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SHAMBHALA
MEDITATION CENTER
OF NEW YORK

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from the editor

AT 11 PM this New Year's Eve, my neighbor Joe Mauricio and I walked to the Shambhala Center. I had been asked to give a short talk. We expected a handful of people to be present. Instead, we found a shrine room filled to capacity. At least 50% of those present had never been to the Center before. I was reminded that the act of sitting itself was a powerfully effective social action, and a worthy way to



The imperial Rigden king

bring in the New Year with benefit for self and others. Joe rang the gong 108 times finishing just as the ball dropped at Times Square. In our silence we could hear the roar of voices across Manhattan. We sat in the smaller room

because our main shrine room was being redesigned.

The New York City Shambhala Center is in the midst of exciting change. We enter the shrine room now and experience the new Rigden shrine, and the space that honors our beloved Vajradhara thangka. Shambhala is rooted in the terma of our root guru Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche and the present Sakyong and Sakyong Wangmo, are flowering the Shambhala teachings into our society today. New York is one

of the largest Shambhala Centers in our mandala. We sit at the heart of a diverse and international city. The Sakyong (*Royal Earth Protector*) Mipham (an incarnation of a great Tibetan teacher known for his brilliance, exertion, and bringing together different schools of Buddhism) Rinpoche, (*precious teacher*) is the head of our mandala, He envisions our Center expanding. We are now overflowing with people, programs, and practice, and will move in 2012. The Sakyong sees us as a future model for what Shambhala Centers can provide globally. Co-director Ciprian Iancu outlines this vision in an article (page 3), and new co-director Katherine Lieberson, a second-generation Shambhala Buddhist, shares with us her strength and conviction to nurture daily activities and move us forward as well.

In order to make this leap, we are looking at our sangha; both new people who arrive daily seeking practice and/or relief from the stress of their lives, and longtime students whose experience, practice and years of devotion render them vital mentors and friends on this journey. Sangha, the community of practitioners, is the engine of our health and this period of change. Given the reality of how large and varied our community is, we are working towards ways to serve and support us more fully. A membership drive will be launched early this spring. It includes a way for those curious and interested to try out involved commitment. It asks that we engage financially and socially with more energy.

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Many other initiatives are being set in place: a community and care committee to help those who are ill, suffering, or dying; improved systems for volunteers, and for mediation instruction. A vigorous look at the role of Shambhala Arts in our daily and ceremonial lives, and a commitment to providing space and time, as best we can with our present space, for advanced study and practice, to ground our center in deep practice.

We are an unusual organization in that we are bound by a lineage of profound teachings propagating a path of meditation and compassionate action. The teachings are open and available to anyone. They are relevant to everyone. Our Center offers a strong path

of study, practice, teachers, and community in service of waking ourselves up and helping others.

City Sangha News is one means of invigorating community. Your feedback is invaluable. Please let us know if the newsletter is of service to you, and what you might like to know more about. In the next *City Sangha*, (April issue) we will include information about the new Rigden Shrine, about our chants, and more about the history of our lineage and the vision of the Sakyong and Sakyong Wangmo (considered the King and Queen of Shambhala).

I hope that we can provide everyone with inspiration, information, and support.

— Laura Simms, *Head of Community Life*

New York's Vajradhara thangka and the Vidyadhara's blessing

རྡོ་རྗེ་འཛིན་པ་ཚེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ།
 དེ་ལོ་ན་ལས་རྟག་ཏུ་ཤར།
 དེ་བཞིན་སྐྱེ་མ་རྡོ་རྗེ་འཛིན།
 རྩེད་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ལས་སྲིད་པ་ཤར།
 སྲིད་པ་ཚེས་ཀྱི་རྡོ་རྗེ་ཅན།
 རྗེན་འདིར་རྟག་ཏུ་བཞུགས་ནས་ཡུང།
 མཚོགས་བྱུང་དོན་གྱུ་བ་སྟོལ་བར་མཛོད།

*Dharmakaya vajra holder
 Always arises from That.
 Similarly, vajra holder of magical display,
 Existence arises from your body.
 Vajra possessor of the nature of existence—
 Always remain in this representation
 And grant the supreme and ordinary siddhis.*

Written by Chökyi Gyatso

The Vajradhara thangka in our main shrine room was made for the New York center by Stephanie Spinner in the late 1970s. As a blessing, Trungpa Rinpoche wrote a poem on the back of the thangka. (The Tibetan text and English translation are above.)

In a commentary based on conversations with Lama Chönam, it says he feels this poem is very profound and beautiful, and very reminiscent of the tantras. The first two lines refer to the dharmakaya, the next

two refer to the sambhogakaya, and the next to the nirmanakaya. The last two lines are meant to

refer to all five preceding lines, though it was difficult to express this in English. He composed a few lines to illustrate their meaning:

Dharmakaya is all-pervasive, like the sky.
 Sambhogakaya appears individually, like the sun and moon.
 Nirmanakaya emanates everywhere, like a rainbow.

The terms “vajra holder” and “vajra possessor” (*dorje dzin[pa]* and *dorje chen* in Tibetan) each recall the literal meaning of Vajradhara (*Dorje Chang*) which also means “vajra holder.”

Many thanks to Jean Thies for the preservation and transmission of this knowledge in New York City.

Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee with the assistance of Lama Chöying Namgyal. ©1997 by the Nalanda Translation Committee.



THE SAKYONG'S VISION

The following note from co-director Ciprian Iancu is a summary of the inspiring vision set out by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche for the future of the New York Shambhala Center and our potential beneficial impact on the international community of this blazing global city, and beyond. In response to the need for more space and to accommodate the increasing interest and need for Shambhala teachings on every level, the Board of Trustees, the center co-directors and others have been developing strategies and ideas for how to move forward. The Sakyong's vision has given us a mission and a focus.

The Sakyong throwing prayer flags on the road to Surmong



Peter Seidler | peterseidler@gmail.com

BY CIPRIAN IANCU

IT IS MY DELIGHT AND CHALLENGE to present this basic outline of how the Sakyong sees the growth and outreach of our Center. We have a strong sangha with a magnificent task at hand. We will be presenting more discussion in future newsletters and will plan on community meetings to raise our lungta, life force inspiration and confidence, so this move forward is a compassionate, potent, and practical group action.

In May of last year, during a community visit, the Sakyong met with Bob Stevens, Chair of the Board; David Perrin, Board of Trustees Strategic Planning chair; and I, to discuss plans for the center's growth over the next five years. The Sakyong introduced a plan for the New York Shambhala sangha both more visionary and more grounded than what we previously considered. Titled "Shambhala House," a new Center would manifest as a collaboration with other businesses and ventures that share and promote Shambhala vision, with the Shambhala Meditation Center. Our practice and education activities would be at the heart of Shambhala House, while other businesses and investors would participate by supporting it financially, sharing the space, and joining our mandate to create an enlightened society. Some proposed features of this plan are



a retail bookstore, an art gallery, a large performance and gathering space, a yoga studio, and a dharma library—all of which would be housed within the same building as the Shambhala Meditation Center of New York, and all under the auspices of Shambhala.

The Sakyong described this vision as a new type of Shambhala Center that could be a model for other important urban centers such as San Francisco, Toronto, and Chicago, and a seat of regional importance from which the Sakyong could reach the world community. Shambhala House would be an embassy to the Kingdom of Shambhala, and would engage in outreach with the diplomatic and business communities of New York. At the same time, the Shambhala Meditation Center will continue the important work of teaching the precious dharma and supporting the community of practitioners, within a strong and stable container without seeing its resources stretched to support new initiatives.

Realizing this vision will require us all to look deeply into the heart of what makes us Shambhala, as well as addressing crucial practical questions. The Sakyong has asked us to imagine a new role for New York within the larger Shambhala mandala. Recently, my colleague Katherine Lieberson and I attended the *Build Shambhala* conference in Halifax, where all the

centers and entities within our mandala with expansion goals in the upcoming years gathered to present and share strategies for development. During this gathering, the Sakyong shared with us his priorities for the most important areas of growth to his vision.

New York was one of the top priorities. In discussions with us, he described it as an important next step for the mandala as a whole. He has dedicated his support to seeing this vision realized. The Board of Trustees of the Shambhala Meditation Center of New York, together with Katherine Lieberson and I, enthusiastically accept this mission. In the year to come, the Strategic Planning Committee will be presenting its plans to our community, and asking for your support. Our spring membership drive is an important first step in raising our lungta, gathering our resources, and preparing for such an endeavor. I hope each of you will be able to look into your own hearts and find the inspiration that has made you a member of Shambhala, and join us in offering that inspiration to the larger world within the vast possibilities of Shambhala House.

To read more about the international mandala of Shambhala, and the vision of Enlightened Society please explore our website <www.shambhala.org>.



Shambhala Levels NYC

PART I: LEVELS ONE, TWO, AND THREE

"I had tremendous fun driving through New York City. A friend and I drove together in New York and we were constantly amazed at how much is going on there... It's a fantastic display. Trying to fall asleep in the morning, there were garbage trucks and tractors and sirens and people shouting... If only people just used what they had around them in their environment, there is already the working basis of enlightened society...."

—Chögyam Trungpa

BY JESSICA LITWAK

Roswitha Schacht | rosevita on Morguefile.com

DECIDING TO BECOME A WARRIOR in New York City makes a great deal of sense. Aggression, competition, excitement, greed, fear, passion, loud noise and endless excess of beautiful and terrible stimuli bombard us 24/7, and we need some way to deal with it. The city that never sleeps is not really awake; we are seduced into a plethora of cocoons. It becomes increasingly urgent to find courage and confidence in ourselves in order to remain genuinely awake. So how do we become urban warriors? Do we learn how to live fast, talk tough, deliver a punch? Some do. But it turns out, for me anyway, that learning how to sit still is the bravest action of all. In New York, training the mind to be an ally becomes the most useful instruction we can acquire. Didn't Frank Sinatra sing: If you can meditate here, you can meditate anywhere?

When I was a Zen student, I was obsessed with being a perfect practitioner. I was terrified of being late to the zendo, bowing the wrong way, chanting incorrectly, slouching enough to get hit with the stick, and being sloppy in work practice. One day as I was clean-

ing the kitchen, my broom handle got too close to the kitchen altar. A ceramic Buddha fell to the floor and his head cracked off. I quickly placed the head back on the neck, crept up to the sleeping quarters for my things and snuck off on a greyhound bus. After decapitating the Buddha, it took years to get back to a daily practice.

I was introduced to Shambhala in Los Angeles. My daughter was in a pediatric ICU because she had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor. During her eight hour brain surgery, her father's family and my own waited in a small room. We sat on separate sides of the cubicle in united anguish but in warring camps. My friend Johanna, a long time student of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, stood in the middle of the room and led everyone in *tonglen*. She told me that the Sangha was chanting for Emma. My daughter survived and we left the hospital; Johanna gave me *The Sacred Path of the Warrior* and told me about a series of wonderful weekend trainings. I promised I would do Level One as soon as I could fit it into my schedule. It took 3,000 miles and almost five years to fulfill the promise.

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LEVEL I: BASIC GOODNESS

My Level One was led by Acharya Eric Spiegel. It was very meaningful and difficult for me. As a former Zen student, I had trouble allowing room for compassionate acceptance of monkey mind without counting breaths in a dark room with black zafus. As a yoga practitioner who has grown up Jewish and gone through everything from EST to 12 Step programs, I kept wondering where to put in the mantra or the prayer and where the higher (better) power was who I was supposed to pray to; the God who was going to get me back to the breath when the pain in my left ankle made breath impossible.

When one of the staff announced that there would be "interviews" and we would be called out one by one, over two days, a thought came up: "they won't call on me, I will be forgotten." The second thought was: "that is ridiculous." The third thought was: "you're supposed to pay attention to your breath!" I struggled with this bubbling all weekend as people got called out around me, and sure enough mid-day on Sunday the facilitator came up to announce, "We assume you have all had an interview. If you have not, stand up and leave the shrine room." I alone stood up and walked to the back of the room. When I finally was brought to Jane, one of the Assistant Directors, I burst into tears. My prophesy of invisibility had come true. She met my tears with her own, and heard my pain with an open heart. Then she gently explained to me how the whole event could be extremely useful if seen as "auspicious coincidence," capable of leading me to discovery as I continued to walk the path. The discoveries are still being revealed. But one thing I realized that first weekend was that each breath that brings me closer to basic goodness, makes me less alone.

LEVEL II: COCOON

Bob Stevens directed us beautifully through what sometimes seemed like 15,000 hours of torturous sitting. In retrospect, it was no longer than any subsequent level. And it was shorter than the weeklong retreats I had done as a Zen student. But the teaching we were experiencing: the ability to see and feel the habitual patterns that take us further from basic goodness and from each other, was hard for me to swallow. I felt lonelier than ever. I wanted to leave at the end of

the first day. I wept again in my interview. However, by the end of the weekend I came to embrace a kind of self-acceptance I had never felt. I realized I could deal with loneliness. As long as I was with my breath, I was never really alone alone.

LEVEL III: DARING, GENTLENESS, AND HUMBLENESS

Irene Woodard called me by someone else's name when I came into my interview. I immediately burst into tears. This interview weeping was becoming a habit. She explained patiently that she actually felt we had made a heart connection and the name she called me which belonged to the person who was supposed to be next in line (the person before me had gotten the wrong person) one of her favorites. It was a complement to be thusly misrecognized, and therefore I realized that I could no longer assume that every seeming rejection is not an act of love. In Level Three I actually stepped out of my weepy lonely victim mode. I learned that to be humble is to be utterly tender and non judgmental. I stopped stabbing myself in the heart. And I made friends not only with myself but with others.

Now, as I work with a meditation instructor and prepare myself for the next two levels, I see that mindfulness is a thin wire moving through clouds. I feel a pressing urgency to recover my birthright of native sanity and the dignity of an upright posture. I realize that the flow of my thoughts is unconscious, and making it conscious is part of the journey. Here I am, in New York City, on the Shambhala path. It feels like the right path in the right place. It seems possible to be a compassionate New Yorker. I do know that I have a long way to go. In the past few days I have yelled at a taxi driver, had a political argument with a man in a check out line, felt murderous on a subway, had no lovingkindness for the rats living inside the motor of my car, and fantasized about silencing my teenage daughters with duct tape. Yet, even though I am faced with all this Big Apple rage, I somehow feel closer to acceptance, less fearful of being who I am, and therefore less lonely and more teachable. I am sitting on my cushion each morning with "garbage trucks and tractors and sirens and people shouting" and looking forward to Level Four.

Introducing Our New Co-Directors

How they see the center, their work, and us

ON EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS, the Shambhala Center is bustling, alive with people chatting and ducking in and out of the kitchen, the classrooms and the shrine room. But most afternoons, the place is near empty. That's the time when the two directors can get work done in relative quiet, free of interruptions and emergencies. Weekday afternoons are also when the half-hour group meditation sessions for the office staff happen—a grounding routine initiated by the Center's new co-directors,

Ciprian Iancu and Katherine Lieberson.

On a recent afternoon, Ciprian and Katherine stood together contemplating a whiteboard covered with black jottings connoting the upcoming year's schedule—the Shambhala trainings, the teacher visits, the Padmasambhava and Werma and Vajrayogini feasts, the Buddhist classes, the calligraphy and flower arranging weekends, the rentals. The schedule is full and complex, and creating it isn't free of conflict.



"...there's the Rigden: I want to help people click into that.... That would make my job as director worthwhile."

—Katherine Lieberson

What happens, for instance, when a feast for 10 or 20 people lands on a Tuesday during our weekly gathering for newcomers—125 strong? Or when a visiting teacher's program falls on the same weekend as a long-planned Shambhala Training program?

The directors' days include handling numerous small problems, like scheduling conflicts, that would otherwise tend to clog the gears of the center. But they also encompass more sweeping issues: the upcoming move to a bigger space, preferably in a building owned by the Center. The move will not occur until 2012, when the current monthly rent of \$13,000, already a stretch, may nearly double. But it is not at all too soon to begin talking, planning and fundraising. A center-owned building would not only prevent precipitous rent increases, but would also provide room to accommodate a multitude of simultaneous

programs and activities. There could be a couple of classrooms, a separate tantra shrine room and a space for kyudo. But finding a spacious, affordable building in or near the center of Manhattan is likely to require a lengthy, concerted effort and a good deal of luck. Paying for it will require the focused work of many, with the directors playing key roles.

Right now, other changes are occurring—in particular, the set-up of the new Shambhala shrine, which has been placed directly across from the shrine room doors. The design is spacious and simple. It consists of a large color print of the thangka of the Primordial Rigden, with a few ritual objects: a crystal ball, offering bowls of water and photos of Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche and the Sakyong Mipham, Rinpoche.

"You walk in and there's the Rigden," said Katherine. "I want to help people click into that. If just one person says: 'Oh, this is what the Sakyong is doing'—then that would make my job as director worthwhile." Introducing the Rigden shrine is a significant transition for the center and community. "We can be open and forthright about the shrine change,"



"We want to grow the culture of membership. We want to put it in the forefront and clarify the means of joining."

—Ciprian Iancu

said Ciprian. "We want to educate people on the shrine change and its meaning. We'll listen to people who have strong reservations. We don't have to think of disappointment and anger as a problem. We want to be open to what people are going through." (The tantra shrine, he added, will remain as it is.)

But then, practitioners have long tended to have strong feelings about the Shambhala

Center, and this is probably a very good thing—indifference would be the real problem. Katherine observed, "People care about this place like they care about their own homes. We welcome people's enthusiasm and their criticism—this is a central part of

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what it means to be in community.”

Ciprian is lean, pale and scholarly-looking, like a *New Yorker* drawing of a poet by William Steig. He is, in fact, a writer. He grew up in New York and first encountered Buddhism as a high school student volunteering at the Tibet House as a part of what would become Students for a Free Tibet. He met the Dalai Lama there, who he says was a “great inspiration...it was a very, very huge thing for me. I felt shocked and inspired by his presence.” When he went on to Bard College in upstate New York, he got to know Adam Lobel, now an Acharya, and Eddie McKeever, who was raised in a Shambhala family. Ciprian participated in the meditation group they started. After graduation, he spent some time in Boston and, six years ago, sat a dathün, a month-long group retreat, at Karmê-Chöling. Three years later he moved to New York and became the New York Center’s office manager.

When Tal Varon, a previous co-director, announced that he was leaving to return to Israel and found a Shambhala Center there, Ciprian applied. The search committee, after interviewing selected candidates from throughout North America, wound up choosing the one closest to home. All he had to do was pack his belongings and move them to the adjacent office.

Katherine was hired after a several-month search

to replace Babo Harrison, another previous co-director, who left to move to Burlington, Vermont and work with Acharya Judy Lief. A childhood gymnast, Katherine is slender and lithe, with fine facial bones and a habit of wearing skirts and heeled pumps to the Center, even on the most ordinary afternoons. As the daughter of longtime Shambhala members Ellen Kearney of Halifax and Peter Lieberson, the composer, she grew up with Shambhala as a natural part of her life.

She was raised in Boston until she was 9, when the family moved to Halifax. “I pictured igloos,” she recalled. “It seemed like the end of my life.” But Halifax became home until she left for Vassar College and then for Naropa University, where she earned a master’s degree in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. She spent a few years in Chicago, tutoring children, and some months caring for her father in the Southwest during his cancer treatment. In June, she went to Shambhala Mountain Center where the Sakyong taught Dzogchen, the highest teachings of the Nyingma School. Before, she said, she had been wondering what she ought to be doing. The retreat blew away the fog. “I was asking the big questions,” she said. “What should I do with my life? My career? After the retreat, it was really clear: the most important thing in my life is dharma.”

A life in the dharma might sound lofty and

romantic to a newcomer. To Ciprian and Katherine, it is entirely concrete, filled with numerous pressing tasks and details: hundreds of emails, continual requests, budgets and organizing visiting teachers to host. In addition, there are new projects intended to further the teachings in specific ways.

One is a tenno room that is to be built in the main director’s office to, in Katherine words, “magnetize the teacher.” A tenno room is a formal space, with Japanese and Shambhala design elements, used for audiences with dignitaries, especially the teacher. “A container for lha,” said Ciprian, using the Tibetan word for “the high,” or “the first point of wakefulness.” “A

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May 20, 1949 –
January 10, 2008

Rosemary Lyons

Our dear friend and community-member Rosemary Lyons died on the morning of January 10th at Columbia Presebyterian Hospital. She had been fighting cancer and related illnesses since May. Rosemary was a devoted practitioner and close friend to many of us.

May the blessings of the teacher lead all sentient beings on their journey.

Tunnel: © Irina Ponomarenko | Dreamstime.com

seat for the Sakyong,” he continued.

Another is the creation of an archive of the center’s rich collection of audio teachings of Trungpa, Rinpoche and other teachers. Since New York was the Vidyadhara’s first city center, its recordings date back to 1971. But they are not properly organized and so are rarely listened to. In addition, New York is one of only seven worldwide centers that ordered from the Legacy Project, the organization recently formed to propagate the teachings of Trungpa, Rinpoche, the 1,500-CD set of his teachings from the Audio Archives in Halifax. The archives are being categorized and stored in proper containers and will be available for members’ use, perhaps with listening stations that have library carrels and headphones.

There are the sprawling and ever-present topics of money and of programs. Naturally, programs that

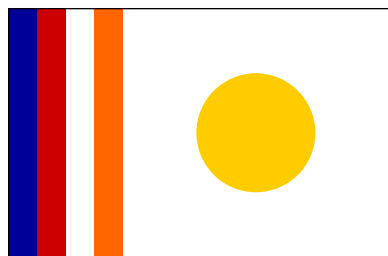
draw a lot of people are cheering to the directors—because they expose so many to the dharma while generating revenue. But popular programs should never squeeze out smaller ones, especially on the vajrayana, said Ciprian.

The question of attracting more members is always on the table, said Katherine. (Currently, New York has 360 members.) But that, too, is delicate. There are no plans to try to push people who aren’t yet willing into becoming members, she said. “This is a place that welcomes everybody,” she said. “The Tuesday night gatherings—those are some people’s path. They come on Tuesdays and that’s it. Others will want to move on and go further.” Nevertheless, Ciprian said, “We want to grow the culture of membership. We want to put it in the forefront and clarify the means of joining.”

As far as the finances go, Katherine added, “We are working really hard to stabilize the Center finances. The membership drive is a big part of this – the more regular dues we have coming in, the more stable and secure the finances are. We can offer programs based on the interests of the community, without so much concern about what brings in money. A more stable financial picture also enables us to look forward with confidence in the vision that the Sakyong has for New York (see page 3). I feel that this is our responsibility as Directors at this particular time—to nurture and stabilize the situation on all fronts, including practice, community, membership, and the finances.

What is coming up in 2008? “Some really fabulous teachers,” said Ciprian. Löppon Lodrö Dorje will be returning to teach on some aspect of the vajrayana. Teaching visits by Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Khandro Rinpoche have been confirmed. The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche is scheduled to preside over and give a talk on Vesak Day on May 20, when Buddhists around the world commemorate the birth, enlightenment and parinirvana of the Buddha. And of course, the ongoing practice that joins us as a community.

— City Sangha staff



Tal Varon brings Shambhala to Israel

By Robert Chender

When Tal told me he and Moran were going to go back to Israel last year, I volunteered to direct a Shambhala Level I. When they went back this summer, we decided that a good time to have the level was in early December. On December 6 through 8 (the Israeli weekend is Thursday night, Friday, Saturday—Sunday is a work day) we had the level with 18 participants (we had to turn away another 10 on the waiting list for lack of space and another assistant director). I taught in English, and Tal translated the main points or words that might be difficult for a non-native English speaker, into Hebrew; although all the participants understood English reasonably well. Aides for the weekend were Moran and Jacquie Dennis, who happened to be in Israel at the time, as well as Jillian Rheingold, formerly of the Austin Shambhala Center, now living in Jerusalem. The level was at an apartment used by the Insight Meditation center in Tel Aviv—we all squeezed into the living room. It was a cozy experience. I also gave a talk on Wednesday night December 5 entitled “Peace Practice”, based on Pema Chödrön’s teachings on *shenpa*. Israel of course is a very fertile place to be talking about peace. Tal and Moran are very happy to be back home, and miss the sangha here, so please go visit them!



Lee Hoch | imagefactory@MorgueFile.com

Provincetown, Rhode Island

From the Field

BY CRYSTAL GANDRUD

aFTER YEARS of whining about New York City noise, speed, filth, etcetera, Christopher (Kilmer) and I decided it was time to actually do something moving. We weren't too sure if it would work, but we wanted to try living somewhere in New England and commute into the city for work a few days a week. After some investigation of upstate New York, and bypassing of Connecticut (I have a prejudice that if I move to Connecticut my life will be over—and I will start wearing cardigans and blow drying my hair); the next state into New England is an afterthought, a small little place the Quakers and Jews ran to from Massachusetts lest they suffer more than holes burned in their tongues. It's called Rhode Island and when one mentions it to one's friends

they get a far away look in their eye and say vaguely, "Oh, yeah."

What I knew about Rhode Island before I moved here was: a) Brown University, and b) Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), because that's where Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth met, and said "Let's do something funky," and the Talking Heads were born. That's it. I had been to Providence for theatre productions years ago when I was at school in Cambridge, but my only memories were of a depressed American city better honored in the ignoring than the investigating. Christopher, however, having grown up in Cambridge, knew all about Rhode Island and when I suggested we explore it; he looked at me like I had, at last, used up my remaining brain cells dealing with

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the stress of living in New York. “No,” he said, “That place is an armpit.”

Since some sangha members who live in Providence had invited me to visit, I decided to go anyway, just to say I had given it a glance. As I was waiting for them to pick me up from the train station, I took in what I now know is the East Side (where both Brown and RISD are). New England autumn was at its best that evening and an orange harvest moon flirted just above the roofs of the closely nestled Federal houses...and I was suddenly sure that I would, live here.

Khandro Rinpoche supposedly said that the nagas are very happy in Providence, and with all the industrial clean up and beautifying the city has been doing for its many waterways, she said they are just going to get happier and happier. It is also a very hilly city, which encourages lungta and drala to sweep around in a rather energizing way. You can feel it—a place with energy—and Providence has it. I’m finding, that my life responds well to a quieter way of being. I’ve noticed that in the three retreats I’ve done since I moved here it takes me much less transition time to settle in and slow down. I used to feel like I basically needed an entire retreat to relax; now it takes just a few days.

The sangha situation here: Many of you know that the Mukpo family lives here, so it seems strange that the community isn’t more organized. This is not a criticism of Acharya Levy and Lady Diana in any way. They are very busy people with vibrant, successful lives. They are doing exactly what their guru wanted us all to do: go forth and be dharmic in the world. There is an official Providence Shambhala Group but it’s not in Providence. It meets in a yoga studio in a large suburb of the city and isn’t really the type of place to attract the many college students who could potentially contribute to an active center,

mostly because of where it is. As far as I can tell, Christopher and I are the only Vajrayana students who darken its doors. Some of us who live here discuss renting a space in the city but nothing has arisen of that yet. Time will tell.

Now, when I run into New York sangha members on the street they hug me and say, “Welcome back” or “Are you here for a visit?” I always feel a bit confused because I haven’t left. I’m in New York almost every week, so my perception is that I’m never gone for long. Christopher and I sublet an apartment in the village where we keep a few clothes and phone chargers and things. I still buy my olives at Zabar’s. I have no idea where one gets towels or jeans or plates in Providence because I buy them in New York. But other than in these superficial ways, it is true that my life is somewhere else now.

Yes, some days I am bored here. Yes, some days I am annoyed by a certain lack of sophistication or good restaurants. But, really, is that important? I write, I practice, I actually sleep. It seems like I am better equipped these days to please the nagas and make friends with the dralas. I do not mean to say that New York isn’t lousy with these energies, because, of course, it is (but it’s also just lousy, full-stop). I do know that right now, right here is where I seem to have the most reserve to meet practice with the lungta it requires. That feels good. One of my favorite Sakyong teachings is that yes, life is suffering, but it should also feel good; practice is hard work, but it should make us feel pleasure, too. And for some reason here in my little Federal house, nestled into the hill, in the midst of a New England autumnal display that might embarrass any other than the unabashedly gaudy Mother Nature, I feel pleasure in and with my life. I feel I am following a pith instruction. Isn’t that wonderful thing?



The Shambhala Meditation Center of New York is pleased to announce the following new appointments:

Greg Pierotti, Resident Director of Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies

Anne Kennan, Meditation Instructor Coordinator

Greg Pierotti began practicing in 1992 at the Washington Square Zendo. He came to Shambhala in 2000 and attended vajrayana seminary in 2004. We would like to thank Greg for all of his hard work and dedication to his former post as M.I. Coordinator, and we are pleased to welcome him onto the Shambhala Council as the Resident Director of SSBS.

Anne Kenan began practicing in Boston in 2000 and attended vajrayana seminary in 2005. In addition to becoming our new M.I. Coordinator, Anne works with the children's program teaching 2-5 year olds.

Thank you to both Anne and Greg, for fearlessly jumping in to these new positions!

Derek Kolleeny, retiring, Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies Resident Director. We would like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank Derek Kolleeny, whose unwavering devotion to the development and refinement of the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies allowed this program to take root and truly flourish. Thank you Derek!

Wendy Miller, retiring, Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies Head of Teacher Development and Enrichment. We would also like to thank Wendy Miller for her many years of heart felt dedication and commitment to the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies. As part of the

SSBS Leadership Team she helped develop and refine the view of SSBS. She created many forms and programs as Head of Teacher Development and Enrichment to embody the view of clarity and preparedness in teaching, teaching as path, mentoring, genuine feedback among teaching teams and SSBS administrators, and developing a sense of community among SSBS teachers including Bi-Annual Teacher Gatherings, the SSBS Teacher Guideline Booklet, on-going Teacher Enrichment Workshops and Seminars, and Archarya Talks to Teachers. Wendy also worked with former SSBS Dean, Tal Varon, to create teaching teams for SSBS from 2004 until 2006, when she became the sole Head of Teacher Placement. Thank you Wendy!

We are also pleased to announce the following additions to our staff!

Daniel Galanter, Environment Manager

Rick Redondo, Audio/Visual Manager

Daniel <environment@shambhalanyc.org> has been a sangha member for over 4 years. He has been a regular work study/volunteer fixture here and, in his own words, "considers it a blessing to now be working at the greatest place on earth!"

Rick <audiovisual@shambhalanyc.org> began coming to the Center in 2006 as a Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies student. He plans to finish the SSBS curriculum and attend Sutrayana Seminary in the next year!

The Shambhala Center is honored to add these two dedicated and enthusiastic practitioners to our staffing team. Welcome Daniel and Rick!



*If you have members news,
articles, or stories to share here,
please send them to Laura Simms at:
community@shambhalanyc.org*

*City Sangha is edited by Laura Simms,
Jessica Litwak, and Irene Woodard.
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