

THE

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## Essence of Mahamudra

### Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche



*This is the 4th and final talk in the series of talks on Mahamudra Meditation given in Sydney in 2009.*

The Kagyu tradition, that we belong to, specialises in two kinds of esoteric practices. One is the Six Yogas of Naropa and the other is, of course, Mahamudra. It doesn't mean the Kagyu have some kind of exclusive claim on these practices. Other traditions trace the Six Yogas and some other practices back to the Kagyu masters such as Naropa and Marpa as well. For example, the Gelugpas, the founder of the Gelek tradition, Tsongkhapa is traced back to Marpa, and through the Drikung Kagyu lineage and so on. So the connections and cross overs are very interesting.

In the Kagyu lineage, the practice of the Six Yogas is called the "path of means", and Mahamudra practice is called the "path of liberation". These two practices are very important in the Kagyu lineage, and within our tradition Mahamudra is seen as the highest yoga tantra, superior or in advance of

the Six Yogas.

To approach the explanation of the practice of Mahamudra in a traditional manner we introduce the practice in relation to Ground Mahamudra, Path Mahamudra and Fruition Mahamudra. In the prior talk we discussed shamatha practice in relation to Path Mahamudra. Of course, shamatha practice is about how to settle the mind, but there are many different ways to settle the mind. Broadly speaking, we can try to settle the mind or we can let the mind settle by itself.

There are many methods but basically the different approaches to settling the mind come down to those two approaches. One is where you are trying to settle the mind in a very deliberate way and the other is to let the mind settle by itself. The second approach is like putting tea leaves into a pot and filling it with boiling water and then letting it brew. You don't stir it, or mess with it; one is just patient and it will work out. You will get

what you want. But if you are stirring and messing with the situation it can be spoiled and the taste can be ruined. A more traditional example used, is of not disturbing a still pond. If there is a pond you don't go there and start messing with what is at the bottom because then the pond becomes totally murky. If you let the pond just be, then the water remains clear and clean.

From the Mahamudra point of view, we think of settling the mind in that way, meaning letting your mind be. If you let your mind be it will settle. As I said in the last talk, when bad thoughts come up, when good thoughts come up, when strong emotions arise, if you do not engage with them, and at the same time do not try to get rid of or suppress them or do anything of that kind, then they can resolve naturally. There is no need to become anxious about the activity arising in the mind necessarily.

As we know, often in meditation, thoughts, emotions and feelings are seen as some kind of enemy, as if they are uninvited guests. We often think of these as intrusive thoughts - "I'm meditating. Get the hell out of here!" We want an empty house with no disturbances. We can have a finite idea of how our mind should be in meditation. We can become very possessive about our space, about our mental space. We can even become territorial with our mental and physical space. "This space is mine. I don't want any intruders. This is my area. Get out! Don't come in here". We can be easily annoyed when thought pops up, particular irritating thoughts. We can feel that these thoughts have no place in our minds. They are seen as intruders - "I am meditating, go away!"

How should we deal with our thoughts in Mahamudra meditation? It is described in this way. In Tibetan it is, *Spangs blang re dogs bral ba*. *Spangs* means "to reject"; *blang* means "to accept"; *re* is short for *re wa* which means "hope"; *dogs* is short for *dog pa* which means "fear"; *bral ba* means "to be free of". So it means, to be free of thoughts of acceptance, rejection, hope and fear. That's how we deal with our thoughts.

We don't accept our thoughts, we don't reject our thoughts. We don't accept our

emotions, we don't reject our emotions. We don't accept our feelings, we don't reject our feelings. We don't hope for blissful feelings and fear disturbance, anxieties, worries and so forth while we are meditating. That is the fundamental point. This is a very different approach to meditation from the more deliberate and discipline approach to managing the mind.

In Buddhist literature, the mind is sometimes compared to a wild elephant and sometimes it is compared to a mad monkey trapped in a six windowed house. With the ubiquitous monkey, if somebody comes along and walks around the house, it doesn't matter which

Before we move on to the discussion of vipashyana meditation, I just want to make one remaining point to do with shamatha and that is the idea of non-fixation. This is related to what we have already been talking about. It's not whether you have thoughts or not that counts. Just because your mind is calm and you think you have no thoughts doesn't mean you are necessarily in a very good meditative state. Just because you have thoughts doesn't mean your meditation is bad.

It is about non-fixation, *dzin pa dang bral wa* in Tibetan. Where *dzin pa* means "fixation", *Bral wa* means "to be free of".

The Buddhist notion of *amanaskara* in

**"As long as we are not getting caught up and chasing after these thoughts, emotions and feelings we are in the meditative state. So often or always we think differently. We think to be free of discursive thoughts or conceptual elaboration is how our meditation should be."**

window one goes up to, in every direction the monkey is there. You go to the window in the south, the monkey is peering out and then you go to the north and the same thing. The six windows are a metaphor for the six senses. The mind is like that. One moment we are looking at something and the next moment we are engaged with what we are hearing and smelling and tasting and touching. So that monkey mind, they say, has to be tamed. Or the wild elephant has to be tamed with the use of the discipline of meditation.

As I explained, in Mahamudra meditation that is not the approach. The idea of not accepting, not rejecting, not having hope and fear, et cetera, is part of the process of allowing a particular atmosphere or appropriate situation for the meditative mind to occur. The meditative mind then arises instead of being created. That is the difference. We think we have to create the meditative state or the meditative mind. We don't think the meditative mind or meditative state will arise. This is a very important distinction to make and understand. So in Mahamudra the mind becomes settled in that way.

sanskrit, meaning non-mentation, is connected with fixation. Discursive thoughts, for example, *vikalpa* in sanskrit or *rnam rtog* in Tibetan, and conceptual elaboration, or *prapanca* in sanskrit are referring to our fixation on thoughts, emotions and feelings that we experience. It is not referencing the fact that we have certain types of thoughts or that we are feeling something or that we have certain emotions.

It doesn't mean we try to be free of *vikalpa* or *prapanca*. It does not mean that we should not feel or that we should not experience emotions or be devoid of thoughts. It does not mean that at all. It means non-fixation on the occurring thoughts and rising emotions and feelings. If we become fixated the grasping attitude becomes activated and then we latch on to whatever it is that has come up in the mind.

As long as we are not getting caught up and chasing after these thoughts, emotions and feelings we are in the meditative state. So often or always we think differently. We think to be free of discursive thoughts or conceptual elaboration is how our meditation should

be. Meaning, we should be sitting there in a zombie-like fashion or that we should be in some kind of trancelike or hypnotic state or something of that kind! According to Mahamudra teachings, that is the wrong approach.

### VIPSHYANA MEDITATION

Shamatha means “meditation of tranquillity”, learning how to settle the mind. The next stage of the Mahamudra path is vipashyana meditation. Vipashyana meditation means “insight meditation” or “analytical meditation”. Vipashyana practice helps us to gain insight. It is about dealing with thoughts, even more so than shamatha because in vipashyana meditation we use our thoughts to transform or liberate our attitudes, beliefs, our way of seeing ourselves and the world generally.

This is true in standard Buddhist practice but even more so in Mahamudra. The best way I think for us to get some idea of how vipashyana meditation is practiced is by going through a series of practices or the stages of the practice that are described in Mahamudra literature.

The first stage is called “*introducing all appearances, all phenomena, as created by the mind*”. The next is to “*understanding the mind’s own nature is emptiness*” or “*the mind in itself is empty of inherent existence*”. The third is to realise that “*emptiness and what is called “spontaneously-arisen phenomina” or “spontaneously established phenomena” are not separate*”. Then finally, it is to “realise that spontaneously established phenomena are self-liberated”.

### 1. Introducing all appearances, all phenomena, as created by the mind

First, we have to realise that everything that we experience about the external world through our senses is created by the mind. I think sometimes people get confused about this. People might take it too literally, like a piece of rock is created by the mind or some such thing. The most important point we can take from this is not whether something is literally created by the mind but rather that everything that we experience has to be experienced through the mind. You cannot step

outside your mind to get an independent perspective of reality. That’s just impossible. How do you step out of your own mind to see how the reality and the mind gel together, or to see, how they correspond or whether they correspond?

Whatever conclusion you come to through analysis, engaging in whatever logical reasoning process or procedure you may choose, still you cannot step outside your own mind to get a perspective on mind-independent reality. So in that



Milarepa

sense, everything is dependent on the mind, from the particular to the more abstract – that is the Buddhist view. The particular processes we engage in through the mind: what we take in through our senses; how we use of our concepts, and ideas; how we categorise - grouping things together with common characteristics, how we think in terms of species, genera etc – all this activity, all our experiences, everything is dependent on the mind.

That is the first step really, to understand that is very important because otherwise we would feel less empowered. We could feel as if we were at the mercy of external circumstances and situations, the way the world operates. If we realise that everything that we experience is dependent on the mind then we develop a different perspective. Then the world is

no longer seen as something existing objectively, independent of our perceptual experiences.

It may sound a bit philosophical but it's not, according to Buddhism anyway. In Buddhism, how we think, how we perceive and how we experience things emotionally and in terms of our feeling tones and so forth are all intimately related. We cannot divide our mental functions up so neatly. How we think about things brings about and encourages various emotional responses, different feelings and so forth.

Even within Buddhism there have been discussions about whether we should think of everything as being created by the mind more literally. Personally, I do not think that is helpful. Dzogchen masters such as Longchenpa, for example, has said on several occasions that when we talk about everything being created by the mind we should not take it literally. This can be an interesting discussion in itself but lets return to discussing Mahamudra practice.

### 2. Understanding the mind’s own nature is emptiness.

The second stage is: “*Understanding the mind’s own nature is emptiness*.” In the first stage we discussed the external phenomena, an extroverted approach. Now we turn our attention inwards and look at the mind itself in terms of our thoughts, emotions, feelings, mental states, dispositions, habit-patterns and so forth. In our analysis we realise that they are not fixed but transient. Everything that we experience is in a state of flux, transience. Even if we think, “I have the same emotions or same feeling arising. I have these recurring thoughts” whatever the case may be, they never manifest in exactly the same way. There is always some variation.

That is an important insight that one can have. In gaining such insight we can become less stuck or burdened, especially with unpleasant feelings or certain recurring negative thoughts and other demeaning mental activities. We can develop a different take on mental habits and burdensome mental states. We will not be thinking, “Oh, I’m stuck with this,

this is the way I am. I can't change", this is because if something is in a state of transience that means whatever it is that is afflicting us can be changed and overcome.

If we believe, "This is a permanent feature of my mental life" then that attitude in itself is disabling, it inhibits us from moving forward, developing and progressing. Even if we think we are experiencing the same things again and again it really is never exactly the same. This is a very good lesson to learn. Believing our negative experiences are static and unchanging causes us problems. The problem is not that we have those thoughts or ideas that we dislike or wish we didn't have - the worries, anxiety, fears, despair, depression, moodiness, what ever it might be – it is believing that we do not have the capacity to change them that is disempowering. Such an attitude helps to reinforce negative habits. We can end up strongly identifying and being defined by some of our most negative states if we believe in them. We may believe and align ourselves with ideas, such as "I am a depressive person", "I am an angry type of person", et cetera. If we believe these things, then we can have less capacity to deal with our depression or anger or what ever it might be than if we did not believe in them. The idea is that our beliefs continue to reinforce our negative feelings and emotions and thoughts.

It a very important point. If we believe our negative habit patterns are transient then they can be overcome. Anything that is transient can be overcome. Because everything is transient that means they don't have a fixed essence. Seeing mind itself as empty or insubstantial means only that. If our feelings, emotions, thoughts, mental contents, states and processes had any kind of enduring essence then they would be fixed and static. They would not be transient. Because they are transient it follows that they do not have a fixed essence.

### 3. Emptiness and spontaneously-arisen phenomena are not separate

The third stage, we can move forward and realise that emptiness or insubstantiality itself is not separate from what is called "spontaneously-arisen phenomena". What that means is that

gradually, through vipashyana meditation practice in Mahamudra, we learn to see the world itself as a display of phenomena.

Instead of thinking in terms of causes and conditions as we normally do, in Buddhism. That is, that everything that exists is produced by causes and conditions, instead we see them as self-arising, and spontaneously arising. In the teachings it is compared to a rainbow. That is, nothing is seen as fixed but is still seen as vibrant, full of colours, a very alive, but at the same time not substantial.

It is like a spontaneous display of the wondrous nature of the phenomena that one sees. That is not separate from emptiness. One does not jump to some kind of nihilistic conclusion. When "non-inherent existence" or other related terms are mentioned, one should not be thinking: "Oh, so everything is empty or unreal". Instead one should be thinking: "emptiness or insubstantiality is not separate from the spontaneously-arisen phenomena. That is the insight that one tries to cultivate in vipashyana meditation.

Through developing such insight and thinking in that way, according to the Mahamudra teachings, we learn to free ourselves from our karmic bondage. Karma is created through cause and effect. Fundamentally, negative karma produces a negative effect and positive karma produces a positive effect. Lhun grub is a Tibetan term, a type of technical term used in both Mahamudra and Dzogchen teachings that means "spontaneously-arisen" or "spontaneously-established". It is related to the concept of *rol pa* in Tibetan, which is also a common word used in Mahamudra and Dzogchen meaning display. You find this word in the Mahamudra lineage prayer:

#### Tibetan phonetics:

*chi yang ma yin chir yang char wa la  
ma ngag rol par char we gom chen la*

#### Translation:

Nothing whatsoever but everything arises from it

this unceasing display of phenomena.

This is a key point of understanding that when we have attained Mahamudra realisation (or other forms of realisation), the phenomenal display does not cease to appear. The appearance is still there.

### 4. Realise that spontaneously-established phenomena are self-liberated

In the fourth stage the phenomenal display is finally seen as self-liberated. When we see the phenomenal display as spontaneously-arisen then we see them arise, then dissipate, arise, dissipate, the transience is ongoing. That's what are able to see and experience.

When there is no fixation even in terms of phenomenal display (the external world) then everything is self-liberated. Nothing then causes us grief; nothing causes deep pain, deep suffering or anything of that nature – because we are seeing it as a display. Instead of getting too fixated on what one experience or what one perceives, we are able to move with it, go with it. You might even want to say "dance with the phenomenal display". This is instead of trying to capture whatever it is, trying to seize onto something in a fixated way as a bad experiences, good experiences, bad display, or the good display or whatever.

We can see everything as if it were a theatrical show, I suppose, in some ways. The drama is being played out and we are moved – people go to the theatre and when they see actors acting things out one can be moved. We may show emotion et cetera but at the same time we know it is just a show. So we may be able to develop a similar kind of approach to our life experiences as well.

Seeing the phenomenal display as being self-liberated doesn't mean we are not responding to it, nevertheless we can see it as a display. Without this perspective we can end up living in the past or the future and then miss the present. We can stop engaging in life properly if we are too caught up with seizing onto the past or wanting the future to arise. We build up all this fantasy about the wonderful life we are going to have but in the meantime we are missing out on life.

As it is said, the display means you have to observe, you have to be there, you have to be aware, you have to enjoy it, you have to be in it, and with it. The display or *rol pa*, has the connotation also of having enjoyment, enjoying the phenomenal display to have more enjoyment and less suffering.

Our normal approach produces more

suffering and less enjoyment and somehow we even manage to make the enjoyable things less enjoyable because of our fixation. We get too graspy, needy, greedy, possessive, and too expectant. Our expectations get overblown. So even when good things happen we are thinking, "Is that all?" But when a little bad thing happens: "Oh, what a disaster! I can't cope. I'm having a meltdown!"

That is something like what happens as samsaric beings. We do not normally have the attitude of going with things and making the most of them, our situations and experiences. Our mind can be too preoccupied to be present. That's exactly what is meant by "conceptual elaboration" or "discursive thoughts" and other similar terms used in the Dhamra. We simply get

"One-pointed Yoga".

As we practice Mahamudra we then develop one-pointed concentration. Of course, one-pointed concentration is mentioned in a variety of literatures on meditation in Buddhism. In the Mahamudra context one-pointed concentration does not mean your mind becomes myopic or tunnelled in any way.

In Mahamudra we are actually encouraged to expand our vision so that we are more aware of everything. That is why in Mahamudra meditation we often meditate with our eyes more open than is the instruction in other forms of meditation. We do not seek to shut out sensory input generally. We pay attention to what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, and so on. One-pointed concentration

**"Even when we are in our darkest state, in a depressed state or something similar, if we allow ourselves to, we will see reality in that also. Reality does not discriminate. It is not partial to what is good and virtuous and uplifting and sacred, and against what is profane, base, repulsive, painful and so on."**

caught up in our head and we are therefore less present with the world, and with our senses. Being too much in our heads can lead to more anxiety, more worry, more unhappiness, following one after the other. That is the gist in brief of how insight meditation is practised in Path Mahamudra.

Now we will move onto Fruition Mahamudra

Fruition Mahamudra is described in terms of the Four Yogas. These "yogas" have nothing to do with physical yoga. "Yoga" in Indian literature generally has a broad connotation. For example, there is a Buddhist school of thought called Yogacara which means "practitioners of yoga". They are called Yogacara, practitioners of yoga, not because they practise physical yoga, but because they emphasise meditation practice.

So similarly in this context also, yoga means "meditation", so it could also be referred to as the four meditations.

The first of the four yogas is called

then means to be able to be with whatever it is that we are experiencing, rather than becoming so focused on something that ones awareness of other things going on is diminished or ignored.

The second is called "Yoga of Non-conceptuality"

It can also be translated as "free of conceptual elaboration" and is the second stage that is reached after attaining one-pointed concentration. As I explained before, Yoga of Non-conceptuality does not mean some kind of blank state of mind, or the idea that one is not thinking anything. It is more to do with not indulging in constant elaborations, that is to avoid such compulsions as *thinking about thinking*, which is what we tend to do insatiably. We think about thinking and about our thoughts all the time and that's what conceptual elaboration is referring to. We don't just have thoughts and leave it at that. We get caught up in them, we become fixated and elaborate constantly. We have an ever running

commentary - we judge, we classify, we pigeonhole *ad infinitum*. When we are not constantly elaborating in a fixated and habitual way we are moving towards the attainment of the Yoga of Non-conceptuality.

To attain the Yoga of Non-conceptuality we do not need to stop thinking all together. That is not the point. If we have thoughts without becoming fixated and overly absorbed in them, without unnecessary complexity and elaboration, if we can leave our thoughts alone, allowing them to be transient within our meditation that is described as the Yoga of Non-conceptuality.

The third is the Yoga of One Taste.

One taste refers to being able to see good experiences, bad experiences, everything, as having the same flavour. Everything is flavoured with the taste of reality, meaning emptiness, or ultimate reality. Free of elaboration, obsession and so on. If we rest in that way in meditation and don't get worked up over whatever it is that we are experiencing – becoming too judgemental and too caught up - we can then see everything we experience through the senses, the mind, conceptually and so on as imbued with that same reality. Reality is all-pervasive, it pervade all aspects of our life experiences.

It cannot be the case that reality is only to be found, or experienced, in our positive state of mind or when we are having positive experiences. When we have bad experiences the reality has not been removed and become distant, as we normally think. Reality, being all-pervasive, is present in everything that we experience.

Even when we are in our darkest state, in a depressed state or something similar, if we allow ourselves to, we will see reality in that also. Reality does not discriminate. It is not partial to what is good and virtuous and uplifting and sacred, and against what is profane, base, repulsive, painful and so on.

This Yoga is called "one-taste" because everything is flavoured with the taste of ultimate reality, emptiness or insubstantiality. In other words, we can actually awaken because of only one kind,

or a particular kind of experience. We don't necessarily have to have good experiences for us to become awakened or gain insight into our true nature or the nature of reality. Even when we have negative experiences, if we recognise the insubstantiality of our experiences and phenomena, if we see emptiness within our experience we gain insight, we become awake or more awakened.

The fourth Yoga is the Yoga of Non-meditation.

The Yoga of Non-meditation corresponds to the Mahayana concept of the "Path of No More Learning", which is at the terminal point of the bodhisattva journey.

Of course, Yoga of Non-meditation doesn't mean the meditator is not meditating. What it means is that the meditator does not need to formally meditate because meditation has become part of his or her psychological makeup. It becomes their natural state, unlike us, so everything is done with a meditative attitude or meditative spirit. Everything is experienced and assessed and valued and so forth with a meditative attitude.

The other reason it is called the Yoga of Non-meditation is because in Buddhism we make a distinction between meditation and post-meditation experiences. As you know, when most of us are meditating we have certain

experiences and then we think: "Oh, my mind is calmer or more aware", or something like that. Then we rise from meditation and re-enter the world. Then we find it can be harder to bring that meditative awareness into daily life.

So through repeated practice we try to bring that meditative awareness into daily life as much as possible until the dividing line or demarcation line between the two disappears. There is no difference between meditating and just walking in the street, talking to people, doing our normal activities. There is no separation between meditation and post-meditation. It becomes one continuous state. ■



The advertisement features a blue background. On the left, there is a white silhouette of a person in a meditative pose. To the right of the silhouette, the text "BUDDHIST SUMMER SCHOOL 2022" is written in large, white, serif capital letters. To the right of the text, the words "Online 8-10 January" are displayed in white. Below the text, there are eight circular portraits of diverse individuals, likely speakers or participants. At the bottom right, the website "www.buddhistsummerschool.org" is written in white.



*Wishing Everyone a Safe  
and Joyous Holiday Season  
Merry Christmas and a  
Happy New Year for 2022*

From the E-Vam Institute community

# Interview with Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche

## Teacher from the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism

### Speaker at Buddhist Summer School, January 2022

Matthew Dawson



**Matthew Dawson:** Rinpoche, perhaps we could start by letting people know what you'll be teaching at the Buddhist Summer School for 2022.

**Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche:** I'm teaching on the Four Dharmas. There's the Four Dharmas of Gampopa and also there's the Four Dharmas of Longchenpa. I'll be teaching this time from Longchenpa's perspective, the Dzogchen perspective on the Four Dharmas. I've been teaching on this topic this year in the US. I think people really appreciate and really resonate with the practical details, because they explain how to apply these teachings to everyday life. They address how to apply the teachings to many different areas of your life.

**MD:** Wonderful. I haven't heard of Longchenpa's perspective on the Four Dharmas of Gampopa.

**OCR:** Yes, it's a big commentary. Almost 10 pages about the Four Dharmas. Each line is laid down and it is for many different levels of practitioners. I have taught it in different places and I really like this subject. I like it because of the details. Gampopa's Four Dharmas are connected with Mahamudra.

Longchenpa's Four Dharmas are connected with Dzogchen.

**MD:** Wonderful. I read that you spent 10 years at Larung Gar. There you received teachings from Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok. Might Rinpoche say something about your time there? What was it like living at Larung Gar at that time? And what was it like spending time and receiving teachings from Jigme Phuntsok?

**OCR:** I lived at Larung Gar for many years. I lived there for around 9 years. I was very young at that time. I had extraordinary years there. I learned so much. Not only from oral teachings, but everyday I was meeting different practitioners. And meeting Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and directly receiving teachings from him. It completely changed my life. I learned not just from intellectuals, but everyday I spent so much time with extraordinary beings. Their activities, their teachings, their laughter, their vajra songs, their empowerments and their meditations. Many different things really – you learn in so many different ways. When you spend time with an enlightened master, like a Dzogchen master, every movement... everything is a teaching. Every time they speak is just completely totally a jewel. Therefore I think that really had a big impact on my life.

In Kham (Eastern Tibet), which is where Larung Gar is and which is where I am from, we don't have much luxurious food like here in the Western world. We mostly eat tsampa (barley flour). And the living places are very cold. But I had the happiest time. Usually when people go to school, for most it is a complicated, difficult time. From early childhood people have many struggles. But I had the very opposite experience. It was the most joyful and harmonious time. And I really learned, most especially from reading Mipham Rinpoche and Longchenpa. I learned

from that. And then I think Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche is an extraordinary enlightened being. I didn't see any signs of an ordinary person. I saw something extraordinary, a manifestation. You know, like Guru Rinpoche. It's really the same manifestation. In my own experiences I never thought this person is an ordinary being. I think when you perceive something like that, something extraordinary then the teachings are totally changed, and therefore everything changes. I don't know how to put it into words. I don't have the words really to really totally accurately say it. That time, even now still has a big impact on me. Like my lifestyle right now is a reflection of those years.

**MD:** Do you have any stories that you would like to share about Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche? I read you went to Wutaishan, the mountain in China, with him.

**OC:** Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche was an extraordinary Dzogchen master. He had this amazing presence, a special presence. Every human being that sees him and is in his presence is changed and transformed. Whether Chinese or Tibetan, it doesn't matter, they are totally changed as human beings, who they are. They become a completely different person. They become genuine practitioners, become authentic. I think he has this kind of presence, to transform all the ordinary perceptions all around me – completely transformative, that kind of presence. My first meeting with him completely blew my mind. I first went to Larung Gar to visit my uncle and then I didn't want to leave and go back. But then my father said, you need to go back. So then I returned home, but three months later I went back to Larung Gar, to stay at Larung Gar and study with Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. Therefore, he had a very special presence. It's very special. His teachings and also his vajra songs. He also has lots of extraordinary Mind Treasures. And then I also had the

fortune to go to Wutaishan with him in 1987. I think there were 10,000 Tibetans who went with Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche to Manjushri places in Wutaishan. We went there and stayed there for three months.

**MD:** Wow!

**OC:** We stayed for three months and for around the first two weeks we were 10,000 people. We did lots of aspirations. We pilgrimaged throughout Wutaishan to many beautiful places dedicated to Manjushri and Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche gave teachings and after that most people left. We had 200-300 people stay behind. We received lots of Dzogchen teachings, Manjushri teachings. He also had Mind Treasure teachings from Manjushri. Therefore I spent three months there and we had a very special experience there. That's really the reason I came to the Western world.

In Wutaishan, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche told us that everyone needs to make aspirations or goals to help other beings in this world, people in this world. Do you want to teach and travel? Or do you want to teach in the Tibetan area? Or in China? Or in the Western world? You need to have some aspirations, some goals, he said. Then I thought, you know, I will go traveling the world (laughs). I want to travel through the world teaching these things, the teachings of Guru Rinpoche mostly, and Manjushri... all these things I want to teach. I set my aspiration toward traveling the world. Here in the U.S. and also Australia... my visiting all these places came initially from that thought. The idea came from Wutaishan. And for the first time I met Western people there also. Before that I didn't have any dreams, but after that I had my own goals.

Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche just taught so many wonderful teachings. I think also we were very happy on that pilgrimage. Everyone felt extraordinary. It was a beautiful time. That first time in 1987 many Chinese people became his student, that early on, you know? That really impacted the Chinese people in a big way. That was only just the beginning. Therefore it was a very wonderful experience.

**MD:** Might Rinpoche say a little bit

about the significance of Manjushri mountain, Wutaishan. What does it mean for Buddhists? Why travel from your hometown far away to visit Wutaishan?

**OCR:** Wutaishan is Manjushri's place. It's Manjushri's holy place. There are five holy places on this earth. The central one is Bodhgaya, the eastern one is Manjushri's place, Wutaishan, the southern one is Potala which is Avalokiteshvara's holy place or pureland, the western one is Uddiyana, and the northern one is Shambala. These are the five holy places for Buddhists throughout the world. So the central one, Bodhgaya is where Buddha reached enlightenment. And the eastern one, Wutaishan, is Manjushri's place where Manjushri gave lots of

might like to share what it was like to meet Thinley Norbu Rinpoche, because there are some younger students at Ewam who have heard about Thinley Norbu Rinpoche, have seen photos and read books, who haven't had the opportunity to meet a being like that. So I just wonder if you could say what it was like meeting Thinley Norbu Rinpoche.

**OCR:** Yes, in 1993 I arrived in Nepal. And in Nepal there's Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling monastery, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's monastery, and I was very fortunate to meet Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche there, and also I received many teachings from Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, such as the Longchen Nyingtik empowerments and some Dzogchen

***"Longchenpa is the most extraordinary Dzogchen teacher, the most famous for his realisation. I think before Longchenpa, Dzogchen was not that publicly known but after Longchenpa Dzogchen became better known, so Longchenpa pioneered Dzogchen."***

teachings, and actually Manjushri was born there and it's said that he's still there. If you have very pure karma you can meet Manjushri there, and likewise the Dzogchen master Vimalamitra. Many previous masters like Guru Rinpoche, Vimalamitra, and Shri Singha have been there and many masters of the Sakya, Geluk and other traditions have been there as well, for example, the Sixth Dalai Lama. They all made pilgrimage there. For thousands of years people have been making pilgrimage there. It's a very special and holy place.

**MD:** Thank you so much, Rinpoche. That's amazing to hear. I wasn't aware of the five sacred sites in the world. I think it'd be very interesting for people to know that.

After you left Tibet and had that experience in Wutaishan, you traveled to Nepal and stayed in Nepal and received teachings and taught there for three years. You received teachings from Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and Thinley Norbu Rinpoche. I'm just wondering if you

teachings. He is a very, very extraordinary Dzogchen master and I was very happy to receive those teachings. When I was there I met Thinley Norbu Rinpoche who had travelled to Nepal from US.

In my area, where Jigme Puntso Rinpoche lived, Dudjom Rinpoche is a lama of that area and we know he is very extraordinary. I knew that Thinley Norbu Rinpoche had been to Nepal before, so when I was there I asked about him and people said he lived in America, but had come back. Before that though I sent a letter to him saying I want to see him when he comes to Nepal. I sent it with a student who was going to the US. And he sent me a letter back saying I'm coming to Nepal next month so we can meet. One month later he came to Nepal and then I met him. I have a very strong connection with Thinley Norbu Rinpoche and he also liked me. I have a very deep connection there and I spent time with him and received teachings, and then he went back to the US. And then a few months later he called me and said, can you come to the US? And so I just came. It was August of

1995 and he said, now you stay here in the US, I'm teaching here so you stay and don't worry. So then I stayed with him for three or four months in New York. It was a very wonderful experience, not only receiving empowerments and teachings but to spend time with an extraordinary being. That had a big impact on my life in many different ways. And after that I came to California and he asked me to go to Lama Tharchin Rinpoche's centre in Santa Cruz. For all that time until he passed away I had a very wonderful connection, receiving a lot of advice and teachings. I'm very happy about those very fortunate circumstances.

**MD:** Wonderful, Rinpoche. I heard that Traleg Rinpoche went to Thinley Norbu Rinpoche's Centre and was very impressed with all the young students practicing puja. And when he came back to Evam I heard that he introduced some Dudjom Tersar practices for the younger students, so now we do the Dudjom Tersar Vajrasattva practice, usually once a month. I personally feel like a strong connection with that practice. Even if I didn't have much time I would still try and do it. It's a wonderful practice and I think it's a wonderful lineage as well.

**OCR:** Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm very happy. After meeting Thinley Norbu Rinpoche I met Traleg Rinpoche and Traleg Rinpoche invited me to Australia. He said, you should come to Australia, we have a Summer School. So I came in 2010 or 2011, for the first time. And Sam Bercholz told me that Thinley Norbu Rinpoche had said that me and Sam should go to Australia to teach and I think that's the reason Traleg Rinpoche invited me. I think Sam had already been going for many years but then he asked me to go too. I was teaching something like Longchenpa. I don't remember exactly but Rinpoche told me purposely to teach something specific. I think it was Longchenpa or Shower of Blessings. So I also have a very wonderful connection with Traleg Rinpoche.

**MD:** Wonderful. It's great to see both you and Sam teaching at the Buddhist Summer School in January.

**OCR:** Yes, I'm very happy to be there, though this year it will be online. I think this is a very wonderful opportunity to see the Australian people again and to engage with them and share these extraordinary teachings of Longchenpa. I'm very happy about it.

**MD:** And Rinpoche, might you want to say a little bit about what programs you have running at Pristine Mind

about your time with Jigme Puntsok and Thinley Norbu Rinpoche. I'm sure people will be very interested and I'm looking forward to attending your course at the Buddhist Summer School.

**OCR:** Oh, thank you, that's very wonderful. I think these Four Dharmas are very beautiful. There's the entire path there. The first is about how to start practice, and the second is then, when you start practice what is the right thing and what is mistaken and how to make sure your practice can bring benefits. And then the third is about how to free your mind, how to increase your enlightened qualities, the qualities of the path. And then the fourth is a little bit more connected to Dzogchen, how your confusions and delusions, your negative thoughts can all arise as enlightened awareness or wisdom without being abandoned. So the entire path is there, from beginning to end. Therefore it's a very beautiful teaching. I have taught it many times and people really like this topic. This can impact people's life.

**MD:** Yeah, absolutely. Just quickly before we go, can you say a little bit about Longchenpa?

**OCR:** Longchenpa is the most extraordinary Dzogchen teacher, the most famous for his realisation. I think before Longchenpa, Dzogchen was not that publicly known but after Longchenpa Dzogchen became better known, so Longchenpa pioneered Dzogchen. For all Tibetans, especially in the Nyingma tradition, Longchenpa is very special. All the Dzogchen practitioners will know who Longchenpa is. He's a very extraordinary being. He has so many Dzogchen teachings. It's said that all the Dzogchen teachings, or rivers came to Longchenpa and then spread out in all directions from him. So he is very important. He is also an incarnation of Manjushri.

**MD:** Thank you so much, Rinpoche.

**OCR:** Thank you, Matthew. I hope you're doing well and see you soon. ■



Longchenpa

Foundation at the moment? I notice you have the Ngondro teaching program and some other programs going?

**OCR:** Yes, we have just finished most of them. We are doing a day-long teaching on the bodhisattva vow and mind training on 11th December. We haven't planned many things yet. On January 1st we are doing something to welcome in the New Year. I will also be doing a day-long phowa teaching on January 15th.

**MD:** Wonderful, Rinpoche. It was great to catch up, Rinpoche and to hear what you've been up to and hear a bit more

# Interview with Pilar Jennings PhD

## Psychoanalyst and Buddhist

### Speaker at Buddhist Summer School, January 2022

#### Felicity Lodro



*Dr Pilar Jennings in her psychotherapeutic practice has developed a unique approach to healing psychological distress and enhancing general well-being through intersecting Western psychological methods and Buddhist teachings. She is one of the speakers at the upcoming online Buddhist Summer School 2022.*

**Felicity Khandro:** Thank you for taking the time for this interview. Could you please tell me a bit about your background?

**Dr Pilar Jennings:** I was born in New York and raised on the East Coast and later on the West Coast of the US. My parents were both curious people who modelled the importance of thoughtful inquiry. My mother was born and raised in Peru, and my father was raised by immigrants. So I also grew up with a sense of how our history shapes our understanding of the world around us. And as I became a teenager, attending University in New York City (NYC), this awareness continued and deepened. NYC is a remarkable place, and there are people here who have experienced every suffering imaginable and every privilege. It's a perfect place to study the human condition, especially the psychological and spiritual causes of suffering and well-being.

**FL:** What were the main motivators for you to seek a career as a Psychotherapist?

**PJ:** By the time I was in graduate school studying medical anthropology, with a focus on illness narratives, I had been studying Buddhism for many years. The combination of my graduate studies and spiritual exploration, left me deeply aware that suffering is all-pervasive. I felt called to better understand the origins of suffering, and to offer whatever support I could toward reducing it. Also, my mother was a psychotherapist and so I had been exposed to that healing modality early in life. I sensed that a Buddhist-informed psychotherapy might offer depths of healing to those seeking therapy.

**FL:** Can you explain when you made your connection with Buddhism?

**PJ:** I was a child when my mother and I took our first insight meditation class. The quiet space, and the quiet adults, were so intriguing! And, I noticed right away the feeling of safety that came with being in a contemplative space. Even as a child it was clear to me that the adults were much more peaceful in that quiet room than they typically were out in the world. I wanted to know more about what they were experiencing, and how it might facilitate healing.

**FL:** What initial impact did Buddhism have on your life, and if you could discuss its ongoing impact?

**PJ:** By the time I was a young adult I had been practicing Buddhism for a while. And I noticed that with all the worries and anxiety of entering adulthood – earning a living; finding loving relationships; cultivating meaning – the Dharma offered a way to navigate the fears and distress and anxiety without collapsing into all these stormy feelings. I also felt the psychological healing of a tradition that normalized suffering while offering incredible optimism about our capacity to suffer less and even enjoy life.

As a young adult, I had experienced sudden personal losses that were challenging to heal from. In my Buddhist practice, I sensed the potential to work with trauma and feel connected to an ongoing trust in a future well-being.

**FL:** You are an author. Two of your books are entitled: *To Heal a Wounded Heart*, and *Mixing Minds, The Power Of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*.

In *To Heal a Wounded Heart*, you include a case study – your therapeutic approach combining yours and Lama Pema's approaches were used to help heal the trauma exhibited by a young patient. Was this the first time you combined Psychotherapy and Buddhism to heal trauma?

**PJ:** As a clinician, Buddhist psychology and spiritual practice has informed my work from the very beginning. What this looks like in a given treatment will change depending on who I'm working with and what they're needing. But in all treatments, my approach to healing is powerfully influenced by a Buddhist trust in our own minds to restore a genuine sense of well-being.

**FL:** Can you speak a little about this journey and how it has influenced your ongoing approach to helping people overcome trauma?

**PJ:** Buddhist psychology and practice offers clinicians critically needed ways to enter into clinical work with compassion, focus, and presence of mind. These are capacities central to helping people heal from trauma. In order to do good and healing work in therapy, people need to feel relatively safe, and well heard. I have a sense that my spiritual practice has supported me in being a therapist who can offer genuine compassion in response to extreme suffering, and a therapist who listens carefully and with relatively little judgment. While all clinical training

programs seek to encourage these capacities, the methods for developing them come from the Buddhist tradition. So it has been an enormous asset to have a spiritual practice that supports my efforts to offer traumatized patients a place of feeling safe, recognized, and heard.

**FL:** "Relationship" from a Buddhist perspective is a profound topic and significant to our own ability to free ourselves from suffering - the separation between how the world is and how we experience it, the difference between reality and perception, how this separation can be overcome, and why this separation can impact our lives negatively etc.

From a Buddhist perspective the path to liberation discusses how this separation can cause suffering. The unlocking of our own fuller potentialities is connected with reducing the amount of this separation, and the eventual removal of the separation. To be in full integration - being fully in relationship body speech and mind, with others and the world environment can be equated with liberation or enlightenment. Do you agree? (only answer this question if you wish - i do not have to include it)

The title of your book in itself is compelling: *Mixing Minds: The Power Of Relationship in Psychoanalysis and Buddhism*. In this book you are looking at the process of uncovering our "true self".

How would you define our "true self" when contrasting the psychotherapeutic perspective with the Buddhist perspective?

**PJ:** This is an area that is really very generative in the conversation between psychodynamic treatment and Buddhism, around what constitutes self. From a psychotherapeutic perspective we all have subjectivity that demands being better understood and better known, in the spirit of having a more harmonious relationship to oneself and others. And while that's not denied in Buddhist psychology, it's not emphasized. What is emphasized is that we tend to get hung up on ourselves, and a little bit fixated on an experience of self that feels fundamentally separate from others, from groups, from all phenomena, and it is the fixation, the grasping and the sense of separateness that

generates so much distress and suffering. So, people like Winnicott, the great British psychiatrist and others, use the phrase "true self." While I tend not to work with that phrase too much, because it can start to feel like it is something that we can pin down and find, I am interested in subjectivity and personhood. And we all know that we have to feel like we are in relatively harmonious relationship with ourselves, and we do need others to be able to find our self-experience that is aligned with how we see ourselves. So it's really just a matter of emphasis. The dharma is more interested in the pitfalls of trying to grasp onto some fixed, permanent, abiding self-experience. And psychotherapy is more interested in helping people free themselves from distorted beliefs or feelings about oneself, so that again, they can enjoy who they authentically are, which of course will always change, is always dynamic, but it's important to appreciate and explore.

**FL:** What are the most fundamental differences?

**PJ:** I think the differences between healing traditions matter, because it helps us appreciate what they can offer more specifically, rather than having a general or fuzzy idea of what we're going to experience if we participate in these traditions. Another central difference is the emphasis in psychotherapy on our early life journey, our attachment to primary care givers, our role in our family system, our various developmental achievements or struggles, that all wield a lot of power in adulthood. Whereas the dharma in Buddhist psychology is primarily interested in what we are capable of later in life. And while that's not spelled out as such, because there are definitely extremely wise young Buddhist practitioners who get a lot of benefit from their spiritual practice, the dharma has been relatively disinterested in early childhood experience and development. So that's a significant difference, and another area where I think the traditions are helpful in conversation.

And maybe just to tease out the point a little bit more, psychotherapy has to some degree ignored what we are capable of, what we can transcend, our extraordinary

capacity to live with insight and death and creativity. And while every clinician of excellence will be looking for that too, in terms of the theory and the methodology it's been underemphasized, and our dramas and our psychopathology have been overemphasized. So it's another big difference between the traditions but it's a helpful one.

**FL:** Where do you see the sameness or similarity between the two disciplines?

**PJ:** Well I would say, an area of compatibility is around the issue of compassion, the respect for suffering. These are two healing traditions that understand most people suffer quite a bit, most of the time, and have made stalwart efforts to understand the causes of suffering; the methods for working out the suffering are very different, but there is a shared appreciation for how much we suffer, how much we endure. And again, while I would say the dharma has gone a little bit farther in terms of compassion practice, and helping people really formulate how to implement compassion, the psychotherapeutic process is by its nature an expression of compassion. Therapists are saying, I'm here, I want to learn about your suffering, I care about your suffering, and so the whole endeavour also seeks to express respect for suffering. And a wish to respond to it.

**FL:** The mixing of a religion and psychology/psychotherapy is sometimes seen as a contentious issue. However I believe most religions have religious counselling and prescribe healing processes.

How do you retain the purpose and purity of Buddhist meditational techniques within a clinical setting?

**PJ:** I find myself functioning very much like a psychoanalyst or psychotherapist with my patients, insofar as I'm there to orient toward their psyche, help them translate and formulate parts of their psychological experience that have remained murky or unconscious. And so unlike some contemplative psychotherapists, I'm rarely doing any kind of guided contemplative practice with my patients. The process is going to look much more psychotherapeutic than contemplative. However, if I have a

patient who is a dharma practitioner and is asking for help with their experience of a particular practice, I'm entirely happy to do that. And with patients who are suffering, let's say from anxiety, or other struggles that I think could be helped by meditation and spiritual practice, I will bring it up. I won't proselytize, I won't push, I'll just offer it as another resource. And again, that doesn't usually translate into actually having a direct experience of meditation with them in the session, unless they express a wish to do so.

**FL:** What are your greatest challenges in this area? Am I right in saying that the insight you've gained from your Buddhist practices feeds your psychotherapeutic process?

**PJ:** I would say there are a few areas where I really feel the presence of the dharma in my clinical work. One is around the experience of and quality of listening, which I think can become quite refined. I'm not saying that I'm a refined listener, but I think I've been supported in listening with much more patience, a lot of curiosity, much in the way we learn to in mindfulness practice, where we're just being present, bearing witness to the arisings of our mind and heart. So I would say that's a through line. Also my appeal to the person for their own capacity for wisdom so that it becomes a more collaborative process. It's another way in which the dharma feels very present in my work.

**FL:** I think that's an incredibly important or potent comment, is the idea of being reminded of one's potentiality.

**PJ:** It is, because when people come into treatment, especially if they have a complex trauma history, it is human to get overly identified with one's traumas and then lose any conscious contact with one's own intuition, insight, sensitivity. So I do spend a lot of time trying to basically reinforce their trust in their own sense of what they're experiencing, what they're needing, etcetera.

**FL:** What do you see as the most significant contrasts between the two modalities Buddhism and Psychotherapy?

**PJ:** Well, there are many. One I alluded to but didn't quite emphasize, was the

interest in psychotherapy in the specificity of what one patient has lived through, whereas in the dharma we are more often than not, looking at general categories of suffering. As well as general categories of transcendence and bliss and joy, but the nuances of how we have suffered or how we have lived out aversion and grasping etcetera are just, again, not emphasised in the dharma. And this specificity is the heart of therapy, to lean in close, and become almost anthropological about all of the nuances, with appreciation for how they make up the mosaic of a person's self-experience. And I have found both perspectives to be critically important, because one of the pitfalls of therapy is that people get a little bit consumed by the specificity of what they have lived through and are still living through. And so the dharma can be such a liberating perspective, that it's okay, don't worry about it, we're all suffering, we're all so neurotic, we're all trying to figure out what the heck it's going to take to feel better. So that ability to zoom out just a little bit, and feel like I am part of the human family, is a perspective that I try to bring in to my clinical work, but with sensitivity, because it is equally important to make a lot of room to very specifically understand what someone has lived through.

And maybe I would just add to that Felicity, it's been an issue in the west with Buddhist teachers coming here from Buddhist countries with trauma histories. I mean, most of our great Buddhist teachers who were sent here, came with extreme trauma history, that was ignored. While their suffering was certainly addressed through their spiritual practice, there weren't any other healing modalities to look at their early childhood losses, shocking losses of family, of country, of health. And then as we know, often that got enacted with students and communities. One of the things that's been important to me is to more fully appreciate the specific suffering of our teachers, our great teachers, without losing respect for them but just appreciating they too have a psyche.

**FL:** A sense of humanity.

**PJ:** Yes, that's right.

**FL:** I have one question, that I will finish

with regarding your comment about curiosity. Regarding the struggle that can come about to settle the mind in meditation. It may be seemingly helpful to become a little sleepy, or to close down and feel that there is a tranquility in the sleepiness, or closedness in one's meditation. In that case there can be a challenge to move towards insight meditation because it's almost like going from sloth to agitation instead of restfulness to investigation. Curiosity can be a very engaging aspect to bring into meditation. And I just was interested, because I haven't heard many people speak about curiosity in one's contemplative practice. What do you feel curiosity can bring specifically to one's meditation experience?

**PJ:** I think it's a wonderful question. It's interesting to note that the historical Buddha initially said, it's not enough for us to achieve heightened capacity for concentration, because we could bring that to any endeavour. Right? We could bring that to an endeavour that's not especially generative or noble. And so really, what differentiated the Buddha's tradition from the Hindu one was the emphasis on using our concentration to support insight. But then the question is, how do we cultivate it? And we need curiosity in order to develop insight. In the same way in psychotherapy, we need a reflective function, we need the part of the mind that is actively bearing witness and is standing somewhat removed, because we need the direct experience but we also need to be able to think about, reflect upon and be curious about the arisings of the mind.

And it's one of the reasons why I deeply appreciate Buddhist teachers who are psychologically-oriented, whether they're clinicians or not. Because they'll keep circling around to curiosity. They'll keep encouraging practitioners to be deeply committed. With friendly curiosity, noticing what's actually happening in their mind, and to not lapse into a rote practice. Of course we do need to settle the mind enough so that we're not just thinking about whether we're going to have a cheeseburger or sushi for dinner, but then once the mind is settled, we need the reflection, we need the curiosity,

otherwise we can't actually do anything with what we notice, we can't generate the insight. So I think that one of the great blessings of the dharma, is the emphasis that we have on this incredible capacity to bear witness, but with engagement. And that's basically what curiosity is, we're witnessing with engagement.

FL: Thank you so much for your time Dr Jennings. I look forward to your teaching at the upcoming Buddhist Summer School 2022. ■

Pilar Jennings, PhD, is a psychoanalyst in private practice with a focus on the clinical applications of Buddhist meditation. She has been working with patients and their families through the Harlem Family Institute since 2004. She is a Visiting Lecturer at Union Theological Seminary, guest lecturer at Columbia University, and faculty member of the Nalanda Institute for Contemplative Science. She is also a visiting lecturer at Weill Cornell University School of Medicine in their newly implemented Integrative Health area.

## E-Vam Institute News, Melbourne Australia Snapshot of our activities from August – November

Even though Melbourne spent an alarming 78 days in lockdown, this did not hinder E-Vam Institute's wonderful offering of Dharma and practice activities.

In August Traleg Khandro held a full-day online course on Tibetan Yoga and Pranayama, with participants learning how the Buddhist approach to health and well being address all aspects of body and mind. With an emphasis on learning these beneficial sequences, Khandrola later provided a revision class allowing participants to further refine their integration of these practices.

"An Evening & Day Of Teachings And Practice" was held in September, encouraging those inclined the opportunity for extended meditation practice, with the bonus opportunity of listening to Rinpoche's teachings on "Is Buddhism Religion or Spirituality?" Rinpoche examined many of the key aspects of the ritual and experiential sides of Buddhism and life in general. This followed a week of Daily Online Meditation - meditators engaged in extended sessions of 45 min. The extra 15 min sessions proved to be much appreciated.

Shogam Vidhalaya students commenced their last year in the first program of 11 years of study. Congratulations to all the students for making it so far! So fortunate, it is with deep heartfelt gratitude to Traleg Rinpoche for instigating this program for students. It was Rinpoche's wish for the Shogam Vidhalaya students to have a comprehensive understanding of the

Dharma. We thank the VV Thrangu Rinpoche for helping the students fulfil Rinpoche's wishes, especially for sending Khenpo Chonyi Rangdrol such a flawless teacher to us every year.



Khenpo also provided the community with two wonderful teachings in the course "Living a Meaningful Life: The Practice of the Six Perfections. Gathering online, participants enjoyed Khenpo's lucid and concise explanation of the 6 Paramitas, quintessential qualities of Mahayana Buddhism.

Monthly Chenrezig Puja's were held. Thank you to all who practised generating compassion much need especially during the unprecedented lockdown atmosphere.

The Under 35's program, saw a dedicated group of students explore "Meditation and the Foundations of Practice". Investigating how practice is more than "mindfulness", the class explored the function of Shamatha, Insight meditation, the importance of cultivating healthy emotional states with the four Immeasurable's and the essential four preliminary practices. It was wonderful to encounter the younger people serious about practice and interested in Dharma.

E-Vam's November Retreat was held

online and just like at Maitripa, we followed the traditional structure of Green Tara and Chenrezig practices, yoga, lots of time for meditation including profound teachings by Traleg Rinpoche on "Clarifying the Natural State". Rinpoche explored the Tranquillity and Insight meditation approaches from the Mahamudra perspectives. Special thanks to Nyima Gelek for leading Green Tara every morning and Lyn Hutchison who helped compile these teachings.

Connected to the new Membership Offering was the launch of the new study group program, "Commentarial Teachings of Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX". The first teachings to be studied are Rinpoche's commentary on "Pointing Out the Dharmakaya". It has been so special to see many community members come together to listen to Rinpoche's teachings on a weekly basis. If you are interested in joining this group visit our website to find out more!

E-Vam Community celebrates the wonderful achievement of collectively contributing towards the Traleg Rinpoche Video Digitising Project. Reaching our target, now more than 200 tapes of Rinpoche's teachings will be digitised. Thank everyone for your generous donations, ensuring the preservation of Rinpoche's precious teachings.

It is with deep gratitude to the wonderful motivation of all the staff and the volunteers that we managed to give such a full and vibrant program. Thank you to all the participants and those who connected with the Dharma through this time. ■

# News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre

## Auckland, New Zealand

To our dear friends all over the world, we offer our warmest greetings from Nyima Tashi in Auckland.

Since we last wrote for this newsletter, Auckland has been under stay-at-home orders of one kind or another, just as it is in many places in the world. This means that Nyima Tashi has closed its doors to visitors once again and moved some of the weekly program online.

With the ongoing restrictions, Ani Jangchub has made the most of a week-by-week introduction to the 9 Stages of Shamatha - (one stage each week) coupled with the usual weekly meditation class.

Although the stay-at-home orders in their various guises may appear and often feel restrictive and tedious, we have been considering how it is such an opportune time to come into direct contact with ourselves and to sit in self-reflection. Staying at home brings the great advantage of being able to cut through the usual busyness of our daily lives. Yet curiously, we resist surrendering. It becomes apparent we are somewhat conditioned to remaining busy, always grasping for a problem or a feeling to immerse ourselves in so the noise of busyness does not abate. This begs the question - what remains when the noise of busyness is no longer fed, but allowed to naturally subside? Why are we so shy about permitting the quiet discomfort of honest and tender self-reflection to arise?

Perhaps this is the extraordinary opportunity that presents when being asked to stay home – especially for a prolonged period of time. We find that there is no “former life” to return to, but only a transfigured and fresh way of being – a chance to really inhabit the nature of eternal becoming. We wonder; if we are unable to take time to consider these things now, then when will we be able? ■

## BUDDHIST SUMMER SCHOOL 2022

11th February - 13th February



Nyima Tashi is delighted to invite you to attend the Auckland Buddhist Summer School on 11-13 February 2022 via Zoom. Opening Forum will be Friday 11th February at 10.30am. Please keep an eye out for an announcement of this year's Teaching Panel in mid-December. Register your interest and be notified of the program by emailing nyimatashi.nz@gmail.com.



**“NYIMA TASHI”**

KAGYU BUDDHIST CENTRE

## News From Shogam Publications

2022 marks the 10th anniversary of our beloved teacher Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX’s passing into Parinirvana. The documentary on Rinpoche’s life *Beyond Two Worlds* has been a moving and interesting journey with a number of obstacles along the way, all surmountable. These delays in its release have created a silver lining ensuring that during the commemorative 10th anniversary year we can witness Rinpoche’s life through the documentary to be premiered early 2022. A commemorative pictorial biography of the same name, *Beyond Two Worlds* will also be released in 2022, depicting Rinpoche’s life and his extraordinary journey beginning as a nomad child in Tibet. The commemorative biography takes us not only through Rinpoche’s life as the 9th Traleg Tulku, but it also gives

some detail of the origins of the Traleg Tulkus and includes accounts of Rinpoche’s life from such authorities as Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, Khenpo Kartha Rinpoche, as well as students and friends. Authored by Sharon Wells and designed by David Bennett the book will include some rare and some so far unpublished photos.

In 2021 we released *How To Do Life: A Buddhist Perspective*, a new book of Rinpoche’s teachings that covers a wide range of topics from love and relationship, our emotional life, happiness, and the importance of our spiritual goals in leading a fulfilling life. All Shogam Publications books are available through Rinpoche’s Centres in Australia and New Zealand, KTD in the US; and can be ordered through bookshops and

purchased online in paperback or as an eBook.

I want to pass on Shogam’s deep thanks and appreciation to the many helpers and contributors to Shogam Publications. A big thank you this year goes to David Bennett, Salvatore Celiento, Anthony Cramer, Sue Howes and all the people who recorded Rinpoche’s teachings in the past and all the transcribers past and present who have taken so much care in preserving Traleg Rinpoche’s teachings. And thank you to all the readers for supporting Shogam. We sincerely hope that you enjoy the books we produce and that we are doing justice to Traleg Rinpoche’s teachings.

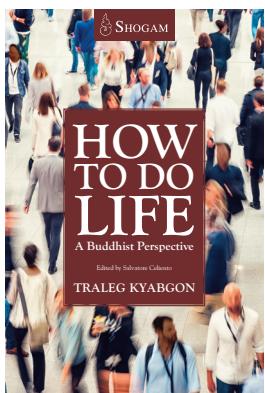
We wish everyone a safe and joyous holiday season. ■

Traleg Khandro

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# News From Akshara Bookstore

Special Feature Book:  
**How to Do Life: A Buddhist Perspective by Traleg Kyabgon**



Akshara Bookstore is incredibly pleased to have the new title from Shogam Publications in stock – *How to Do Life: A Buddhist Perspective* by Traleg Kyabgon. Order your copy now! Call (61 3) 9387 0422.

"From the Buddhist viewpoint, seeing ultimate reality is vital and everything else must be founded on that—how we relate to others and how we relate to ourselves—because if we understand reality, we will see that

"subject and object" or "myself and other," is also a dependent concept. Self is there because of the other. As it is expressed, there cannot be a single, free floating, self-existing, isolated ego. All of the individuals, the selves of the world, are interconnected. One is either the subject or object in relation to the other. From the Buddhist point of view, in this sense, "self" should be seen a relational concept rather than a label for a form of self-existing entity, an ego. A "self" is a self one moment and an object in another. In a different context, self becomes object and in yet another context, self is the self. It depends on the perspective and point of view. There is the agent, act, and object acted upon. For example, if I help an individual, there is the relationship of being a helper and a helpee. In Buddhism, this is not seen as simply an intellectual exercise, but if one thinks about it deeply, it will transform how one thinks about oneself and others.

The same happens with the natural physical world that we inhabit. In Buddhist language, the relationship is called "container and content." All the sentient beings and other things that inhabit the natural world are called "content" and the natural world is called the "container." There is a relationship between the container and the content. A container without content would not be a container. A container by definition means "something that contains things." Content, on the other hand, suggests "the content of something," therefore, it implies a container. In Buddhism, this is called *pratityasamutpada* or interdependent arising.

When we look at it in this manner, showing positive emotions to others becomes natural. If there is the interconnectedness of everything, it makes sense that the showing of positive feelings and emotions, bonding of human beings and humans to other sentient creatures and our environment should be natural. It is important to see love and compassion as natural emotions that with an interconnected and inclusive perspective, would naturally arise. In fact, it is unnatural to have an absence of love and compassion. If everything is interconnected, to have emotions that make us feel cut off from one another, seeing everything and everybody as discrete, individual entities, self-sufficiently existing, self-enclosed egos, means that there is no proper room for the notion of communication, communion, or bonding. Reality demands that we come to the realization of the interdependent nature of all things, and therefore, the interdependence of all living beings." – Traleg Kyabgon. ■

Mark Dawson

## News from Maitripa Centre, Healesville



Maitripa Centre re-opened for bookings on 12 November. With daisies blanketing the lawns and leaves back on the trees, it was a welcome delight to see new and familiar faces at Maitripa for a silent Zen retreat. The following weekend, the coffee machine in Dogen's hummed away for Sparkly Yoga retreatants who enjoyed a weekend of teacher training and an eclipse. In

December, Maitripa will open for individual retreat bookings. We hope you can take up the opportunity to dedicate some time to either a retreat or quiet getaway during this period.

During lockdown, the Maitripa gardens (with the reduced presence of herds of humans) were thoroughly enjoyed by herds of deer (much to our dismay). But alas, it provides an opportunity for replanting by the fountain. If you are in a position to make a donation that would go directly toward installing lighting & replanting the garden beds by the fountain it would be greatly appreciated. You can do so by EFT (reference: MC gardens restoration. BSB: 633000 Account: 155104102) or by phoning the office (03) 9387 0422.

Michael Neighbour continued his

efforts in improving our gardens through weed control, fuel reduction and establishing tactical fencing. Bill Howes has been extremely helpful with repairs and maintenance to buildings and equipment throughout the year. Lisa Blaze has been wonderful in continuing to assist in many ways during her spare time. From gardening, to helping with the cafe and booking operations Lisa has been such a tremendous asset to Maitripa. We are very grateful to have all these volunteers providing their expertise. We look forward to welcoming the E-Vam Community back to Maitripa in the coming months and we hope reconnecting with Maitripa Centre will bring rejuvenation and joy to all who come. ■

Daniel and Lisa Blaze

# News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute, USA

We completed our study group sessions for 2021 in October, having focused throughout the year on Rinpoche's Dzogchen teachings included in his book, *Actuality Of Being*. It was so inspiring to practice the mediation exercises Rinpoche prescribed and to listen to Rinpoche's teachings on Dzogchen together. Rinpoche managed to make this exceptionally profound topic so accessible from both a theoretical and practical life enhancing perspective.

We kick off our teaching programme for 2022 in February welcoming Lama Jinpa from the KTD Sangha who will take an in-depth look into aspects of Traleg Rinpoche's book on *Moonbeams Of*

Mahamudra. This will be a fascinating and enlightening course. It will be run once a week, in the evenings at 7pm NY time for six weeks on zoom.

In April I will be giving instructions on Pema Dorji Rinpoche's Tibetan Yoga Sequences for long life over 2-3 evenings. Tibetan Yoga is a unique physical practice that incorporates movement, postures, breath and visualisation to enhance ones general well being and meditative equipoise.

In May, we will study teachings given by Traleg Rinpoche on both the Preliminary practices and Mahamudra. Our online course format begins with meditation, followed by listening to Rinpoche's

teachings and concluding with a discussion. Attendees are provided with emailed hand-outs for each session that defines terms and summarises some of the key aspects of each talk.

All the above mentioned courses will be on zoom and by donation. Newcomers are welcome. Please contact office@evam.org to register your interest in attending any of the courses. Updates on the teaching programme will also be added to the E-Vam website <https://evam.org/>. So please check there for dates, times and further details. We hope to see you in the new year. Have a safe and happy holiday season. ■

*Traleg Khandro (Felicity)*

## E-Vam Institute Summer Teaching Program 2022

### 8-10 January 2022

#### Buddhist Summer School – Online

The 39th Annual Buddhist Summer School is online again this year! Log on and take part in this rich opportunity to engage with both international and local teachers and to immerse yourself in teachings from Mahayana, Vajrayana and Zen Buddhism. The Summer School offers courses on Buddhist philosophy and meditation, as well as psychology and comparative philosophy. Teachers in 2022 include: Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche, Ekai Korematsu Roshi, Venerable Dr Juewei, Traleg Khandro, Sam Bercholz, Teishin Shona Innes, Dr Pilar Jennings and Dr Peter Oldmeadow.

Reserve your place now:

<https://evaminstitute.org/event/buddhist-summer-school/>

### 28-30 January

#### Weekend of Practice and Teachings

#### Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX teachings: The Four Immeasurables

*The greatest quality one can have is the capacity to connect with others and have a positive effect, which comes from within...*

The Four Immeasurables or Four Brahmaviharas are love, compassion, joy and equanimity. In Buddhism these four positive attitudes can be developed with precision and clarity so "that we may know ourselves well enough to be of real use to others" says Rinpoche. In this weekend program from February 2003, Rinpoche emphasizes the essential role of self-enrichment practices on the spiritual Path; only then can self-transformation and thus enlightenment, be possible. Details coming soon.

### 31 Jan-4 Feb

#### A Week of Daily Meditation Practice

*The practice of meditation has to do with the greater understanding of ourselves.*

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, "The Essence of Buddhism" p. 13

These sessions are open to everyone and are an opportunity to

come together in a welcoming and supportive environment to practice mindfulness meditation. Details coming soon.

### 11 February

#### Chenrezig Puja

On-line

### 25-27 February

#### Summer Retreat for Under 35s

As part of E-Vam Institute's ongoing Under 35s Program, we welcome regulars, newcomers and those with an interest in Buddhism to participate in the weekend Summer Retreat to be held at Maitripa Contemplative Centre. The retreat program includes Indo-Tibetan yoga, meditation, Buddhist philosophy and ritual practice; as well as incorporating aspects of retreat such as noble silence and adopting a mindful and positive attitude as outlined in the instructions provided by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. Details TBA.

### 4 March

#### Chenrezig Puja

7.30-8.30pm

### PLAN AHEAD FOR KEY E-VAM INSTITUTE TEACHING PROGRAM EVENTS:

#### I April

#### Chenrezig Puja

7.30-8.30pm

#### 14-19 April

#### The Annual Easter Retreat.

We look forward to sharing details with you soon.

Please check-out our website for regular updates and new program offerings both online and in-person in 2022.