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Religion and Spirituality

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche



This is the first of three talks Rinpoche gave discussing the relationship between religion and spirituality, given at the Buddhist Summer School in Melbourne. Talks two and three will be featured in the next two newsletters in December 2023 and May 2024.

Many people have questions about whether Buddhism is a religion or a spiritual path. Those two words, religion and spirituality are very loaded, that is, they have multiple meanings. People think about religion and spirituality in different ways so it can be a complex issue, but I hope in these three talks to make these considerations clearer and more straightforward.

Often, when people think about religion it can be referring to following a dogma, external things such as rituals and prayers. If you are praying, that may indicate you are being religious. But, if you're praying, you could be praying to win the lottery. You may not even be concerned who you are praying to—Confucius, the Buddha, or God, etcetera. So religion means something like that for a lot of people—prayer and ritual practices.

Many religions include such things as feasts and fasts. Feasting and fasting may seem ridiculous from a non-religious point of view! So they are feasting and are having so much fun and then they are told, now is the time to fast, so you fast. This is an aspect of all religions as far as I know. These are a few aspects of what we think of as being religious; in many ways it can be beneficial, something I will address in these talks.

In some contexts, religion says sexuality is to be celebrated. In another context, continence, abstinence is seen as important. This is also considered important in relation to our five senses as well, what we see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. On one level, almost all religions work on our senses. For example, we see iconographic representations such as the pictorial representations of great saints and deities. There are many pictorial representations as well as particular types of



music, singing and chanting, incense, candles, all designed to stimulate the senses. Within the same religion, it can promote this idea of indulging in and stimulating sensory impressions, and also promote the idea of abstinence to cut out or cut down certain sensory input to reduce distractions and avoid other types of stimulation.

So how do we make sense of all of this? I cannot really do justice fully in terms of other religions, but from the Buddhist point of view, and particularly from the Tibetan Buddhist point of view, I will seek to make sense of it.

So let me begin by saying that Buddhism is a religion. The religious aspect can be understood as the external, and the spiritual as the internal aspect of the whole religious phenomenon. Many people who come to Buddhism may see it more as a spiritual path but the religious aspect does play an important role.

Buddhism is seen by many as a way of life or philosophy. Often the people who

“So the more you go out from yourself, you become more religious and the more you go inside, you become more spiritual, that really is the case. So the more you believe in the veracity of your ritual practices and incantations, invocations, and so forth, you become more religious. And the more you go deeper into yourself, and look into yourself, you are becoming spiritual.”

describe it in that way are still participating in many of the religious aspects despite their view. From a Buddhist point of view, the religious aspect is important because such activities as praying and committing to a belief system, when done skillfully, can be uplifting and sustaining. There is nothing non-spiritual about creating a supportive and uplifting environment.

Secularization of Buddhism is not a way to improve it, but that does not mean Buddhism as a religion cannot have problems associated with it. Whenever a particular religious tradition becomes too focused on the external, then dogmatism, fundamentalism, racism, and other forms of fixation and prejudice arise from that, as well we know.

Rather than a dogma, in Buddhism, religiousness should be seen as a means, it is a method. Religion is a means to attain enlightenment or spiritual realizations. So often people can get fixated on the means and forget about the ultimate goal, which is about inner cultivation. It is a journey of the soul, you might say. Even though as Buddhists we do not believe in the notion of the soul, you could still call it a journey of the soul. When you say someone or something lacks soul, this does not refer to a metaphysical soul, but rather some kind of lack of experience, lack of insight and depth.

So the more you go out from yourself, you become more religious and the more you go inside, you become more spiritual, that really is the case. So the more you believe in the veracity of your ritual practices and incantations, invocations, and so forth, you become more religious. And the more you go deeper into yourself, and look into yourself, you are becoming spiritual. Without the guidance of the

path, one can become lost. We don't have to denounce and renounce the religious aspect, as it will aid our spiritual growth if we give our spiritual practices form, such as prayer and other ritual practices.

For example, even in a secular setting, when you want to go on a date, one normally follows some protocols, such as presentation, showing interest in the other person, and so on. Such procedures as romantic settings, candlelit dinners, etcetera are commonly used secular ritual practices. So we are practicing all these type of everyday rituals all the time. Religion can be seen as an extension of that because it has the same effect. That is, when we have a shrine or altar and we wear certain garments, light a candle and incense, it makes us feel different, it can

aid us to go inward naturally. When one chants, one can feel transformed. So we can use all of these things to help us to transform ourselves and become a more spiritual person.

The problem comes if we are thinking these rituals are the spiritual journey instead of recognizing that the practices are helping me to get to my spiritual destination, to my goal of enlightenment. That is what happens with a lot of religious people, the fixation on dogma and on rituals. It is not a question of “either or,” either Buddhism is a religion or a form of spirituality. It is both.

Religion has, particularly in recent times, been seen as having a very negative effect. Often, people who come to Buddhism believe it to have a different approach. I agree in many ways that Buddhism as a non-theistic religion does have a different approach, comes to different conclusions, and so on. But we don't have to then say, Buddhism is not a religion. It is a religion which is very rich. It is because of this religious dimension that we have Buddhist architecture, literature, iconography, arts, music, healing practices, and so on. Buddhism has contributed so much to all aspects of so many cultures in Tibet, Thailand, China, Japan, India, and so on because of this religious element.

So we need to think of the religious aspect of Buddhism as being an aid not an end. The end is the spiritual aspect of Buddhism, nirvana, satori, what we wish to attain. If we think in this way, we can then sing and chant, light incense, feast and not feast, fast, or not fast, and there need be no contradiction. That is the Buddhist way. It is all about testing ourselves, Buddhism teaches us to test ourselves.

So we can do all of those practices and benefit from doing them but we have to know that that is not the ultimate. Sometimes people think because these practices and rituals are not the ultimate goal, we should dispense with them, we should not pray, we should not circumambulate stupas, chant, sing, light incense and candles, set up alters, and so on. This seems to be a wrong view. We can become diminished and negative as

human beings by not doing beautiful ritual practices. I really believe that. Even in our own home, we can feel better when we can create a nice atmosphere with simple things such as a basic ritual of lighting a candle. Ritual is a good thing, unless it becomes an obsession.

Part of ritual practice includes conviction, believing in a philosophy of life. When I say believing in philosophy of life, I am referring to believing in Buddhist philosophy, if you are a Buddhist. Through using our reasoning capacity, logic, study, and contemplation, we can really engender a tremendous amount of motivation and conviction. Traditionally, we usually do this in three different ways in Buddhism. First there is textual support, we study the texts. That is, we investigate, “Did the Buddha say this?” Secondly, we use our own reasoning capacity to review what is being said. Thirdly, we reference our own experience to check the validity of the philosophy. So that is traditionally what we do to in terms of learning and building conviction in Buddhist philosophy and this is an ongoing process. We never come up with the ultimate answers straight away. By using this approach of study, investigation, reasoning, and its application into everyday life, we build belief and conviction in the Buddhist path.

Looking at the authoritative literatures of the Buddha, the Buddha of course was a special being so if he said it, you would give the Buddha more credence than a random person, your next door neighbour, for example. It makes sense to look at and study what the Buddha taught. One looks to see if there is coherence and consistency in the argument presented.

For example, the Buddha approached teaching from different perspectives depending on the audience or individual he was teaching, so we can find variation. If we found the Buddha was truly contradicting himself, then it would leave us with a lot of doubt. I have not found any contradiction. Through practice, we may end up actually having the kind of experiences that the Buddha talks about, which then reconfirms our own belief in what the Buddha taught.

To summarise, the aspect of religiosity



in Buddhism is about going outward but if we get lost in that, then we become dogmatic or sectarian or similar, “my school of Buddhism is superior to yours,” or “I’m in this school of Buddhism and you are that school of Buddhism” or “you’re Hindu or you’re Christian.” That is not very helpful, to say the least. However, if we focus only on the spiritual and ignore the religious aspect, so much is lost. It is a truncated version, because it has no life. When we try to avoid ritual, and choose not to believe in anything, we can still develop our own version of religiousness, whether it is for a football team or a specific cause. These things become like a religious passion which can easily become monofocal and may not be life enhancing.

We often don’t even know when the religious zest is creeping into our psyche. For example, ardent communists can be like religious people and many people have said a committed communist is a very religious person. Many non-religious organisations or systems have hierarchy, rituals, uniforms, and a bible of beliefs.

For members of extreme or radical organizations, non-adherence can lead to great tragedy.

So the religious aspect is a very good thing because it helps us to work with different aspects of ourselves on the physical level, psychological level, and the spiritual level. Without a more multi-dimensional approach, we would be only thinking about the mind in Buddhism. It is only when we start to think about Buddhism in other ways, in religious terms, that we can think about Buddhism in relation to the body, speech, and mind.

So the material element, the material dimension of Buddhism is very important in terms of physical embodiment of what is sacred for example, even in terms of Buddhist statues and religious materials, the Buddhist cannon, and the sacred literatures, even Buddhist music, all those things, are very important. So we use all of that to transform ourselves spiritually. Otherwise, it is easy to get stuck and that is when we can become dogmatic, fundamentalistic, sectarian, etcetera. It is all about personal transformation. ■

Interview with Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

Traleq Khandro



Ringu Tulku Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist Master of the Kagyu Order. He was trained in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism under many great masters such as HH the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa and HH Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. He took his formal education at Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok and Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, Varanasi, India and has served as Professor of Tibetology in Sikkim for 17 years. His doctoral thesis was on the Ecumenical Movement in Tibet.

Since 1990 he has been traveling and teaching Buddhism and meditation at more than 50 Universities, Institutes and Buddhist Centres in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia, and Asia. He also participates in various interfaith dialogues. He authored several books on Buddhism as well as some children's books both in Tibetan and European languages.

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche founded Bodhicharya (www.bodhicharya.org), an international organization that coordinates the worldwide activities to preserve and transmit Buddhist teachings, to promote inter-cultural dialogues and educational & social projects. He also founded Rigul Trust which supports his projects in his birthplace, Rigul, Tibet (www.rigultrust.org).

Rinpoche is the Official Representative of His Holiness the 17th Karmapa for Europe and the Founder of Karmapa Foundation Europe (www.karmapafoundation.eu).

Khandro: Thank you for giving of your time for this interview Rinpoche.

Rinpoche: It is my pleasure.

Khandro: It has been very generous of you to have travelled extensively all over the world to teach the Dharma for a number of decades now, particularly in the West. I wonder if you could reflect on the particular issues that you are addressing for your students and people who come to your teachings, specifically in relation to addressing the modern world. What do you feel are the most important things for Western students to address?

Rinpoche: I started to travel to the West in 1990. I was studying English and had made some connection with some Western people. Generally, when I come to the West, I share my understandings of Buddhism, and try to clear up all the misunderstandings that people have developed about the Dharma, about Tibet, and about Buddhism generally, so I have found myself trying to focus on that.

I want people to know what is most important in Dharma. Sometimes people give too much emphasis on deities, sadhanas, and things like that, but they may not have connected with the main concerns in the Dharma. In Dharma practice, usually we talk about three different steps: to become a Bodhisattva

and attain complete enlightenment; to free oneself from the samsaric state of mind; and to find a better life in this life and the next. I find that the last one, to try to make this life and the next life better, how to live life in this world with less negatively, learning to work on the emotions, and to try to live with less stress, and to discover how to be more compassionate and kind—these are the most useful thing to emphasise.

I am looking to clarify how many people understand enlightenment, the idea of seeking to free all sentient beings from suffering, and freeing oneself from the samsaric state of mind. Also, people are seeking better ways to deal with the problems of their life. So naturally these become the incentives and major topics for me to address and teach.

Khandro: In many of your teachings and books, while you have some very traditional topics, addressing such things as how to relate to practices such as Tara, Chenrezig, or Mahamudra, and providing commentary on texts such as The Jewel Ornament of Liberation, and the Four Dharmas of Gampopa, you have also written on topics such as how to be less disagreeable, managing emotions, and looking at what it is that one wants in life. So Western Buddhists, while wanting to know about the Dharma, can also be given help on how to sort out our immediate pain. Embracing the Bodhisattva way of life, and these types of practices and concepts don't take precedence in one's life if one is struggling just with one's emotions, is that what you are also addressing?

Rinpoche: Yes, it is to know what is the main objective of people trying to practice Dharma and coming to Dharma teachings. Of course, we have to work on developing our wisdom and compassion and reduce our kleshas (negative deluded tendencies). We can't just emphasise becoming enlightened and give up on how we live our lives and communicate with others effectively and so on. This is very important to understand I think. So

therefore, to approach Buddhism in a very balanced and simple way and then slowly, we can develop a better life. A better life in this life, with a little bit less stress, good ways of reacting to people and situations, learning to work constructively with our own emotions. These are all important, as well to have some understanding into the nature of things and how much the cause of all the sufferings and pain and our personal stress is actually because of our kleshas. So a little bit of all these things need to be addressed.

Being kind and compassionate is not just being nice to others and helping others but it is also the best way of helping oneself, because we can develop a better state of mind. It is extremely important for people to know this, that you are trying to help yourself actually, you are also trying to live life in a better way for your own purpose, and you are actually practicing the Dharma and you are practicing the Bodhisattvas path. You come to know very clearly that it's not two things to help oneself and to help others. It is one thing, this is very important to understand and experience. I try to emphasise this when teaching before I give sadhanas and Vajrayana ritual instruction. These practices can help generate all these qualities of wisdom and compassion but they need to be understood and related to properly. The Tibetan way of doing Vajrayana practices is often so different from the usual Western way of doing things so it is not always easy to connect with their meaning. So if you cannot connect deeply and understand deeply how these practices are working on yourself, to transform yourself and your emotions and things like that, then it can become more of a cultural thing and more or less a ritual without substance. We need to understand the practice and its connection with one's own transformation.

When I teach, I try to go through certain Vajrayana practices or sadhanas to try to connect with how these can be used to help work on one's state of mind and emotions. So if we can bring these elements together, then these practices can actually be used to transform oneself.

Khandro: So your broad approach has

developed to be very helpful to the Western student and their approach to understanding the Dharma and how they approach their meditation practice and study?

Rinpoche: Many people come to Buddhism to learn meditation. That is very good but I am more interested in our ability to change our attitude, because sometimes our attitude becomes very important in our transformation. I found myself that when I understand something more thoroughly and change my way of looking at it, that makes a lot of difference on how I react in my daily life.

So with more understanding about how to look at life and look at any of our problems and difficulties, it is most helpful to change a little bit one's own way of being. I feel to get the result through meditation, you need to have really good meditation that can take time. It is worthwhile, but to change our attitude and understanding is relatively easier. So, it is so important to have a better understanding because then we can be changed and the benefits can come more quickly. Of course, meditation is very, very important, but to really get lots of benefit from meditation, you need to have really good meditation, and that comes from good understanding. That is why I like to focus on studies on texts such as Bodhicharyavatara and Lojong as one's understanding increases and it is easier then to let go of such negativities as anger, hatred, or jealousy. These kind of emotions are not good for you, and not useful, so if you can let them go, how much better it is in your everyday life. These can be noticeable kinds of change.

For instance, in my own experience, when I was very young, a small child, I was very quarrelsome, I was fighting with everybody, children of my age or sometimes a little bit older, and getting angry very easily. Then I studied the Bodhicharyavatara and it changed my way of seeing things and I stopped being like that to a large degree. It was also to do with culture. In Tibet, especially in Kham, people always encourage, especially boys, to be brave. To show you are brave, you have to be a bit warrior like. For a boy, that often means being quarrelsome or

aggressive. So when I studied Bodhicharyavatara, I was less like that. I became a little warmer and softer. My point is that that didn't come from my meditation, it came from my study and contemplation. That is one of the reasons I keep on teaching Bodhicharyavatara again and again.

Even though quite a few Western Buddhists have managed to do the traditional three year retreat, most people who live in the cities and in the towns don't have that much time to do lots of meditation so to understand the Dharma can give more immediate help to their daily life. It is an important way of integrating that understanding in your life. So this is my approach.

Khandro: Rinpoche, can you tell me about when you met Traleg Rinpoche?

Rinpoche: Traleg Rinpoche is a very, very high Lama, very high Lama. I visited Rumtek Monastery and saw Traleg Rinpoche there but I did not actually meet him until later. I was studying in Sikkim Gangtok having received a scholarship from the government of India to study Sanskrit and English. Traleg Rinpoche had already left Sanskrit University when I arrived. There are lots of stories about him because he was quite naughty. There was a famous story of when he annoyed one of the teachers with his antics so much, the teacher gave him a book and told him to memorize it overnight. The teacher said if he could not recite the whole text to the teacher the next day, he could not stay at the University. So the next day Traleg Rinpoche stood in front of the teacher and recited every word of the text. The teacher reportedly put his head on Traleg Rinpoche's feet and said, please excuse me I will never say bad things about Tulkus again.

I actually met Traleg Rinpoche in the 90's at a conference of the Kagyu Lamas in Rumtek Monastery. We had many discussion in the course of the conference. At that time, Traleg Rinpoche invited me to Australia, so I came.

Khandro: I am aware you do a lot of charitable work. I wonder if you would speak about that?

Rinpoche: My charitable work is more in Tibet. Around 1979-80 I went to see the 16th Karmapa. At that time he discussed work that needed to be done back in Tibet. His Holiness also spoke about the Kangyur and now Tengyur being published. Once finished His Holiness was going to organize its distribution.

His Holiness then said I should go back to Tibet and rebuild my monastery. I was a little bit shocked because at that time we could not go to Tibet. Then in a few years time it was clear that because Tibet had opened up a little bit I could fulfill His Holiness's request. By this stage His Holiness had passed away. I came to understand that some of the monks and some of the villagers were trying to rebuild my monastery. So from then on, whenever I can I send money to help support them. It is not just me. A lot of efforts from the people there - villagers, monks and Khenpo's have been responsible for rebuilding Ringu Monastery.

Also I am very interested in education so I always wanted to build a Shedra college and build other types of educational resources at my monastery. When I went to Tibet in 2005 we built a modest Shedra college. We also built a small primary school and a medical clinic to serve the local population. I established the Ringu Trust in England to support these centres and facilities. We hold fund raising events every year to raise funds. So that work is going well.

It became clear to me that many people in the west also needed certain kinds of support. In particular end of life support for those who are very sick or dying. There is good medical support, but spiritual support, and human support seemed to often be lacking. So, we started training for the hospice environments and also training to send people to the homes of very ill people, especially for those people who are at home and want to die at home.

This has worked quite well at my Centre in Berlin, Bodhicharya where we actually have a hospice on the Centres grounds. As well as donations we receive funds from health funds, insurance payouts and so on, which allows us three full time staff and we are able to organize training for additional people to provide this much needed spiritual support. It has been

working very well.

I try to emphasise with all the Centres under my direction to try to do some project that are helping in one way or another. So there are different such activities at the different Centres. One centre was working and helping a school in a Tibetan refugee camp in India for a long time, and another centre has started school in a low caste area near Bodhgaya, and they are doing very well. It has been running for quite a few years and now has around 300 students. It also helps to train the local women in tailoring to provide them with a useful way to create an income. Special events and weddings provide very good opportunities in India for the women who now have tailoring skills.



Khandro: Could you speak more about your interest in education?

Rinpoche: With most Dharma Centres in the west you can get a lot of teachings. Visiting teachers may come and go and give all kinds of teachings but for many Centres there is not a step by step curriculum. Because of that, some people directly receive teachings on Vajrayana, or Mahamudra, and things like that, even if they have never received a teaching on the Four Noble Truths, and other essential aspects of Buddhist philosophy. There can be lots of gaps for many people. I have always wanted to have some kind of curriculum that people follow over a number of years. If possible, it would be helpful if Kagyu centres in different parts of the world can have a similar curriculum. I asked His Holiness Karmapa and he suggested I work with Mingyur Rinpoche, and other Lamas in our tradition. It has been challenging to bring the Lamas together.

I made some drafts with Mingyur Rinpoche as he was quite interested in this. These were submitted to His

Holiness Karmapa for review. Some course work has begun but more development work is needed. It could become very useful for more people to be able to follow a set curriculum, particularly if people move from one place to another, they can then continue their studies without interruption. So the first, second and third year etcetera can cover the same topics and texts to be studied. It would create a uniform standard of education to follow a set curriculum of teachings and practices. It is something I have been thinking about a lot, and I think it is slowly happening.

We now have lots of learned Khenpos in India and Nepal. The different Shedras have been producing brilliant scholars, and many great practitioners from retreat. Also many of the nunneries now also have Shedra and some brilliant young monastic groups are coming out of this. They are often trained in the traditional Tibetan style so there remain some challenges if they are to be able to teach in the West and more broadly in the world. Sometimes it can be difficult to connect because of the different cultures. So I think it would be a very useful to have some additional training from experienced Lamas and other people such as scientist and other western fields of enquiry. Just before Covid hit such training began in Bodhgaya about 2019 with Khenpo David Choephel from Thrangu Monastery, Matthieu Ricard and Mingyur Rinpoche. It went for about one week and it was quite useful. We were not able to continue because of the Covid.

Khandro: I wish you all the best with your plans for a standardized curriculum for the Kagyu School and its many Centres, and additional training for Shedra graduates and Retreatants who will be teaching in different parts of the world.

The diversity of your work and efforts throughout the world are very inspiring. I hope you will be able to teach again at E-Vam Institute when you next come to Australia.

Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview.

Rinpoche: Thank you very much, it is my pleasure. ■

Interview with Natalia Bullon of Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre, New Zealand

Traleq Khandro



Khandro: Natalia I want to thank you for your time today, I really appreciate it.

Natalia: Thank you

Khandro: Would you talk about how you came to Buddhism?

Natalia: I was always interested in mind and how the mind works. Since I was very young, I was always interested in knowing myself, what was behind my personal issues, how I relate to my problems, because I was a very contrary person and I didn't have the tools. Also I was born into a traditional catholic family, and had a religious catholic education. I always knew that there was something beyond what we are, you know, in that case, God.

So my way of thinking was always related to the idea that there is something that moves us and there is something that is behind us, something like that. Before I came to New Zealand, I was starting to go to Buddhist temples and Buddhist centres in Chile, in Peru, but just visiting them. I knew they had something I was interested in, meditation, but I couldn't establish the habit of meditating. At some point, I thought meditation is not for me, because I couldn't do it, but I was very determined

to get to know how to do it, that is why I kept visiting temples or centres in Chile.

Once I came here to New Zealand, I came across Nyima Tashi Centre and that's how I started. I came to meditation every Tuesday and then to classes to study Buddhism and then eventually I decided to become a Buddhist. And why? Because I felt that meditation, the approach given in the Buddhist tradition, is very methodic and has a framework, and it works for me. And it worked for my mind. I need a kind of a structure, so that is how I started with practice, and then little by little, I took up Shedra studies. It made more sense and so eventually that is how I entered Buddhism.

Khandro: That's very interesting. At Nyima Tashi you have become involved in many things such as developing their social media more and also translating Ani Jangchub's talks into Spanish. But before we talk about that, I was very interested in what you said about the impact of having a structure had on your meditation practice. And I just wonder if you would speak a little bit more about the importance that you have found in having a structured meditation practice?

Natalia: What happens is it comes with perhaps my education and my background as a scientist; it's like you need to know some tools to overcome certain problems, or what to use if something is not moving in the right direction. When you do science or you do certain experiments, if the solution is broken because you added too much, I don't know, salt, you know how to separate them again and you use a centrifuge or another solution that has more polarity. So you know what to use, even though you don't know how to fix it, you know what to use. And it's more like the same for meditation in the Buddhist tradition for me. I started with very basic instruction, just sit and come back to the object of meditation again and again and again. Once I knew that, then I could use that instruction to work with obstacles that came up in meditation. So if you get very drowsy, then you use mindfulness, use awareness to come back. If you detect sceptical dialogue, then you return to the object. So it was very useful to know what to use when I found certain obstacles. That is why I say it is an instruction that way, and also to know the certain levels of shamatha—first level is this, second level is this, and then you know oh okay perhaps I'm at the first level—that there is a path and that gives you some sort of security in the path, that it is a very step by step method. It's not something that "Oh you will feel it." It gives you security that if you continue to follow the guidance and instructions properly, even if it lasts one hundred years, you will get there.

Khandro: Could you talk a little about your work as a scientist?

Natalia: Well I just finished my PhD in Marine Biology, marine science, and I wanted to make, maybe add something to this field. This is a clearer example of what I was saying. When you get into university, you want to push for a degree. You choose your study area and the curriculum is established in a way that the person, if the person follows the path, if they study biology the first year, human

anatomy let's say, the second year, or health and environment, microbiology second year, third year, they know that by the end of the 3.5 or 4 years they will become marine biologists or a biologist, just following those steps, and that gives you faith in the path. It's the same with meditation in the Buddhist tradition.

In terms of the studies, the doctorate, I'm a pharmacist, that's my main background. And now I can integrate marine biology and marine science.

Khandro: Congratulations for putting in your dissertation. It would have been a number of years of really hard work, so I congratulate you for that. I'd like you to speak a little bit more about your time at Nyima Tashi.

Natalia: There is a huge interest, I would say in the South American population in general, to know about themselves but because of the language, there is not such a vast number of Buddhist teachings. There are some meditation books, some meditation audio or podcasts that translate the purity of the Dharma into Spanish. So the opportunity to do translation work at Nyima Tashi came up because of the vast number of teachings from Traleg Rinpoche, which are very sophisticated and very articulate and go to the core of the Dharma and its purity. So it was just basically to promote Dharma, in a way that Dharma is not necessarily what people in South America think it is, seeing someone in monastic robes and just maybe thinking, oh they are Eastern people. Buddhism is vaster than that, it includes ethics, many other things such as meditation itself, the Four Noble Truths, all the things and by having a translation,

the Spanish people can find out what the Dharma is about really.

Khandro: So your efforts supported by Ani Jangchub's talks and Traleg Rinpoche's teachings is increasing the availability for the Spanish speaking community in New Zealand mainly and overseas so that is quite a gift for those people. I'm interested in what you said about South American population in general, that there is a great interest in the mind. Were you meaning in how the mind works?

Natalia: Yes, correct. I think that is true for people in South America. What I detected in New Zealand is that immigrants, because we face loneliness and often starting life all over again, we are out of our comfort zone and everything falls apart, in a way there is this need to understand ourselves. Especially young people like me in the West are quite interested in knowing why we are the way we are. Not from a particular point of view but as interesting observation and with curiosity, why we react the way we react, and that is where meditation comes into play. For me, that's why I'm so interested in meditation because it's just like an exercise of observation with curiosity and it can be a good source of developing a sense of humour. Also what arises is this scientific action, to know, what to apply when this comes up. How do I manage this equation when I don't know for example, I'm falling asleep in meditation? So people in New Zealand are more receptive, I would say because of our situation as an immigrant.

Khandro: That is so interesting. You also use social media to really inspire young

people and I don't know if it's in particular but also inclusive of South American young people, it seems to me. And I'm just interested in your mission in wanting to in a sense be of help or be of service to your generation both broadly and also the South American young people. What drives that interest that you have in wanting to be a support and help to others?

Natalia: I think it comes from what I've seen at Nyima Tashi. I have been a resident for around five or six years and I realise that it is driven by Traleg Rinpoche's wisdom and his focus on interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue and diversity. Diversity is a gift. I came across this because of his books. I don't know Traleg Rinpoche, but I can see that in his teachings, for example in Buddhist Summer Schools when different teachers from different traditions are invited to the Centre, there is this very gentle, open discussion and dialogue without any identification of one being better than the other. This is very unusual for me because this is what is seen in academia, this rapaciousness, this attitude of this is the truth. And that is what motivates me to open-mindedness. This wisdom has this quality of being tolerant to many different views, and that is what I try to express in my social media, which is quite diverse. Buddhism is special, it has something beneficial, like many other traditions as well including Western disciplines, such as psychotherapy and so on. There are many different things that can be of benefit and that we can relate to.

Khandro: Wonderful. Thank you so much. ■



MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS BENEFITS

Please see the E-Vam Institute website site <https://evaminstitute.org/membership> for details about our membership options and benefits.

49 Day Prayers for Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche



Nyima Gelek and Ani Jangchub Lhamo represented Traleg Rinpoche's Sangha at the final days of the 49 Day Prayers for Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's parinirvana in Nepal.

Nyima Gelek and Ani Jangchub Lhamo travelled to Namu Buddha Monastery in July to participate in the prayers within the 49 day's of Thrangu Rinpoche's parinirvana. They were able to pay their respects to Thrangu Rinpoche's Kudung, and celebrate Thrangu Rinpoche's remarkable and extensive Dharma activities over his long life.

Upon arrival at Kathmandu airport, Nyima La was greeted by some of the Lamas and driven to Namu Buddha, as was Ani Jangchub a few days later.

Thanks to the generosity of the E-Vam Melbourne Sangha, Nyima La distributed our Sangha's combined donations to the monastic community. Nyima La

consulted with the head Lamas regarding the distribution of the donations and they suggested that it could be given individually to each member of the monastic community. So Nyima La exchanged the Australian dollars to local currency which he then personally distributed to the monks and nuns when they were assembled in the main Gompa for puja, as is done traditionally.

On behalf of myself and the E-Vam U.S. sangha, Nyima also made offerings to Zuri Rinpoche, Lodro Nyima Rinpoche, Tulku Damcho, and some of the head Lamas. Nyima La personally sponsored 1,000 Butter Lamps dedicating these offerings for health and long life of Traleg Rinpoche's Yangsi, and for the continued strength and health of Traleg Rinpoche's Centres. Nyima La told me that the power of many 100's of monastics chanting all together through the many pujas and

prayers in the beautiful Namu Buddha Gompa was a profound experience, where one's mind could not help but turn to the Dharma.

After the 49 day pujas were completed, Nyima La and Ani Jangchub were able to spend a little time with Zuri Rinpoche and some of his Sangha. They visited Thrangu Rinpoche's Shedra College and some significant Buddhist sights in the surrounding area. Nyima La made time also to make some purchases for the Akshara bookshop at E-Vam in Carlton – statues, incense, malas and mala bags, which are now on display for purchase at the bookshop.

We thank both Nyima Gelek and Ani Jangchub Lhamo for representing Traleg Rinpoche's Centres and Sangha so beautifully at these important and historic proceedings. ■

News from E-Vam Institute



participants had the opportunity to practice meditation and listen to audio teachings on Mindfulness by Traleg Rinpoche.

Part 1 of the course focused on “What is Mindfulness?” with Rinpoche debunking modern misconceptions surrounding mindfulness. Rather than “just being in the now,” Rinpoche explained that mindfulness is about remembrance—choosing what to remember and what to forget. Part 2 of the course focused on how Mindfulness can actually benefit us. Rinpoche explored amongst many insights, how mindfulness practice is a transformative approach and that just being mindful in itself, is not helpful. Rinpoche explained how self-acceptance is to be encouraged and that it is important to dwell on positive thoughts and experiences. In contrast to the misconception that Buddhism rejects all attachments—“holding on” to helpful emotions and using them wisely is important and necessary in gathering the merit and confidence we need to transform our perception.

Monthly Urban Retreats for the Under 35s demonstrated the current generation’s affinity for meditation and Dharmic ideas. Each month, participants engaged with Traleg Rinpoche’s integrated approach, which includes not just Meditation, but all three trainings—lots of Shamatha practice, teachings, and discussions on key concepts of Buddhism and the practice of the Four Immeasurables.

Each month, a small group has gathered to continue the practice of “A Chariot of Great Merit,” a Vajrasattva Sadhana of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition, and the E-Vam Members had the incredible blessing of listening to Rinpoche each week as they continued to study Traleg Rinpoche’s incredible teachings on Longchenpa’s Natural Freedom of Mind.

The broader community also gathered for many beautiful Chenrezig practices. Notably, the Sangha came together for a heartfelt practice in August following the sad news of the passing of Traleg Rinpoche’s exceptional nephew Tenzin (Tim).

Upon hearing of Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche’s ill health in May, the E-Vam community joined the world in prayer, accumulating many Amithaba mantras. After the News of Rinpoche’s passing, this practice continued more fervently resulting in a great number of mantras being offered to Thrangu Tara Abbey. A special puja was held in honour of Thrangu Rinpoche, and it was inspiring to see many people participate to pay respects to such an influential master. A video of the community practicing “Calling the Guru from Afar” was sent to the Thrangu Lamas as a sign of our support and throughout seven Sundays, we held online practice sessions of “Calling the Guru from Afar.” Thank you everyone for your combined prayers, this was inspiring, and thank you to all who offered donations, supporting our community offering to Namu Buddha Monastery. We pray wholeheartedly for Rinpoche’s swift return.

In July, we came together in remembrance for the 11th anniversary of the Parinirvana of Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. A beautiful Puja with a feast offering was held and it was very moving to see both in-person and online attendees express their devotion together. Thank you to Jarrah Wishart for prayer leading and to Shogam Publications for the profound remembrance video we watched of Rinpoche.

Weekly meditation classes, both in-

person and online began at E-Vam, with clear and eloquent instruction by meditation instructor Matthew Dawson. The class has built into a regular group of committed meditators. Participants receive weekly quotes on meditation and an opportunity to refine their practice of Shamatha—a healthy addition to the program!



Do Tulku Rinpoche, resuming teachings on “The Way of the Bodhisattva,” is developing a devoted audience and it is clear that people resonate with Rinpoche’s heartfelt and genuine style. Rinpoche’s teachings are a real lesson in the power of taking one’s time to connect with a text, making the effort to imaginatively connect what one is learning with one’s own experience. We are very fortunate to study these teachings and so deeply with Do Tulku Rinpoche.

During this period, we hosted the “Mindfulness Living Series,” where

Ekai Korematsu Roshi continued teaching at E-Vam Institute on Zen Master Dōgen’s: *Sesshin Seshhō* (On Expressing One’s True Nature by Expressing One’s Intent). Ekai Roshi dynamically explored the meaning of this text, and how it relates to going beyond the mere engaging in intellectual discussions about the nature of the mind. And how “expressing one’s intent,” specifically refers to actively manifesting one’s spiritual intention. Such rich and nuanced teachings. Thank you Ekai Korematsu Roshi, and all who attended.

Thank you to all the volunteers and all the participants for your inspiring support and continued engagement in the Dharma. ■

Mark Dawson



News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre Auckland, New Zealand



Tēnā koutou katoa from Auckland, Aotearoa and the sangha of Nyima Tashi. We hope you are all well as we emerge from winter into our southern hemisphere spring. Our northern hemisphere friends have had a turbulent summer of extreme heat and wildfires. The uncertainty pertaining the weather, from flooding rains and wild storms to bush fires is swiftly becoming part of our everyday vocabulary. Our lives are busier and busier, with unrelenting pressures and demands and so we must firmly hold to some kind of sanity without expecting reprieve from the onslaught. It sometimes seems so easy to get caught up in the mele.

It is in these times that the steady presence of a Dharma Centre—and a



Centre which is held in the view of a Great Master such as Traleg Rinpoche is a precious jewel like no other. The regular rhythm of weekly meditation classes, coming together to recite prayers with a shared purpose, Shedra, becomes a life raft—something which brings buoyancy in an effortless kind of way. The flame that is the continued Blessings of Traleg Rinpoche is sustaining us in ways we often forget.

The 2024 Auckland Buddhist Summer School on January 11-14 will be a moment to pause and reflect as we pay homage to the enduring legacy of His Eminence the 9th Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche. Rinpoche’s skill in illuminating

the Dharma has allowed the precious teachings to advance into contemporary settings without distorting Buddhist truths—which is not an easy task.

Although His Life seemed brief, Rinpoche’s brilliance and expansive intelligence continues to motivate a new generation of students with clarity and precision.

There will be a variety of Rinpoche’s Talks on offer at the 2024 Auckland Buddhist Summer School—some of these talks have not been aired outside of NZ, there is an intimacy and vibrancy imbued with humour, joy, and tenderness. We look forward to announcing more details about the programme in the coming weeks.

Nyima Tashi continues to offer accommodation, with guests coming and going every day. We are delighted and honoured to be hosting a Buddhist Wedding in the coming weeks, with the wedding party staying overnight in the Centre holding their Wedding feast in the Centre too. It is uplifting to come together as a sangha in the weeks leading up to the ceremony in an effort to really make the Centre shine in honour of the nuptials.

As a timely reminder, there are a number of retreat rooms at Nyima Tashi available on an ongoing basis for urban retreat. Bookings can be made through [booking.com](https://www.booking.com).

We send our warmest wishes to you all and very much look forward to reading this coming issue of *Wheel of Times*. ■

News from Maitripa Centre



inspection, the books remain in good condition, and we thank Felicity and Sal so much for their time and involvement in this important project.

Anthony and Lisa have been working together to re-establish some of the garden beds around the property, which have been heavily grazed by deer & rabbits. This is an ongoing process, with further deterrents to be established, and plants to be tested. We are very grateful that Anthony and Lisa are providing this much needed attention to the gardens that are such a great aspect of Maitripa's environment and an enhancement to visitors experience.

Throughout August and July, we had the pleasure of hosting several groups, including the annual Hoop Away retreat with Hoop Sparx; The Healing Academy; Ikon Institute of Australia's 5 day Ecotherapy intensive as well as Underwood Healing's Sound Healing retreat focusing on the Heart Sutra. Looking to the next few months, we are excited to be having our own E-Vam retreat in October as well as possibly opening for solo retreat in December (stay tuned). If you would like to be added to the mailing list for the Solo Retreat opportunity, please send an email to info@maitripacentre.org. Wishing everyone a warm and prosperous Spring ahead. ■

Daniel Blaze

Throughout the winter months this year, Maitripa Centre has been active with group hires and various renovations. With a quieter month in June, we were able to complete some necessary repairs and renovations to the lower buildings, as well as renovate and re-paint one of the main bathroom blocks. We also upgraded the plumbing to improve the water service to the newly



renovated bathroom. This work has been in planning for a while, so it is great to have finally accomplished this improvement to the property.

Also in June, Felicity and Salvatore visited for a few days as part of an ongoing initiative to care for and protect Traleg Rinpoche IX's precious books, which are currently in storage at Maitripa. It was great to see that upon

5-Day Retreat: October 13-18

THE FOUR YOGAS OF MAHAMUDRA

Maitripa Contemplative Centre, Healesville and On-line

- Audio teachings by Traleg Rinpoche
- Sitting and walking meditation
- Tibetan Yoga
- Green Tara and Chenrezig pujas

News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute U.S.



Lama Jinpa

In E-Vam U.S.'s Summer semester, we welcomed back Lama Jinpa from the KTD community to continue his commentary and reflections on Traleg Rinpoche's *Moonbeams of Mahamudra*. In the series of talks, Lama Jinpa discussed the importance of accommodating what arises in the mind, among other essential themes within the Mahamudra approach to managing the mind in meditation. We

thank Lama Jinpa for his ongoing involvement in E-Vam's activities and his heartfelt and thorough approach to discussing these important teachings in such a practical way.

Coming up in our online program October through to the end of the year, I will be leading a Tibetan Yoga practice weekend focused on a review of the Chime Palter sequence for the students

who have attended prior courses with me. Also beginning mid-October is a six week program held online each Tuesday evening (7pm New York time) reviewing the Dzogchen meditation techniques based on Traleg Rinpoche's teachings included in his book, *Actuality of Being*.

Details will be online soon. For further details please contact E-Vam U.S. office@evam.org ■

Traleg Khandro

News from Shogam Publications



We are excited to announce that a new book of Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche's teachings is due for release in time for Christmas this year. *Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral translation and commentary* is a seminal Dzogchen text. Rinpoche intertwines the root text with detailed and spontaneous oral commentary, revealing the essential meaning of these profound teachings. The book contains three Cycles—Mind, Ultimate Reality, and Equality. Within each Cycle, as well as receiving the profound teachings that challenge all dualistic notions of self and phenomena, Longchenpa also gives concise instructions on how to practice these teachings within a retreat situation. Rinpoche's erudite description provides the greatest opportunity for these transformative teachings to not only be known, but also experienced.

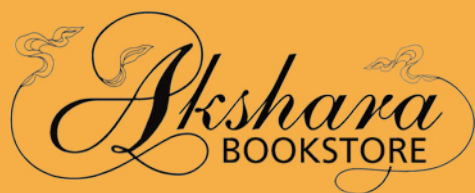
Shogam's documentary *Beyond Two Worlds: Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX* is the feature movie for the Tricycle Film Club for the month of January, 2024. If you are not a subscriber to Tricycle, you may want to consider it to have the opportunity to watch not only *Beyond Two Worlds*, but other wonderful Buddhist and related movies in the Tricycle film and documentary selection <https://tricycle.org/filmclub>.

For release early 2024, Shogam is teaming up again with E-Vam Institute to produce the *Journal Of Integral Buddhism*. This will be Volume 2 and will present papers from a range of schools within Buddhism, and provide academic and comparative perspectives as well. We hope you will continue to support this initiative whose existence was born out of a wish that Traleg Rinpoche shared for the existence of such a journal. ■

Traleg Khandro

News from Akshara Bookstore

Akshara Bookstore has recently replenished its stock with a variety of beautiful statues, malas, offering bowls, and incense! These ritual items, along with many wonderful book titles, are now available for you to explore. To enquire or place an order, feel free to contact Akshara Bookstore at 03 9387 0422 or drop an email at info@evaminstitute.org



E-Vam Institute Spring Teaching Program 2023



Weekly Meditation Thursdays 6.00pm-6.45pm In-person and on-line

Meditating in a group can provide the support we all need to establish and maintain a regular meditation practice. The weekly meditation series runs in 6x week blocks with 2

weeks off until the end of the year. Please check the website for the schedule.

An Evening and Day of Teachings and Practice: A Series on Meditation, Life, and Spiritual Maturity: Embracing the Three Yanas as the Path

September 29-30: Part 1

The Foundations of Buddhism

November 17-18: Part 2

Purification, Transformation & Self-liberation



The Evening and Day of Teachings and Practice includes meditation sessions and teachings from Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX. Emphasizing the dynamic nature of Tibetan Buddhism through the Three Yana system, Rinpoche provides a comprehensive guide to

incorporating the discipline of Hinayana, the engagement of Mahayana, and the richness of the Vajrayana, as a complete Path towards spiritual maturity. You can attend all or part of the series.



5-Day Retreat: October 13-18 Maitripa Contemplative Centre, Healesville and On-line

Upholding the retreat format provided by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, the E-Vam Institute retreats include structured time for sitting and walking meditation, Green Tara and Chenrezig pujas, recorded teachings by Traleg Rinpoche, and yoga. During this retreat we will have the opportunity to listen to teachings on the Four Yogas of Mahamudra. Traleg Rinpoche guides us through the each of the yogas and helps us appreciate that we practice to “become what we are”, rather than grasping at enlightenment as something to be acquired.

Khenpo Chonyi Rangdrol On-Line Teachings: November 10 and 17

Details of Khenpo-la's annual teaching series will be announced soon.



Monthly Chenrezig Puja First Friday of every month 7.30-8.30pm On-line and in-person

In times of great strife and suffering in the world, gathering together to invoke Chenrezig who embodies

compassion, is a means to care for both ourselves and others.

UNDER 35s PROGRAM



Under 35s Urban Retreat: Every last Sunday of the month 9.30-4.30pm

Traleg Rinpoche IX encouraged students to take an integral approach to Buddhism; one of the ways this is practised is through urban retreats. The urban retreat includes mindfulness meditation, pranayama & indo-tibetan yoga, audio teachings on key Buddhist concepts (new topic each month!), group discussions, and the Four Immeasurable meditations.



Monthly Vajrasattva Practice: First Sunday of Every Month 10am-1pm

For those curious about practice within the Tibetan Buddhist system, we offer a monthly practice of Vajrasattva entitled “A Chariot of Great Merit”, a Vajrasattva Sadhana

of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition revealed by the Tertön Garwang Drodrul Lingpa Tsal. These sessions are suitable for beginners.

Courses are both in-person at E-Vam Institute in Princess Hill and on-line unless otherwise stated. All courses are open to those new to Buddhism.



SAVE THE DATES

Buddhist Summer School

13-16th January 2024

Program coming soon

