitted construction to proceed as funds became available and also allowed for a few artistic touches, like the log columns and beams on the front of the main building that might have been unaffordable if contracted out. Over time, more of the work has been done by professional contractors.

While the retreat facilities are the raison d'etre for this project, we have from the beginning understood that an active relationship with the land was essential. It required looking and listening, research and consultation, to understand how to live with the wildlife and the forest, how to respond to previous logging and grazing impacts and to balance wildfire protection with habitat restoration and much more.



Small trees in tubes have been planted for riparian habitat restoration.

The very first activity on the land was planting 1,000 pine trees ordered by the previous owner. Though unplanned, it turned out to be a fortuitous way to begin our tenure, an opportunity for many members of our community to get to know the land in a direct and personal way.

Later KCC obtained a \$60,000 grant to plant 11,000 more trees and shrubs to restore streamside habitat. More recently, members have created a three and a half mile network of walking trails using old logging tracks and deer trails.

In the early days, between construction projects, we squeezed in idyllic camping retreats in our big tent in the shade of the pines. As the long-retreat cloister moved toward completion, retreat activity increased and shifted into the new facilities. We now regularly use the completed north wing for group and personal retreats ranging from a few days to several months.

The most recent addition to the program at Ser Chö Ösel Ling is the "2011 Winter Season Retreat" , an opportunity for personal retreats of up to two months. This will be conducted in the north wing in January and February. These retreats are valuable in their own right but they also allow us to gain more insight into the facilities that will be needed to complete the rest of the vision and the dynamics of the community that will live and practice here.

The south wing is tantalizingly close to completion—roughly \$100,000 is needed to finish the interior work. After the south wing is finished, all that will be required in order to start the long retreats are facilities to accommodate the retreat master and retreat cooks and fences to demarcate the cloistered environment. With an additional estimated \$500,000 all the needed facilities can be completed.

Ser Chö Ösel Ling is on the threshold of a major transformation. What has been principally a long-term construction project is becoming a place steeped with practice. We are nearing the point when the home for long retreats will be ready and another generation of practitioners will have an opportunity to explore the depth of the Dharma.

With a little help from our friends that day will come soon!

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For more information about Ser Chö ösel Ling and Kagyu Changchub Chuling, please visit: www.kcc.org.

Contributor: Bill Spangle. Photos: Dora DeCoursey.

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