



Kootenay
Shambhala
Meditation
Centre

NEWSLETTER • May 2008

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“Equanimity is not being untouched by the world, but letting go of fixed ideas.”

—SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE
Contemplation for March 28, 2008
www.mipham.com

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 up-to-date and complete information about the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, please visit our website at www.nelsonbuddha.com or contact us at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

REGULAR PUBLIC EVENTS

Everyone is welcome to attend these events. Participation is free of charge (donations are gratefully accepted). For the latest schedule information, go to the Clickable 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 (this month, May 4 & 20), 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

Upcoming key introductory program

On Saturday, June 7th and Sunday, June 8th, we're offering a key introductory program—Shambhala Training Level I: The Art of Being Human—and everyone is invited!

Shambhala Training is a sequence of contemplative weekend workshops, suitable for anyone looking to explore the transformative benefits of meditation.

The program involves the study and practice of Shambhala warriorship—a path of nonaggression born from the willingness to meet our world without bias or judgment. This path shows how to take the challenges of everyday life as opportunities for both contemplative practice and social action.

The workshops include thorough instruction in meditation, the practice of sitting and walking meditation, one-on-one interviews to clarify questions, group discussions and talks by senior teachers.

For an outline of the Level I program, see the program listing below. For a complete description, visit the Programs area on our website.

Celebrate being human at our July retreat

Looking for a meditation retreat longer than the weekend programs regularly offered at our Centre? Interested in exploring your mind and heart in a beautiful and supportive environment? Intrigued by the possibility of mixing meditation and celebration? If you are, then consider coming to "Joining Earth, Energy & Space," this year's annual public *weekthün* (one-week meditation retreat) at our retreat land near Nelson, from Saturday, July 5th to Sunday, July 13th. See the program listing below for details.

GENEROSITY POLICY

Our Generosity Policy allows everyone to participate fully in the life of our Centre regardless of his or her ability to contribute financially. It states:

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.

To learn how you can make a donation, please go to the Donations page on our website.

MEDITATION INSTRUCTION

Mindfulness-awareness meditation is the basis of all Shambhala activity. Originating from Shakyamuni Buddha over 2,500 years ago, 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 curious about the path of meditation to work regularly with a meditation instructor.

Shambhala meditation instructors are senior Shambhala Buddhist practitioners specially trained and authorized to help people deepen and expand their conceptual and experiential understanding of meditation.

For more information, visit the Meditation area on our website or contact our Meditation Instruction Coordinator, Lynn Dragone, at 250-352-1964 or info@nelsonbuddha.com.

CORE PATH PROGRAMS

As currently presented at the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, the Shambhala Buddhist path consists 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 seminars and other advanced programs and engage in subtler practice and study. Upcoming core path programs are listed below.

For more information about the Shambhala Buddhist path, visit our website or contact our Practice & Education Coordinator, Jim Northcote, at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

SHAMBHALA TRAINING

Level III: Warrior in the World

With Coleen Logan

Friday, May 2, 7 - 9:30 pm; and Saturday &

Sunday, May 3 & 4, 8:30 am - 6 pm

Prerequisite: Level II • Suggested donation: \$120

Developing fearlessness by examining our habitual tendencies, we are willing to experience our life without relying on the cocoon. We begin to engage the world directly and extend the attitude of fearlessness to our activities. For more information about the program, visit the Programs area on our website or contact Sally Albert at info@nelsonbuddha.com. You can register online.

SHAMBHALA TRAINING

Level I: The Art of Being Human

With Geoff Bannoff

Saturday, June 7, 9 am - 6 pm, & Sunday, June 8,

9 am - 1 pm (times to be confirmed)

All welcome • Suggested donation: \$100

As human beings, we long for sanity, compassion and inspiration in our lives. According to the Shambhala teachings, this longing is a manifestation of basic goodness—the dignity and wakefulness that we all possess. Level I, a key Shambhala introductory program, introduces the practice of meditation as a way to uncover and contact this innate dignity and wakefulness. For more information, visit the Programs area on our website or contact Sally Albert at info@nelsonbuddha.com. You can register online.

PUBLIC WEEKTHÜN

Joining Earth, Energy & Space

With Shelley Pierce

At Senge Ling

Saturday, July 5 - Sunday, July 13

All welcome • Suggested donation: \$450

The Kootenay Shambhala Centre heartily invites 25 people to come celebrate with us at this summer's annual public one-week meditation retreat at Senge Ling, our retreat land near Nelson.

Senior Shambhala Buddhist teacher Shelley Pierce will lead us in exploring the principles of earth, energy and space and the way that experiencing the inseparability of these principles brings us into harmony with ourselves. As we discover this harmony—as we open our minds and hearts—we also discover our capacity and inspiration to benefit others.

The program, appropriate for newcomers and seasoned practitioners alike, will include:

- mindfulness-awareness meditation instruction
- eight to ten hours of meditation practice each day
- a range of other practices of joining earth, energy and space—among them, *lujong* (literally, "body purification") exercises, mudra space awareness (a form of mind-body training), ikebana (Japanese flower arranging), and oryoki (meditative-style) meals
- talks based on Shambhala Buddhist teachings
- group discussions
- private interviews with authorized meditation instructors
- camp chores
- a celebratory closing banquet

Senge Ling is rustic. Accommodation is in participants' own tents, and there is no electricity. The shrine hall is a screened pavilion open on all sides to the forest.

The retreat is open to anyone, though preference will be given to those who plan to attend the whole program. The suggested donation is \$450 (see our Generosity Policy). A \$100 reservation deposit (refundable before June 1, 2008) is requested.

SHELLEY PIERCE is a highly experienced teacher of Shambhala Buddhism. She is also a qualified Sogetsu Ikebana instructor. She has served as Director of Shambhala Training International in Halifax and now works at the Whatcom Museum of History and Art in Bellingham, Washington.

For more information, visit the Programs area on our website or contact Ojan Cromie at info@nelsonbuddha.com. You can register online.

OTHER PROGRAMS/EVENTS

May Open House Talks

Mondays, 8 - 9 pm

All welcome • Free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)

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

Monday, May 5, 8 pm

Tiger Lion Garuda Dragon

With Antonio DeNicola

Monday, May 12, 8 pm

Learning to Meditate

With Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (on video)

Monday, May 19

No talk is scheduled

Monday, May 26, 8 pm

Yeshe Tsogyal and the Feminine Principle

With Margaret McKeown

This newsletter describes only some of what's happening at our Centre. For the most up-to-date and complete listing of the Centre's programs and events, please visit our website at 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.

LOOKING CLOSER

Commentary on the *Supplication to the Takpo Kagyü*

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 in the Shambhala Buddhist tradition for about 30 years.

The Kagyü lineage is one of the three main Tibetan lineages that form the basis of Shambhala Buddhism. Each of these lineages contributes a unique approach to enlightenment. The particular approach of the Kagyü lineage is marked by a very methodical progression of practice and study that leads deeper and deeper into their specialty, mahamudra. The majority of the major practices that we do, including shamatha-vipashyana, Kagyü ngöndro, Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara, the mahamudra retreats, and the six yogas of Naropa are all part of the Kagyü mahamudra system. The Kagyü forefathers are the ones whose stories we are most familiar with. The stories are well documented historically, and colorful as well. Many older students

have treasured relationships with Kagyü teachers, including Thrangu Rinpoche, Khandro Rinpoche, His Holiness Karmapa and Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso. Trungpa Rinpoche himself was a Kagyü. So this lineage looms large in our background.

Now let's turn to the chant. It begins:

*Great Vajradhara, Tilo, Naro,
Marpa, Mila, Lord of Dharma Gampopa,*

In the Kagyü lineage, devotion is very important. Devotion is a translation of the Tibetan word *mögu*, which implies longing to experience the guru's mind, accompanied by a genuinely humble and open quality on the part of the student. Therefore the chant begins by acknowledging the sources of the lineage. Knowing a bit about the stories helps give a sense of what kind of guru's mind is at play.

Vajradhara is the source of inspiration. Because we live in a world based on names and concepts, the name "Vajradhara" enables us to point our awareness to the nameless source: the *dharmakaya*. The *dharmakaya* is the great space of mind that is empty and can thus accommodate all experience. It also has the potential to manifest that experience, although at the *dharmakaya* level, it is just potential. So Vajradhara could be described not as an entity, but as a sort of cosmic buddha potential that pervades all sentient beings.

Tilo, short for Tilopa, was born in India and lived from 988 to 1069 AD. He had human teachers, but he went beyond his human teachers into the *dharmakaya*. He was the first human in the Kagyü lineage to enter the *dharmakaya* and report back. The transmission of that experience of reality is what became the Kagyü lineage.

At a certain point in Tilopa's training, his teachers gave him permission to abandon formal meditation and enter into meditation in action. In *thangkas*, he is usually depicted holding a fish. According to Thrangu Rinpoche, as he was wandering about, he noticed that fishermen were catching fish and discarding the entrails. By eating the entrails, he was able to do two things: to be free to practice whatever he wanted and also to practice equality. Equality is the ability to separate the concepts about things from the pure experience, which is beyond good or bad, tasty or disgusting.

For twelve years, Tilopa pounded sesame seeds during the day to obtain their oil. At night he served a village courtesan, escorting male clients in and out. By putting oneself in lowly jobs, one can eliminate any vestige of arrogance. In this way he practiced the *samadhi* of suchness.

Tilopa's student Naro, short for Naropa (1016-1100), came from a quite different walk of life. He was a famous and successful professor at Nalanda University. At that time, universities in India were great centres of learning and debate. Each of the four gates to Nalanda had a master scholar in charge. It was that person's job to debate opposing masters from other schools that wished to challenge the views of the scholars at the university. Naropa was a great success, and, like many very intelligent people, became very proud of himself. This pride was punctured when an old woman asked him if he understood the words of the dharma. When Naropa confidently retorted that he did, the hag was very happy. When she asked if he understood the meaning as well as the words, she began to cry. She told him in no uncertain terms that he had better seek out the yogi Tilopa if he ever wanted to truly understand the dharma.

Tilopa was not easy to find, and Naropa's arrogance prevented him from recognizing Tilopa several times when he did encounter him. However, Naropa had intense longing for someone who could show him enlightened mind, and he finally succeeded. Tilopa put him through rigorous trials in order to break through his residual arrogance and suppositions about reality.

Naropa's student Marpa (1012-1097) was the first Tibetan in the lineage. Marpa had been angry, and aggressive as a child. His parents, thinking that he would likely become a brigand unless something was done, sent him to a monastery. When he grew up, Marpa went to India, looking for teachings that he could bring back to Tibet. He made three trips to India, studying with Naropa and others. At first, he just wanted to collect teachings without really understanding them. When he lost his books in a river on the way back to Tibet, he finally realized that the only teachings that mattered were the ones that he understood. On one of his trips, he presented the customary offering of gold dust to his teacher, who casually threw it into the jungle. Striking his big toe on the ground, rocks and pebbles became gold. He said, "Everything is a land of gold."

Marpa's student Mila, short for Milarepa (1040-1123), had been involved in a family feud and killed several people. He was a very earnest person and he had a very guilty conscience. By that time, Marpa had understood the energy of anger in its enlightened form, so he used his anger to cut through Milarepa's false assumption that by dutifully being a "good" student he could receive Marpa's transmission. Milarepa was at that point not genuinely open, so Marpa made him build a four-story stone tower and then tear it down and start over. He did this four times. Each time he directed his anger at Milarepa and accused him of not following instructions.

Finally, Milarepa dropped his facade of earnestness and was genuinely open to Marpa's mind. Subsequently, Milarepa meditated in caves throughout Tibet, and ripened Marpa's instruction to the point where he became Tibet's most famous yogi-saint. His extemporaneous songs and verses expressed his realization and are still important teaching tools today.

Gampopa (1079-1153) was a physician-monk from Takpo, who, upon merely hearing of Milarepa, was filled with great longing and the need to find him. Gampopa brought a monastic element into the Kagyü lineage, which up to this point had been composed of wandering yogis.

*Knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa,
Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages—
Drikung, Tag-lung, Tsalpa, these three, glorious
Drukpa and so on—
Masters of the profound path of mahamudra,
Incomparable protectors of beings, the Takpo Kagyü,
I supplicate you, the Kagyü gurus.
I hold your lineage; grant your blessings so that I will
follow your example.*

Four great and eight lesser Kagyü schools evolved from Milarepa's students. The Karma Kagyü descended from Gampopa. Since Gampopa was known as the "Physician from Takpo," the Karma Kagyü are also known as the Takpo Kagyü, hence the name of this chant, *Supplication to the Takpo Kagyü*.

One of Gampopa's students was the first Karmapa, Tüsum Kyenpa. In the tülku tradition that he initiated, when the abbot of a monastery dies, he later reincarnates, is recognized as a young child, and is then trained to be the next abbot. Accomplished students of the previous abbot train the young tülku so that there can be an unbroken line of transmission. The Kagyü tradition holds that a living human connection is essential to transmit the essence of the lineage wisdom.

*Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.
To this meditator who is not attached to food and wealth,
Who cuts the ties to this life,
Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor
and gain.*

Before one can be effective in the world, one has to move beyond attachment. One path is the actual abandonment of people and things that one is attached to. A more subtle path involves maintaining a connection, but abandoning the *attachment*. As meditators become more experienced, they begin to see their thought patterns and how those patterns create suffering. A sense of revulsion arises towards those patterns. One of the most fundamental kinds of renunciation is to abandon

attachment to one's own thoughts in meditation. Only then can one appreciate them as the energetic play of the mind.

*Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.
The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral
instructions.
To this meditator who continually supplicates him
Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion is born
in me.*

Devotion, or *mögu*, means "longing and respect." At its crudest level, devotion can be blind hero worship of the guru as a person, a kind of personality cult. Perhaps one wants an all-knowing advisor who will help one select a career or solve marriage problems. Maybe one wants to simply improve one's social status by having close proximity to the teacher and have stories to tell. This kind of primitive devotion does have some useful aspects, but the true meaning of devotion goes deeper. It is longing to experience the world as the guru sees it. True devotion also has a strong element of respect, based on one's own personal experience of the mind of the guru and the mind of the lineage that s/he represents.

The mind of the guru can be found in the atmosphere of the room s/he is in, in the teachings, and in the teaching mandala that s/he has created to communicate that mind. Trungpa Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, for instance, have placed tremendous emphasis on how the shrine room is set up and the quality of wakefulness that communicates. The appointment of acharyas as traveling teachers is another small example of how a guru can create a mandala to transmit the sense of the teachings as well as the words.

*Awareness is the body of meditation, as is taught.
Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.
To this meditator who rests simply without altering it
Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from
conception.*

Many meditators think that meditation is a thoughtless, blank, peaceful state. In fact, that state is a kind of ignorance. Sometimes it is dwelling in a subtle thought, like the thought of meditation. Some thoughts can be so subtle that they are hard to detect. Instead of dwelling in a peaceful, blank state, we are asked to notice the quality of freshness, which is related to awake mind. When one rests in pure wakefulness, thoughts can come and go, and there is no need to alter anything. Freshness remains in the midst of thoughts. In the beginning, though, it is necessary to rely heavily on mindfulness of the breath, or one will simply be carried away in the stream of discursiveness.

*The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.
Nothing whatever but everything arises from it.
To this meditator who arises in unceasing play
Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability
of samsara and nirvana.*

If one rests in fresh awareness, without attachment to conceptualization, then one can appreciate thoughts as the play of the mind. They come out of the great empty space of mind called dharmakaya, and they retain the qualities of dharmakaya as their essential nature. They are empty but still part of the present display. In this way thoughts become an opportunity for experiencing the dharmakaya. The meditator sees them as inherently empty, but still appreciates the vividness and dance of their energy. Seeing this vividness or brilliance is discovering what is called "luminosity." This is how *nirvana* (the peace of liberation) is realized in the very midst of *samsara* (the entrapment of thoughts and projections).

*Through all my births may I not be separated from the
perfect guru
And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.
Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhumis,
May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.*

The buddhist journey is commonly divided into five paths, or stages of development: the paths of accumulation, unification, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning. These overlap with an alternate classification system called the ten *bhumis* (literally, "earth levels"). Each *bhumi* is a stage in the approach to buddhahood. For example, the first *bhumi* is called Supreme Joy, because one experiences true emptiness for the first time, and is freed from fear of all kinds. The joy experienced here is far deeper and more permanent than the transient joy experienced by ordinary people. The major practice here is transcendental generosity. Attaining the state of Vajradhara is equivalent to buddhahood, the final stage after the tenth *bhumi*.

The perfect guru is the perfect spokesperson for reality. If we have a strong karmic connection with a guru, then it is likely that we will have a relationship with him or her in the future, *and so enjoy the splendor of dharma.*

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 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 Jim Northcote at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Everyone is invited 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 go to the Membership page on our website or contact our Membership Coordinator, Lynn Dragone, at 250-352-1964 or info@nelsonbuddha.com.