Message to the Sangha from Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

Tashi Deleg for the Year of the Wood Rooster-2132 (2005-2006)

As it states in the Pratimoksha Sutra:

Commit not a single negative action,
Cultivate a wealth of virtue.
Completely tame one’s own mind,
Never disturb the minds of others.
This is the teaching of the Awakened One.

These five lines are not to be taken casually or to be ignored. They are some of the most practical and profound words spoken by the Buddha. As you know, the Buddha taught 84,000 categories of teachings and turned the Dharma wheel for the first time by explaining the Four Noble Truths. In teaching disciples to avoid negativity and the ten non-virtues, the Buddha showed the way to engage in the practice of first two Truths: Suffering and the Cause of Suffering. If one recognizes that negativity results in suffering and unhappiness, then one will practice the path of knowing what to accept and what to reject. In doing this, one can practice the third and fourth Noble Truths, which are the Truth of the Path and the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. By abandoning negativity and accumulating virtue and merit, the result will be enlightenment!

Also, by taming one’s own mind and avoiding harming the minds of others, one will be practicing the Four Immeasurable Qualities and the Six Transcendental Perfections. These practices bring temporary happiness and lead to ultimate bliss for self and all others. That is why as Buddhists it is so important to follow the truth of these five lines and put them into daily practice. Please try to do so to the best of your ability.

Since the Buddha himself practiced in this way and then taught the path that leads to enlightened realization, it seems important to try to follow this example. Whether explained as nine, eight, three, two or even just one vehicle, all of the Buddha’s teachings lead to the state of permanent peace. Even if one were to practice for thousands of years there would still be
endless teachings and practices available to us through Buddha’s speech. Since Buddha’s inconceivably profound and far-reaching teachings are so vast and applicable to all, they have not only endured in the lands of their origin but have spread throughout the world where they benefit countless sentient beings from all walks of life. Since all of you are educated and have developed qualities you already know this.

Well then, what is the result of Dharma practice? The results are the inconceivable actualization of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities and activities. These include the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks and signs of enlightened body, the sixty branches of melodious enlightened speech and the two aspects of omniscient prajna-wisdom of enlightened mind. Those who are diligent in perfecting the three wisdoms of hearing, contemplating and meditating will achieve these results according to their own prayers and efforts. Of course you can read about all the many thousands who have already done so from many countries such as China, Burma, Thailand, Japan, Tibet, India, Bhutan, Nepal and so forth.

In Tibet the Dharma flourished due to the efforts and hardships of the original gurus and translators. That is the case today as well. Those translators first relied upon their gurus and then went ahead to develop their own qualities through the three wisdoms of hearing, contemplating and meditating. Their efforts in meditation were not like the retreats people speak of these days but rather they stayed in retreat practicing until the fruit of realization occurred. Their conduct, like the great Khenpo Santaraksita, Vimalamitra and others was impeccable so that followers could always learn and become inspired from their example. The translators became equal to the gurus by mastering the Dharma not just intellectually but through practical application. Whether this is true or not you should investigate for yourselves by reading the life stories of Padmasambhava, Berotsana, Yeshe Tsogyal, Mandarava and countless others.

These masters always knew what their vows were, unlike present day vow holders, many of whom do not even know the categories of vows that they hold. In addition they always knew what their bodhisattva vows and Vajrayana words of honor were and held them closest to their hearts. If we use these great practitioners as our examples then this will be of great benefit to us for achieving the same results in the future.

Especially in the context of Vajrayana, there are two gurus to be aware of, one of which is the translator. A good translator has already accomplished listening, contemplating and meditating in order to be able to correctly translate and transmit the guru’s teaching, especially when it has to do with the view and other advanced subjects. The translator is also accumulating the merit of giving the most sublime gift, the gift of the Dharma, as well as serving the teachers in the highest, most meaningful way. This is not an ordinary job at all and should never be looked upon as such. This position demands the accomplishment of higher levels of spiritual understanding and the development of many qualities. Translators are fortunate to be able to engage in the enlightened activities of all the Awakened Ones. Since this is activity that is for the benefit of self and all other sentient beings, translators must be careful to maintain the highest
standard in order not to accumulate negative causes for lower rebirth.

Students should always take care to respect and honor their translators with appreciation and vajra affection that is based on pure samaya. Please consider the importance of keeping pure samaya with not only just the gurus but also the translators for the important reasons that I have just explained. The translators are your teachers as well so in order to keep a pure connection with the Dharma the entire situation must be taken into consideration in these ways. Learning Dharma and receiving transmission does not come about easily as there are many necessary links in the karmic chain that make this possible. It is important to be aware of every aspect and honor those who help you in this profound way with love and respect. One should not think in ordinary ways that you like someone or dislike someone with impure perceptions. Whoever is serving the gurus, the Dharma and sentient beings must be cherished and pure samaya must be maintained.

In addition to qualified teachers and translators there must also be the patrons of the Dharma. Those who are in a position to be generous towards the Dharma must not be small minded. They should have a vast perspective so that great merit will be accumulated.

All the lineages that have come into this world and flourished until now are due to the kindness of the gurus, the translators, the patrons and the pure practitioners. This includes the entire Kama and Terma lineages. The Terma lineages have even flourished despite the devastation caused by the Cultural Revolution. Many dedicated students have worked hard to ensure the preservation of the sacred texts and in particular we must acknowledge and express our gratitude to Mr. Gene Smith for his lifetime dedication in this field. All of you should do your very best to make connections through body, speech and mind to serve the doctrine and sentient beings in these ways to the best of your ability so that this precious human rebirth is best served.

Tashi Deleg to everyone!

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**Message from Sangye Khandro**

Warmest greetings to everyone! We enter another year with the precious human rebirth. One of the endowments of the precious human rebirth is meeting with the teachings. We all have that good fortune, so our opportunity is really something extraordinary. Even more wonderful is finding oneself in the presence of great vajra masters who kindly pour the nectar of their wisdom into us. This is truly the greatest fortune of all. We may have heard countless teachings and received the most profound blessings, but we still are responsible for coming to know the nature of our mind. Without accomplishing this, we will not be able to be liberated from our karma, passions and delusions. The greatest challenge seems to be maintaining this awareness in the face of life’s various circumstances. Gyatral Rinpoche reminds us of this by quoting the familiar words of the Buddha to ‘completely tame one’s own mind.’

The difference between Buddhas and sentient beings is that Buddhas know the mind’s nature to be pure wisdom phenomena, while sentient beings experience the ordinary dualistic mind as impure deluded phenomena. Because we want to be like the
Buddhas, we must learn how the Buddhas continuously sustain pure wisdom phenomena that never causes suffering. Once we realize that this knowledge is based upon ascertaining the correct view then we must study, contemplate, and meditate so that we have total confidence in the view that is in fact the true nature of the Triple Gem and all the objects of Refuge. The nature of our mind and the nature of the objects of Refuge is undifferentiated.

If we do not understand our wisdom mind even though we have had many profound opportunities in this life, our Dharma practice will remain only an outer pursuit because we will still be emphasizing ordinary deluded phenomena rather than pure wisdom awareness. If our Dharma practice is only superficial and based on this life’s appearances alone, it is hard to imagine that we will be able to have confidence in the wisdom nature at the time of death.

In order to establish the view on the path of Vajrayana one must meet with a qualified vajra master and receive teachings referred to as pointing-out instructions. Once at least a glimpse of awareness into the mind’s true nature occurs during such a transmission, it is crucial to receive more instruction and begin to practice in order to purify obscurations, accumulate merit and meditate in samadhi. It is then very important to arrange one’s life so that one is able to sit at the feet of a qualified vajra master in order to receive instructions from the great commentaries on tantra. These commentaries explain the ground, the path (the ten topics of tantra) and the result.

Generally receiving teachings about the ground of the path means learning about the genuine nature of reality and the origin of all phenomena. Depending upon the depth to which one investigates this, there can be many extremely profound insights gained into the primordial origin of samsara and enlightenment. Once the nature of the ground or the view has been established with confidence, one is able to practice the many methods of the path depending upon the guidance received from one’s teachers. Based on one’s practice, results will emerge as the veils of ignorance and confusion are lifted and released. It seems extremely important to be fully aware of the path that one is practicing: knowing what is involved, where this leads, what can be expected and so forth. It is through this approach that ordinary mind is slowly turned into wisdom awareness.

Of the many commentaries that illuminate the path of tantra, one of the most extensive and profound was written from the perspective of Dzogpa Chenpo by the omniscient Longchenpa. Called *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions*, it is a word-by-word commentary to the root text *The Secret Essence Tantra* (*Guhyagarbha*). To have the opportunity to receive this teaching is indeed rare even among advanced practitioners of Vajrayana, especially because it is now even more difficult to find a teacher who is qualified to teach it. After receiving teaching on the *General Meaning of the Secret Essence Tantra*, Gyatrul Rinpoche and I decided to request the highly qualified Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche to teach on the most extensive commentary, so that this most important opportunity could become available to sincere western Vajrayana Buddhists for the first time. Although we knew it would be a monumental challenge to undertake, Lama Chonam and I offered to translate if Khen Rinpoche would agree to teach.

During the first year, David Lunsford generously offered the mandala space and patronage for the teachings. Khenpo Rinpoche was initially reluctant to teach due to the text’s length and profundity. He established many strict requirements for the first year’s attendees. Nevertheless a strong group of dedicated practitioners gathered and during the first year of the teaching we were able to successfully complete the first (very long) chapter of a total of twenty-two.

Khen Rinpoche was pleased with the signs he received and decided to continue until the text was completely transmitted. He also relaxed many of the earlier requirements. He recommended that we change the location from Hawaii to Alameda since this would allow more students to attend. Both Gyatrul Rinpoche and Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche realize how precious the circumstance of this teaching is and through their wisdom and compassion
they have adjusted as much as possible to the needs of the students so that those who may still have the fortune to attend will be able to do so. This alone is unprecedented in the history of such a transmission. In addition, Gyatrul Rinpoche, Sonam Tsering, Lama Jigmed, Lama Drimed Lodru, Lama Thinley and many students have worked to prepare the main shrine room at Orgyen Dorje Den. It is the fulfillment of the aspirations of our supreme root guru, Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche, who founded this center some twenty five years ago.

Q. Your book is titled *A Beginner’s Guide to Tibetan Buddhism*. You began your Buddhist path 30 years ago. What is the difference between beginners today and the Western Buddhists you knew in the 1970s?

A. I think the major thing is we are no longer young. When I studied in Nepal and India we were mostly in our 20s and we still had a lot of youthful mentality and a lot of ambition and we were all aspiring yogis. By the time I returned to the United States, most of the practitioners I met were in their 40s, locked into a busy life that didn’t have that much flexibility. The first line in many dzogchen texts is “Go to a quiet place and practice…” That’s assumed. So if people can’t accomplish that first step, then where does that leave us? That question was a lot of the inspiration for writing this book.

Q. I loved the book. I read it like a page-turner - all the way through over one weekend. I experienced the book “filling in the gaps” in my understanding and connection to the Dharma.

A. The main gap is that the teachings were presented for people who are practicing in solitude while our lives are just the opposite. Then there’s the cultural issue. Practitioners who grow up in the system view Tibetan Buddhism like a fish views water; they don’t even know it’s there, it’s the world they live in. Buddhism pervades the culture. Here we go to the Y to work out, we go to the temple to do Dharma. It’s something we do, it’s not like the air we breathe. That’s a big difference.

Q. In *A Beginner’s Guide to Tibetan Buddhism* you say the short answer to the question “Why am I writing this book?” is because your teacher told you to.

A. In 1997 it became possible for my wife Susan and I to go to Nepal. One evening, I was pontificating
about Buddhism in the West, and Susan said “You should write a book,” and the next morning I went to see Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, who has been my root guru since 1976 and he said the same thing, so I considered that an order. Still I procrastinated. I had no typing skills, no computer skills, no writing skills, but the next time I saw him he really emphasized the importance of writing the book. And he said I should add a lot of personal anecdotes. That made the writing much easier.

Q. How did you meet Gyatrul Rinpoche?

A. In 1977 I had to return to America because of family and health issues. In those days in Nepal, His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche was very accessible, he had open house every morning, you could just drop into his house, and there was a translator. I told him I was returning to America and he recommended Gyatrul Rinpoche. I have kept in contact with Gyatrul Rinpoche constantly since then. He authorized and encouraged me to teach. He said, “I will teach the boulevards and highways and Bruce will teach the avenues and streets.” So, I don’t pretend to teach the boulevards and highways. I present what is basic, gradual, step-by-step, and in doing so, I hope that then beginners are able to receive and practice Rinpoche’s teachings with a much more sophisticated and prepared perspective.

Q. Do you have an image of your ideal reader?

A. I imagine that the reader is someone fairly similar to the people taking my classes. Really what I hope for is that people don’t give up when they encounter difficulties. Maybe they go to the center and people aren’t friendly to them, or everything is in Tibetan and they don’t understand a word of it. I hope that A Beginner’s Guide to Tibetan Buddhism will be something that a new student can fall back on. Let’s face it; most of us are middle-aged Western lay people studying a tradition that was created for young monastics practicing in paradise. It’s overwhelming.

Q. But yet Tibetan Buddhism is here and we are the students.

A. And where did that connection come from? Guru Rinpoche has said that the people who have the karma to meet and practice the terma teachings are people who have trained in many lifetimes. That’s what he says and he doesn’t lie. The fact that we are here at Tashi Choling and we study the Dudjom Tersar or the Nam Cho is a sign that we have many lifetimes of practice. It’s hard to imagine how we have the karma to be here. That’s our challenge.

—Barbara Caselli
Two Dharma Journeys

A Journey to Golok
by Heika Wierenga

It all happened quickly. Between the decision to go and actually sitting on the plane, it was five days. So I did not have time to think too much about what to expect. And was I in for the biggest surprise. Once we drove up into the Himalayas my perception was transported into a new realm. It quickly became clear to me that this land is blessed and consecrated into a holy place. Every rock, the sky, my perception it all was extraordinary and still now I feel the effects of this relic called Tibet. Due to high elevation vegetation was sparse. There are treeless vast valleys and mountain ranges with unusual rock formations and glistening reflections of water. Water flows everywhere you go. Dancing lights of shadows and space keep you constantly in awe as does knowing that here walked Longchenpa, Guru Rinpoche, and Dudjom Lingpa.

Sangye Khandro, Lama Chonam, David and I drove up to Jigme Phuntsok’s monastery to meet with Gyatral Rinpoche’s sister and Khenpo Lobsang Chapel, also a relative. It was a very emotional day and they looked into us and kept saying that in meeting us it was as if meeting Gyatral Rinpoche in person.

The Serta Monastery was impressive to me. Thousands of tiny houses all face the main Gompa, surrounding it like a beehive. Looking down into the Dharma city I would see only robed Sangha walking. Women on one side, men on the other. The earnestness of the Tibetan people is staggering. We were loaded with gifts and food wherever we went and the smiling, gentle, playful faces of the people everywhere we went was a constant reminder of the beauty and strength of their bloodline and influence of Dharma in their lives. My heart was overflowing with real love. This place truly made me weep with joy on a daily basis.

Going with Lama Chonam made it very special. We were well-received everywhere because this is his home. And all the mundane things that I could never have dealt with were taken care of. We visited several holy places, even though it seems it’s all a holy place. One place that made a deep impression was this ancient charnel ground, a place Do Khyentse Yeshe Dorje held sacred, and Tibetans will still take their loved ones there to receive a sky burial. The region is full of history. Gesar of Ling lived there and our dear Lingtrul Rinpoche has his Gompa right there. Marvelous.

The nomadic folk in Golok manage to live side by side with the Chinese mostly peaceful and free. We spent time at Chonam’s parents’ house in a town called Darlag. The downtown area, composed of one intersection, always was the most delightful place filled with unusual characters. I could stop there and stare forever in awe. When people come down from the hills to shop for supplies, they dress up. They ride into town on horse or motorcycle, both of which are covered with Tibetan rugs. Men with long hair, reddish brown faces, high cheekbones, often tall, wear sheepskin chubas with gorgeous silver belts and traditional jewelry. No one is out of shape. The lifestyle doesn’t permit that. They all seem to be calm and social. Also you’ll see lots of monks, ngagpas (the real deal), pretty women; the list goes on. Time stands still in some ways.

During our stay, the families that have livestock moved from summer camp to winter camp. These families’ lifestyle works well with the land, and the families are prosperous. To me it seems as if family and community are key in their lives. There is a very supportive feeling in that. Coming back home now, I know what our precious lamas gave up to stay with us, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.
A Pilgrimage to India
by Cache Hartzell

“Pilgrimage is not about comfort. It’s about purifying and accumulating merit.”
—Khenchen Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche

It’s 5 AM in Bozeman, Montana as I attempt to find words of our journey to share that will be of some benefit. Yesterday it was 6:30 PM in India at this time, I think, or maybe it was tomorrow. We find ourselves coming in and out, soft-kneed, jetlagged. If you have been to India on pilgrimage, then the best I can do is remind you of the wonders. If you haven’t been there yet, I can think of nothing to say that will prepare you.

I started a journal of our experiences the day we made it to the Namdroling Monastery in Bylakuppe, India. I told myself it was to help us remember, but I think now I was really looking for some way to make something solid. Everything was quickly softening into the surreal, and I wanted a handle to hold. This of course was futile. As Will put it “Nothing is on our terms. Forget it!” So I once again decided to surrender, to open up wide and be swallowed whole.

Should I write about the 30-hour trip from Montana? Or maybe the 6-hour heartstopping, thrilling car ride from the Bangalore airport? The monkeys? The suffering? The garbage? The air pollution? The food? Losar Celebration? The mind-blowing constant generosity of His Holiness Penor Rinpoche? The pain of seeing the suffering of the animal realms? The nine hours of puja each day? The most spectacular temples imaginable? The seven story high thangkha? The loving warmth and kindness of the people? The beautiful colors the Indian women wear? The beggars? Or maybe how we had to let go of all ordinary concepts and judgments just to survive? Or perhaps how easy it seemed to experience the dream fabric of everything? Or maybe the dream I had was about the only true refuge?

In India I was reminded of Buddha Shakymuni and his first experiences of the truth of samsara, of the suffering. How he might have felt when he first came out of his sheltered life and witnessed the relative truth: raw, exposed and heartbroken. How once the truth was revealed he had to find some way to end this suffering. I realized that here in the USA we are somewhat protected from the truth. As a society we try and hide the uncomfortable things. We are like Prince Siddhartha’s father. Maybe we think this is for our own good. But I found the honest exposed truth of India inspirational. Experiences were more open, more fresh, more honest. My heart broke open to the beauty and the pain. It was like the relief of finally confessing a lie to a loved one.

When leaving India I cried at the airport. It seemed way too soon to leave. Our Tibetan friends who were seeing us off smiled and said, “Don’t worry, you’ll be back.”

May it be so.

Will and Cache Hartzell are the program and facility directors of Namdroling Montana. They are currently organizing a group pilgrimage to India for February 2006, led by Khenchen Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche. For info on this and Namdroling Montana, visit the website, www.namdrolingmt.org
Mirror of Wisdom, known formerly by its Tibetan name “Yeshe Melong,” serves as the archives and publishing organization for Pacific Region Yeshe Nyingpo and related Dharma centers, under the guidance of the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche.

**Expanding World Wide**

Our new website www.mirrorofwisdom.org, will be up and running soon. Development of the new website has been a real community effort involving numerous volunteers. Stephanie Lain of Austin, Texas has headed up the project with great care and devotion. Our gratitude and special thanks goes out to everyone who contributed. Whether you are a beginning practitioner or a longtime student, we hope the extensive catalog of Dharma found at www.mirrorofwisdom.org will be a beneficial resource for you. The site is full of precious jewels of Dharma from Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, HH Dalai Lama, HH Dudjom Rinpoche, HH Penor Rinpoche, Ven. Yangthang Rinpoche, Ven. Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche and many others brought forth through the excellent work of quality translators such as Sangye Khandro and Alan Wallace. You can easily access Mirror of Wisdom’s published commentaries on numerous practices, practice texts and prayers, teachings and sadhanas on audio tape, beautiful photos of great lamas and deities, traditional Tibetan texts (pechas) and a wonderful collection of Dharma books. By simply typing in a keyword, the site search capability allows you to seek out the item you are looking for or presents all items relating to a particular topic, author, lineage, etc. Ordering is easy and various payment options are available; credit card, check or money order —online or by mail.

**New Addition**

Creation of www.mirrorofwisdom.org has been a major focus of activity this year along with upgrading office systems at our Alameda, California site. The restructuring and implementation of the new systems are important factors to ensure the timely processing and fulfillment of orders. Orders can be taken online, via phone/fax or in person at one of our bookstores.

The majority of those will ultimately be processed and filled by our newest staff member and office manager Ani Chodran who came to us from Sedona, Arizona where she was with the Kunzang Palyul Choling Sangha. We would like to extend to her a most warm welcome. Ani Chodran has been devoting her life to her dream of helping to establish an American center of learning for the Dharma in the tradition of a monastic university or “shedra.” Chodran joined Mirror of Wisdom to work towards that goal, recognizing the relationship between Dharma archives and publishing and establishing a center for higher Buddhist studies. Fortunately for Mirror of Wisdom, her professional experience in database and computer technology systems has been a valuable contribution as we prepare to launch our website and coordinate our various software systems—ordering, website and accounting—to work efficiently. Since she joined our staff six months ago, Chodran has been learning more and more about the wealth of material Mirror of Wisdom holds. When you contact us for orders or information, she will do her best to help you find what you are in need of to support your journey on the path.

**Special Projects**

It’s been a busy year at Mirror of Wisdom with a flurry of activities, but there are a few projects that we are especially excited to share with you. The **Bodhisattva Training** text, with a special commentary by His Holiness Penor Rinpoche, will be printed soon. Willie and Deborah Korman have worked together on this over the years along with many other volunteers. Sponsors and customers have been patiently waiting for this special text and we are pleased that it will be available soon. The “Pecha” (traditional Tibetan scripture) department continues to flourish and was very busy this winter with Jigme Lama, our hard working smiling Tibetan monk, preparing hundreds of pecha volumes for the purpose of filling and consecrating the radiant new statues at Orgyen Dorje Den.
Tashi Choling Sangha member Trish Demers has worked over the last year on developing a new “look and feel” for Mirror of Wisdom. First she created a logo by using the traditional seal (previously redesigned by artist Sonam Tsering) as a basis to work from. She then designed the layout for the website and is currently designing new covers for a variety of Mirror of Wisdom printed materials. A special thanks goes to Trish for volunteering her time and beautiful work.

There are also two wonderful bookstores where local and visiting students can browse through Mirror of Wisdom materials. Both stores also carry a number of unique Dharma items. The newest of our bookstores opened last spring in the new East Wing building at Tashi Choling. Many thanks to Lisbeth LaCoste, who has managed the bookstore and donated most of the furnishings for it. We also appreciate Lee Furbeck and the other volunteers who have helped out in the bookstore there. The original Mirror of Wisdom bookstore at Orgyen Dorje Den in Alameda is a wonderful Dharma shop run by Brian Flaherty who maintains it in a most friendly manner. We wish to thank Brian for all his volunteer time at the bookstore.

The Future of the Archives
Mirror of Wisdom consists of several areas of creativity enriched by the volunteers who passionately work in the day-to-day process of producing extraordinary Dharma material. For the past thirty years Mirror of Wisdom has been the guardian of many teachings brought to us by many great lamas and translators. In addition to the production of new, current teachings, there is a revitalized emphasis in Mirror of Wisdom on improving the archival preservation and cataloging of these early transcripts, recordings and images. It is crucial that the entire collection of archives, dating back to the early 1980’s, is digitized in order to preserve it. This is a large project that is time-sensitive, time-consuming and costly. Many items in the archives are currently undergoing the digitization process and hundreds of photographs have now been preserved as have hundreds of hours of video footage. In addition, older materials are being updated and polished to prepare for circulation.

Opportunities
We invite your support both in the form of volunteering expertise and time and/or financial donations. Some volunteer positions available are in the areas of digital preservation and archiving of audio teachings; document restoration and layout; audio and video (recording and editing); transcription, copywriting and editing; text production (copying and binding); pecha marketing and production; photography (photographing, printing and archiving) and working at the two bookstores. If helping to bring the Buddha’s teachings out to the world to ensure their preservation for the future is a cause close to your heart, we would like to welcome you to find the time and place for your participation in our organization that meets your particular interest. We need your help and value your input! Financial contributions to keep Mirror of Wisdom alive comes from direct support from the Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, customer purchases, and from a number of sponsors who have initiated and supported special projects that are personally
meaningful such as salary support for employees, medical insurance support for employees, translation projects, printing projects, support for transcription services, funds to purchase digital audio equipment, support to upgrade archival preservation of rare, old media, bookstore rent support and equipment and furnishings for stores, offices and workshops. We depend on your support to fulfill our mission of preservation and dissemination of Dharma materials and invite you to join in the gathering of merit by expressing generosity. We also invite you to share your support through feedback on ways to improve our organization. Wishing you well in the New Year, “May Auspicious Good Fortune Prevail!”

Please visit us on the web or at one of our little stores.

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In May 2004, we had the supreme good fortune of receiving Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche at Norbu Sam Phel Ling, our small shrine room here in Austin, Texas. Rinpoche bestowed empowerments and appropriate ‘lung’ making it possible for us to receive his teachings and commentary on *Natural Liberation*, Padmasambhava’s teachings on the Six Bardos. Rinpoche’s explanation on this profound terma, discovered by Karma Lingpa—the great 14th century tertön, was wonderful and had a significant impact on all who attended the retreat.

We also had the great fortune to have Sangye Khandro accompany Rinpoche, so that we could benefit from their inexpressible Dharma connection and her signature eloquence as translator. Rinpoche taught from May 4-15th to a group of over 30 students.

We had invited Rinpoche in 2003, but he directed us to read and study first. So upon his advice we formed a weekly group that met throughout the year. We prepared as much as we could by going over, studying and discussing Rinpoche’s book, *Natural Liberation*. This auspicious connection helped us in many ways, including our coming together to support one of our Sangha members during the passing of her husband. The group continues to meet and practice the meditations weekly, sharing the practice space with our weekly Ngondro group and several bi-weekly and monthly pujas.

Rinpoche’s teachings as always were direct and poignant, richly adorned with his unique mix of unpredictable humor, profound wisdom, and brutal honesty. We are so fortunate that he is willing to travel so far and put up with such a lot. We are very grateful Rinpoche, thank you!

Gyatrul Rinpoche’s teachings concluded with a Shower of Blessings Tsog at Palri Pema Od Ling, a country property blessed and named by H.H. Penor Rinpoche. Rinpoche’s warmth extended with equanimity toward all, and everyone was deeply touched by his awareness and loving-kindness. We eagerly await his next visit, pray for his health and long life, and send our best wishes to his immeasurable number of students around the world.

Rinpoche’s kindness continues to touch us here in so many ways; the Guru Rinpoche statue he helped us build has continued to be a magnetizing force in our community with many local Tibetans coming to visit on auspicious days. Also as a Sangha we have made the collective aspiration to accumulate 100 million Vajra Guru Mantras doing *khorwa* around the statue. Please pray for our baby group, that we may uphold our lineages purely and naturally.

For Losar, we accomplished a five-day Vajrakilaya retreat, concluding with a fire puja and tsog based on the Lakeborn Vajra Tersar practice.

May all beings benefit.
Center Reports

Dharma Notes from Portland, Oregon
by Dick O’Connor

Before giving an update on our center’s activities, I wish to convey all of our center’s gratitude to the Sangha members in Ashland who sustain Tashi Choling and make possible our visits there for various retreats and practices. This past year we have also been blessed with a visit and empowerments from Gyatrul Rinpoche.

Several years ago, Rinpoche mentioned to Lama Bruce Newman that he saw a connection between Bruce and the Portland Sangha developing. Not too long afterwards, our center asked Bruce if he could meet with us and have a discussion about the kind of teachings he might give us. Most of us felt we needed a better grounding in the basics of Buddhism, as most of us had jumped into the Dharma in mid-stream, starting with Vajrayana practices before we knew much about Hinayana and Mahayana. We also had many questions that arose during our practice but had no one to answer them as we were so distant from Tashi Choling and could only sometimes participate in its retreats and practices during Rinpoche’s stays there.

Also, our center needed some activity to pull us together, as we found making a common practice time impractical because of the diversity of our schedules.

I am happy to say that we have found an answer to the above issues with Bruce Newman’s classes which started several years ago with the first series devoted to the study of The Jewel Ornament of Liberation and our current class on the Seven Point Mind Training. The Jewel Ornament did provide us with the basic grounding we all were looking for, and The Seven Point Mind Training has provided tremendous help to us in our meditation practice.

Bruce’s teaching has created a wonderful learning and sharing atmosphere where all of us feel quite comfortable in asking our many questions and sharing with others our insights and confusions. And there are always great amounts of laughter and playfulness in much of the discussion. We have gradually grown to trust and cherish each other, which has led to our opening more of ourselves to the particulars of practice. I especially value the opportunity to ask questions to acquire increased understanding and clarity. I feel quite confident in Bruce’s answers and am also very grateful for his humility when he answers, “I don’t know, you’ll need to ask Rinpoche.”

We meet over the course of a weekend every two months and leave each set of teachings with a list of assignments, all of which are geared to our becoming better practitioners. This may not seem like much, but for us it was a very important and powerful step on our respective paths.

News from Los Angeles
by Valrie Swift

The Los Angeles Sangha is small, but together. We hold the bi-monthly tsogs and are looking forward to hosting visiting lamas in the future. In December, we were blessed with a visit from Gyatrul Rinpoche. He did a one-day talk about the Buddhist perspective on death and dying. He was very well-received and many past and present students attended. The Sangha had a lovely visit with him and then he went on to Ojai to do a talk there, which was hosted by Sondra Bennett. The L.A. Sangha recently elected officers. Ed Heckerman, who is a long-time student of Shenpen Rinpoche, is president. Lorraine Suzuki is secretary and Valri Swift is treasurer. The address for Southern California Region Yeshe Nyingpo is 12021 Wilshire Blvd. #708, Los Angeles, CA 90025. Ed can be contacted at asitis@earthlink.net.
It was an amazing year of activity at Orgyen Dorje Den. We hosted a month long retreat with Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche on the Guyagharbha Tantra, had numerous programs with some of the world’s finest lamas, rented our center to many outside groups and saw both our total income and total expenses nearly double. We improved our center by installing a new roof, exterior painting, fixing leaks and unclogging drains, and making continued enhancements to the Lama’s Room, which included the construction of a new private bathroom. We welcomed Rinpoche’s nephew, Lama Drimed Lodro, to our center and he has added new programs and activities that have further invigorated and expanded our Sangha. Last but not least, we’ve participated in the creation of a 19-foot Buddha Shakyamuni statue and the installation of an 18-foot, 2,500 pound brass Guru Rinpoche statue (shipped from India).

So what’s the value of enumerating all this? On one hand we can all rejoice in our collective merit, and marvel at Rinpoche’s skillful methods; he’s provided us with these opportunities to increase our merit and purify our obscurations, as we (as miraculous as it sounds) help create a stable place to practice for generations to come. As a Sangha, we can also recognize how far we’ve come and how much we’ve grown over the years. For example, we used to struggle when our rent was $500 per month, then we struggled when we paid slightly more per month, now our monthly expenses are many times more than that and yet we are slowly becoming more confident in our ability to sustain our center, and are also slowly learning to worry less. Rinpoche has shown us, and helped us to believe, that by growing the outside container, we can expand and develop our inner capacity.

Are we done? Not yet, probably not even close. While we may be slightly more harmonious and a bit more capable and productive,
Rinpoche frequently reminds us that we still have work to do. Hopefully, we will realize just how fortunate we are to have him pushing and encouraging us; helping us to learn and go beyond our habitual limitations. One day as we were talking with Rinpoche about the temple, he said, “You guys will change this temple one hundred times before you’re done.” Stage by stage, Rinpoche is patiently guiding us and transforming the former “funeral home” into a pure realm and us into real disciples. We at ODD are wishing for long lives, for both Rinpoche and ourselves, so that we can finish traveling the excellent path that he’s set out for us.

At Tashi Choling, thanks in large part to the indefatigable Chris McKinnies and Matthew Small, the new East Wing facility was given an official occupancy permit by the county in late spring. Now the infamous “blue rooms”—portable toilets—that we used for so long are in the nostalgia category and even the joke about how we miss going out to visit them in the cold is slowly disappearing. The new facilities have allowed us to house a small number of people during retreats and to host visiting teachers comfortably, including lamas such as Lingtrul Rinpoche who once again presided at the annual Vajrasattva and Vajrakilaya retreats; Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche who visited in October; and retreat leaders such as Les Collins who guided the ten-day bardo retreat in July.

The kitchen space was immediately put to good use for monthly tsog preparation and cleanup, but the real advantage of having a commercial kitchen available was seen at the Vajrakilaya retreat in November when several Sangha members—primarily Laurie Gadbois and Rebecca Wood, suspiciously dakini-esque—cooked heavenly food three times a day for retreatants! This provoked several token protests that the new
facilities lacked an authentic ‘ascetic’ feel. Come to the next catered retreat and judge for yourself!

Over the summer, the East Wing echoed with gibberish as the Educational Program students continued their study of Tibetan language under the guidance of Lama Chonam. At the request of several local families, Lama Chonam also established a biweekly children’s Dharma and Tibetan language class, which threatened to exceed the building’s approved limits for cuteness.

The downstairs community room has been baptized by many meetings and several Sangha social events, and was awash with tormas, butter, and decorations-in-progress before the Vajrakilaya retreat. The new facilities have not led to neglect of the temple itself, however. On the contrary, with the space in the East Wing to house these kinds of periphery activities more properly —previously they took place inside the temple—the temple has become a quieter practice and teaching space.

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche was present for the Vajrasattva and Vajrakilaya retreats and taught for several weekends in July, blessing us in his inimitable style by making faces at the children (as well as many of the adults) and haranguing us one and all. Rinpoche reminded us of the inexpressible preciousness of the “preliminaries” and gave the empowerments for Ngondro—Vajrasattva, Guru Rinpoche, Yeshe Tsogyal and Amitabha. Crowds of more than one hundred squeezed into the temple and sat outside to receive the empowerments, with many people coming to Tashi Choling from afar or for the first time.

The Venerable Khenpo Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche was invited by the Educational Program for two weeks in October. Like Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, he stressed the importance of studying and practicing step by step, and promised to return to Tashi Choling next year.

The temple was also used for the annual Ngondro retreat with Matt Small at the helm, surrounded by his usual stacks of books from which he drew explanatory quotes. Lama Bruce Newman led the weekend silent retreat in September, completed the third year of the monthly Marig Munsel program, and offered ongoing classes and also signings of his newly published book, A Beginner’s Guide to Tibetan Buddhism, in Ashland. Also in Ashland, in what we hope will be a precedent, Tashi Choling coordinated with several other local Buddhist Sanghas to host the Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche in November.

In short, Tashi Choling is “slowly, slowly” developing, encompassing more retreats and a greater variety of activities than was ever previously possible. Although the East Wing has had a conspicuous impact on the workings of the center, it is perhaps also impressive as an accomplishment in itself because of the tremendous generosity, discipline, patience, enthusiasm that was required for its completion.

It is encouraging to recognize what has been completed when
How to Make Tsog Torma
by Ila Reitz

This is the recipe for the tormas that we actually eat at tsog, not for the oatmeal tormas that we offer to the protectors. The drawing shows how the torma should look from both front and back.

4 1/2 cups tsampa (roasted barley flour)
2 cups brown sugar
3/4 cup raisins
1 cup finely chopped nuts
1 cup melted butter, plus extra butter for painting and ornaments
1/2 cup brandy
hot water as needed

Mix the dry ingredients together. Add the brandy and the butter. Stir and knead. If necessary, add a little hot water to make the dough more workable. Then form the dough into a teardrop shape (symbolic of a dakini breast). Paint the torma red with red food coloring, beet juice coloring, or whatever other red dye you can think of (please let me know if you discover a really good natural dye!). Then paint the torma with melted butter to make it shiny and juicy. You can also make several small tormas instead of one big one.

Making the Gyen (ornamentation):
With unmelted butter, make a flower decoration for the front. Put a little teardrop on the top front and dab one or five dots on the back.

Offer the tormas at tsog, and enjoy!

LONG LIFE CEREMONY FOR VENERABLE GYATRUL RINPOCHE

Please join a gathering of the wider Sangha at Tashi Choling July 8-10th when we will offer a Ten Shuk or Long Life Ceremony for Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche. It is auspicious for disciples to gather as a mandala and practice together, praying for the long life of their guru.

Lingtrul Rinpoche will preside as we practice the Yeshe Tsogyal puja together. July 10th is Festival Day, Chokor Duchen, which celebrates the day that Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma for the first time, teaching the Four Noble Truths. This is an auspicious day to finish the practice.

EAST WING ACCOMMODATIONS

We have very comfortable rooms in the new East Wing at Tashi Choling and we welcome your visit. For more information, please contact the East Wing reservation line at 541-488-9267.
It seems a long time ago when I first came to Tashi Choling. I was working in Hollywood as a production designer in films when I became aware of His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche’s coming visit and teachings. What an opportunity— I decided to not accept any more work and to attend all of this special event. The center was a house in Santa Monica and it was there that I met my future. The activity at the center was in full swing with Rinpoche, Sangye and Yeshe working to clean and prepare for His Holiness’ visit. I soon found myself helping. During this special time Rinpoche asked me to come with my daughter Tara to Tashi Choling. I was happy to agree— the thought of helping build a monastery in the country really was a dream come true. It took until the following spring to head north. We arrived in a converted school bus, pulling a trailer full of tools. The road was not as well maintained as it is now and what a surprise when we first saw the magnificent statue of Vajrasattva. The students would come out from Ashland to help. Some lived in the Mouse House or in the little cabin next to it. On the hill behind the old barn was the home of Gaea, Shandor and their daughter Sophia. Rinpoche would have a barbecue on the weekends, an incentive to make a work party. There was a family atmosphere with many children arriving with their parents. These were precious times that allowed friendships to develop. The preparations to begin the building of the temple included building a spring box nearly a mile away and laying a pipeline to the temple site. It was challenging to learn to lay cinderblocks. Somehow as we worked together the temple took shape. Rinpoche offered advice and teachings. The retreat land at Tashi Choling was not totally welcoming. There weren’t any facilities. The sun was relentless and bathing was confined to Cottonwood Creek yet the feelings of friendship and purpose made that time very happy. All in all it was wonderful. Over the years as the temple grew, many students came and many left. Some have died. The students that died at least had an excuse. It seems strange that when someone finds a lifeboat in the middle of
At the age of 38, Susan Bosworth was finishing her undergraduate degree at Southern Oregon University. That year, she took a class called Psychology of Aging that clarified the course of her professional life. One of Susan’s projects for that class was to interview people in a nursing home. “I was amazed at the suffering I saw there. When I saw and recognized what wasn’t provided to old people—spiritual energy, support or context—and when I thought that this would be what I and people I knew would experience, I was not willing to accept it. I felt that I had to find solutions.”

Susan has always loved old people. “I had the good fortune to have had many grandparents. Because of divorce in my family, I had eight grandparents. Each of them was different, but they inspired me. They were intelligent, compassionate, sophisticated, and powerful.”

In conclusion — the last twenty years flew by like a dream. The next twenty will go by as quickly. All our young will be middle-aged and we old ones will be gone. There is no time to waste. Life is not a stream, it is a torrent. That is a hard lesson to learn—mostly you have to live so long. Having said that, please don’t waste as much time as me. Take advantage of the precious human life. The best is yet to come, formed in the moment with good motivation and kindness.

Susan has been in private practice as a geriatric care manager, guardian and conservator since 2003. “Some of my clients don’t like me the entire time I work with them,” she said. “I have to take control of their lives and cut everything inessential away in order to make them as comfortable as possible. I try my best to be both kind and clear because it is so hard to take things away from people.”

“Most of my work is in the last years before death,” she continued. “This work is a constant training in patience. People are often angry or frustrated. The older person is angry because they are not in control. The kids may be angry or frustrated because they want access to the older person’s money.”

According to Susan, few people are prepared to deal with aging. “Mainstream culture has such denial of death and therefore no preparation for death, and it is very unfriendly toward aging,” she said. “I find that many people are not ready for old age. It is a shock to them, and I am called in to help them face that shock. I have to help them with government and medical issues, sell their houses, and deal with their possessions. People have such attachment to their stuff and to their younger selves. It’s almost as if I have to
retell their story to them, to help
them part with the past.”

“As a Buddhist, what I do makes
sense to me, but what makes me
sad is that most people have no
idea that they could be generating
virtue at this point in their lives. I
have long conversations with
people getting them to accept old
age, getting them to understand
that it is not a personal assault on
them, but something that happens
to everyone, encouraging them to
settle old grudges and to identify
and deal with their fears, which are
often about abandonment or
death.”

The majority of Susan’s clients,
she says, are not spiritually
engaged. “Out of 25-30 clients,
I’ve had only one who is prepared.
She has an active spiritual life as
a Christian. She had everything in
order, her legal and medical
matters, even the music for her
funeral. All she wanted me to do
was to call her every morning at
9AM to say hello. She wanted
somebody to check in on her every
day. I’ve been doing that for 2
years now.”

The most satisfying part of her
work, Susan says, is stabilizing her
clients’ lives and removing
external chaos so that they can
relax more. “I do that, and help
them identify and deal with their
fears one by one, and surround
them with loving and kind people
as caregivers,” she said. “Then
when their death approaches, I try
to create as much peace,
relaxation and kindness as
possible so that they are not
afraid.”

In her business, Susan has begun
to employ members of the Sangha
who are already trained as
caregivers. This is the first stage
in a long-range plan. “My hope is
to develop a Buddhist end of life
program. The program will be
available to the general public and
even more specifically to Buddhist
practitioners so that they can be
supported at the end of life and
during the process of dying by
Buddhist caregivers,” Susan
explained.

Within the next year, Susan will
begin to develop a training
program designed to train
Buddhists to support other
Buddhists at the end of life. Stay
tuned. And please keep this worthy
effort in your prayers.

“I like learning how to understand the teachings of
Shakyamuni Buddha,” said 8-year-old Sage Maia
Boucher, a student in the childrens’ program. “I like
to learn languages, too,” she said. “We are learning
to read, write and speak Tibetan. We’ve learned how
to count to 20, and we’ve learned words like star,
sun, moon, rainbow, person, father, mother, big and
small. Lama Chonam taught us about Manjushri and
he talked to us about why the Buddha wants to help
people,” Sage reported. Here, she shares a page of
her alphabet homework practice.
As always, Gyatrul Rinpoche sees—no, actually, he burns—right through me. Then he holds up the mirror so I witness it all too. Mostly I miss seeing anything because my eyes and my heart are shut tight and my mind races around like a woman with hair on fire, or else it just wants to lie in the cool mud like a fat pig. That’s my problem—which Rinpoche points out in no uncertain terms—and which sometimes I hear when I unplug my ears.

 Isn’t this what we want at the time of death, and all the mini-deaths we experience every second? Rinpoche sets the example for clarity, for authenticity, for the purifying bonfire. If we miss the teaching, then Rinpoche flashes the mirror or tells us loud and clear, “PRACTICE.” “Practice, practice, practice.” It is the only way to experience the truth now rather than wait for our dying breaths and all the emotionalism that will surely rain down as we clutch and wail at the loss of our body.

 The Bardo retreat, Rinpoche’s last visit to Austin, was especially powerful. My only aspiration, a secret one, was that my son Bret at least meet Gyatrul Rinpoche. My plan was that Bret would help carry in the vegetables, beef, spices and pans so I could cook for Rinpoche. Bret’s plan was to do so quickly and then go outside and sit in the sun or take the car and visit a friend. “Because, Mom, I’m really not into Tibetan anything,” as he explained.

 Upon seeing Rinpoche, Bret put down the box he was carrying, put his hands together in the lotus mudra and bowed, as if he had done this all his life. Then he sat on the hard floor next to Rinpoche’s feet. Together they finished watching the last 30-45 minutes of a teaching by Dudjom Rinpoche—all in Tibetan.

 A few days later, the meeting between Bret and his teacher was sealed: Gyatrul Rinpoche kindly gave him refuge. And Bret, today known only as Konchok Kyab, with a heart that had burst wide open, cried and cried.

 Many of us cried that day. Oh no, it isn’t always sweetness and light to be in Gyatrul Rinpoche’s presence. That is because he is the compassionate guru. He will not allow you to waste time on your pet habits or kleshas of the week. He is definitely ready to burn right through you. I hope that he comes back to Austin soon.

 When I asked my 23-year old daughter Iridea how Dharma has affected her life, she said that she feels very fortunate because, thanks to what she learned within Dharma, she knows which way she is going. She told me that she cannot compare Dharma methods with those of other religious systems because she was raised from the very beginning with Dharma principles.

 Iridea feels fortunate when she listens to other young peoples’ concerns about life itself. They have a lot of unanswered questions about the meaning of their lives and about why things happen to them and if they can control their ups and downs in life. Dharma gives Iridea a strong sense of responsibility. She prays and thinks about her friends and this encourages her to study and practice Dharma more seriously. All sentient beings like her friends experience a lot of suffering by not knowing how to control their circumstances.

 Iridea is studying English at University and she is focused on becoming a translator. She had a near death experience two years ago when competing in Mexicali in a national athletic competition. She was asked to participate in four categories and it demanded all of her energy. At the end of the
last competition her team got the gold but she had to be assisted because she was exhausted. She was given a sugary beverage that provoked a hypoglycemic crisis. She was taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital. The way she was treated there caused her a lot of problems because she only needed to take water with minerals in order to restore her energy and she was given sugar instead. The point is that she experienced, for the first time in her life, that she didn’t have control over her body or circumstances. She was conscious of what the doctors were doing to her but she couldn’t speak or move at all for almost two days. My husband had to travel for four hours in a bus to the city where Iridea was hospitalized and I stayed home chanting the Vajrasattva mantra like crazy. My idea was to purify all the energy around her, and from the bottom of my heart I purified my relationship with her as “my” daughter to the point were I could perceive her as another human being who was going to need all my support and love in order to recover from her collapse.

On the third day, Iridea came home. She could not eat or move on her own. I had to feed her, bathe her and care for her for almost a month. The only way I could relate to this sitation was by applying all the teachings I had received on impermanence, karma, and, most important of all, by confirming once more that to practice Dharma doesn’t mean to be enclosed in a magic bubble that keeps you from suffering, like in a kind of paradise. It was obvious that some negative karma was ripening for Iridea and that the methods Dharma provides for purifying our negative actions were our support. I remember now that one week after my daughter arrived home, I had enough time to practice Tara for a longer period of time after finishing my Ngondro. Iridea was sleeping and I was beside her lying down in bed, looking at her and visualizing Tara on top of her head. It was very funny because I wanted Tara to be perfectly visualized on top of her head and I was fighting with the furniture in the room that was “so distracting” that I couldn’t elaborate “my” visualization. The time passed by and I was so moved by her condition of total dependence on me that I found a spot in my heart where I thought I should pray for all the daughters I had in all my previous lives and also for all the mothers that were suffering the same circumstance I was in. It was so moving the way I just rested and chanted Tara’s mantra that I lost the sense of time. I felt completely abandoned to Tara’s compassion for all beings.

Dharma allowed me to connect with my daughter’s energy in a very profound and sacred way. I stopped my chanting when she woke up and her voice was stronger. Her face was luminous when she told me: “Mami! I just had a dream with Tara. I was cleaning the garden around her and I brought flowers to her and I was within Tara’s energy and I felt relaxed and knew that I was going to recover from this.”

I never told her that I had been practicing with Tara that day. I just continued my routine as always. Through the experience of her illness, our communication opened in a way I did not expect. Suffering made her more receptive. When she began to confess things she has done that I didn’t know about, I knew I couldn’t judge what she had done wrong. I could only repeat to her teachings I have received about how to purify our negative karma. Dharma provided both of us with the tools we needed to overcome the nightmare we went through. So I thank Gyatrul Rinpoche, Lama Dawa and all the teachers that have kept Lord Buddha’s teachings alive.
About two years ago, I put a message up on the inside of my front door. “It’s no big deal” was what it said. I found it a good way to remind myself of Rinpoche’s general instruction to lighten up about everything. I saw it every day as I went out of the door and it settled my mind a little.

My daughter Susannah was learning to read and write at the time. One day she asked me what the words said and what they meant. After I told her, she disappeared for a bit and came back with her own message, written on another piece of paper which she put up right underneath the one I had put up. Her message said “It’s a big deal.”

When Susannah wrote “It’s a big deal” at first I thought it was a personal statement she was making. She made it quickly and forcefully, in writing, published on the front door for everyone to read; sort of first grader’s coup. “Kids!” I thought, feeling a little annoyed at first. “Why does she have to be so oppositional?” I considered taking it down. But, I thought, everyone is entitled to their view and their opinion. So it stayed.

Over time as I have passed through the doorway and I am faced with the dual statements time and again, I have had the opportunity to let the two messages sink into my consciousness more deeply. I have come to the conclusion that, far from Susannah being oppositional, it is more we all are the same, children and adults. Our minds are habitually dualistic. The moment any statement is made, out of habit, immediately the opposite comes into being. Not content with things as they are, the mind jumps up with a comparison, a comment, a statement to argue the case. Start with “No” and “Yes” is born. You can get a good argument going this way, and a good headache. And you don’t even need another person. You can argue all in your own mind. I do it all the time.

You may wonder if there is an end to the story of the duality doorway. There seems to be no end of concepts about it, and lately I have come to think that both messages are true at the same time. Everything is a big deal and no big deal all at once. Now, what do you think?