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## The Approach of Mahayana Buddhism

### Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX



*This is the first talk of a three session course that Traleg Rinpoche gave discussing Mahayana Buddhism, touching on the three principal concepts of Mahayana – compassion, wisdom and emptiness; given at the Buddhist Summer School in Melbourne 2006. In the first talk Rinpoche gives an overview of Mahayana. Then in the next two talks that will appear in subsequent newsletters Rinpoche goes into each aspect in more detail.*

Mahayana Buddhism is characterised by the diversity of its teachings and its openness in terms of the many different kinds of practices. Mahayana Buddhism has produced a vast array of literature that covers many different kinds of topics. The Buddhist sutras have a variety of literature styles ranging from different kinds of mythic stories to the highly sophisticated, refined forms of philosophical thinking. Corresponding to the diversity of the teachings is what I call *openness* in terms of meditation practices. What that means is, in Mahayana Buddhism there is not just one single type of person that is portrayed as the ideal spiritual person but there are many; and there is not just one path to enlightenment, nirvana or liberation, but there are many paths. So there are many different kinds of

teachings and there are many different kinds of paths that can be traversed by many different kinds of individuals, who can then, in turn, realise many different kinds of spiritual attainment. Therefore the Mahayana system is a very open system. It encompasses and incorporates many different kinds of teachings and practices and it puts forward different kinds of spiritually idealised persons.

A Mahayana practitioner needs to see the interrelationship between these different kinds of teachings and different kinds of practices and paths that are outlined in the teachings so that one has some kind of understanding of how the concepts of wisdom, compassion and emptiness are interrelated both in terms of teachings and practices – how we traverse the path, and



how we practice meditation and so on. The reason is largely to do with the Mahayana concept of compassion. There are many different approaches because, in Mahayana Buddhism we have the understanding that not everybody is the same. There are many different kinds of people. People are diverse, people have different predilections, different interests, and capacities; therefore one needs to have different kinds of teachings that can cater for the many differences.

As far as the teachings are concerned, what we need to understand is that there is the concept of the *'turning of the wheel of the Dharma'* or *'turning the wheel of the teachings'*. The Buddha approached teaching in many different ways to help encompass our human diversity. So we say that the Buddha turned the wheel of the Dharma many times but primarily or principally three times, each *'turning of the wheel'* emphasising different kinds of teachings. In the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma, the Buddha spoke about

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the Four Noble Truths and other fundamental Buddhist concepts. During the second turning of the wheel of the Dharma, Buddha spoke about the importance of compassion and wisdom, and how compassion and wisdom have to be conjoined. Buddha also spoke about emptiness and insubstantiality. He emphasised emptiness rather than simply impermanence. Then he went beyond that and turned the wheel of the Dharma a third time, when the Buddha spoke about how everything is in nirvana, how everything is already in a state of enlightenment. The Buddha also then spoke about what is called Buddha-nature, and that Buddha-nature is present in everyone. We may not be enlightened, we may not have had great, spiritually advanced experiences but, nevertheless in ourselves, in our true nature we are in possession of Buddha-nature.

With skillfulness we can use the teachings to develop a clear understanding of what is being taught and explained.

When we become acquainted with the different kinds of teachings, we find they are all directly related to the practice of compassion - for ourselves and others. We should endeavor to incorporate whatever we are able to within ourselves. By deepening our understanding, it will eventually manifest as wisdom, then we can develop and practice compassion more fully. Otherwise we will be restricted in terms of what sort of ideal it is that we can set for ourselves, what we can learn to attain, and what sort of path we can follow; what sorts of teachings we can incorporate into ourselves, and what sorts of teachings we can take onboard.

It is not restricted in Mahayana because we have the understanding that we have to do everything piecemeal. That is really the Mahayana understanding: that we cannot do everything all at once so therefore we have to do everything in a skillful way, gradually building our understanding and incorporating that into our lives.

Doing everything skillfully is referring

to,- how we incorporate the teachings into our meditation practice, how we follow the path. That is, how we go about making use of the teachings, both in terms of how one applies them into one's own daily life and how we use that in relation to other people. How we use the teachings for oneself and how we use them in relation to others - in Mahayana Buddhism, there has to be correspondence between self and other. That is, how one uses the teachings for one's own benefit must correspond to how one uses the teachings to benefit others. There should not be any kind of discrepancy there; it should be harmonious.

So from the Buddhist point of view, to be able to do that is not just an expedient thing or some kind of skill that we pick up; that skill, in itself, is a demonstration of compassion. In Mahayana Buddhism compassion is not just some kind of sentimentality or some kind of soft, or warm feeling that we may have for someone or other - or a great number of

people, or all sentient beings, as we say in Buddhism.

Compassion has to come directly from having incorporated the teachings. Through incorporating the teachings one is able to first develop insight and this then turns into wisdom. So how one incorporates the teachings is dependent on how one develops that insight or wisdom - by incorporating the diversity of teachings - and that comes from how much one has an understanding of emptiness, as it is described in Buddhism.

Right from the beginning in terms of the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma, for example, one's own understanding of The Four Noble Truths, one's own understanding of *anatman* or selflessness etcetera; the second turning of the wheel of Dharma - teaching on emptiness; and the third turning of the wheel of Dharma - teachings on the perfection of everything - everything as being in a state of nirvana, and Buddha-nature. A deeper and deeper understanding of emptiness in that way has a direct impact on how one is able to demonstrate compassion. So from the Mahayana Buddhist point of view these three different concepts with in the three turnings are interrelated.

In Mahayana Buddhism, when we are instructed to practice compassion or some other practice we should cultivate that through the six virtue - generosity, patience, ethical conduct, vigour, meditative concentration, and wisdom. If we are a genuine Mahayana practitioner, when we are instructed to be generous or to practice patience it does not mean just simply giving someone money or trying to be patient, with a grimace on our faces. It is not about displaying what ever we think virtue might look like. It is not just purely a volitional thing: that we are willfully trying to lead a moral life, trying to be generous or trying to be patient. The practice of generosity or patience etcetera comes from some understanding, from understanding of oneself, understanding the concept of the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma; and some understanding of the integration of wisdom and compassion, which in Mahayana Buddhism is called *bodhicitta* or enlightened heart.

To be ethical then, from the Mahayana

Buddhist point of view, to lead an ethical life is to lead a compassionate life. To lead a compassionate life does not mean one is simply leading a moral life but one is leading a life which is supported by greater understanding of oneself and others. So the compassion that one realises and the bodhicitta or enlightened heart that one is cultivating reflect that understanding.

In that way, compassion and one's understanding of the three turnings – different levels of understanding about reality, as explained in the teachings – corresponding to different levels of compassion and these levels have to be co-present. This is described as *directional* and *non-directional compassion* – I suppose we could call it the active aspect of compassion and the contemplative aspect of compassion, for want of better words.

In Buddhism both components are necessary. Compassion is not just about doing something (directional) but is also a way of being (non-directional). Real compassion has to have those two components. Directional means the compassion is directed outwards, and non-directional compassion means the compassion which comes from understanding, from insight. The contemplative aspect of compassion comes from understanding and it is called non-directional because real compassion is supposed to come from a state of mind or a state of being where there is non-duality; there is no separation between the person who has compassion and the object of compassion.

This may then manifest in the form of directional compassion: one is practicing generosity, let us say, and if one is practicing the material form of generosity then one would be providing shelter for the homeless or giving material assistance to someone in need of such help, so that is the directional kind of compassion. Directional compassion should be based on the non-directional form of compassion. In other words, there has to be some kind of deeper understanding of the experience of non-duality, that oneself and others are not opposed, that self and other are not in tension, that self and other are not in conflict.

As long as we hold the view that there

is separation, that self and other are totally separate, autonomous – that there is something called self which is enclosed within our own body, that is entrapped, and there is other who is everyone or everything that is not oneself, that is other than 'myself'. Thinking that way, according to the Mahayana perspective, is the root cause of all of our problems. In this state of total separation genuine compassion cannot arise. We may have some feeling of compassion towards others, when we see others in pain or misery or whatever it might be, and we may be compelled to do something about it, but genuine compassion would not be present.

**F**or genuine compassion to be present, for one to be able to be a real Mahayanist and to have embarked on the Mahayana path, then one has to have had some understanding of the three turnings of the wheel of the Dharma, including the idea of selflessness, the idea of the emptiness of duality - of self and other, and some understanding of the notion of Buddha-nature, that Buddha-nature is present in everyone.

In that way, building insight through understanding emptiness, understanding the nature of reality, and then deepening that insight leads to wisdom. From that our capacity to practice compassion arises. As I mentioned, Mahayana Buddhism does not say we should all practice compassion in the same way. It is understood that we are going to practice compassion in many different ways because we are different.

How we incorporate the teachings is also going to be quite different from individual to individual, even when following the Mahayana path. Mahayana teachings permit that freedom because different people are different. How they incorporate these teachings of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma will be different and so therefore their understanding of emptiness and the Four Noble Truths, selflessness and so on, is also going to be different. So based on that, how one goes about practicing compassion is also going to be quite different. Nevertheless, Mahayana Buddhism is very clear on the notion that we have to learn to incorporate all three

turnings on the path – that is the guideline. If we do not incorporate all these three concepts then we are not following the Mahayana path. If we incorporate all three aspects then we are following the Mahayana path.

So even though diversity is allowed, that we can follow the path in many different ways and may develop different understandings; nevertheless it must include understanding that we must try to develop insight or wisdom and compassion. In that way, we can develop an understanding of reality, dependent on our understanding of the teachings – if we have that understanding that these three ingredients are needed, then we can make progress. Then we are able to follow the Mahayana path.

So Mahayana Buddhism makes it very clear that we can lead our life in many different ways. Even as a spiritual person we have many options. We can focus purely on the ethical side of things or we can focus on some form of spiritual reality - some kind of abstract concept which is very distant and transcendent - and the many options in between. From the Mahayana point of view all these kinds of approaches can remain incomplete.

According to the Mahayana way of thinking, simply leading an ethical life in itself is not sufficient. We have to lead an ethical life that is imbued with compassion. Being compassionate is not enough because that compassion that we have, has to be imbued with understanding, the understanding of reality, the understanding of the self, and we cannot develop these understandings unless we become familiar with what has been taught by the Buddha – we have to go to the teachings. The more we begin to incorporate these teachings the more we will have greater understanding about ourselves. As we develop greater understanding of ourselves then this will bring about some kind of change in terms of how we perceive things, how we perceive ourselves, others and the world. The change in our perception will bring about change in our behaviour as well.

So this is the idea, that insight or wisdom is ultimately spiritual in nature. The insight is not just a normal kind of insight that we are looking at, even in

terms of understanding ourselves. When we say 'try to understand ourselves' with the use of the teachings, we are not talking about simply getting snippets of insight into how our mind works. Often, I think, we can tend to think that way. We may use meditation practice for that purpose, for example thinking 'If I do meditation then I will begin to know a little bit more about my mind, how my mind works'. Although that kind of insight can be useful, that is not necessarily the kind of insight that leads to liberation and enlightenment.

So in Mahayana Buddhism then, the insight that will help us to lead a more complete life has to be a different kind of insight, insight which is spiritual in nature – that would then bring about liberation and enlightenment. The basic distinction, in other words, is made in Mahayana teachings about the normal kinds of insight that we can have and the deeper kinds of insight that really bring about fundamental changes in our lives, that lead to liberation and enlightenment. Liberation here means being liberated from all the unwholesome states of mind we can generate, all the unwholesome states of our being.

Liberation is more about what we can free ourselves from and enlightenment is what we acquire after having become freed. The state of freedom is not the ultimate aim from the Mahayana point of view. The ultimate aim is freedom plus what we acquire as a result of having liberated ourselves from what we call samsaric bondage or the bondage of cyclic existence. That is, perpetually going around and around in a circle due to our delusory mental states.

So that can only come from having some deeper insight into ourselves and that has to be spiritual. All other forms of insight are considered more mundane. Using Buddhist language they are referred to as mundane and supra-mundane. Mundane insight that we can gain either through reflection – we may engage in some rudimentary form of self-reflection and come to know a little bit more about ourselves - or through meditation we may realise something new about ourselves, such as how selfish one has been lately, or what sorts of worrying thoughts one has been having, what sorts problem – fears



and anxieties one has been experiencing, etcetera. Those kinds of insights can be useful but they are not liberating. The reason is, according to the Mahayana way of thinking: genuine insight does not come from having some kind of specific understanding of one thing or the other. We may gain insight into individual instance, or state of mind, or individual situations, but that does not lead to any real fundamental way of resolving our existential condition, our human condition, our human dilemma. This has to come from a more general kind of understanding into ourselves.

In Buddhism, when we speak about deeper insight, we are speaking about deeper insight into the human condition, deeper insight into the general condition of our mind. When we say deeper understanding of our mind we are not looking specifically in terms of what sorts of problems we may be experiencing on a day-to-day basis. Although those kinds of insight are also incorporated on the mundane level. One seeks to develop supra-mundane insight. Vipashyana or insight meditations are designed to bring about fundamental insight into the human condition.

So if we have a deeper understanding, genuine and deeper insight into the human condition then we will find some

kind of way out of our conundrum, but if we have specific understanding of certain problems then that problem may be resolved but similar problems will arise again. We are back to trying to resolve situation again.

If we have deeper insight into our mind then a real change can occur. When specific things happen in our lives or when specific thoughts or certain kinds of emotions well up or certain feelings begin to arise, we have a different way of relating to and experiencing them. We are able to put ourselves into a different mental frame or frame of mind. That is the purpose of Buddhist meditation, in terms of how we cultivate insight. So insight helps us to develop compassion, which in turn has an impact on how we lead our lives providing us with insight into the very nature of our condition, rather than specific issues or aspects.

Therefore, in Mahayana Buddhism, we make a distinction between what we call *relative truth* and *absolute truth*. As human beings we have a relative aspect and a transcendental aspect. When we have partial understanding and insight into ourselves this relates to our relative aspect. Through the cultivation of genuine insight, which is called *prajna* in Sanskrit, we can develop a deeper understanding of our own true condition, which then gives

us a glimpse into our transcendental state of being, and insight into our Buddha-nature, which is part of that. So when one has that kind of deeper transcendental insight into our true nature there is real change.

The point of Mahayana practice is to cultivate insight in conjunction with our compassionate activities so that we do not slide back into old unhelpful habits, so that there is a real transformation and that transformation is a lasting one, not just a temporary one. Sometimes we may change for the better and we may do things in a way that is helpful but it is easy to slide back if we are not building insight into the human condition, our progress can be stunted. But if we are trying to follow the Mahayana path in this integrated way the transformation is lasting and we have the skill, understanding and insight to not slide back. The encompassing approach avoids the fragmented way that we may often lead our spiritual lives.

According to Mahayana, there are ten stages of the bodhisattva that one can traverse between the normal state of being and the attainment of full enlightenment. The idea is that if we have insight then the stages will be traversed without any kind of regression – regression is not possible because of deep insight into oneself. This is needed to attain the first level of bodhisattva. If the first level of the bodhisattva is secured then the succeeding levels of the bodhisattva will be attained in due course because there will be a real progression. This understanding is very important from the Mahayana point of view. In that way, one tries to stay on course, to integrate compassion with insight and how insight is developed in relation to reality. This is based on the assimilation of the teachings. Therefore, in Buddhism, the teachings are not seen as doctrine, the teachings are not doctrine; the Buddhist teachings are taken as descriptions of our condition, the human condition and the nature of reality.

The Mahayana Buddhist teachings contain two forms of teachings, roughly speaking. They correspond to a description either of our current samsaric state, the state of bondage, so it may describe how ignorance (of reality) is

responsible for the condition that we are in. This is where the delusory mental states of mind come from. That is to say, how suffering is perpetuated. All of these things are described when describing the samsaric condition. Then there are descriptions of what are referred to as our elevated states of being, the states that we have not yet attained, like the ten stages of the bodhisattva. We have not attained the ten stages of the bodhisattva, we have not had experience of the ten stages of the bodhisattva, yet these states are described in detail.

Therefore, the teachings give descriptions of how we remain in the state of bondage and how we can actually free ourselves from that state – that is one. The other is how to acquire enlightenment – how to acquire enlightenment by tapping into our resources and how to develop those potentials which we have innately, that so far have remained latent. Mahayana Buddhism says that if we tap into our inner resources there is a tremendous amount that we can use. Because of ignorance we have failed to do

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this, therefore we remain entrapped in our samsaric condition. Thus we lead a more impoverished life. Our life will flourish if we learn to tap into the higher states of being, the higher states of consciousness. Doing that brings about insights and those insights in themselves will produce higher and higher states of consciousness and enrichments.

In Mahayana, detailed descriptions of the state of bondage and the state of freedom are given. A common saying in Mahayana, “to correspond to the eighty-four thousand different types of mental torments we can experience as a samsaric creature there are eighty-four thousand different kinds of teachings that we can find.” It is a way of saying that the teachings correspond to our condition, the condition that we find ourselves in right now, and the possibilities of what we

can attain.

I believe this is very important because I think these days in the west we often tend to spend a lot of time thinking about impermanence, the Four Noble Truths and emptiness and things of that kind. The aspect of wisdom, or wisdom consciousness may not be emphasised enough. ‘Wisdom consciousness’ may make us think that we are talking about a completely different kind of state from that we are already in. We may have a lot of reservation about aiming towards attaining a very highly advanced state of being such as enlightenment. We may want to think of our spiritual experiences as normal experiences. We may even become skeptical about anything considered out of the ordinary as if it is beyond human reach or something of that kind.

From the Mahayana point of view, equal emphasis has to be put on the nature of reality and the wisdom consciousness because if we do not emphasise wisdom consciousness and do not cultivate that then the nature of reality will remain

unrealised. Our normal state of consciousness is largely incapable of understanding reality and incapable of understanding our own true condition. For that to occur we need to acquire wisdom or wisdom mind, rather than relying just on our ordinary consciousness. Ordinary consciousness is called *vijnana* (Sanskrit) and *rnam shes* in Tibetan. Wisdom consciousness is called *jnana* (Sanskrit) and *ye shes* in Tibetan. Only then can we say that we have some experience of reality, we have some insight into our own true nature.

So that is also another reason why, simply having some insight into ourselves here and there does not lead to deep transformation because that is still part of our ordinary consciousness; it is the ordinary consciousness that is offering up these experiences – *vijnana*, or *rnam shes*

in Tibetan, the ordinary consciousness. Even if we have unusual experiences but even those unusual experiences may just be part of the permutation of our ordinary consciousness.

From the Mahayana point of view, we try to deepen our understanding of the Mahayana teachings so that we will know how to cultivate this higher state of wisdom consciousness and see that the wisdom consciousness has its practical use: our wisdom consciousness is inseparable from compassion. Wisdom consciousness is not separable from non-directional compassion and non-directional compassion cannot remain dormant and inactive – it has to manifest, it has to manifest in interpersonal dealings and interpersonal situations.

In that way, the cultivation of wisdom consciousness coordinates with acquiring

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greater insight in relation to reality – our understanding deepens regarding reality and our own true condition – this then has an impact on how we conduct ourselves, and how we express compassion. From the Mahayana point of view it is not surprising that when we try to be compassionate, that is different to someone like the Dalai Lama practicing compassion. That difference comes from the Dalai Lama having more wisdom consciousness than we do.

From the Mahayana point of view, even though compassion is emphasised - and compassion is a necessary part of Mahayana Buddhist practice - it is not the kind of compassion we normally think of as being a compassionate act. It is compassion which is based on understanding arising from wisdom consciousness.

If we are yet to develop wisdom consciousness, we have to use our own ordinary consciousness and acquaint ourselves with different teachings. In that

way we can use the methods that are set out, laid out in the teachings, in terms of how to bring about that change. How to gradually extricate ourselves from the influences of our ordinary consciousness and allow the wisdom consciousness to grow.

So from the Mahayana point of view, from the time we attaining the first level of the bodhisattva, the wisdom consciousness has already taken root. As I mentioned, the wisdom consciousness is based on the fact that we already have Buddha-nature. Gradually the wisdom consciousness becomes stronger and stronger until one attains full Buddhahood.

Until we attain the later stages of the bodhisattva – called bodhisattva *bhumis* the bodhisattva is not free of defilements and delusions. This is an interesting point to keep in mind, because it is not

contradictory for someone to be quite spiritually advanced and have some deeper understanding into one's own self, one's own condition, and yet from time to time be vulnerable to the influences of negative states of mind or negative impulses and so on.

As it is described in Mahayana Buddhism, certain habits of mind are very well-entrenched. Even though we develop new habits and new insights and new ways of being, we still have to contend with these old impulses for a long time. As it is described in Mahayana teachings, even though we are not creating fresh, new karma, as it were, even though we are not now doing something really horrible or very negative, nevertheless traces of old habits remain and so from time to time we may fall under their influence.

It does not mean we have now gone backwards. Even if one is making steady progress on the bodhisattva path, that does not preclude the possibility that occasionally one is going to be vulnerable

to certain feelings of negativity or even traces of selfishness or self-centredness and so on. The main point is that these tendencies gradually diminish, so over a period of time these negative predilections will play less and less of a significant role in one's life.

So this is how we try to understand how these three concepts support the Mahayana practice, and the importance of the teachings. The teachings are just as important as the practice of meditation and the practice of compassion. From the Mahayana point of view contemplation on the teachings is part of meditation.

There are two different kinds of meditation in Buddhism. One type emphasises meditative concentration (*shamatha*) and the other emphasises the meditation of analysis or insight (*vipashyana*). The meditation of insight is related to meditation on the teachings. We can study the teachings just as a way of expanding our mental horizon or trying to stimulate our mind, or we can learn about the teachings in the way that we are supposed to as a meditation practitioner, using them as tools to free our mind. If we are approaching it in that way then we are doing *vipashyana* or insight meditation.

That kind of integrated approach is emphasised. It is important to remember that the teachings are not like doctrines; they are to be utilised, they are tools. The Buddha used the example of the raft to demonstrate the usefulness of the teachings. He said the teachings are like a raft that we use to cross the ocean of *samsara* – cyclic existence.

We utilise these teachings to grasp their meaning, “what is meant by our own true nature?” which the teachings describe. Because we do not have wisdom consciousness yet, we do not have full understanding. We can gain understanding from the teachings. The teachings assist us to find ways to tap into our untapped, inner resources and utilise our mind to the fullest capacity so that ordinary consciousness can be transformed into wisdom consciousness, to experience enlightenment.

That is the general outline of what Mahayana is basically about or what it emphasises. As I said, insight is attained through familiarizing ourselves with the

teachings and there are many different kinds of teachings. Some of the teachings use allegory, metaphor and things of that kind, and tell mythic stories and so on; others are straight philosophical teachings on emptiness, selflessness, Buddha-nature, the attributes of enlightenment and the definition of nirvana, enlightenment and similar states.

So approaching the teachings on any of these levels is helpful to give us insight into ourselves, whether we are reading sutras or familiarising ourselves with mythic stories. Instead of just discarding them, saying, 'Oh, this does not make sense' or 'This is just too incredible. It cannot be true'. If we read them with an open mind gradually they can assist our well being and understanding. Teachings on topics such as emptiness will also give us a better understanding of how things are in reality, free of embellishments.

Understanding the nature of things (phenomena) and the nature of our own condition, is a superior form of knowledge to understanding how this or that thing works. For example, technical knowledge, is a very useful thing but that does not transform our state of being fundamentally. A scientist may know how certain things work but that knowledge does not free that scientist from his or her own demons. Deeper insight into our own condition, which the Mahayana teachings speak about, can transform us and that will allow us to be compassionate in a very different way.

As I mentioned, compassion in Mahayana Buddhism is used as a broad term; compassion does not have that narrow definition that we give to it normally. Compassion in Mahayana encompasses all forms of activity, activity that we may not even immediately associate with being moral or ethical. Any kind of activity associated with what we call body, speech and mind is included. So how we use our body, how we use and formulate our words and speech - how we choose to use the spoken word and the types of thoughts we have - all of these things are related to whether we are doing things in a compassionate way or not. So any form of action has the capacity to be compassionate.

Action, in this context, does not simply include physical action but verbal acts and mental acts as well - all three are described as actions in Mahayana. So we can act physically in a compassionate manner, verbally in a compassionate manner, or mentally in a compassionate manner. All different kinds of actions - everything that we do and think about is part of that, part of what we call compassion.

The other way to put it is this - in Mahayana there are two different domains: the *relative domain* and the *absolute* or *transcendental domain*. The transcendental domain is connected to the contemplative aspect of the wisdom consciousness and the relative domain is encompassed by what we call compassion so it is the active domain of the wisdom consciousness. So the wisdom consciousness prevails upon the relative domain and that is the active aspect of wisdom consciousness. Any action performed on that level is compassionate.

Thus in Mahayana Buddhism, compassion has a very broad connotation, and within that we have many different kinds of compassion because many different kinds of people practice compassion. Only a Buddha (fully realized being) has mastery over these two domains: the transcendental aspect of the ultimate state of being, which is the domain of wisdom, and then the active side of that, which is the compassion. As I mentioned, the two are related because true compassion in its essence is non-directional compassion, and non-directional compassion is inseparable from wisdom consciousness.

There is no conflict between wisdom and compassion in Mahayana Buddhism. There are many different manifestations and degrees of compassion, from the material level of the manifestation of compassionate activity to more subtle, more refined levels. The more refined states of compassion are not separate from wisdom consciousness and the gross forms of compassion and the subtle forms of compassion are not separate either. Just like water and vapour are not separate, similarly the more gross forms of compassion and the subtle forms of compassion are not separate - it is all a matter of degrees.

Real wisdom, wisdom consciousness that one attains radiates as compassion. When compassion comes from a very open state, which is not directed towards any one individual or any one thing, even when it manifests on a more gross level - the material level, has a wider impact than the compassion that arises from a very narrow focus, such as focusing on a single individual or single issue.

From the Mahayana point of view, if our compassion that we practice toward a social issue, for example, such as compassion in relation to saving animals or doing something for the environment or whatever it may be, if it is coming from that non-directional state of consciousness then this is coming from a different state of mind. It is not coming from our normal, ordinary state of consciousness. For Mahayana Buddhists this is a very important distinction because we can, through good actions create positive karma. But to engender a broad non-directional compassion, then we are able affect real change in oneself, to plant the seed of wisdom mind. We can work towards correcting things as best we can, and make things somewhat better, right some of the wrongs that may have been done. If we can take that further we can instill a real fundamental change in our selves as well, and this will enhance us and our capacity to practice compassion.

This is a fundamental issue, that it is possible to be active, to be effective and not become passive, reticent, retiring and indifferent. From having had the experience of insight into reality, having acquired wisdom consciousness supports compassion and compassionate activities on a more tangible, physical, material level.

From the Mahayana point of view that is what we need to do. We need to aim towards doing compassionate activities that will support our effort to grow and aim towards enlightenment, rather than purely being stuck on the moral level. The issues of morality or ethics or issues of justice, doing what is right or what is good, whatever the case might be - all of those things are very important. Nevertheless, the actions that we perform have to be supported by some kind of higher state of being, from wisdom and non-directional compassion for it to be all encompassing. ■

# Interview with Lama Jinpa

from the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Sangha in Woodstock, New York

## Salvatore Celiento



*Lama Jinpa (Aaron), is a longtime student of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. He completed the traditional Karma Kagyu three year retreat at Karne Ling Retreat Center in Delhi NY under Karthar Rinpoche's guidance. Since that time he has served Rinpoche and the KTD community by teaching regularly at KTCs (KTD satellite centres). Lama Jinpa is a householder practitioner, and enjoys practicing at home with his family. Lama Jinpa regularly gives courses for E-Vam Buddhist Institute in the U.S. and is a valued presenter always bringing such insight and warmth to his courses.*

**Salvatore:** The first question I would like to ask is how did you get interested in Buddhism? Or how did you get involved in Buddhism?

**Lama Jinpa:** When I was in college, I had a good friend (Nathan Maxwell), and we all had similar interests in music and so on. We're still friends to this day. Our school was in a party town, but my friends and I didn't party per se. But we'd just go downtown and watch the girls, watch the fights, all sorts of chaos, and we were just curious happy bystander people who were apart from that world and into our own thing.

**Salvatore:** Yes, people watching.

**Lama:** Yep! Just kind of entertained to be around it all? One night, everyone had gone to bed early and he and I stayed up late talking and watching rap videos, talking about girls, and basically, we got on to the subject of karma and vegetarianism. We talked about our views, and he said, "Your views are very in line with Buddhism," and I said, "Oh, I don't know anything about Buddhism."

The reason this is so interesting to me, is that at the time, I was heavily judgmental about a lot of things. To give an example, if somebody said, "You should play basketball," I'd rationalize, "No, I shouldn't" (because I'm not good at basketball). But if someone said, "You should play guitar," I'd say, "Yes, I should!" (because I'm good at guitar). In this way, I was very guarded in what I liked and disliked at a social level based on how it benefited me. Somehow, I had this openness toward Buddhism though. He also said, "You should meditate." It was the weirdest thing for me at the time, but I said, "Yes! I should meditate." He then directed me to the Greenville KTC.

**Salvatore:** It sounds like you had a natural affinity toward Dharma, toward Buddhism, just naturally, in the way you were thinking and experiencing the world.

**Lama:** A strange openness to it, honestly. Where we grew up in North Carolina, it's an interesting place. It's in the middle of nowhere. Most Americans look at it as if it's uncultured, but what happens in environments like that is that people with like interests (art, music, spirituality) tend to find each other very quickly – and there's close bonds. Actual community.

There was a KTC there and it turns out to be the one that I now help. It was an older crowd; they never really had many college students drop in, so they were very curious but encouraging. They gave me meditation instructions, and I felt like the pragmatism of it hit immediately. It was such a personal shift to slow down and

examine my mind – begin to look at my habits and change them. It felt empowering to suddenly feel that I had an option beyond my habits; which was deeply valuable.

Another value that jumped out immediately in Buddhism involved one's human potential; *buddha-nature*. I was a "hard learner" as a kid, a bit of a wild child. So, I'd always get in trouble. I remember my mom reading a bad report card where a teacher only said, "Well... Aaron has potential," (and nothing else) and my mom laughed and said, "Gosh. I don't know what to make of that statement." Encountering Dharma was the first time in my life where I felt like personal potential wasn't an abstraction or a far-out quality, it was something that was quite close to all of us. I recall reflecting: "Gosh, if I can turn away from just one habit and toward *buddha-nature*, even on a simple level, and then my potential is somewhat activated as opposed to being a dormant thing."

**Salvatore:** That's a really beautiful, interesting thing about Dharma; some things sound abstract in the beginning but in actuality, they're real. As you were saying, it's a potentiality not just necessarily an idea. It's something attainable?

**Lama:** Yeah, I think that's the aim. To be able to go to a place and meditate and examine ourselves can provide a fresh canvas of mind and it's useful. I say that because now I think we're in a world where ideas are more and more compressed, like the hash tagging of everything. Everything is over discussed, put on the marketplace; but never utilized. Life is so speedy and reactive as well – and we're all caught up in that. But especially as beginners, we need a space to slow down and begin to work on our minds.

It also helped there were other peer practitioners there who were living examples of sangha. I don't mean like realized masters, but just heart and soul



people; like your next-door neighbour type who's been working on their mind for the last ten years, who might say, "Oh, man. I've been through it too, and here's how I navigated things using Dharma." That made a lot of sense to me. So that's how I got initially involved.

In other aspects, I didn't jump right in. I meditated, studied, and did a lot of mantra, and I did a lot of tonglen and eventually got to meet some of the KTD lamas that were coming through; but I was very respectful and cautious before committing to ngondro. For about a year or two I kept the whole thing a secret from my other friends and family. But eventually, my friends noticed a big difference in how I was relating to things. My family especially liked the difference Dharma made in my attitude.

I instantly had an affinity toward Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche just from reading his book, *Dharma Paths*. Before long, I had met other lamas, but I really just wanted to see him. I eventually moved to Washington DC, which is a lot closer to New York than North Carolina, and I would drive up to KTD any chance I got. I couldn't make it every time he taught of course, but that's how it started up, you could say.

**Salvatore:** Yes and I wanted to ask you about Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. When was it that you did the three-year retreat at Karma Ling with Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche? And would you like to share anything or reflect on that experience or your experiences with Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche?

**Lama:** The first time I met Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, I went to attend a teaching at KTD and there were interview sessions available. I met with Rinpoche and I confessed a bunch of stuff that I'd done as a younger kid when I was quite rough. As I said, I was a bit of a wild child, and there was a lot to unpack there. Anyway, I confessed it all to Rinpoche and started crying. What was immediately impressive was that there was no judgement in his attitude, but he had tears of love and acceptance in his eyes; he was compassionately crying. He took his time, shared some kind words, practical advice and he blessed me. At that point I asked if

I could be his student. I thought maybe there was this margin where he'd say, "Well, no, you're actually too bad!" but he accepted me and said yes. At that time, he also blessed me for the first time by touching our foreheads together. Since that time, he was like a spiritual father to me.

Rinpoche was well known for putting his forehead against people's foreheads as gesture of blessing. You can't fake that gesture actually. I don't know another way to say it. In some cultures, there's the gesture of bowing it's true, but people can fake a bow. But this gesture of touching of foreheads was genuine—you can't fake coming in that proximity with someone that well if you aren't sincere. It just doesn't have the same effect. But when he would do that – you'd really feel some deep blessing.

***"To be able to go to a place and meditate and examine ourselves can provide a fresh canvas of mind and it's useful. I say that because now I think we're in a world where ideas are more and more compressed, like the hash tagging of everything. Everything is over discussed, put on the marketplace; but never utilized."***

Anyway, I think of it now because I miss it, but I also feel that his openness was always very refreshing, and his blessings cleared so many things away for me—and that's something that is still active for me.

So, about retreat. Around this time, I met a Western retreat lama and read about Milarepa, and I thought, "How exciting! This is still a thing! There's still an active tradition of retreat at the present!" As a person who came to Dharma from my own mistakes, Milarepa was someone I could relate to; a bit of a personal champion. To meet someone from our culture who's essentially doing the same curriculum, made me feel that I could aspire to follow that same path today. It reminds me of Milarepa's, "Parting Aspiration Song" where he sings about the blessings of hearing of his life or pursuing things in his way. I feel there's really a blessing in just hearing about Milarepa and contemplating him.

The internet wasn't so prevalent at the time; which I think was a blessing. I had nothing but books and human beings to encourage me with Dharma. To connect with Dharma, one would go to a centre or read a book by a master. But I think now the internet has a lot of compression of subtle ideas, missing context, a lot of gossip, and a lot of stuff basically for sale. It doesn't hit what we need in terms of human connection. We go on there because we're looking for something and we just end up adrift and looking for more. We just want to feel something. Of course, now legitimate Dharma is on the internet, but I felt very fortunate to find it at that time and make a genuine human connection first.

My dharma exposure was my practice and my people (this small center and later KTD). So, there was no complexity for

me, and I think it spared me a lot. Now I see a lot of people get very involved and practice intensely as a beginner, and then they encounter something confusing online while they are putting all this energy forth, and it ends up shaking their faith; and many end up quitting. I was so lucky that I had a good environment and friends – a pure container.

**Salvatore:** Yes, sounds like a very analogue experience, instead of looking up the answer quickly, you could take time, study Dharma texts, listen to masters, and all these kinds of things.

**Lama:** Yeah, I definitely wasn't getting my information from the internet. I remember meeting Khenpo Karthar and knowing that he was the real thing. It left me feeling an aspiration of, "I want to do Dharma the way he is explaining it. I need to do that!" Because you see, what drove me into Dharma is that initially, I liked the potentiality and pragmatism. But then

once I started to read about karma, and I knew about all the rough things I had done when I was younger, I wanted to make it right. I knew I had to. I was actually a bit haunted by it. I needed to, and I very much related to Milarepa because he was determined and able to fix the bad things that he had done and to me it was, “I need to do that, and I need to heal a lot of things.” That was my motive for practicing and going into retreat.

Around this time Rinpoche was offering a short phowa retreat. That retreat was a week of just phowa and Amitabha, and it was held at Karma Ling Retreat Center in a giant tent outside. In an interview I told Rinpoche, “I really like this. I like spending a whole day practicing. I like spending time around you, and I like practicing in the mandala in this way and I have a wish to do three-year retreat.” He said, “That’s good! It is because you must have practiced in the past.” And he said, “You should hold on to that aspiration.”

Then a few months later, I said something wishy-washy, and he stopped me and said, “You know, if you don’t do this retreat, I’ll be very disappointed.” At that point, it was suddenly locked in my mind. I said “Oh, this isn’t just him encouraging me, it’s for sure. This is my master; I can’t let him down.” At which point I never looked back.

The other thing was that at the time, he had just turned eighty and I was probably a bit older than twenty – so didn’t want to miss that opportunity.

I have an older friend whose husband has been very sick. She takes care of him and said, “I’ll probably never be able to do retreat.” And I said, “You can’t think that way. Take care of your husband now, take care of imminent affairs in your life without a doubt. But never let go of your aspirations – but your wishes are yours. You can make them big, and you can take the smallest steps toward them, but if you’re moving in that direction, it will happen one day.” We owe it to ourselves to have big aspirations that we work towards.

No one is going to find a Westerner and say, “We’d like you to do retreat, sir.” It might happen for a few Himalayans, like a tulku, but it’s only going to happen really

if you want it. So, for me, it was like a determining factor. I really wanted it for my own reasons; and there was no doubt that this was what was going to happen for me once Rinpoche said that. I think aspiration is the key thing for anything. It comes up when you talk about the bodhisattva path but I also in life, anything you want to do, you must set your sights on it, and work in your own little ways to make it imminent, to make it real or make it happen.

I don’t like to say too much about retreat itself because the context is mostly for us, the people who do it. One significant value was that I got to spend the time with Rinpoche – it was where he lived. Sometimes this would be direct – like asking a teacher for advice or lessons which are really important. But in a more general sense being around a realized master and just receiving their blessings and energy, and example was quite powerful. We knew one another from prior to retreat, but as things progressed, things got more subtle. Sometimes Rinpoche wouldn’t give a hard explicit answer from Rinpoche; but I wouldn’t need one. He could look over at me and I would just know if he wasn’t happy about something, or he was. Rinpoche could simply look at me - and I’d know, “Oh, I need to behave or pay attention.” Or he might express pleasure - and like we would feel delight. There was no complexity or heavy handedness in the relationship. We were around each other a lot so he’d know things like what we were comfortable with as well as our idiosyncrasies.

For example, I have an amazing skill in life of physically breaking things. Once, I broke an “unbreakable knife” while working with him, and he laughed, and kind shook his head smiling- expressing, “only you could do this accidentally!” He really knew this funny quality of mine right away! But I think he similarly had a lot of care and concern for each of us as people and students.

Prior to three-year retreat, I would attend the annual ten-day-teachings. Rinpoche was teaching Karma Chagme’s Mahamudra teachings. In this teaching there’s a switch where the teacher says, “I’m going to ask you questions now, and your answer tells me your understanding –

and we will calibrate.” Which creates an involved interactive teacher-student exchange – a bit like that in *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*.

From then on, if I saw Rinpoche, I’d always ask him some Mahamudra questions. In retreat, every week I’d ask him, “Okay, you told me to meditate like this and I did it, and this is what it’s like.” And would say, “Hmm, no.” And then he’d say, “Oh, that’s a little better, but what about this?” And I’d say the wrong thing again. There was a lot of that. I can’t say I realized Mahamudra – but it definitely calibrated my meditation significantly. I’m so grateful for that time together.

Toward the end of retreat, he was like, “I’ve told you all these things. Now it’s up to you to do it. You have to do this.” And there was a shift.

When I first entered, the retreat masters say, “You made the right decision.” Then halfway through, they’re like, “I think you guys can do a little better,” and you think, “Really? We’re working so hard,” and then at the end, “Well, you’re a lama,” and I was like “What!? I thought I wasn’t doing good,” (laughter). Then when other people start calling you Lama and it’s a heavy thing to hear, I think.

I remember afterward, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche said, “When you do Dharma work, you have to wear the Dharma robes. I expect that of you.” Which I mostly do it unless I’m visiting some Western Dharma communities where it’s not really observed.

**Salvatore:** It sounds like there was a very deep and profound connection where you had communication on a subtler level. I understand that you are a regular presenter at E-Vam Buddhist Institute, and that Traleg Rinpoche used to visit when you were on retreat. I was just wondering if you could mention something about Traleg Rinpoche?

**Lama:** Traleg Rinpoche wasn’t someone I knew in a personal or informal capacity – but he certainly impacted me as a meditator and Buddhist (and still does). He went to KTD every year and I would make a point of going. Those talks were typically Mahamudra themed and given in a very generalized way. When I say “generalized,” if Rinpoche taught on the 4

yogas of Mahamudra, it might be a more a fluid talk and personal, as opposed to terse and doctrinal. He was a real meditator talking about meditation. It didn't seem like he was working off a text, which was very nice. KTD is very fortunate that we had masters like Traleg Rinpoche, Thrangu Rinpoche, and Khenpo Tsultrim, who would come every year often sharing Mahamudra instructions or empowerments.

Later, Traleg Rinpoche came to my three-year retreat. When I came out of retreat, he passed away about three to four months later which really hit each of us hard.

When I read Rinpoche's books, particularly his edition of *Moonbeams of Mahamudra*, it has a spoken quality to me. Like you're hearing the advice right from a lama in a closed setting. That text is very good. It is a meditation manual of course, and manuals can naturally be a bit extensive and detailed by nature – but his commentary feels like a spoken transmission to me.

**Salvatore:** Yes it's remarkable. It's one of my favourite books.

**Lama:** I often wondered, if Traleg Rinpoche were here right now, I'd have a lot of questions about "bringing thoughts to the path." In the footnotes, he suggests that we could allow ourselves to accommodate thoughts. The way he expresses this is incredible to me, because it's a distinctly Mahamudra view and approach. Rinpoche uses and examines the most precise English word for the situation; "accommodate." Which I think is really unique and exact choice of words. He compares it to accommodating a friend, which is different than managing, struggling, negotiating with our friend. There's some sense of overarching acceptance necessary if we want to accommodate.

"Bringing thoughts to the path" has been important to my practice the last few years. For me it's more dynamic and involved than thinking, "I just want to have the peace of shamatha," or "I just want to have the clarity of vipashyana," and then rejecting or defining what my experiences should be. The approach Rinpoche (and Dakpo Tashi Namgyal)

are suggesting, allows a space to bring all kinds of experiences to the path, taking and integrating them in the sense that you allow life to join experiences and meditative awareness. One can't simply reject thoughts and expect work with them at the same time. So to practice in this way, we have to allow ourselves to "give rise to thought," or "allow thoughts to occur."

This theme can be challenging to discuss with people, because a lot of meditators are troubled by their thoughts, and don't want to do that just yet. Or they say, "Well, I've never done that. That's strange." So, there's people who would benefit from Rinpoche's explanation, I think.

**Salvatore:** Yes, I think that's one of the beautiful things or the incredibly, amazing things about Traleg Rinpoche's books and writings is that it's very accessible but that doesn't take away from its profundity. And also Lama la, I wanted to ask you about your music, that you're a musician. Could you tell me about your music and what you do with music?

**Lama:** The kids in my neighborhood all played guitar and skateboarded. Guitar stuck for me. I wasn't particularly good at skateboarding, and my father was a soldier, so I was a little bit of a "latchkey kid." When I say, "a little bit," because I was really cared for as a kid, but if you didn't keep your eye on me, I'd drift. I'd sneak out to another neighborhood. I ended up learning music from other kids in my neighborhood. There was a girl named Carol, who was an amazing guitarist, who taught me a lot. I started playing in bands when I was maybe fourteen. When I was fifteen, my first band put out our first EP, and started playing regionally, like the DIY punk

thing. That fell apart when high school ended and then there was the college version, with kind of some the same people. By the time college was over, our band *The First Step*, would travel up and down the East coast, and the next thing you know, we went to the West coast. We went to Europe three times and were one of the first bands of our genre to tour Central America. Because of that, the people there really appreciated it. It meant a lot to the people who were there. I still hear from kids in Central America who saw us, and they are still very passionate about it, and say, "That meant so much to us."

These days for me, I like music to be relaxed and holistic. If I have a speedy day, and I try to sit down and meditate, it affects meditation. Whereas, if I have a speedy day, and play guitar for thirty minutes, that could slow me down just right to then meditate afterwards. My current project is a band called "*The Living Memories*" – which is my friend Stephen's words and poetry put to my music. (He is also a Kagyupa actually)

**Salvatore:** I've heard of similar practices like stretching or doing yoga before doing sitting meditation.

**Lama:** Yes, and I've always loved the story of Vinapa and the Buddhist analogy of the musician and the jina (guitar); "not too tight, not too loose," which is such a big theme in Mahamudra.

It's a perfect analogy for asking, am I in tune in my mind and life? Am I too speedy, uptight, and cranky, or too ambivalent and carefree?

**Salvatore:** Thank you so much Lama Jinpa for taking the time to talk to me, I know you're very busy.

**Lama:** You're welcome. ■



# News from E-Vam Institute



Such an auspicious beginning of 2024—E-Vam Institute and community were incredibly blessed to host The Visit of Dudjom Tersar Lineage Master Tulku Pema Rigtsal Rinpoche. Rinpoche provided teachings on the Nine Yanas of Tibetan Buddhism, and granted the empowerment for Dudjom Jigdral Yeshe Dorje's Dorje Sempa Lama Chopa: The Chariot of Great Merit. This significant event marked 15 years since Traleg Rinpoche IX introduced the Vajrasattva practice to the younger generation, who continue to uphold this practice. The full five-day event was recorded and is available on the YouTube channels of Tulku Pema Rigtsal Rinpoche and E-Vam Institute [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/@evaminstitute/playlists). <https://www.youtube.com/@evaminstitute/playlists>

A week later amidst beautiful weather, E-Vam Institute hosted the 41'st Buddhist Summer School. Kicking off with the "on trend" opening forum topic, "Can AI be your teacher?", local and international teachers engaged in vibrant discussion. Across four days, participants had the great fortune to spend time with such esteemed speakers as Orgyen Chowang Rinpoche explaining, *Longchenpa's Wisdom on Six Amazing Things You Can Do With Your Life*, Venerable Ajahn Hāsapañña teaching how enlightenment is a natural process, and



Traleg Khandro uncovering how to bring the Mahamudra Approach to our meditation practice.

Other highlights included the insights into Zen Master Dogen's teachings from Ekai Korematsu Roshi, and Sam Bercholz, who joined fellow U.S. teacher Lama Jinpa to give perspectives on Buddhism across the different stages of life. Also, Philip Greenway, PhD, provided western psychological insights relating to Buddhism, Japanese brush calligraphy with Jinesh Wilmot, and Teishin Shona Innes guided participants through the profound elements of the Soto classic 'Zen Mind, Beginners Mind'.



Celebrating the year of the wood dragon, Losar this year was marked by a beautiful Chenrezig Puja and a gathering of new and old friends. We also celebrated the second edition of the Journal of Integral Buddhism, and the Sangha enjoyed refreshments and each other's company well into the night. It was a joyous occasion that brought together people from all walks of life to celebrate the beginning of a new year.

Our regular practices resumed early in the year including monthly Chenrezig and Vajrasattva practices, and weekly meditation practice.

The Annual Easter retreat was well-attended, featuring four days of structured program and video teachings from Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX on the Psychology of Meditation.

Rinpoche spoke about what doing mindfulness practiced properly means, learning to forget

certain things and remembering other things. When thoughts and emotions well up, we don't treat them as enemies. If we have thoughts that are helpful we learn to notice those things and when bad thoughts crop up we learn to forget. That's real mindfulness. Learning not to get too attached to all the disturbing things that are going on inside our head but gradually learning to pay attention to all the good thoughts, good feelings, good emotions that we experience, we become transformed.

The first of the new quarterly "Meditation and Teaching Series" focusing on Buddhist psychology had an encouraging and success start. It was great to see people sign up for the full year to attend all 4 courses. The first teaching, entitled "The World of Buddhist Psychology", delved into the unique approaches of Buddhist psychology, encompassing early Buddhism, the Mahayana, tantra, and self-liberation perspectives. Here is a quote from the teaching on Early Buddhism:

"Everything that we perceive is always in a state of process and never static. When we come to realise that things are



not substantial, we also come to realise that things are impermanent as well. This has enormous psychological ramifications. When we start to realise that the mind is not substantial but is always in a process, then we begin to realise that there is no underlying abiding psychical principle that we can call Atma or soul, and our whole attitude towards "our self" begins to change. We also begin to realise that we can either progress or regress in relation to how we see ourselves."

It was inspiring to see many participants, both online and in-person, so keen to practice and learn. We are

looking forward to delving deeper into Buddhist psychology on the Abhidharma and the comparison of Western perspectives in the subsequent courses planned this year.

We were happy to begin the first of the Urban Retreats for Under 35 for 2024. With Tibetan Yoga, an introduction to the 4 thoughts that turn the mind to the Dharma, lots of meditation and discussions on the four noble truths — It was an enriching day for all.

It is so special to start the year with such positive engagement and wonderful intention. So much gratitude to all the volunteers and everyone for participating and helping make these Dharma events come to life! ■

*Mark Dawson*



## News from Nyima Tashi Buddhist Centre Auckland, New Zealand

At the time of writing this, the auspicious month of Saga Dawa has just commenced. Celestially, this time is marked by a certain star which is visible in the sky. But, from our vantage point here on earth, if we consider ourselves Buddhist, during this month we are encouraged to apply some additional awareness to our vow of non-harming, while dedicating the merit - as it is multiplied million-fold - to benefit of all sentient beings. All our time spent on the cushion in meditation or going about our daily lives in an undistracted way, making offerings, all the times we utter prayers, perform puja, show kindness to other beings are magnified.

At Nyima Tashi we will be marking this auspicious time with the continuation of the regular programmes, and by coming together to perform sadhana on the most auspicious dates such as Saga Dawa Duchon - the celebration of the birth, enlightenment and parinirvana of Buddha

Shakyamuni - on 23rd May.

Our weekly meditation groups have been undertaking study of the Nine Stages of Shamatha, led by Ani Jangchub Lhamo, as part of our regular meetings. With the view that if we take to heart some kind of genuine knowledge and understanding of these stages, the reason why we practice Shamatha and the kinds of obstacles and challenges which inevitably arise, then we are truly empowered to develop some stability in meditation. The two groups include a group of high-school students who are interestedly studying the topic. And our regular Tuesday evening group has swelled with the number of regular attendees often filling the Gompa to capacity. It's wonderful to be sharing

Traleq Rinpoche's eloquent teachings on this topic with students who are Buddhist & non-Buddhist alike - because the benefit of Rinpoche's lucid explanations is felt equally.

In April, we were honoured and delighted to welcome Khenpo Dawoe Rinpoche on His



second visit to Teach at Nyima Tashi. Rinpoche very kindly taught on the topic of Dependent Origination - with a focus on the twelve links - to a full audience. Rinpoche is the current Abbot in chief at the Drikung Kagyu monastery Drikung Thil in Nepal and has been travelling through Asia prior to arriving in New Zealand.

Preparations have commenced for the upcoming Troma Nagmo retreat in September at St Francis Retreat Centre in Auckland. We are so joyful to be able to welcome Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro back to New Zealand, as it has been their wish as well as our sincere wish to bring this retreat to fruition after it was cancelled in 2020. Students from near and far are expected to join the week-long retreat from 22nd - 29th September. The venue has just made another few rooms available, so it is possible to find out more about attending the retreat, which was previously fully booked, by contacting Ani Jangchub at [nyimatashi.nz@gmail.com](mailto:nyimatashi.nz@gmail.com) ■



# News from E-Vam Buddhist Institute U.S.



Early May we completed a six week online course *LoJong, Cultivating Compassion through Training The Mind* with our regular and wonderful presenter Lama Jinpa from the KTD Sangha. Lama La based the course on aspects of Traleg Rinpoche's "LoJong" book through Shambhala Publications. It was an inspiring and very helpful course on bringing the LoJong view and contemplations into ones meditation practice, and for that view to positively affect ones perspective and attitude. We look forward to further discussions on LoJong throughout 2024. Thank you Lama Jinpa for your wonderful guidance.

We have just concluded the joyous E-Vam annual retreat 17-20 May, *The*

*Path Of Mahamudra Meditation* at the beautiful Saranam Meditation Centre in West Virginia providing, the perfect environment for retreat. Traleg Rinpoche's teachings – spontaneous translation and commentary – on the text by Padma Karpo on the 4 Yoga's Of Mahamudra were the centerpiece of the Retreat, with Lama Jinpa leading puja

and discussion on Traleg Rinpoche's teachings. Tibetan doctor, Kyle Weaner supported retreat again this year offering yoga sessions through the weekend and designing a healthy menu for the 4 days. One of the highlights of retreat was the Guru Yoga "Blazing Confidence in the Great Bliss of Naked Wisdom" Puja and Tsog (feast offering) dedicated to the Traleg Tulku lineage - past, present and emerging. Julie Brefczynski Lewis, as always was an amazing guide and support for Retreatants and support to Lama Jinpa, with a number of the retreat attendees coming from her own wonderful West Virginia Study Group that she runs for many years in accordance with Traleg Rinpoche's instructions.

Thank you Julie for your ongoing Dharma activities and support for E-Vam's activities.

Anma Ingeana, who looks after many aspects of the E-Vam Crestone Colorado land took a special trip out to Crestone in May to visit the land. She also took time to visit Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's magnificent temple, Osel Ling – Abode Of Radiant Light, and other wonderful Dharma sites in Crestone. The E-Vam land is situated on the plateau, with a creek running along its back boarder. This beautiful environment that this unique high plateau provides, surrounded by remarkable mountains is reminiscent of the Tibetan plateau. Crestone provides the perfect home for many Centres retreat facilities. We are delighted to be apart of this special Dharma community of Centres. ■

*Traleg Khandro*



## News from Shogam Publications

The documentary *Beyond Two Worlds: Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX* is now available for rent or purchase <https://beyondtwoworlds.vhx.tv/>. We are excited to be able to now make accessing the documentary as easy as a click away. We hope that Dharma Centres and related organizations around the world, as well as individuals moved by the presentation of Rinpoche's remarkable life, will take the opportunity to watch this intimate portrait of this great master.

Journal of Integral Buddhism Volume 2 2024 will be available as an eBook any day now. Please check on any of the major online stores in your part of the world to secure your copy. The paperback can be purchased at E-Vam in Melbourne.

Shogam Publications latest release (released late 2023) *Longchenpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom* is a must read for anyone interested in an in-depth, profound text on the Dzogchen tradition. As always, despite the complexity of this text, Traleg Rinpoche has managed to bring the teachings to us with such transparency and precision, in such a way that one cannot help but be moved and changed by immersing oneself in the teachings this book contains. Presented



in such an accessible way for his many western students, it breaks through any cultural barriers and takes us straight to the pith of the teachings, without compromising or diluting their depth, meaning and profundity.

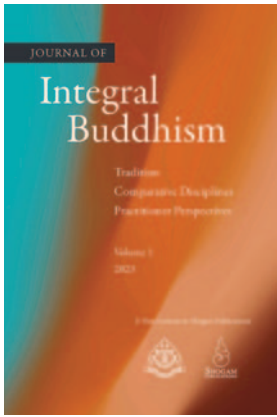
As well as accessing the book at E-Vam in Melbourne, all Shogam books are available at all the major online bookstores in different parts of the world, and can normally be ordered through your local bookshop in the US, UK and Europe etcetera. ■

*Traleg Khandro*

# News from Akshara Bookstore

Akshara Bookstore is proud to announce the latest joint calibration between Shogam Publications and E-Vam Institute. The Journal Of Integral Buddhist Volume 2 is out now!

## Journal of Integral Buddhism VOLUME 2 2024



Volume 2 includes the following teachings:

- **Traleq Kyabgon Rinpoche IX – “Buddha-nature: Mahamudra Perspectives”:** Explains the notion of buddha-nature from a Mahamudra perspective, and provides an excellent and accessible overview of the Mahamudra path.
- **Venerable Chi Kwang Sunim – “The Ten Bhumis”:** Writes about the ten bhumis with the purpose of illustrating the experience of following the Buddhist path.
- **Ajahn Dr Buddharakkhita – “Abundant Solitude, Scarce Loneliness”:** Discusses the potential richness and fullness of solitude and the idea of overcoming the experience of scarcity in the excessive pursuit of worldly fulfillment.
- **Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche – “Generating Empathy, Joy and Compassion in Buddhism”:** Explains the Mahayana approach to building a compassionate heart and mindset that can override our fixation on the small vision of ego centeredness.
- **Pilar Jennings PhD – “The Psychology of Compassion”:** Discusses the concept of attachment and its relationship to compassion and well-being from Buddhist and Western psychological perspectives.
- **Traleq Khandro – “Buddhism as a Living Philosophy, Integrating the View into Meditation”:** Not seeking to represent a particular school of Buddhism, but has prepared a Buddhist non-sectarian paper on the practice of meditation, reviewing the traditional instructions to meditation and their relationship to how we can work with the mind to build wisdom.

Order your Copy here!

<https://form.asana.com/?k=Yu2Ga3WHX0WwqZHLg1A7cg&d=1191134214814809>



## Longchenpa’s Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral Translation and Commentary by Traleq Kyabgon



*“We don’t attain peace from rejecting certain things about ourselves, but from incorporating and assimilating every aspect of ourselves. That is what leads to happiness and well-being. The authentic state is attained through participating in, being involved with, and incorporating, everything that one is.”*

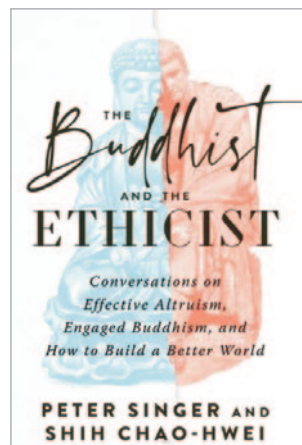
Longchenpa’s Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral translation and commentary is a seminal Dzogchen text that is divided into three cycles: Mind, Ultimate Reality and Equality. The ninth Traleq Kyabgon Rinpoche, one of the great meditation master and scholars to come out of the Tibetan diaspora, has provided a detailed oral commentary and spontaneous translation of Longchenpa’s text to help reveal the essential meaning of these profound teachings.

Order your copy here:

<https://form.asana.com/?k=F2IZgaWEQJnws47U8cZzuA&d=1191134214814809>

## The Buddhist and the Ethicist: Conversations on Effective Altruism, Engaged Buddhism, and How to Build a Better World

By Peter Singer & Shih Chao-Hwei



An unlikely duo—Professor Peter Singer, a preeminent philosopher and professor of bioethics, and Venerable Shih Chao-Hwei, a Taiwanese Buddhist monastic and social activist—join forces to talk ethics in lively conversations that cross oceans, overcome language barriers, and bridge philosophies. The eye-opening dialogues collected here share unique perspectives on contemporary issues like animal

welfare, gender equality, the death penalty, and more. Together, these two deep thinkers explore the foundation of ethics and key Buddhist concepts, and ultimately reveal how we can all move toward making the world a better place.

These and many other titles are available at Akshara Bookstore. ■

# E-Vam Institute Winter Teaching Program 2024

## WEEKLY MEDITATION

**Thursday May 2- August 15 6pm – 6:45pm**

The weekly sessions offer the opportunity to begin or renew your meditation practice in a welcoming and supportive environment. With meditation instructions as provided by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, these sessions can nourish our motivation to practice by practicing with others.



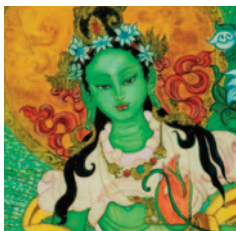
### **DO TULKU RINPOCHE ON THE THE WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA: VIGILANT INTROSPECTION**

**Tuesdays 4, 11, 18, 25 June  
(Online) 7.30-9.00pm**

Do Tulku Rinpoche returns this year to continue his teachings following the text. Chapter 5 on *Vigilant Introspection* is an essential guide to working with our attachment to wanting things to be how we want them which only causes ourselves more suffering. Known for his learned, interactive, often unconventional, and humorous way of teaching, Rinpoche brings the text to life providing the inspiration we need to utilise this important text. *Each chapter is a complete teaching, so you are welcome to join the series at any point.*

**The Meditation and Teaching Quarterly Series –  
TOWARDS THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BUDDHISM  
SERIES; PART 2: MEDITATION & EMOTIONS  
Friday June 14, 7.30pm-9.00pm  
Saturday June 15, 9.30am- 4.30pm**

Meditation is often associated with the idea of simply working with the mind as if this is all that is required, and on that basis, the belief is that overcoming negative and painful emotional states will follow. Within the Buddhist psychology teachings, known as the *Abhidharma*, the relationship of mental and emotional states is detailed, providing important insight into how our 'ordinary' psychological experiences arise. In this series of talks, Rinpoche guides us through these teachings and shows us how integral working with the mind and the emotions are on both the Path and to our psychological well-being. The Meditation and Teaching Quarterly Series includes meditation sessions and teachings from Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX.



### **GREEN TARA: THE MEANING AND INSPIRATION OF THE PUJA**

**with Traleg Khandro (Felicity)  
Saturday June 22  
10.00-12pm; 2-4pm**

How can we build a more enriching relationship with the prayers and practices contained in the Green Tara Puja? This one day course is designed to study the qualities of the deity and meaning of prayers contained within the Tara practice. Experiencing the positive qualities of the deity, and building a clearer relationship with the meaning of the prayers can help us to generate an inner richness and a greater

ability to recognize attributes of the deity within ourselves. No prior experience with puja is required.

## **GREEN TARA PUJA: MONTHLY SUNDAY PRACTICE**

**Sundays July 21, August 25, September 22  
9-10.30am**

The Green Tara course is followed by three monthly Green Tara pujas. You do not need to have completed the course to attend. Please join us for these monthly sessions which also provide a great opportunity to gain familiarity with the practice before the October retreat where Green Tara puja is practiced each morning.



**ANNUAL WINTER ZEN  
COURSE WITH EKAI  
KOREMATSU ROSHI  
Friday July 12, 19, 26,  
and August 2.  
7.30pm-9.00pm**

Continuing the annual tradition as requested by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX, Ekai Roshi will teach on the Shōbōgenzō by the Great Master Eihei Dogen. Please check our website for further information.

## **CHENREZIG PUJA**

**First Friday of every month  
7.30-8.30pm**

In times of great confusion and suffering in the world, gathering together to invoke Chenrezig who embodies compassion, is a means to care for both others and ourselves from the spiritual point of view.

## **UNDER 35s PROGRAM**

### **UNDER 35s URBAN RETREAT:**

**Every last Saturday of the Month, 9.30am - 4.30pm**

Offering a warm and inviting environment, E-Vam Institute welcomes people under 35 with the unique opportunity to join us to learn from key meditation practices and delve deeply into understand key concepts of Buddhist philosophy.

Rather than only being about meditation or philosophy the Urban Retreat encourages an integrated approach to spirituality through practicing what are known as The Three Trainings of Buddhist Practice: Meditation, Wisdom, and Moral Sensitivity.

## **MONTHLY VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE FOR UNDER 35s:**

**First Sunday of Every Month 10am-1pm**

For those curious about practice within the Tibetan Buddhist system, we offer a monthly practice of Vajrasattva entitled "A Chariot of Great Merit", a Vajrasattva Sadhana of the Dudjom Tersar Tradition revealed by the Tertön Garwang Drodrul Lingpa Tsal. These sessions are suitable for beginners.

**Please check our website for details for other exciting program events.**