



LOTUS ARROW

Newsletter of the Kurukulla Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies

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Tara Retreaters Relish Time Away

Kerry O'Brien

Looking back on the five-day Tara Retreat, organized by Wendy Cook and Debra Thornburg and led by Venerable Neil (Thubten Dondrub), several immediate impressions well up and scatter into a ripple of smaller images and memories. The first impression upon arrival at Bertram's, was of the beautiful weather and setting, right on the Duxbury coast, as if the trees and tides conspired to aid us in this endeavor. Once ensconced in this solicitous environment, the next five days were an alternating rhythm of silence and prayer. The black hush of early, early morning was broken not by sunrise but by taking precepts kneeling on the gompa floor, while Neil gently and patiently led us through precepts, purifications, and visualizations. Looking around my cushion, I was struck by the unfamiliarity of some of the faces—we

had come from places as varied as Maine, Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C.—and by how easily we fell into sympathy in our efforts in spite of our strangeness to each other.

The gompa was immersed in an air of intense concentration during the four daily sessions, bracketed by the darkness of sleep and waking. In this rhythm of retreat, the daily round of voice mail, email, friends, and family faded completely out of my mind. I was amazed by how little I thought of, or missed, all the necessities of my "normal" life. At the same time, the knowledge of my physical and mental limitations was powerful and humbling in those moments of pain, inability to stay focused on my visualization, of hunger and muscle ache from prostrations.

Each of us was given a yogi chore in between sessions, and we came to value them as the expression of our newly settled concentration. From the bell ringing to call us to session, to the labor of clean-

ing and preparation, we all contributed to the rhythm of practice and prayer. Inside the gompa, and out, we were enfolded in the extraordinary care and love of Neil, Wendy, and Debra. The most indelible impressions are of Neil skillfully leading every session, answering all our questions with humor, warmth, and integrity. And of Wendy, who labored endlessly cooking delicious food—sometimes a rarity on retreat I am told—answering our questions, running our errands, and seeing to our comfort. Between the three of them, they made the gompa beautiful and the retreat smooth.

Just how smooth, I did not realize until the trip home, when the accelerated pace and noise of the reentered world jarred harshly on our senses. The ordinary rituals of driving and negotiating traffic momentarily overwhelmed us. We have readjusted to the whirl of sound and movement, but part of us has changed in the knowledge of those five days in retreat.



Tara Retreaters in October led by Ven. Neil Huston

Monk Sponsorship Continues

Sue Macy

Last Christmas eve, I was helping Geshe-la unwrap—and eat—some holiday cookies sent to him from a student in North Carolina. In the package was an update of a program that sponsors Geshe-la's students at Sera Je Monastery in India. I had never heard about this program, and learned that there were several "chapters," including one through Kurukulla Center. I asked to participate, and left his house with a photo of "my" monk.

Little did I know that I would be traveling to India a few months later and

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

would get to know the monk that I sponsor. I saw firsthand how much our support means to the monks, and how much it benefits their Dharma studies.

I returned determined to help with this program, and was delighted when Geshe-la asked me to assume the administrative function of the Kurukulla sponsorship program so successfully run by Angela Hoffman.

There are two ways to sponsor Geshe-la's students in India:

> You can sponsor a monk on a regular basis for whatever amount you decide. \$10 a month covers food, and \$16.60 each month (\$200 per year) covers all expenses, including food, robes, medical, and schooling expenses. You can pay monthly, quarterly, annually, or whatever schedule fits your needs.



Geshe Tsulga at Sera Monastery in August with two of his students. photo: Sue Macy

> Donations are sent to the program as a whole, and this amount is used for the monks at Geshe-la's discretion.

Checks can sent to me (made payable directly to me), or, if would like the tax deduction, to Kurukulla Center. They are deposited in a separate account, and twice a year the money with interest is distributed to Geshe-la's students.

If you sponsor a monk, I will send you his address and photo. I will also write to him and let him know that you are his sponsor. If you would like any additional information, please either call me at (617) 262-5084 or write to me at the Center's address.

On behalf of Geshe-la's students at Sera Je, I thank you.

Sue Macy

New Yoga Class Added

A new Ashtanga Yoga class has been added to the Kurukulla schedule on Tuesday nights. The morning classes have been discontinued because the time seemed to be inconvenient for most students, and this Tuesday class has been added to supplement the popular Friday night session. Ashtanga yoga is a vigorous, challenging form of hatha yoga known for its dynamic style of connecting movements between postures. No prior knowledge is needed. All are welcome to attend.

Yoga Details



TUESDAY AND FRIDAY EVENINGS
7:00-8:30 P.M.
FRIENDS' MEETINGHOUSE
INSTRUCTOR: SHARON CARDAMONE
\$12 PER CLASS
DISCOUNT FOR MULTIPLE CLASSES
SEE SCHEDULE FOR EXACT DATES

PUJAS AT KURUKULLA CENTER

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has recommended that Center members perform regular Tara pujas (ceremonies). The goddess Tara embodies all the buddhas' compassionate actions. Feel free to join us. Participants are invited to bring offerings such fruit, cookies, or flowers to offer at the puja.

The Center is also holds regular Guru Puja tsogs. The Guru Puja is the most commonly performed ceremony in the Gelug lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, an eloquent expression of the entire Vajrayana path composed by the First Panchen Lama. A tsog is a ritual feast to which participants are encouraged to bring a food item or flowers to share.

See schedule for times and locations.
Call (617) 624-0177 for more info.

A Clarification

In the last newsletter, Geshe-la extended an invitation to Kurukulla Center members to come and visit with him in his home in East Somerville. Geshe-la wanted to clarify that the offer was to help if you have Dharma-related questions—on personal practice and on integrating the teachings into daily life—or if you are seeking advice about your health, family, or personal difficulties. Please call in advance to make an appointment: (617)629-0389.

Volunteer Opportunities

We are always looking for new people to join our volunteer teams and help strengthen our community. Current volunteer opportunities include:

- Set-up crews before teachings
- Drivers for Geshe Tsulga and Damchoe
- Publicity coordinator
- Newsletter editor
- Bookkeeper / Treasurer
- Fund-raising and Building Committee

If you'd like to volunteer, please send e-mail to kkc@ziplink.net or call 617-624-0177.

Geshe-la's Computer Needs

Geshe Tsulga used his home computer to write his latest book, *A Lamp Illuminating the History of Dargye Monastery*. But his old system does not allow him to access Tibetan texts on CDs, it does not allow him to send email to students here and abroad, and he is not able to access Tibetan Buddhist resources online. If you would like to assist Geshe-la in getting a relatively up-to-date system, either Mac or PC, contact David at kkc@ziplink.net.

From the Director

Dear Kurukulla Friends,

Happy New Year! The millennium brings with it a new Director for Kurukulla Center. After two productive years, Jennifer Campanelli has stepped down, and she will continue her work for the Center by focusing on the ever-important initiative to secure a permanent home for Kurukulla. We saw her grow in the position in admirable ways, and she has been a warm and effective presence throughout her tenure. Thank you Jennifer! As the Center is run completely by volunteers, I am particularly pleased that she, following the example of our other former directors, will continue to make important contributions as part of the management committee. My own tenure as Director begins officially on January 1st.

The beginning of the millennium brings with it as well many events at Kurukulla Center. We start it off with a bang with a visit from the always inspiring Robina Courtin. Later in January, there will be rare teachings on inner heat from long-time Dharma teacher Tubten Pende. And Geshe Tsulga has agreed to begin teaching the mother of all teaching texts, the *Lamrim Chenmo* by Lama Tsongkhapa.

This selection of teachings says a lot about the heritage of Kurukulla Center, which is part of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) founded by Lama Yeshe. Lama was unusual for a Tibetan in that he saw very clearly the strengths of his Western students and believed that they had the potential to make great progress on the Buddhist path. His teachings were very direct, based in experience, usually with a dose of maternal warmth. He was also a master scholar and championed non-sectarian views, and invited people to check up and discover wisdom for themselves rather than believing something just because Lama said so.

While we no longer have Lama Yeshe to coax us and explain things to us, we

do have two of his closest students coming to Kurukulla Center in January. Listening to Robina teach is like having a little bit of Lama channeled to us, as she has the same emphasis on finding what is most tasty, most clean-clear about the teachings, and she presents them in such a way that practitioners at all levels can benefit. Tubten Pende, previously a monk for over twenty years, is one of the most highly trained Westerners in the FPMT, and he brings us a taste of Lama's teachings on inner heat—one of the Six Yogas of Naropa and one of the final practices Lama taught before he passed away in 1984.

Geshe Tsulga, our beloved resident teacher, will be teaching on Tsongkhapa for the first time since arriving in the United States six years ago. Lama Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) was a brilliant scholar who is known for showing how the goals of sutra and tantra practice are in complete harmony and for his particularly incisive explanation of how conventional and ultimate truth are two sides of the same coin. He led a monastic revival, passed on numerous tantric and mahamudra lineages, and composed a wealth of texts, the most reknowned being his *Lamrim Chenmo*, or *Great Exposition on the Steps to Enlightenment*. This text will soon be available in English translation for the first time, making Geshe-la's teachings particularly timely.

Geshe-la is also finishing up his explanation of Shantideva's *Way of the Bodhisattva*, which he has been teaching for over two years now. And he begins a class on Buddhist tenets, which he last taught in 1994. The teaching on tenets provides an important framework for getting the most out of Geshe-la's teachings, because it explains a lot of terminology and uses a comparative method to show why emptiness and other concepts are explained the way they are at Kurukulla Center. We are indeed fortunate to have a teacher who is so learned, kind, and who is such a strong practi-

tioner. And we are fortunate as well to have such a competent translator in Ven. Damchoe.

Like all phenomena, Kurukulla Center is ever-shifting and changing, dependent for its continuing existence on the contributions of energy, talent, and financial support from its members. If you would like to help out in some way at the center, there are many opportunities, particularly in the area of publicity and in coordinating setup for regular classes. Please contact me at kkc@ziplink.net or talk to me at a teaching if you would like to help out.

I've been in the background of Kurukulla Center for six years now, and I am honored that Lama Zopa Rinpoche has determined that it may be somehow beneficial to have me serve as Director for a while. My aspiration is to do well by the center, to help it become more of a cohesive, mutually supportive community, and to help make the liberating message of the Buddha more widely available. The Buddhist teachings have been for me a source of inexpressible joy, a real vehicle for making my life meaningful and full of possibility. It is a pleasure to be a part of the Center, which exists to help people transform their lives through the practice of the Buddhist dharma. May we truly provide such an opportunity!

With warm wishes for the new year,

David





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Have you received our year-end appeal? Your donations and memberships are so important to us. Send in your response today. Thank you for your generosity!

Regular/Student Membership

*Donation level: \$200/half-year ♦ \$40/month
 (Student: \$125/half-year ♦ \$25/month)*

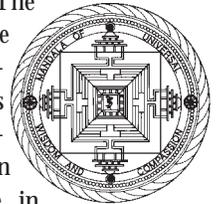
- Receive *Mandala Magazine*
- Attend teachings by Geshe Tsulga at Kurukulla Center *free*
- Attend special events at member discount

Friend of Kurukulla Center

Donation level: \$100/year

- Receive *Mandala Magazine* for one year—
Magazine of the FPMT—informative articles, Buddhist teachings, connect with centers and activities around the world.
- Attend regular teachings at 20% discount

kurukulla center is a member of The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (fpmt), a world-wide community of Buddhist centers dedicated to preserving the pure teachings of the Buddha as found in Tibetan Buddhism. Founded by Lama Yeshe in 1975, and currently under the spiritual direction of his main disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the FPMT provides teachings, retreats, literature, hospice care, and social services in twenty countries. Kurukulla Center was founded by Lama Zopa in 1989 and is named for a wrathful emanation of Red Tara, who manifests the buddhas' compassionate activity in the world.



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