



Kootenay  
Shambhala  
Meditation  
Centre

## NEWSLETTER • February 2008

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"If we can learn to relax our discursive mind,  
we will find that underneath it all, we are  
already happy."

—SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE

### WELCOME

The Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre is part of an international community of meditation centres founded by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, and now led by his son and lineage holder, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

Our Centre offers free meditation instruction, a clearly defined path of practice and study, a range of community activities and more. All our offerings are meant to help people of every description awaken their innate wisdom, compassion and sense of irony.

We invite you to join us in this journey of discovery.

*For the most complete and up-to-date information about the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, please visit our website at [www.nelsonbuddha.com](http://www.nelsonbuddha.com) or contact us at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).*

### REGULAR PUBLIC EVENTS

These events are open to anyone, free of charge (donations are gratefully accepted). For the latest schedule information, see the calendar on our website.

#### Meditation Practice

**Sundays, 9 am - noon**

**Mondays, 7 - 8 pm**

**Thursdays, 5:15 - 6:15 pm**

These sessions highlight the Shambhala community's core practice—mindfulness-awareness meditation—in both sitting and walking forms. Most sessions start and end with chants. Sunday sessions include mid-morning refreshments and, occasionally, short teachings and/or

maitri bhavana healing practice. Participants are welcome to come and go as they choose.

#### Open House

**Mondays, 7 - 9:30 pm**

Our Open House program offers a friendly introduction to meditation practice, Shambhala Buddhist teachings and our community. • **7 pm:** Meditation instruction and practice (introductory instruction is available at 7 pm; follow-up instruction, at 7:30 pm) • **8 pm:** Talk and discussion • **9 pm:** Tea

#### Sadhana of Mahamudra

**New and full moon days, 7 - 8 pm**

*The Sadhana of Mahamudra* is a text written by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. It embodies a way of invoking the energy and wisdom of the Kagyü and Nyingma lineages and cutting through all forms of dogmatism. The practice involves chanting the text and relaxing into the atmosphere that doing so creates.

### TIDBITS

#### Special events in February

February kicks off with our annual **Winter Practice Intensive** (January 30 - February 5), an opportunity to clear karmic clutter before the start of the new year. At our **Neutral Day Cleaning Blitz**, on February 6<sup>th</sup>, we're turning our attention to clearing *physical* clutter and otherwise sprucing up the Shambhala Centre. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, **Shambhala Day**, we're ringing in the Year of the Earth Mouse, with festivities throughout the day. And on February 17<sup>th</sup>, we're celebrating our lineage with our annual **Milarepa Day** event. Everyone is welcome to all these events! For details visit our website.

#### Ordering books for upcoming courses

With our next Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies course—Transmitting Natural Mind—starting on February 28<sup>th</sup>, and with the course *Sadhana of Mahamudra* following on its heels, it's time for

interested students to place their book orders. For more information, contact Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## New on our website

Check out **Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche's daily contemplations** via a new link in the "Quotable" section of our home page. And for introductory information about the **Dorje Kasung** (the Shambhala military), whose motto is "Victory over War," go the Community area.

## MEDITATION INSTRUCTION

Mindfulness-awareness meditation is the basis of all Shambhala activity. Originating from Shakyamuni Buddha over 2,500 years ago and passed from teacher to student ever since, this practice is the art of resting the mind, opening the heart and appreciating what it is to be fully human.

Free instruction in this practice is perhaps our Centre's most valuable offering. We offer introductory instruction to newcomers and follow-up instruction to other practitioners on Monday evenings, as part of our Open House program, and at other times by appointment. We encourage anyone interested in a close exploration of the path of meditation to work regularly with a meditation instructor.

For more information, visit our website or contact Lynn Dragone at 250-352-1964 or [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## CORE PATH PROGRAMS

As currently presented at the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, the core Shambhala Buddhist path consists largely of three interconnected elements, each grounded in mindfulness-awareness meditation:

- **Buddhist Study** is offered primarily through the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies, a curriculum of weeknight courses and weekend programs that presents a thorough introduction to Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular.
- **Shambhala Training** is a sequence of weekend workshops that emphasizes embodying bravery, gentleness and wakeful intelligence in every sphere of human activity.

- **Contemplative Arts** are a vehicle for integrating mindfulness and awareness into everyday life.

We invite everyone to explore any of these offerings to the degree they want. Altogether, this training is a big part of the preparation students require to attend Shambhala seminaries and other advanced programs and engage in subtler practice and study.

SHAMBHALA SCHOOL OF BUDDHIST STUDIES  
**Transmitting Natural Mind**  
**With Tim Albert & Jim Northcote**  
**Thursdays, February 28 - April 3, 6:30 - 8:30 pm**  
Open to anyone • Suggested donation: \$60 •  
Online participation possible

This course (a.k.a. Lineage and Devotion) presents the principles of transmission and the student-teacher relationship as a key aspect of the study and practice of Shambhala Buddhism, explores the meaning and development of devotion, and introduces the central lineage figures of the Shambhala Buddhist tradition.

The course readings—from the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies *Lineage and Devotion Sourcebook* and a variety of other sources—will be available as a package to course pre-registrants for \$35.

For more information, go to the Programs area of our website or contact Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## GENEROSITY POLICY

The Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre thrives due to the generosity of its program participants, friends and members. Recognizing that generosity, trust and openness are interconnected, we offer all of our programs on a suggested-donation basis and welcome participants to donate less or more than the suggested amounts as they choose.

## OTHER PROGRAMS/EVENTS

**Winter Practice Intensive**  
**January 30 - February 5**

Open to anyone, free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)

This program coincides with the end of the Tibetan lunar calendar year. According to Tibetan tradition, the year's

end tends to be cluttered with accumulated personal, social and environmental chaos. So it's the perfect time to slow down, intensify awareness and reconnect with our fundamental nature in the company of other practitioners. For more information, go to the Programs area of our website.

### **Neutral Day Cleaning Blitz** **Tuesday, February 6, 12 - 5 pm**

The day before Shambhala Day is considered a "neutral day." It is traditionally a time to clean and refresh one's physical environment—home, shrine etc.—in preparation for the coming year. At the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, we're planning to give our space a good spit and polish between noon and 5 pm—with munchies, music and merit on tap! Please join in whenever you can. For more information, contact Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

### **Shambhala Day: Year of the Earth Mouse** **Wednesday, February 7**

Shambhala Day marks the beginning of the new year, and is the Shambhala mandala's most important holiday. Based on the traditional Tibetan New Year's celebration of Losar, the day is calculated astrologically according to the Tibetan lunar calendar.

Around the globe, people gather in their local centres to practice, enjoy good food, socialize, and celebrate. The day's highlight is the annual Shambhala Day address by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, which is broadcast to every Shambhala Centre in the world. For details, go to the Programs area of our website.

### **Milarepa Day: Taking Delight in Our Lineage** **Sunday, February 17, 9 am - 6 pm**

The focus of this special event is reading aloud *The Rain of Wisdom: The Essence of the Ocean of True Meaning*, a text translated under the guidance of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. This text contains a collection of poems/songs and prose of the great meditators of the Kagyü lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, some of the forebears of the Shambhala Buddhist tradition. By reading aloud the works of these teachers we simultaneously invoke their presence and learn from their example. For more information, go to the Programs area of our website.

### **February Open House Talks** **Mondays, 8 - 9 pm**

Open to anyone, free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)

Our Open House program offers a friendly introduction to meditation practice, Shambhala Buddhist teachings and our community. Senior or intermediate Shambhala Centre practitioners present the teachings, typically in talk-and-discussion format. Upcoming talks are listed below. For the latest information, see the calendar on our website.

February 4  
**Join the Military**  
With Marilyn Thurrott

February 11  
**Welcome to Our Shrine Room! (An Orientation Session)**  
With Margaret McKeown

February 18  
**Do You Exist? Understanding Selflessness**  
With Russell Rodgers

February 25  
**Devotion: Opening the Heart to What Is**  
With Jim Northcote

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*This newsletter describes only some of what's happening at our Centre. For the most complete and up-to-date listing of the Centre's programs and events, visit our website at [www.nelsonbuddha.com](http://www.nelsonbuddha.com).*

## **ELSEWHERE IN SHAMBHALA**

*For information about programs and events taking place in the wider Shambhala world—or about any other aspect of the community—visit [www.shambhala.org](http://www.shambhala.org).*

## LOOKING CLOSER

### Pacifying Obstacles: The Mamo Practice

By Russell Rodgers

*This commentary is part of a series meant to help interested practitioners deepen their understanding of the purpose and meaning of Shambhala Buddhist chants.*

*RUSSELL RODGERS is a senior member of the Kootenay Shambhala Centre. He has been practicing and studying Shambhala Buddhism for about 30 years.*

Dön season is coming up fast. From a Tibetan Buddhist point of view, there is a ten-day period before the Tibetan New Year when obstacles abound and old karma ripens unpleasantly. Accidents, sickness and general bad luck seem more common. From an ordinary, non-Buddhist point of view, we could say that we have survived the winter solstice but the harshness and darkness of winter are still dragging on. The fresh promise of spring and bliss of summer have not yet arisen. Statistically, suicides tend to be highest around this time. When we look around the world, there seems to be no relief from suffering and no escape from the karmic baggage we humans have created.

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has requested that all Shambhala Centres perform a pacification of obstacles practice during a period before the Tibetan New Year, Shambhala Day, on February 7<sup>th</sup>. At the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, the pacification practice will start on January 30<sup>th</sup> and continue until February 5<sup>th</sup>.

This time of obstacles is known as the "dön season." Döns are negative forces that arise out of the environment and cause us to do something self-destructive or mindless. They can manifest as sudden fits of anger or madness, or bad decisions that lead to injury or misfortune. They produce sudden, unexpected neurotic upheavals. More generally, they can also manifest as problems in the larger society. On a personal level, the best protection against döns is increasing one's mindfulness. Therefore, it's an especially good time for meditation practice.

*Mamos* are another source of obstacles during this period. They are visually symbolized in the form of feminine deities called *dakinis*. Mamos are mostly a worldly variety of dakini, unenlightened aspects of the feminine principle. (Mamos can be enlightened, however, like Ekajati.) Many mamos were tamed, or at least partially tamed, by Padmasambhava, a great adept of the eighth century, known by Tibetans as the "Second Buddha." As the legend goes, when he encountered

mamos in the form of various obstacles on his way through Tibet, he overcame them and bound them by oath (*samaya*) to protect the dharma.

Tibetans depict mamos as fierce and ugly demoneses, black in color, with emaciated breasts and matted hair. They appear with sacks full of diseases. They cause havoc with a roll of their magical dice, creating pestilence and warfare. They are associated with the karmic consequences of degraded personal or societal actions. Their response might be in proportion to the karma accumulated, but it could also be unpredictable and completely out of proportion. As we know, there have been many cases where small provocations have produced great wars.

In Tibetan monasteries, for several days preceding the New Year, monks do ceremonies, all day and through the night, invoking protectors and wrathful deities to clear obstacles. At the end of this period, the karmic baggage from the old year is symbolically concentrated into a giant sculpture, which the monks burn to the accompaniment of firecrackers, horns, cymbals, chanting, lama dancing and drums. After the practice ends, there is a relatively neutral day where one cleans one's house to expunge the unwanted traces of the old year. Then, on the first day of New Year, one visits one's guru, and on subsequent days people visit each other in their homes and there is general feasting and celebration. There is a strong sense of a fresh beginning.

In our community, we also do intensive practice, including the mamo practice, during the ten-day dön season. Neutral day, the day before Shambhala Day, is when we do our yearly deep cleaning of the Shambhala Centre, and also our homes if that has not been done already. On Shambhala Day itself, rather than visit the lama at our nonexistent village monastery, the lama comes to us in the form of a live broadcast from Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche on Shambhala Day morning. Celebrations follow throughout the day.

We start the practice with the protector liturgies, inviting the various male and female protector principles to be present. Protector practice guards the sacred ground of pure being. Having established the presence of the protectors, we are now able to start the actual mamo practice.

The mamo practice itself starts with a short Vajrakilaya liturgy. In this liturgy we arise as a wrathful deity, rolling the handle of a huge dagger (*kila* in Sanskrit, *phurba* in Tibetan) between the palms of our hands. This dagger has three edges, and is triangular in cross section. It points downwards. Its three edges slice through passion, aggression and ignorance. The *kila* pierces any

possible obstruction. It works by arousing a penetrating, exquisitely sharp quality of awareness.

Vajrakilaya is dark green and surrounded by flames of wrathful compassion. This is not "feel-good" compassion, but the fiery quality of uncompromising destruction of egoistic tendencies. These are tendencies that may seem familiar and comforting in the short run, but will inevitably produce alienation and suffering in the future.

After flashing ourselves as the wrathful deity, we tune into Vajrakilaya's energy with the mantra "OM VAJRA-KILI-KILAYA HUM PHAT" for a few minutes. Then we invoke Vajrakilaya's action aspect with "OM VAJRA-KILI-KILAYA SARVA-VIGHNAN VAM HUM PHAT." The practice ends with "HUM HUM HUM" and then "PHAT PHAT PHAT." *SARVA-VIGHNAN* means all obstacles. *HUM* is the seed syllable of mind. *PHAT* has a quality of explosive dispelling. Vajrayana practitioners who are practiced in visualization would actually visualize themselves as Vajrakilaya. Shamatha students might best work with a sense of the energy.

But why would we do such a practice? In our culture we may occasionally feel "hounded" by misfortune, but we do not, except perhaps jokingly, attribute it to agents like mamos, gremlins or dōns. The concepts are foreign. Let's digress for a few paragraphs to talk about what we are being hounded by and why we might do this practice in the first place.

As always, with protectors, dōns, mamos, and other deities, one can see them as external to oneself, or as aspects of one's own mind. If you contemplate for a few minutes, you will realize that both the sense of self and the sense of an external "other" are interpretations in the mind. As you read these words, the paper or the computer screen probably seem to exist outside, but it is actually an image in your mind. You may think that this image is faithfully assembled from electric impulses traveling down your optic nerves, but the idea of electric impulses and nerves is, again, a thought in your mind. So, not only do the labels and interpretations of phenomena reside in our minds, but the appearances do as well. So appearance and mind are the same. Obviously this has implications for the sense of being "hounded."

Whether, or in what manner, there is an objective reality outside of the mind, beyond appearances, we can never really know for sure. However, since we habitually operate on a dualistic level, we mostly think that the outside world is separate and distinct from our minds. Karma Chagme, the 17<sup>th</sup> century yogin who wrote this liturgy, has conveniently phrased the liturgy for us in

just that way, as though there were real mamos "out there," just as real or unreal as we are "in here."

The lineage masters are fully aware of the problems of duality/nonduality when they create these practices. One enters into them with the most obvious tool that one has: dualistic conceptuality. However, by becoming conscious of one's conceptuality as one uses it in the chant, the concepts become transparent, just as any thought becomes transparent when you see it in meditation. At the same time that one is using the conceptual mind, the practice points one to subtle layers beyond the concepts.

Practices such as this one belong to an advanced level of Tibetan Buddhism, called *vajrayana*. Another name for vajrayana is the "vehicle of skillful means." There are many, many techniques in vajrayana, and they have been found over the centuries to be very quick and effective. Most seem strange when one first encounters them. To enter into them, one has to have some basic trust that the lineage masters have access to wisdom and know what they are doing. We acquire that trust over time by listening and contemplating teachings that are easier to understand—usually those of the earlier stages of the path. As we test them against our own experience of mind and gain insight into our being, our trust increases to the point where we are willing to try something like the mamo practice.

Returning now to the practice itself, the heart of the practice is the chant entitled *Pacifying the Turmoil of the Mamos*. The liturgy is based on the story of the mamos that were bound by oath by Padmasambhava to protect the dharma. The story goes that these mamos become active when people, especially practitioners, forget ground of basic goodness, the sacredness of all phenomena, and act in a degraded way. Then the mamos express their legendary wrath in order to repair our commitment to sacred outlook and basic goodness. Their wrath arises not from personal insult or violation, but from the practitioner's improper relationship to life. The chant begins:

*BHYOH*

*At the end of the five-hundred-year dark age,  
When the secret mantra has strayed into Pön.*

The secret mantra straying into Pön refers to the tendency of Buddhist practitioners to corrupt the advanced vajrayana teachings (the secret mantra) by slipping into popular folk magic in order to attract a following.

*When sons do not listen to their fathers' words,  
An evil time, when relatives quarrel,*

*When people dress sloppily in clothes of rags,  
Eating bad cheap food,  
When there are family feuds and civil wars:  
These provoke the black mamos' wrath.  
These various women fill a thousand realms  
Sending sickness upon man and beast.  
The sky is thick with purple clouds of sickness.  
They incite cosmic warfare.  
They destroy by causing the age of weaponry.  
Suddenly, they strike men with fatal ulcerous sores.  
Completely daring, they bring down hail and  
thunderbolts.*

Humans become susceptible to the attacks of the mamos when they lose contact with their own being. When we are truly in contact with that sense of presence, we experience sacredness, primordial purity, and basic goodness. The clouds of thoughts cease and one is simply present, nakedly. When one has the confidence of just being, then one's presence and energy become powerful, and obstacles seem to be repelled, or at least easily overcome. Such persons might metaphorically be described as having a certain glow.

*Earth lords, nagas, and nyens are your subjects.  
The eight classes of devas, raksasas and so on are your  
retinue.  
There is nothing that you cannot subjugate.  
Whatever sickness there is comes from you, mamos;  
Whatever plague there is comes from you, mamos;  
Whatever blood there is comes from you, mamos:  
Please change the course of evil and sickness.*

Having acknowledged their power, we beg for forgiveness:

*I make this offering so you may be appeased.  
By the samaya substances, amrita, and torma,  
And the offerings of representations, appeasements, and  
practice materials,  
May the turmoil of the mamos be pacified.  
Be appeased! SAMAYA!*

Instead of torma (a barley flour and butter sculpture), we put offerings of food and cookies on the protector shrine, adding more to the plate with each day of practice. We also offer body (in the form of meditation posture and gestures), speech (in terms of chanting and mantra), and mind (in terms of confession and devotion to the dharma). We do not actually physically offer amrita (a kind of blessed alcoholic drink), or representations. With "SAMAYA!" We exhort them to remember the oath that they made to Padmasambhava.

Then we ask them to act on our behalf:

*Through the blessings of appeasing you,  
For us yogins and our disciples  
May sickness cease and plague be averted.  
Erase us from your chart of doom; put away your  
dice.  
Please avert sickness, dōns, and obstacles.  
Please avert evil prophesies and bad omens.  
May the misfortunes of the he-maras be banished to  
the right;  
May the misfortunes of the she-maras be banished to  
the left;  
May the misfortunes of all maras be banished into space.*

Maras are sources of personal degradation. There are four: denial of impermanence and death, belief in a solid self, being blinded by attraction to pleasure, and giving in to emotional upheavals (kleshas).

*Now is the time of great exorcism.  
Now is the time—SAMAYA!  
Please perform the activities we request of you.*

Next, we acknowledge our own culpability in bringing on misfortune:

*Overcome by ignorance from beginningless time,  
Clouded by stupidity due to laziness,  
However we have strayed from the path of omniscience,  
May the hosts of emanation dakinis forgive us.*

The chant ends with an adaptation of the long Vajrasattva mantra. This mantra, which is prefaced in this case by "OM SAMAYA/AH SAMAYA/HUM SAMAYA..." is one of the most famous of all Tibetan mantras, and it is used whenever one wishes to purify oneself of the stains of karmic misdeeds and obscurations. When we say this mantra, we should think of the world and ourselves as being fundamentally pure, sacred and basically good. "Good" here means good beyond the thought of good or bad. In fact, the Tibetan word for that is *kadak*, which means "first pure," or as Trungpa Rinpoche put it, "alpha pure."

Whether one regards the mamos as existing separately from us or not, or whether one regards them as a deeper aspect of our own minds, the practice can still be effective. The effectiveness is found in simply doing the practice and being aware of what we are doing, while we are doing it. On one level, the practice may serve to bring about a sense that the dangers and unpredictable threats in the external world could be seen and as aids and warnings on our path. They might be indications that we need to guard with awareness the sacred ground of pure being. On another level, we might become

conscious of how the mind projects reality, and therefore, how reality can be worked with.

The mamo practice is essentially an extended protector practice. Protector practices in general at first seem foreign and difficult to understand. However, with time, most experienced practitioners come to regard them as essential. As well, they are highly recommended by the same teachers in whom we put a lot of faith—so everyone is invited to start the new year right by joining with us to pacifying their obstacles during the dön season.

For further reading, you could check out *Dakini's Warm Breath*, by Judith Simmer Brown, and the *Vajradhatu Practice Manual*. Werma practitioners could read Robin Kornman's essays on lhasang practice in the *Werma Sadhana Manual*.

## COMMUNITY

The Kootenay Shambhala Centre is home to a diverse and vibrant community of about 35 members who share a connection to mindfulness-awareness meditation and the aspiration to realize a wakeful, joyful society. There are many ways to get involved—attending meditation practice sessions and celebrations, joining in recreational activities, taking courses, working with a meditation instructor, and volunteering, to name a few. Everyone's participation is invited and appreciated.

You can keep in touch with our Centre by visiting our website at [www.nelsonbuddha.com](http://www.nelsonbuddha.com) and/or by subscribing to one or both of our email lists. If you subscribe to the Newsletter list, we'll send you our monthly newsletter (as a PDF file) and little else. If you subscribe to our Active Friends and Members list, you'll get the newsletter plus reminders about upcoming programs and events, announcements about community activities, and an assortment of other community-related messages. To join either list, contact us at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## MEMBERSHIP

We invite everyone to become a member of the Kootenay Shambhala Centre. Membership is a way to express appreciation for what Shambhala provides and help make it available to others.

Membership involves supporting the community in three main ways:

- Practicing mindfulness-awareness meditation
- Volunteering
- Providing financial support

Membership also comes with several privileges. For more information, please visit our website at [www.nelsonbuddha.com](http://www.nelsonbuddha.com) or contact Lynn Dragone at 250-352-1964 or [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).