Creating Sacred Space Together

“The Dharma will flourish here in Boston, and our children and our children’s children will be able to learn and practice.” —Geshe Tsulga

The Kurukulla Center Building Campaign is underway! This past year, the Building Project has been gaining momentum as more and more of you have joined the effort to purchase a home for Kurukulla Center and Geshe Tsulga. On October 5th, 2000, we launched the campaign with an official kickoff dinner, which was attended by thirty-five Center members and friends.

At the kickoff, friends and members perused a display of local real estate and exchanged ideas about our future center. The evening’s program began with a recitation of the Twenty-one Praises to Tara and an inspiring talk by Geshe-la about the importance of establishing a permanent Center. After making a prayer of offering, we enjoyed a delicious Tibetan meal, provided at a discount by the House of Tibet Kitchen.

After dinner, Nick Ribush, one of our teachers and the Center’s first Director, entertained us with the history of Kurukulla Center. Then David Kittelstrom, our current Director, talked about the steady growth of the Center over the past couple of years and shared his vision of what Kurukulla Center can offer with a home of its own.

To end on the right note, Jennifer Campanelli spoke about the Committee’s groundwork to prepare the Center to purchase a building, including building our membership support and stabilizing our finances. Her big announcement was how much we have already raised in gifts and pledges for a down payment: over $140,000! And we have also raised over $75,000 in pledges toward the payment of our mortgage.

Our aim is to raise at least $200,000 for a down payment. We plan to raise funds through multi-year pledges to pay off the mortgage within five years, enabling us to either operate debt-free, or look for a larger place. We will begin considering properties more seriously in the springtime.

By now you have most likely received a letter from David asking for support. This is truly a rare opportunity for us to help establish an enduring Dharma center in the Boston/Cambridge area. We can all delight in the merit we create by participating in this undertaking. If you have already made a gift to the Building Fund, thank you! If you haven’t, please consider making a gift before the end of the year and pledging your support for future years. You can also offer your time and skills to the project. Send any questions, comments, or suggestions to building@kurukulla.org.

A Visit Home for Damchoe

Our dear translator, Ven. Damchoe, is happily on his way for a visit home for the first time since his arrival in the United States in the early fall of 1998. A center member generously sponsored a ticket for Damchoe to spend four weeks, from December 21st to January 21st, in Nepal. While there he will see his mother, a nun at Khachoe Ghakyil Nunnery. Damchoe’s sister Mendo has also been working in the United States to support her family for three years without a visit home. So that will be a happy mother! And Damchoe will be happy, too, to see Mendo’s husband and children, who live near Boudha Stupa in Kathmandu. He will spend the bulk of his time at Kopan Monastery, where he will reunite with his lamas and give presents to his Dharma brothers. The best present of all will be his smile. Have a wonderful trip, Damchoe! We will miss you!
A Busy and Happy Fall

This fall brought a wonderful mix of teachings, retreat, initiation, and refuge.

With the introduction of the Basic Studies Program (consisting of two classes: Lamrim Chenmo and Grounds and Paths), Geshe-la has been helping us deepen our studies and our understanding of suffering and the way to liberate ourselves and all beings from that suffering. Wendy Cook, Debra Thornburg, Kerry O’Brien, and Christina Russo have done a wonderful job of organizing the classes and compiling and grading homework, and online support has been provided by Suzanne Persyn.

An Entertaining Tsatsa Workshop

Early in the fall, Center member Wendy Cook hosted a tsatsa workshop, which was attended by a dozen Kurukulla Center members and friends, including two children. Wendy’s entertaining instruction guided attendees through the entire practice of casting and painting tsatsas, plaster Buddha statues made from molds. Although tsatsa making in its entirety is a profound spiritual practice, involving preliminaries, mantra recitation, and concluding practices, it is also a captivating activity that is great for children. The workshop was a wonderful way to spend the afternoon, generate merit, and get to know each other better.

The Merits of Medicine Buddha

November was a particularly busy month; Geshe-la held a Guru Puja and Tara Puja

By Ann McCann

I’ve been a member of the Kurukulla center for over a year: learning more about Buddhism, getting to know Geshe-la and Damchoe, always wishing for more time for Center events, and trying to live compassionately. To be honest, my practice has been a separate, and too small, slice of my life. But work is close to the whole enchilada.

I used to work as a laboratory administrator at Massachusetts General Hospital. The job involved very long days, and the laboratory conducted research on the central nervous system and pain. So when I was recently offered a job with a company that makes antibodies used in cancer research, I asked about animal research. I was told that the company didn’t conduct animal research.

But it turns out that we do have mice, rabbits, rats, an animal room, and an “Animal Care Committee,” which meets twice a year and with which I was asked to work. I wondered how bad it could be since only blood samples were used, and no surgery or pain tests were conducted. In a word, bad. After one meeting, I felt depressed, even crushed.

I would be editing euthanasia protocols, but I told myself that was just typing. Right? No matter how I tried to distract myself, I felt stuck, miserable—and unable to speak up or take action.

Finally, feeling a little ridiculous to make so much out of a couple of pages of typing, I called to speak to Geshe-la. I told Damchoe that my job was depressing me. Immediately, he said, “So don’t do it.” I still gave him the details for Geshe-la, who literally lifted the cloud from my mind. He said that it was all right to be depressed about making killing possible. In the short term, I won’t be processing the paperwork to kill animals. As for the future, I’ve started to look for other work. Intellectually, I know that everything I do can be practice, but it took Geshe-la to help me see that my job was working against my practice. His kindness and wonderful smile were a great help and brought me great happiness.

Geshe-la’s Travels and Teachings

In late January, Geshe-la will travel to Sera Monastery in India, where he will attend teaching on the Lamrim Chenmo given by one of his own teachers, Khensur Urgyen Tseten Rinpoche, a former abbot of Gyurme Tantric College. Geshe-la will stay at the monastery through Losar, Tibetan New Year, and then visit Dharamsala to attend teachings on a different lamrim text by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

While we will have Geshe-la back with us in April, in May he will be traveling to attend teachings on the Heart Sutra given by the Dalai Lama in San Jose, CA. For more information about this event, please feel free to contact the Center or go to www.medicinebuddha.org. Many Center members and friends are planning on attending, but tickets are going fast.

Kate Thornburg shows how it’s done at the tsatsa workshop.
**Kerry Takes Ordination!**

Center members received some wonderful news just after Thanksgiving. Kerry O’Brien, a senior member, requested ordination while attending the annual month-long retreat at Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. The November 25th ceremony was led by Geshe Lhundub Sopa, and Kerry received the ordination name Lhundub Monlam. She sent back a quick email while shopping for her robes, and she sends her love and prayers to us all.

Kerry began attending classes at Kurukulla Center in the fall of 1995. A dedicated volunteer, she consistently showed up for teachings early to assist with setting up the altar, and she served as a member of the Management and Spiritual Program Committees for the past several years.

Volunteering put Dharma into action for Kerry, reminding her that the teachings are not just words, but actually practices that need to inform your life. She volunteered for years at Rosie’s Place, a shelter for homeless women, and she tutored children at an elementary school in Chinatown during her lunch hour.

After the one-month retreat at Kopan, Kerry will likely participate in a smaller, three-month Vajrasattva retreat that traditionally follows. At this writing, it is not clear where she will settle down subsequently in her new life as a nun.

We all return her love, and we wish her the best in her new life.

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**Dear Kurukulla Center Friends,**

For Thanksgiving weekend, I went up to Milarepa Center in Vermont to attend the Green Tara retreat led by Kurukulla’s resident teacher, Venerable Geshe Tsulga, and I realized once more what a rare privilege it is to have Geshe-la with us. There are really very few teachers out there with his collection of qualities. It is rare to begin with to find a monk who upholds the Buddha’s discipline so well, one whose mind is so clearly subdued and who takes such joy in wholesome activity. This alone is enough to make him an object of great esteem.

On top of that, however, Geshe-la is a great scholar. Of course to become a geshe, he had to complete a rigorous curriculum of philosophy and debate using the textbooks of his monastery, Sera Je. But Geshe-la’s interests and knowledge are far broader than what was necessary to earn his geshe degree. He is a lifelong learner who takes pleasure in studying the texts of different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, and he is an adept historian, able to judge the various doctrinal disputes within their historical context. Gene Smith, a local expert on Tibetan texts who has met hundreds of lamas over the past forty years, is greatly impressed with the breadth of Geshe-la’s knowledge and the openness of his mind.

Having witnessed the destruction of his country’s Buddhist institutions, its great texts, and many of its greatest practitioners, and having had to rebuild his monastery from scratch in exile under extreme privation, Geshe-la has personally endured countless manifestations of the Buddha’s noble truth of suffering. Yet he is consistently cheerful and kind. Geshes in general sometimes get saddled with the reputation of having a lot of intellectual knowledge without the depth of meditative experience. But Geshe Tsulga does not speak only out of book knowledge; his conviction arises out of a deep understanding of the truth of what he teaches.

A longtime center member who attended the three-week tantric retreat Geshe-la led this past summer in Vermont commented that she was able to experience much more clearly than ever before that Geshe-la has real inner attainment, that he is a real lama who understands the minds of students and can offer skillful advice. He became for her a true vajra master—powerful, wise, and compassionate. And when one looks at all his qualities together, how could one think otherwise? Without true inner qualities, Geshe-la could not simultaneously be a pure holder of the monastic discipline, a committed tantric practitioner, a well-read scholar, and unfailingly kind and compassionate to his students. He may make it look simple, but his qualities are not random. He is a rare teacher who can lead students in a complete path because he himself is so completely accomplished.
Late this summer, Kris Snibbe, Center member and photographer, was fortunate enough to join the Harvard Pluralism Project. Developed by Professor Diana Eck at Harvard University, the Project’s goal is to study and document the growing religious diversity of the United States, with a special view to its new immigrant religious communities.

For the last six months, Kris has been photographing the Cambodian Buddhist community, documenting their practice, gaining perspective about different approaches, and getting ideas for what we should have in our own Center! He was kind enough to share some of his beautiful work with us here.

Images of Buddhism

Above and right: Sanghikaram Wat Khmer, Lynn, MA.