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Religion and Spirituality

Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche



This is the second and third talks of a three session course that Rinpoche gave discussing the relationship between religion and spirituality, given at the Buddhist Summer School in Melbourne 2010. The first talk can be found in the September 2023 newsletter online at <https://evaminstitute.org/news-and-free-teachings-2>

TALK TWO

Is Buddhism a religion, or a form of spirituality? This question is often asked. This question assumes that there is a clear distinction, that the two can be separate things. The notions of religion and spirituality should go together, they should be in harmony, particularly if we follow our religious traditions properly. That is really the key to this discussion. Religion can be full of contradictions, as we discussed in the first talk. Religions can appear to promote both violence and peace. Religion says there are times when we should feast, and other times when we should fast. It also says one should be socially engaged, and at other times be socially disengaged, such as, live in isolation, go on retreat or become a hermit, and so on. Religion may say to feast on our senses, and

then to abstain from sense pleasures.

So as Buddhists we have to work out how to deal with the issue of contradiction, as a religious person and as a spiritual person, and that is something we can and should do. The religious aspects themselves are not to be blamed for all the bad things that go on in the world. Fundamentalistic beliefs and systems be they religious or not, can find their followers caught up in extreme views and belief systems. It is not because of the religion as such, but it is because of how religion itself has been incorporated or appropriated by the individuals. They have lost sight of the spiritual aspect. They have lost sight of the main intentions for the guidelines within their religion. When one is becoming too religious - focusing on one aspect too much rather than being more



encompassing, they have forgotten their inner self and their inner nature. When the inner nature is forgotten one becomes too focussed on the external. For example, if one only reads one sacred book, or only a favorite passage in a sacred text. Scriptures and excerpts from religious texts can easily be taken out of context and taken literally. Instead of going further into the meaning of the sacred texts and books, contemplating them and seeking to understand their essence and meaning, one simply take some of the words at face value and out of context. As an example, if one takes part of the Bhagavad Gita too literally you may see it as talking about fighting and violence, which of course it is not.

A spiritual person would always seeks to understand and learn the traditional literature in a deeper way, to go behind the written word. If you really want to understand your own religious tradition, if you are serious, you need to do that. One should not just be satisfied with what

avoid ritualistic things. As I spoke about previously, when you take someone out for a romantic candlelight dinner, there are protocols - how one dresses and prepares for the evening, ones behavior towards the guest, and so on. Ritual is part of everything we do, and there is nothing wrong with that, it can be a good thing. From a spiritual perspective it helps with transformation, to transform ourselves spiritually. It is only when we use rituals in combination with dogma that serious issues can emerge. So, where does the dogma come from? From a religious perspective, dogma comes from taking what is written in our holy scriptures too literally. If we spend a bit of time reading the scriptures properly, and go behind the written words to the deeper inner meaning, we would become richer, having developed a better understanding.

Ritualistic practices should be seen as a means to an end. The ritual is the boat, that takes us to the distant shore of enlightenment. It is not enlightenment

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one finds in a written book alone, and say, 'Well this is what the holy book says, the holy book says – “I must stamp out intruders”, and then go off on some rampage. One should not resort to violence. Instead, one should contemplate and consider what is actually being said, and what is the deeper meaning, what is the intention. In the Buddhist tradition, for examples, the literatures often use metaphorical language, interpretative and symbolic language. I believe metaphorical language is used liberally in all religious literatures, perhaps even more so in Buddhism.

This is something that needs to be taken seriously, then we can develop a deeper understanding of the meaning and intention behind the ritual and other practices. In religion, there are all kinds of rituals. Non religious rituals form an important part of our everyday life as well, outside the religion context. We cannot

itself. When we become too religious, the rituals themselves become the end, and the holy scripture becomes the end, but they are not the end. Even if one can recite certain passages from the bible, Koran, Dharmapada or the Bhagavad Gita that does not mean the person also has a deep understanding of its meaning. If we already believe we have the truth in the words alone, there is no journey, there is no journey of the soul, our journey lacks soul. If you believe you have already worked it all out, and believe you know what the truth is because it is written and you read it, then no inner journey has been embarked on. It remains external. The truth is in what you are doing ritualistically, even in terms of abstinence or indulgence or whatever it might be.

So how do we integrate the essence of the meaning is the question to be discussed. We become more spiritual when we are not so fixated on the rituals;

fixed ideas of ethics, morality, social agendas and so on. As a spiritual person, to develop, one cannot have fixed ideas or fixed notions about anything. That does not mean that morally one is not making distinctions between what is good or bad, it means not getting fixated on what is good or bad. When one becomes fixated, it has nothing to do with whether something is really good or not, it has more to do with ones own psychological state. For example, if you think something is bad, it becomes bad and one locks in around that as a type of ultimate truth. Then you don't want anybody else to do that activity, because you have decided nobody should. If we have more openness - tolerance and patience and so on one can be more open in terms of what is more beneficial and more helpful.

In Buddhism, for example, we talk about what brings more benefit and happiness to people, as the Dalai Lama keeps on saying, rather than what we think is right, or just. Sometimes what we think is right or just actually brings unhappiness to other people. We may think we are on the side of the righteousness and may become moral crusaders, saying, 'you should be like this', for example, if a westerner wants to instruct people in the third world countries about how they should behave and live their lives.

We can become too preoccupied by what we care about, whether it is religion, social issues or what ever it might be and then dogmatism can arise. Having a moral code should not mean we stop being open. If we have morality in combination with openness we can grow. We can never develop or really grow if we believe we have already worked out the solution, if it is already pre-empted. If we are approaching any type of issue where we believe we have the solution, and all that is needed is for others to follow our instructions, we believe everything will then be wonderful. Everybody will be singing with joy, 'what a wonderful world this now is'. Of course we know that is not how the world works and such thought processes have to do with attempting to control the external circumstances, and have little or nothing to do with openness and inner growth.



So what Buddhism says is really that the reason why we need to develop as individuals - build compassion and love for all beings and so on. We have to be moral, act ethically, and consider our actions. All of that is necessary because of the world we live in and the state of things. If we believe we already have all the answers we will not see the need to be moral or ethical in relation to caring for others. When people want to implement certain things to make things better, it is approximating what is believed may help. We are essentially guessing. Many causes and conditions come into play with the instigation of any new initiatives. With openness one will realize they will be learning as they proceed. From a Buddhist perspective this relates to the wisdom that comes from understanding and contemplating interdependence.

Let's return to the discussion regarding moral issues and social issues.

The seeming contradictions within religions including Buddhism of feasting and fasting, abstinence and indulgence, and all of that, really can be reconciled. Even in terms of people who we believe are living this lifestyle of total restraint and a renunciant's life. Even Buddhist renunciants, sometimes they fast

sometimes they feast. Even the retreatants who live in caves have feast days, and then they fast. What is important about these practices is, if you really think about it in the spiritual way, it is about exercising, about building oneself up in terms of strength. You have to be strong as a person.

Buddhism teaches that it is important to be strong. To develop spiritually you have to be a strong person, you cannot be a weak willed person. If you are too weak then you will suffer from all kinds of malaise, but if you are strong then you develop more quickly. So feasting and fasting, restraint and indulgence, going back and forth, back and forth, builds up strength and resilience. If you are behaving in only one particular way, then you become habituated in that way, so then it is not helpful. But if you are going back and forth, it is more dangerous, but it builds you up. If one feasts and then fasts one can become stronger. Normally if you are used to eating too much, constantly eating and indulging in that way or if we fast and not eat sufficiently and become emaciated, there will be weakness emerging within those two extremes. These practices of working with different situations and circumstances from a Buddhist perspective is seen as very

helpful. It is the same with social engagement. What Buddhism says, is that politically we should take interest, we should be engaged, but on the other hand we should also be disengaged.

In other words to develop spiritually from a Buddhist point of view, engagement and disengagement should go together all the time. So we are engaged and we are disengaged. That may sound peculiar, but it is not because if we get too engaged, we get too upset about something or other and then we lose perspective, and if we are too disengaged we lose interest. So it makes sense that we should be engaged and disengaged at the same time.

If we look at the hermit in Buddhism or the Sadhu in Hinduism, we can see they live in a somewhat homeless manner, sometimes as hermits, then at other times mixing with people, and then going off and doing a variety of religious and spiritual practices. They do not shy away from people, they are quite happy to share their life with others. Both isolation and communality are integral in their spiritual and religious journey.

From the moral/ethical perspective and the sensory level, what we smell, taste, touch, feel, and hear, the same principle applies, that of being engaged and disengaged. Not too engrossed nor too distracted, engaged with the senses but not excessively distracted by them. If we do that then we can grow as a spiritual person. If we do not then we do not grow, instead we become fixated. We become fixated on whatever it is, like 'I don't want this, I don't want to deal with this, I don't like this, I don't like that, or I like this, I like that'. Buddhism is always talking about how we feel, our likes, dislikes, desires, anger, resentment, jealousy, pride. As spiritual people we need to deal with all of these aspects - because how we engage with people on the social level, moral and ethical level, psychological level in every way is based on developing an understanding of what is beneficial, and what is helpful. As I mentioned, even with the notion of morality, it often comes down to what we like or don't like, or what we approve of, or don't approve of. There may not be much consideration about what is beneficial and helpful. What is

believed to be right may not be beneficial, it depends on the accompanying circumstances. That is the Buddhist view. Often, people tend to think that what is right is right, and that version of “right” should be good for everybody. From a moralistic perspective what is seen as right is not necessarily beneficial. What is beneficial may not be right from a strictly moralistic perspective, but it can still be beneficial.

As a spiritual person we need to keep an open mind and keep on learning, rather than feeling we know what we need and then lock down. Buddhism talks about paths and stages of development. If we believe we can work everything out in advance then we are saying we don't have to learn anything. Even in the teachings about the path and stages it says these are just guidelines. You do not take them literally. It is not a description of how the stages will be or exactly how the path is going to pan out. They are important guidelines, but they are just guidelines to follow. We learn on the path, and develop on the path. The inner meaning opens up over time. So we keep on learning, but we have to have some kind of guideline and that is what Buddhist teachings provide.

TALK 3

As I have mentioned religion has the potential to be abused but spirituality in its true essence cannot be subject to abuse, because spirituality is something that occurs inside the person, the living human being. Many aspects of religious practice can be abused if we think our religious activity is the “end” rather than the “means”. For example, if chanting becomes an end in itself, reciting certain passages from the sacred scriptures, praying, circumambulation of stupas and reliquaries become an end in themselves. If all those religious activities become an end in themselves, instead of thinking they are the vehicles for ones spiritual development, then we cannot flourish spiritually. When we use prayers, circumambulation and recitation and things of that kind to develop ourselves spiritually, we flourish. Otherwise, we may become too fixated. For example, if we work towards improving reciting the scriptures better but do not delve into



their deeper meaning, or circumambulate a stupa more than others but do not take the activity to heart, or light the candle in a better way than others but do not enhance our mindfulness, we are becoming fixated on the act of doing, instead of seeking inner development and transformation.

Invocation and evocation are very important part of religious practice. We invoke and evoke our ancestors, saints, masters and divine beings such as gods and deities. This can seem problematic if we are looking at it as an objective truth. Simply because one may appeal to a divine being, deity or Master, does not mean one actually believes somebody is out there with all the characteristics and the attributes you are attributing to them. You don't have to actually think about it in that way. We often insist on over-conceptualizing everything, simply thinking too much. We are always conceptualising but we can ruin things through over-conceptualisation. As an example, we can think about when we are falling in love, 'Does she love me? Doesn't she love me? What does this mean?' or 'why is he not calling me, or why is he calling so much. What is it all about?' We do the same thing when we practice meditation. We either engage in too much conceptuality or sit there and nothing is happening. 'I've been sitting for seven days, nothing has happened, I'm just sitting there and nothing has happened, this is so boring. I thought something fantastic might happen, but nothing, zero.'

But the more you think like that the less you are going to get any kind of sensation of awakening.

What Buddhism teaches is, whatever you need for your own enrichment you should seek it. It is an expedient method in that way. It is nothing to do with the truth or non-truth. It doesn't get complicated in that way. If you need something, you then appeal for that skillfully and it will manifest within. So if you appeal to Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara or Tara or another deity, you will benefit, if you are not over-conceptualising. If you are not full of expectation and endlessly thinking different things such as thinking, 'I've been praying to Tara for seven days and nothing has changed, I'm still single!' Buddhism is a religion it is not just spirituality, so this kind of belief system is an important part of Buddhism. Having genuine belief and faith in the path one can benefit enormously. If you do not believe in these things then we cannot have depth of experience. One can feel lonely, adrift, feel cut off from other people, and find it difficult to relate to others, and then you have no one to call out to in your darkest moments. When we have some faith and call out to a Deity such as Tara, generate their qualities within, then we can feel protected, connected, enriched and looked after.

When you become familiar with some chants, and can chant with a focussed mind, it can help your spiritual development. If we are overthinking

instead of involving ourselves in the activity of chanting there maybe no benefit. If we involve ourselves fully in what we are chanting it can be so meaningful, and personally transformative. If one is full of thoughts and doubts while chanting then we cut ourselves off from the benefits. When we chant properly, that in itself, even on the physiological level, brings transformation. From an esoteric perspective, in tantricism it is said that by chanting with a clear open mind one activates ones energy centres, the chakras. There are all kinds of benefits associated even with chanting, just using your own voice. Using your voice, using your body, chanting, singing, all of these things can be an aid to spiritual transformation.

With the visualisation of deities we can see them as beings out there, but they also become part of us, we generate their qualities within ourselves in order to experience them. They represent various aspects of ourselves, so they are outside of us and not outside of us at the same time. This idea is not as bizarre as it sounds, because all these deities have attributes and qualities that individually and collectively can be attributed to certain human beings. What we regard as qualities of a divine beings are human beings at their fullest potential. We can relate to the qualities they are said to possess and have perfected. In that sense they have some kind of existence or reality, one could say. In other words they are not just made up by an individual person, one person does not simply think of Tara or Avalokiteshvara. Many human beings think of divine beings having certain attributes, and if we appeal to them, and develop a relationship with their attributes and characteristics, and these attributes and characteristics are understood, we experience the deity as part of oneself. There is a changing developing relationship that occurs.

In contrast a fanatical religious person always comes into the picture with a pre-established belief system that they believe is right, 'this is right, this is wrong, this is what is to be believed, that is not to be believed', etc. A spiritual person on the other hand, does not think in that way. So when that person has a relationship with

their divine beings they are more likely to think of the divine beings as being integrative, rather than objectively existing. With an exclusively objective relationship the considerations become different and external, 'am I obeying this divine being or not', 'am I offending this divine being or not', 'am I going to be punished by this divine being or not'.

From a Buddhist perspective a spiritual person understands that whatever divine being or deity they have a relationship with, is not separate from themselves. So that divine being is an integral part of one's own psyche and one's own being. Even in the most esoteric practices of tantric Buddhism, the whole notion is about bringing the expression of the divine energy into oneself, incorporating the divine being into oneself. So it is a self-empowering exercise, as opposed to a disempowering exercise. Disempowerment can occur due to slavish commitment to religiosity, where one just surrenders to the divine image as an objective manifestation, rather than incorporating it into ones psyche. One

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can think of oneself as nothing, 'I'm nothing, please forgive me I have sinned, I am a bad person, I've not yet managed to do things that I want to do, but please forgive me for all the things that I want to do but I have not yet managed to do, please forgive me, please.' We often don't think like that in terms of our relationship to divinity. We can feel so small, and then the divine being or deity is seen as everything, which is an anathema to self empowerment.

In Buddhist spiritual practice it is about self-empowerment, so you then become like the deities that you worship, so one develops those special qualities, such as immense love, compassion, clarity of

mind and so on. The whole point is to emulate or become like them. However, it is not an isolated journey. There is the moral and ethical dimension and the social dimensions. Even in most esoteric forms of Tibetan Buddhism we have the notion of mandala that incorporates everything. So all the fellow practitioners and everybody, human beings generally, and everybody is part of the mandala circle we are visualizing. The idea is that when you become spiritual, that energy spreads through you and starts to influence your moral vision, your social interaction, your dealings with everyday life generally, and that is the goal. When you become a more deeply spiritual person, then you can partake in the religious activities in a proper manner. When we pray, when we interact with other beings, behaving ethically, taking social responsibilities and so on, everything we do is then influenced by our own spiritual vision, our spiritual transformation, and our spiritual insights gained through integrating our religious practices.

What are the spiritual insights that we are looking for? According to Buddhism it is to not look at things dualistically, to relate to things more directly, in a more non-conceptual way. Buddhism is not about just going off in a light-hearted manner to become spiritual. Following the Buddhist path, is not a trip to 'netherland,' when you are not entirely sure where you are. It is about integration, as Mahayana Buddhism says, samsara and nirvana are not seen as essentially different. And it doesn't mean samsara and nirvana are not different. If you are looking at them in a dualistic way they are different. If you don't look at them in a dualistic fashion then they are not

different. What that indicates is that morality is important, ethics are important, social responsibility is important, all our normal engagements with life are important. But they are not as defining or as meaningful as we think they are. Just like with religiosity, we think, 'getting married, having children, feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, that is all there is.' All these things are important, but there is more. That is not all there is. As a spiritual person, we recognize there is more.

If we see things in a non-dualistic way with wisdom, called having the wisdom eye, in the Buddhist tradition we are living the spiritual life. Spiritual life comes from having the wisdom eye, and the creation of merit. We often do not focus enough on the idea of creating merit. We should normally emphasize the importance of creating of merit. Merit comes from activities such as being morally and ethically engaged; doing wholesome things, and mixing with people and being

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part of one's own society in a meaningful way, promoting social good, and things of that nature, that is where merit comes from.

Merit and wisdom, are called two accumulations in Buddhism. As a human being, and as spiritual practitioner, we advance through and understand more deeply those two accumulations of merit and wisdom. Wisdom is seen as superior to the accumulation of merit, as wisdom teaches how not to get fixated on things tightly, then you are more able to accumulate merit in a proper manner. If we are thinking with absolutistic certainty, even in terms of moral actions we will be focused on the literal rather the situation and circumstances we are faced with. With moral fixation the present situation itself is not taken into account. With a fixed view we are less able to look at all the

factors, and every aspect of the situation. Instead we may be thinking, 'I know what is right and what is wrong.' If we make such assumptions we can just be barging in to a situation and telling people how to behave, what to do and how they should be feeling and responding. Instead, with a more open and present mind we can take stock of circumstances and situations more fully and seriously, and include a number of factors so ones meritorious actions can truly make a substantial difference. This applies to all social interactions.

So we look at the context of everything, even when we want to take actions like political or social actions we take everything into account, all the factors. Then when we look into our own mind, our thoughts, feelings and emotions, they are all inter-related. Our mind is like a network of many, many things, so instead of thinking we have to deal with one thing, we should be thinking about dealing with many things.

Dealing with many things in the mind is actually easier than dealing with one thing because we can look at each aspect individually, one at a time. Otherwise we can become overwhelmed with some things that arise in the mind, such as anger. If you are thinking, "I am an angry person, I have this huge problem with anger," we begin to believe that, and then the idea of you being an angry person becomes solidified, it can seem insurmountable. Instead, if we look into what is actually occurring to generate an angry state within our mind we can begin to see the support structures that we have in place that create anger. We can see the thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings that are associated with the arising of anger. Then we can have a different picture of what is occurring. Gradually we can start working on each aspect, for example, start to look at the

kind of thoughts that help create anger, and seek to have less of those types of thoughts repeating so much in our minds. We can ask ourselves, "Why do I have to immediately have those thoughts?" We can decide to ease up and take some kind of a break from those repetitive thought patterns. Just to take a break. In the same way we can look at the feelings associated with anger, attitudes related to anger and so on. We may feel certain things about how people see us, but only you are feeling that way, everybody else is just getting on with their lives, while you may be ruminating about the idea, such as, 'everybody is against me.' It is about reviewing our attitudes towards life, other people and so on. We do not have to have such fixed views about everything.

So spiritual transformation has to occur on all those levels, social, moral and ethical, psychological, and spiritual levels. This comes from developing a more non-dualistic way of looking at things. So in Buddhism, when we say spiritual, what we mean fundamentally is looking at things in a non-dualistic way. In Buddhism it is not about achieving union with God, it is about seeing things from a non-dualistic perspective, that is what spiritual realisation amounts to. In that way nothing is separate from "me", everything that we experience is not separate. This relates back to what I was saying about deities in Tibetan Buddhism. Since nothing can be totally separate from us and our experience of it, even deities cannot be separate from us. We don't have to think they are separate or not separate. We don't need to conceptualise about it. We do not need to see deities as completely separate. In the same way, everything we access through our sense is not separate from what we experience.

According to Buddhism you can't experience anything outside of your mind, even logically, and even in principle it is not possible, practically or in principle. How can you step out of your mind and get an independent look at yourself, having this relationship with God, or deities. Even if we see it that way, we are still using our mind. We cannot step outside of our own mind to experience something separately from ourselves. Even in terms of the rules of logic and



mathematics, you cannot step outside of your own mind, and say, oh this is how it is, you cannot.

Spirituality it is so important to realize this because everything is dependent on the mind. If everything is not dependent on the mind spirituality would not mean anything. We could just be religious, do our religious duties, go to the temple or church and sing our hymns happily without needing to consider things more deeply. If we don't add some kind of soul to these activities, if we are saying that we do not care about whether something is wonderful or not, or meaningful or not, then there is no soul to it. Spirituality is really important, especially for religious people, because without spirituality, just being religious is not helpful and in fact may be harmful. Being religious can harm us, but if we are religious in a proper manner, then our religious practices can heal us instead of harming us.

If we pray in the right manner, for example, we will feel liberated, we are able to use our vocal chords, it is fantastic, and if we do things in an ethical manner, without thinking, 'I have to follow some kind of rules or regulations or whatever', having ethical considerations and acting ethically becomes freeing and liberating. It becomes something we want to do because we can see it is good, helpful, and of benefit. Instead of thinking, 'I have to do this, but I hate it. With that type of attitude then being a do-gooder can bring you down. But if you, yourself, feel that it

is a beneficial thing to do, a great thing to do, then you will feel liberated and uplifted. It is the same thing with social engagement. Also, it is the same with religious activities such as feasting and fasting. It is experienced as good when you fast, it is good when you feast if you have the right attitude, the spiritual attitude. If you don't have that, then again it is like a duty of sorts. It will be like meeting your in-laws at Christmas, with the wrong attitude it will drag you down. We can think of many things like that.

So really the spiritual perspective that you bring into everyday life is what makes religious practices worthwhile, that is what I want to say. I really do not believe, as some people say, that Buddhism is just a way of life, or philosophy or something like that. It is not, Buddhism is more than that. Buddhism does put more emphasis on the spiritual aspect than the religious aspect, perhaps more than some other religious traditions. Even though many people in Buddhist countries do not follow Buddhism as a spiritual path, nevertheless they actually do recognise that they are not following the Buddhist spiritual path. They may see they are doing the religious things to creating good karma, for example, but they still have clear recognition that they are not following the spiritual path. People who are very religious may be thinking, 'I'm so spiritual, I'm so religious, and I do everything right; 'I eat the right food, I eat at the right time of the day, and do not eat at the wrong time of the day'. They may

be thinking all kinds of things like that, 'I'm being so spiritual', but that is not spirituality.

From a Buddhist point of view spirituality is about integration. Often people think spirituality is about running away from the world, or even disassociating oneself from one's religious roots. There are many versions. There are songs and poems found within the Buddhist traditions where certain aspects of religious practices are made fun of, and that is a good thing. The sixth Dalai Lama, for example, has made all kinds of comments about his practices. So when you are spiritually minded you can see the humor in incorrectly seeing the means as the end. That can be expressed when we have integrated the religious aspects into our spiritual journey.

So basically what I am saying is that we should use everything that religion has given us in our own tradition, but not take them at face value, or take them to be the ultimate. They are there to be utilised, to aid us on our spiritual path, they are not an end in themselves. We pray because it makes us feel good, it will transport us, it will engender a certain psychological state which is necessary to see things in a non-dualistic fashion, for example. If we pray, if we meditate and even if we chant, or make music as part of our rituals, doing all those things, will transport us into a different mode of being. That is what we should be thinking about, instead of 'thinking', chanting in itself is the thing', or, 'being able to recite the scriptures in itself is the ultimate'. All these things are just aids, and if we use them as aids we become spiritual, if we don't, then we become religious, we become dogmatic, we can become fanatical, even violent, all the problems that we associate with religion these days can arise.

Buddhism is a philosophy, a way of life, and a religion. And there is wonderful advice in Buddhism that can be helpful to non-Buddhists. But I want to say, there is nothing wrong with being religious. It is just a matter of degree; if we are not getting too fixated on the religious practices that we engage in then we can benefit from participating in religious rituals. It all comes down to our approach and our attitude. ■

Interview with Teishin Shona Innes

Traleg Khandro



Teishin Shona Innes is the assistant teacher at Jikishoan Zen Buddhist Community. She will be teaching the the E-Vam Institute Buddhist Summer School 2024.

Khandro: Could you tell me how you came to Buddhism, what was your journey?

Teishin: In 1986 in the midst of a very difficult time personally, a friend of mine handed me a copy of “Zen Mind, Beginners Mind”. I was standing in the middle of her living room at the time in a complete state of distress. I opened the book and read a paragraph from the chapter entitled “Naturalness” and realised then that I had found what I had been looking for. And so it went on from there – very slowly. Nevertheless I had a burgeoning faith that I was on the right track and that I had found a way forward. A year or two later I was introduced to Trungpa Rinpoche’s “The Myth of Freedom” and eventually to an understanding that I needed to look for a teacher. I really had no idea how to do that, but I did think that I needed to find a woman teacher. This feeling was quite strong and soon I found a flyer at a Carlton yoga school advertising the Buddhist Summer School with teachings by Ayya Khema. Ayya’s strong faith and simple approach were just what I needed at that point. I spent a couple of years in the Theravada tradition, then after Pema

Chodron’s visit to E-Vam Institute in 1994, I began to attend meditation sessions at E-Vam. What impressed me was the dedication of the practitioners that I met there and the fact that they were obviously practicing strongly. I was a student of E-Vam institute and Traleg Rinpoche for nine years from 1994 – 2003.

Khandro: You have found your spiritual home in Soto Zen Buddhism under the guidance of Zen Master Ekai Korematsu Osho. Could you tell me something about the Soto Zen tradition, about your connection with this tradition?

Teishin: Soto Zen is one of three main Zen Schools in Japan. It’s the largest single religious denomination in Japan, with over 14,000 temples. Its two Japanese founders were Eiheiji Dogen Zenji and Keizan Jokin Zenji but it traces its lineage back through China to the 6th Patriarch, Hui Neng and from there all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha. The Soto school is characterized by its emphasis on zazen (seated meditation) and “silent illumination,” Zen. It is also emphasizes practice and is very active physically. It is a Mahayana Buddhist tradition and the Bodhisattva ideal is central.

Dogen Zenji rejected sectarianism and prohibited his disciples from identifying with any particular sect or even being considered as a branch of Zen. If a name had to be used, he suggested “Buddha-mind School”. ‘ Soto Zen tradition is based on Dogen Zenji’s teaching of continuous practice and the identity of practice and verification or “practice-enlightenment”. In Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo he said, *“Although continuous practice is not something worldly people love, nevertheless it is the true place to return for all people. Because of the continuous practice of all Buddhas in the past, present, and future, all Buddhas in the past, present, and future are actualized...”* (Living By Vow, Okumura, p11).

My connection with this tradition started with my attendance at a talk given by Ekai Roshi at the E-Vam Buddhist Summer

School in 2004. What struck me about that first encounter was how direct the communication was, and how joyous. I remember walking away thinking “no Dharma” – fantastic. At that point, I had been studying the Buddhist teachings (meditation and doctrine) for some years and while quite wonderful, my understanding and practice had become stagnant. Ekai Roshi’s manner of communication, his gestural language in particular, spoke very directly to me. From that day on, my whole relationship with the Buddhist teaching was completely refreshed. I will never forget it.

Khandro: Could you tell me about your main areas of study and practices in the Soto Zen tradition?

Teishin: The ground of the practice is the three forms – bowing, sitting and walking. And within these forms the core is “posture.” It is understood that this posture is not just of the body but also posture of the mind. The practice and experience of “posture” is central and understanding flows from there. In all aspects, the practice is very physical and so relates very directly to the activities of daily life. Everything is practice. In terms of emphasis, practice comes first and study comes second. From my very first Jikishoan retreat, the formality of the practice was something which was very prominent for me. For whatever reason, formality was not something that I had much experience of. Maybe that is partly due to the Australian cultural preference for the “casual” approach in many aspects of life. I perceived that formality was important in this Zen practice and that it had something to teach me. The attention to detail and the precise instructions about bodily action does convey something very essential. It is also through action, that the meaning of “community” practice is developed and demonstrated. By the immediacy of this person to person interaction the Buddha’s teaching can be transmitted. Soto Zen is practiced in the spirit of Mahayana.

Khandro: Would you speak about your

main teacher Master Ekai Korematsu Roshi, His approach, and other aspects of his teaching method? Would you also speak about the connection between Master Ekai Korematsu Roshi and Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche from your perspective, and the close relationship that was fostered by the two teachers and continues to this day between the two Centres?

Teishin: Ekai Roshi has said that his work has been to adapt the essentials of the monastic tradition into a form suitable for lay practitioners. Because of this alignment with the monastic tradition, there is a natural emphasis on daily practice. The rhythm of daily activity and establishing a routine is strongly encouraged and nurtured. Ekai Roshi has created a practice and study program called “Zen and Integrated Buddhist Studies.” This is a program that brings together the essentials of Zen Buddhist practice within a form similar to a western tertiary education structure. In this way it offers something familiar to lay practitioners as an entry point. Roshi’s approach is multi-dimensional. He laughs a lot and has a joyous approach to practice but is also deeply serious about its vital importance. He is steeped in the tradition and at the same time is completely free within it. Practice is not just about sitting on the cushion. He regards everything as practice and he is constantly and effortlessly demonstrating this to his students. Wherever possible, he uses expedient means to assist practitioners to go beyond their personal limitations. Ekai

Roshi often speaks about the fact that there is “no such thing as individual enlightenment”, which presents as quite a challenge in an individualistic culture such as ours. He is also very interested in students having a personal direction in their practice. The very Australian attitude of “we’ll see what happens” is something he often references and laughs about. With that kind of vagueness nothing much happens and practice becomes a very “hit and miss” affair and of limited use to others. Understanding human language correctly is also a strong current in Roshi’s teaching. Using words but “not being used by the word” is something we are reminded about on a regular basis.

Regarding the relationship between Ekai Roshi and Traleg Rinpoche, I really don’t know much about the relationship of these two great teachers but my sense is that it was based in mutual recognition and deep respect. Their association spanned a period of many years after Traleg Rinpoche invited Ekai Roshi to teach at the Buddhist summer school in early 2000. Later, Rinpoche asked Roshi to give some lectures on Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo and so the Winter talks at E-Vam began and at the invitation of E-Vam Institute, Roshi has continued giving these lectures ever since. As a student of both of these teachers, what unites them is my perception is their humour & seriousness, their drive and energy, their deep and pure connection to their respective lineages and their dedication to bringing their understanding and practice

into the western culture for the benefit of all. For me, Ekai Roshi’s memorial gatha for Traleg Rinpoche brings out an essential quality about their relationship. When it was read as part of the 10th Anniversary memorial of Rinpoche’s passing, the audience received it with deeply felt emotion, going to the heart of the matter and to the reverence with which E-Vam students hold their teacher.

This is a memorial tribute Roshi wrote for – Traleg Rinpoche in July 2020

Through the gateless gate the Dharma king of Vajra-Dhatu returns home

The gate keeper humbly welcomes and receives a dorjebell

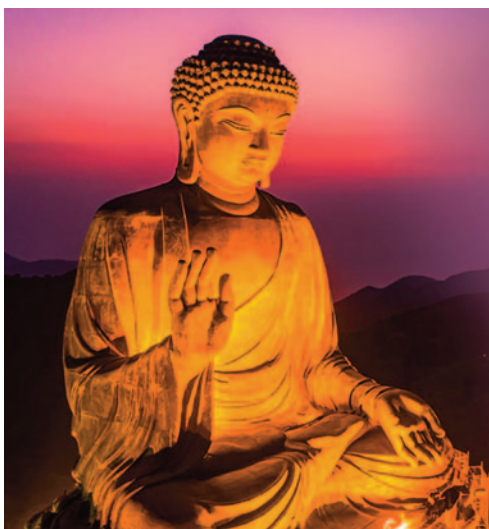
Hardly noticed is the black bird flying over a dark night sky last eight years.

His wondrous teaching brings Dharma joy and contentment to all faithful.

Humbly, Monk Ekai

In my case, I have met all my Buddhist teachers through the profound care and agency of Traleg Rinpoche and I am deeply grateful. Not something I could have imagined. How amazing it is that we have had this kind of history in Melbourne? It is my sincere wish that the practice and gifts of these two masters will continue to resonate through the years and bring great joy and continuous benefit to all. Thank you for offering me the opportunity for this interview to speak about this remarkable set of circumstances. May we all find the Way through our true teacher.

Khandro: Thank you for taking the time to give this inspiring interview. ■



MESSAGE FROM THE E-VAM BOARD

To our dear Sangha, on behalf of the E-Vam board, we would like to wish you all a happy and healthy holiday and festive season. Thank you very much for partaking in all the wonderful activities that were on at Rinpoche’s Centre’s this year. We hope to see you all at the Buddhist Summer School at either E-Vam Melbourne, or Nyima Tashi in New Zealand. The E-Vam board is now seven people strong, with Matthew Dawson the latest addition. Welcome aboard Matt.

Thank you all, and we look forward to reconnecting with you again in the new year. I hope everyone has a safe and joyful festive season.

Yours in the Dharma

Matthew Hassett

Interview with Matthew Dawson

Salvatore Celiento



Matt Dawson is a sangha member at E-Vam and is currently studying Shedra at E-Vam's Shogam Vidyalaya. In 2020 he started his publishing business, Platform Publications, www.platformbooks.co

Salvatore: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Please tell me how you came to Buddhism.

Matthew: I was going to Monash University at the time when I first started meditating. I'd always wanted to try meditation at high school actually, but it was something that, when it came time to do it, the particular social group I was in probably would look down on that. All the girls went and did yoga or meditation when the option arose, and I always wanted to do that. So at university I took the opportunity. They had lunch time sessions, they were mindfulness sessions. I went to these mindfulness sessions and my concentration, surprisingly to me, improved quite a lot and my marks, as a result of that, dramatically increased, because I could concentrate for longer periods of time and I became sharper intellectually.

That was a shock to me, and I just kept at it. My social situation and my relationships also improved. I was able to listen and pay attention more in conversations and interactions with friends and family. So I just kept at it, and I went to the mindfulness sessions so much that the people there would say, "What do you keep coming here for? We do the same thing every day." They

mentioned a LoJong course at E-Vam Institute and so I went along to the course. That is how I started coming to E-Vam Institute.

Salvatore: That is straight forward journey, and you noticed immediate benefits.

Matthew: Yes, my introduction was quite practical. Almost materialistically, the efficiency and the clarity and the benefits I saw in my own everyday life, drew me in to the more spiritual aspect of it. I wasn't interested in religiousness, ritualistic aspects of Buddhism, I was more interested spiritually. I was maybe curious but I thought it was a bit like New Agey or something like that, at the beginning. And it was only after reading the later chapters in *Essence of Buddhism* by Traleg Rinpoche and coming to E-Vam, attending retreats and doing Green Tara and Chenrezig pujas that I really started to soften to the idea of there being some benefit to the rituals too. As Rinpoche says, as a way of going in, using the outer sensory aspects of religious practice to go inward. So that's how I came to Buddhism.

After coming to E-Vam, I went to Nepal and stayed in Kopan monastery – which Bill and Sue Howes always have good chats about, and about Lama Zopa at that time, and Khen Rinpoche. I found the monastery thing was a bit much but coming back to E-Vam felt very much like coming home. Reading Traleg Rinpoche's LoJong had a big impact as well.

Salvatore: You have been part of the Shedra program for many years, which is studying Buddhism in depth. What impact has that had on you?

Matthew: Good question. It's such a gift to study Shedra because rarely in books that you read when you first start to engage with Buddhist material, do you get the opportunity to go into granular detail. I think the benefit that it has given me is related to that straightening out certain gaps in my thinking or my reasoning. Also, the study flows into the practices,

such as Ngondro practice and resonates with Mahamudra meditation, and all the other activities that go on at E-Vam Institute. I think studying Shedra helps on the everyday level as well. So it sort of grounds things and helps one interpret the Dharma in ones own way so that it's like your own self-help. That is not a good example really. It gives you the map and the territory and it's up to you to apply it in your practice. So there is a lot of freedom with Shedra, I think.

Salvatore: You have been a volunteer staff member at E-Vam Institute for many years. What has been the motivation for volunteering so much at E-Vam?

Matthew: I really don't know. I think it has to do with meeting Rinpoche and the closeness that I feel to Rinpoche and also the benefit that I personally get from engaging in service to the community. I think it is really a wonderful opportunity for growth, spiritually, and also a way to practise generosity. So from a Buddhist point of view, those are the reasons. Also, I just love the people, so from a personal point of view it is very fun. I remember how Rinpoche said spiritual practice should be really fun and that's how I feel with volunteering too.

Salvatore: It is interesting in the Buddhist teachings how the masters say that through being of service to others or being generous, you also benefit so much and your happiness increases with others' happiness.

Matthew: Absolutely - the more the years have gone on that I have been volunteering, the more I've become aware of that. What the Buddha said is true in regard to that, that if you volunteer in a wise way it really does benefit, not in terms of burning yourself out or going too far beyond what you can contribute at a particular time, but within reason, it really does reflect on your own life, I think.

Salvatore: You started your own Buddhist publishing company, Platform Books, in 2020, and you have a new book out soon. Could you tell me more about that and

also about the philosophy of your company?

Matthew: I started selling books during Covid on Instagram and there were many Buddhist books. I was just speaking to a friend that I met up at Maitripa actually. He was doing the same. And a lot of people were doing that sort of thing during Covid and my niche was selling Buddhist books. Around that time or just before Dungse Lama Pema came out to teach at E-Vam, we got to talking and he said he might have the a book manuscript and I said “Oh, Dungse-la, I’m interested in publishing. I’ve done some work with Traleg Rinpoche’s publishing company, Shogam Publications, and I continue to be interested in that. And he said, “Would you like to publish a book I’ve written on LoJong?” and so of course I said “Yes,” and it was called *Making Friends out of Enemies*. And that’s how Platform Books, in terms of the publishing aspect started - it was organically, like that. Dungse-la was so generous, it was wonderful. He is obviously so steeped in the LoJong practice and you can really feel his compassion when you are around Dungse-la. So I thought, “What a wonderful book to publish!” from someone who is living it and is so realised in that way.

In terms of the book that came out in November this year, is Ian Green’s wonderful memoir that he has written, called *Monumental: the story of the Stupa*. It has been such an inspiration to me personally to read that book and see what can be achieved if one has the perseverance and the determination to carry out the guru’s wishes. Also, I just learnt a lot working with Ian Green on the creation of the book. He is such a wonderful person to work with and it is very apparent to me how much he is someone who can work with lots of different types of people to achieve something so monumental, in creating the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion and also the Jade Buddha of Universal Peace, which is such an important message - both compassion and peace, such important messages to emphasise at this time in the world right now when we have wars going on, in Ukraine and in the Middle East. I think the impact of Ian’s



book will be quite beneficial in terms of the secular setting and also the Buddhist projects aspect.

Salvatore: You have a Western philosophy degree and a law degree, how have your studies impacted your understanding of Buddhism? Have you seen any parallels or crossovers?

Matthew: Any parallels or crossovers really come from listening to Traleg Rinpoche’s teachings. As you know, Rinpoche was very deeply versed in Western philosophy and psychology. So when conflicting ideas in both the law and in Western philosophy came up when I was studying, while my classmates became quite befuddled or confused about how to reconcile those ideas with their own beliefs, I sort of had a guide, and I was extremely fortunate in that respect - and particularly thinking in philosophy about nihilism and eternalism.

There’s a lot of nihilism among philosophy students. And there’s a lot of eternalism, I think, among law students. But Rinpoche’s guidance in respect to philosophy, Western philosophy in particular, and also in relation to karma, in relation to the law, helped me a lot, in understanding and having a framework when I was studying, and also to reconcile the vastness of Buddhism with the studies that I was doing at university.

Salvatore: With such an amazing teacher as Traleg Rinpoche who, as you said, was fluent in philosophy and psychology and Western thought, Rinpoche brings out theoretical discrepancies and discusses

common issues. So it’s wonderful that you’ve had Rinpoche as your guide while doing those studies.

Matthew: I might just add that he was a guide both when he was alive and also when he was in Parinirvana, a guide through his books - particularly Karma, in relation to the law; and some of his teachings that are now in book form, published by Shogam Publications, in relation to philosophy.

Salvatore: You are involved with E-Vam’s weekly meditation classes. Could you tell me a bit more about how that’s going? And what have you noticed have been the benefits for young people?

Matthew: I decided to volunteered and helped facilitate the meditation sessions. It is very close to my heart because that’s how I was introduced to the Dharma, as I mentioned at the start of the interview. I simply went along and practised shamatha, tranquillity meditation, and noticed the practical benefits for myself. So in many ways, it’s close to my heart because that is how I engaged with the Dharma initially. I would also add that a lot of people have their own reasons for coming to the Dharma and I just see that as one way. I offer my time to help out and the benefits of improved concentration, increased awareness in everyday life, the ability to engage in insight/vipashyana meditation, in deeper ways.

Salvatore: Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me and it’s been wonderful. ■

News from E-Vam Institute



Jangchub Lhamo, joining us. After the Chenrezig practice, participants were privileged to hear Ani-la share stories about her relationship with her teacher, Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche and the establishment of Rinpoche's centre she oversees, Nyima Tashi. We extend our gratitude to Ani-la for generously sharing these stories and intimating such a vivid impression of Rinpoche.

In October, E-Vam was happy to hold the second retreat of the year. Hosted both at the beautiful Maitripa Center and online the retreat went for five days. Retreatants listened to teachings on the topic of the Four Yogas of Mahamudra, and many participants expressed that these teachings beautifully complemented the extended practice sessions. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers who contributed to the success of this beautiful retreat.

In November, in honour of the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche and coinciding with the Cremation Ceremony at Namu Buddha in Nepal and the prayers from people all around the world, the Community gathered both in person and online to practice the Milarepa puja and pay their respects to such a sublime teacher. Special thank you to Lyn Hutchison for her help with preparing the practices and to Nyima Gelek for leading the Puja and for constructing such a beautiful shrine. Thank you everyone for your prayers -- We pray for Rinpoche's Swift return.

Also at this time, live from Namu Buddha in Nepal, we were fortunate to have Khenpo Chonyi Rangdrol teach. In the first session, Khenpo-la taught on the ordinary preliminaries, how appreciating our precious human life, having a deep understanding of impermanence, karma cause and the dissatisfactoriness of Samsara, how they are essential not only at the beginning of the path but essential on the middle and at the end of the path. In the second session, Khenpo-la taught on the Four extraordinary preliminary practices (Ngondro). Khenpo-la also has guided the Shedra Students through the text, Introduction to the Middle Way, a commentary of Chandrakirti's

In late 2023, E-Vam Institute offered the Community many opportunities to practice, study, and deepen their connection with the Dharma.

On Thursday nights, both at E-Vam and online, people attended our Weekly Meditation Sessions. Thank you to staff member Matthew Dawson for elegantly leading meditation. Participants also benefited from weekly inspirational quotes to enhance their practice...

Rather than forcing ourselves to practice with a complete lack of interest, or to practice through periods of depression, we should remind ourselves of the benefits of meditation: that it cools the heat of conflicting emotions, as well as that of aggression and passion, and provides a true and tested antidote to our lonely, agitated states of mind. By contemplating our emotions, character traits, and spiritual goals, and then examining what happens to our mental states when we're not meditating, we are better able to appreciate the benefits of practicing shamatha in our daily lives.

-The Practice of Lojong- Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

Monthly Under 35 Urban Retreats saw consistent participation. Attendees practiced Tibetan yoga, Shamatha meditation, and the Four Immeasurables, and discussed teachings on wisdom and compassion. These sessions included

audio teachings from the book "Essence of Buddhism." Thanks to all who made these practice days welcoming.

Part one of the "The Complete Buddhist Path Series" offered participants the opportunity for study and meditation. Amongst dedicated meditation sessions, participants listened to teachings by Traleg Rinpoche. These teachings emphasised the importance of the Hinayana and the necessity of having a solid fundamental foundation on the path.

*The fact that things are impermanent
– is not the source of suffering..*

*The fact that we think things shouldn't be
impermanent
– is the source of suffering..*

*That things should not be the way they are,
and that is something we can't do anything
about
– is the source of suffering.*

*We suffer because we have the attitude or
expectation that things should not change...
If we understand that,*

*Then we will see that the Hinayana
perspective, the Mahayana perspective, and
the Tantric perspective,
Are in harmony.*

– Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

Chenrezig pujas were held each month, with a special guest in October from our Sister Centre in New Zealand, Ani

Madhyamakavatara by Jamgon Mipham.

In December, E-Vam Institute prepared for Tulku Pema Rigtsal Rinpoche's upcoming visit. Lama Pema Topchen from Namkha Kyung Dzong Monastery in Nepal guided the Under 35's and Shogam Vidhalaya in the practice of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition's "A Chariot of Great Merit" Vajrasattva Sadhana. Attendees appreciated practicing with such a qualified Buddhist practitioner.

Thank you to all the participants and volunteers who came together to help E-Vam Institute be such a conducive environment to practice and access the Dharma. We look forward to the Buddhist Summer School and meaningful activities in 2024! ■

Mark Dawson



News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre Auckland, New Zealand



Tēnā koutou kātoa, dear friends, from Aotearoa New Zealand. We hope you are all well – as we merge into the summer holiday season which brings many of us blinking, out into the sunlight for a few weeks of rest and relaxation. We hope this season brings you all nourishment and joy and that we all prosper in the Dharma in the coming year.

In aesthetics, the sublime (from the Latin *sublimis*) is the quality of greatness, whether physical, moral, intellectual, meta

physical, aesthetic, spiritual, or artistic. The term especially refers to a greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation.

We would like to announce The 13th Annual Auckland Buddhist Summer School 19th - 21st January 2024 with our focus of interest resting this year on only one presenter, the IX Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche and his influence upon the landscape of integral thought. A montage of Rinpoche's talks will be on offer across three days – available in person in the Gompa at Nyima Tashi and live-streamed on Zoom. The essence of Traleg Rinpoche's unique approach to unfolding the

Dharma seems to echo in Ken Wilber's Tribute:

“But what was so amazing about Rinpoche is that, even though a high-ranking teacher in the Tibetan system, he was no mere traditionalist. He wanted to keep Buddhism pure, but he also wanted it to advance into the modern and postmodern world, and he (and I) were deeply worried about what some of the popular forms of Buddhism were doing to both distort traditional understanding and forestall evolutionary advancement.

He was particularly concerned with the rampant anti-intellectualism that pervaded much of American Buddhism (and spirituality in general), and the common confusion of postmodern platitudes ('all things are equal') with deep Buddhist truths (which acknowledged absolute and relative truths equally). He was, in my opinion, one of the first truly Integral Buddhists, and at the time of his passing, he and I had in place plans to do a book together on these general notions, and had already transcribed our seminars in preparation.”

The talks on offer for this Summer School will soon be announced and advance registrations will open. This will be a wonderful opportunity to immerse ourselves in Traleg Rinpoche's refined intellect and witty, insightful and warm spirit as we enter 2024. Please join us if you can. If you are not already on our mailing list, –

email nyimatashi.nz@gmail.com to be alerted when registration opens. ■



News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute U.S.



As the wintery weather began to move into the US we completed this year's activities at the end of November with a five-week online course exploring Meditation from a Dzogchen/Mahamudra perspective. After each discussion guided by Traleg Rinpoche's teachings, those participants able to spare the time did a one-hour meditation session together practicing the 4 Immeasurables and exploring some of the meditation techniques included in Traleg Rinpoche's book, *Actuality of Being*.

The discussions centered around a number of Traleg Rinpoche's publications:

Mind At Ease/Luminous Bliss; Actuality of Being; King Doha's Advice to a King; and excerpts from the new book soon to be released in the US *Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom*.

We look forward to sharing the 2024 Teaching program with you early in the new year. Please keep the dates open for the annual May retreat at Saranam Retreat Centre in West Virginia – Friday 17 - Monday 20 May 2024. We hope you can make retreat. Wonderful Mahamudra teachings by Traleg Rinpoche will be featured at retreat. Lama Jinpa from KTD sangha will be providing his very learned

and profound commentary on the teachings and will be guiding the puja's and meditation sessions along with Dr Julie Brefczynski Lewis, long-time student of Traleg Rinpoche.

Please keep in mind that for the month of January 2024 *Beyond Two Worlds: Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX*, the documentary will be featured at the Tricycle Magazine online film club, as the documentary of the month.

Wishing everyone a safe and warm festive season, and we look forward to connecting with you all through 2024. ■

Traleg Khandro

News from Shogam Publications

Throughout January 2024 *Beyond Two Worlds: Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX*, the documentary celebrating Traleg Rinpoche's life, will be featured at the Tricycle Magazine online film club, as the documentary of the month. We hope that anyone who has not seen the documentary movie as yet will have an opportunity this coming January. Rinpoche's remarkable life and exquisite Dharma activity are presented in the beautifully filmed documentary, a most inspiring and beautiful story.

The process of editing, proofing and compiling the new book of Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche's teachings was a completely profound and special experience for the Shogam team. I cannot recommend the new book *Longchenpa's Three Cycles Of Natural Freedom* more highly. These are advanced teachings from the Dzogchen tradition that are very

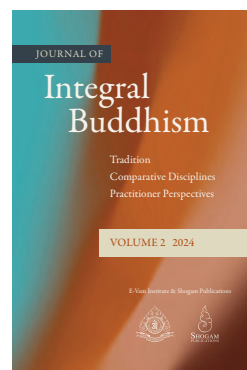
penetrating, and connects the reader with a complete sense of boundless spaciousness of mind. The book will be available at Rinpoche's Centres in Australia and New Zealand, via KTD Bookshop in New York, and all good bookshops globally, and e-Book stores online.

Volume 2 of the *Journal of Integral Buddhism* will be available in paperback and e-Book from early 2024. The journal is a joint venture with E-Vam Institute produced annually as a real celebration of diversity and difference within Buddhism, across the many traditions and schools. In the spirit of the Buddhist Summer School and Traleg Rinpoche's love of dialogue, six

papers from different schools of Buddhism and western psychology have been compiled into volume 2 of the journal. Contributors include: Traleg Rinpoche; Chi Kwang Sunim, Korean Zen; Ajahn Dr Buddharakkhita from Theravadin tradition of Sri Lanka; Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche from the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism; Pilar Jennings, psychotherapist and Buddhist; and myself, with a paper speaking about meditation from a Buddhist non-sectarian perspective.

We look forward to bringing out more of Traleg Rinpoche's teachings in the coming year and look forward to introducing some new authors to Shogam Publications as well. Wishing every one a wonderful festive season and new year. I hope it is full of joy and wonder. ■

Traleg Khandro

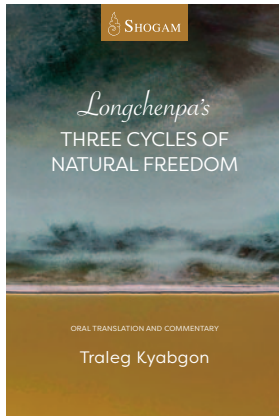


News from Akshara Bookstore

Akshara Bookstore and E-Vam Institute are proud to announce a new title from Shogam Publications by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche. Order your copy here:

<https://evaminstitute.org/akshara-bookshop/>

Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral Translation and Commentary.

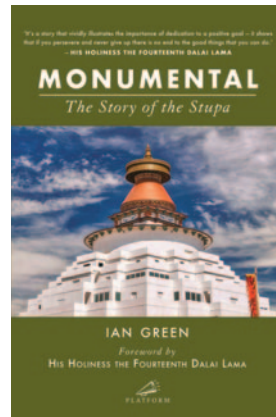


Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral Translation and Commentary is a seminal Dzogchen text that is divided into three cycles: Mind, Ultimate Reality and Equality. Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche is one of the great meditation master and scholars to come out of the Tibetan diaspora, has provided a detailed oral commentary and spontaneous translation of

Longchenpa's text to help reveal the essential meaning of these profound teachings. A glimpse at each cycle - in the Mind Cycle, Longchenpa is in part concerned with our ability to comprehend and experience the freedom within the authentic state; in the Ultimate Reality Cycle, all dualistic notions are challenged as the nature of self and phenomena are revealed as the same; in the Equality Cycle, our aboriginal state is described as that which transcends conditioned existence. Within each cycle, Lonchenpa also gives concise guidelines on approaching one's practice within a retreat situation. Rinpoche's renowned fluency with the English language, coupled with his own profound levels of realization, makes this translation an exciting opportunity for these

transformative teachings to not only be known, but also experienced.

Monumental: The Story of the Stupa



"I would like to congratulate Ian Green and his team on what they have achieved and welcome this book in which he recounts the story of creating the Great Stupa from an enchanting idea to a completed project. It's a story that vividly illustrates the importance of dedication to a positive goal—it shows that if you persevere and never give up there is no end to the good things that you can do."

—From the Foreword by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

"Lama Yeshe always told us to "think big." Similarly, Lama Zopa Rinpoche would exhort us to "do more, not less." In building the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, Ian has succeeded in fulfilling his Lamas' wishes beyond anybody's wildest dreams. It really is a mind-boggling achievement—one that will continue to benefit uncountable people and other sentient beings for longer than we can imagine. And it is great to be able to read the blow-by-blow of how the Stupa was built, not to mention the builder's backstory and what led him to undertake this monumental challenge."

—Dr. Nicholas Ribush, Director of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

These and many other titles are available at Akshara Bookstore.



BUDDHIST SUMMER SCHOOL 2024

Saturday 13th – Tuesday 16th January 2024
Maitripa Contemplative Centre and Online
www.buddhistsummerschool.org

The 41st annual Buddhist Summer School brings together both local and internationally streamed (remote) teachers, providing both in-person and on-line opportunities to participate. Please visit the website for full program details and registration. Summary of teachers and topics:

Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche
*Dzogchen Master Longchenpa's
Wisdom on Six Amazing Things You
Can Do With Your Life*

Ekai Korematsu Roshi
*Zen Master Dogen's Teaching:
Gakudo Yojin Shu*

Lama Jinpa and Sam Bercholz
*Why Be a Buddhist? Perspectives
across the lifespan*

For more information on the Buddhist Summer School, the teachers and to book
evaminstitute.org/event/save-the-dates-buddhist-summer-school-2024

Ajahn Hāsapañña
Enlightenment is a Natural Process

Venerable Thich Linh Tan
*Buddhism for Modern People in the
Modern World*

Traleg Khandro
*The Art of Accommodating Whatever
Arises in Meditation: Bringing the
Mahamudra approach to practice*

Phillip Greenway
*Applications for Mental Health,
Aging and Death*

Teishin Shona Innes
Zen Mind, Beginners Mind

Sam Bercholz
*Replacing Bad Habits with Good
Habits, until there are no Habits
The View that Leads to Liberation*

Jinesh Wilmot
*Japanese Brush Calligraphy:
An introduction*

E-Vam Institute Summer Teaching Program 2024

VISIT OF TULKU PEMA RIGTSAL RINPOCHE JANUARY 2 - 6

Teachings on the Nine Yanas of Tibetan Buddhism January 2 & 3, 7:30pm - 9:30pm

Over two nights, Tulku Pema Rigtsal Rinpoche will be teaching on The Nine Yanas (or Vehicles), a full system of practice that brings together all the approaches of the Buddha's teaching into a single comprehensive path.

A Chariot of Great Merit", a Vajrasattva Sadhana of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition

Empowerment, Transmission and Instructions January 4 - 5: Empowerment, Transmission and Instructions, 6:30 - 9:30 pm

January 6: Group Practice with Rinpoche, 1:30-5:30 pm



Tulku Pema Rigtsal Rinpoche will give Empowerment, Transmission and Instructions on the practice of "A Chariot of Great Merit", a Vajrasattva Sadhana of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition, revealed by the Terton Garwang Drodrul Lingpa Tsal. This practice was made available by Traleg

Kyabgon Rinpoche to sangha members through his connection with Thinley Norbu Rinpoche in 2009. This is an exciting opportunity to receive teachings with a master of the Dudjom Tersar Lineage.

UNDER 35s PROGRAM

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



Traleg Rinpoche IX encouraged students to take an integral approach to Buddhism. This is practiced through urban retreats which include 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 for Under 35's : 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 Terton Garwang Drodrul Lingpa Tsal. These sessions are suitable for beginners.

THE ANNUAL TEACHING PROGRAM: MEETING THE TEACHER THROUGH THE TEACHINGS



Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IXth spent over thirty years teaching in the West, presenting a wide range of topics from the Buddhist canon in order to give his students an overall understanding of the paths open to them. At Evam Institute we maintain a rich archive of Rinpoche's teachings that form the foundation of our annual program. Our intention is to provide attendees, whether new to Buddhism or from other Buddhist traditions and our community of Rinpoche's students, with a program that will enable them to explore Kagyu/Nyingma Buddhism as Traleg Rinpoche presented it. In terms of progressing on the spiritual path in Buddhism, Rinpoche states, "one has two different types of goals, the immediate goal of leading a fulfilling life and the distant goal of enlightenment" (How to Do Life: A Buddhist perspective, p. 10). On this basis, you will find the annual teaching program provides both general topics related to the application of Buddhism to our lives from the perspective of Integral Buddhism as Rinpoche described his approach; as well as teachings from the Kagyu tradition of Mahamudra that introduce the path of self-liberation. Our annual teaching program provides regular opportunities to engage with Rinpoche's teachings via quarterly Evening and Day of Teaching and Practice, the Traleg Rinpoche Bookclub, and two annual retreats that maintain the schedule format as established by Rinpoche. In 2024, we will continue to reach into the deep archive of Traleg Rinpoche's teachings to present his unique approach which provides a profound bridge between the philosophy of Buddhism and its practical application.

The program also includes a regular meditation program, monthly Chenrezig Pujas, an Under 35s program, and visiting teachers which together support Rinpoche's vision of a Centre with a focus on study, contemplation, and practice to enrich one's life.

*Please look out for new program offerings coming in 2024. Check our website for regular program updates:
<https://evaminstitute.org/whats-on/>*