

Tashi Choling Sangha News April 2020

Prayer for the Peoples and Nations of this Earth

*At this very moment
for the people
and nations of this earth,
may not even the names of disease,
famine, war, and suffering be heard.
But rather may pure conduct, merit,
wealth, and prosperity increase,
and may supreme good fortune and
wellbeing always arise!*

---Dudjom Rinpoche,
Jigdral Yeshe Dorje

Dear sangha
brothers and sisters,

We find ourselves in the midst of a global pandemic that is afflicting millions of people in many countries, and each of us is affected in some way. It is a challenging time, and the preciousness of dharma practice and engagement becomes even more clear. Please take good care of yourself and your family by following recommended CDC guidelines. Although Tashi Choling and other dharma centers are closed, online

practice opportunities provide ways for us to gather together. Sending love and good wishes for your wellbeing and happiness.

Sangha Spotlight Alexis Kostich



Alexis Kostich

Imagine growing up in a fairytale hamlet created by the Rockefeller family, a place whose architecture, horse-filled fields, and ornamental stone walls are styled to resemble a quaint English scene. Sangha

member Alexis Kostich did grow up in that fabled environment, Pocatino Hills. Was it magical? Yes, it was. "It was like a combination of Downton Abbey with Hogwarts nearby," she noted. Alexis started riding horses at seven, and began showing them at ten, something she did until entering college. At school, she was free to pursue whatever interested her. At home, the environment was saturated with art. Alexis' mother, a painter who had trained in Paris, worked in a Rockefeller museum and had a lab at home filled with objects from the Rockefeller family's private collection—including Peruvian gold, Incan feather capes, African masks, and native American pottery. During her childhood, Alexis explored many art forms, including painting, printmaking, and metal smithing. Early contact with the ultra-wealthy was a learning experience, too. "They were trapped in their position. They had everything and enjoyed nothing," she observed. As time went on, it became clear that Alexis' life path was different from the fairytale world she was born into. "I was a black sheep with a silver spoon," she quipped.

At the age of twelve, Alexis had a dream that set her on her spiritual journey. In the dream, a roomful of people dressed in red cloth were bent over long tables reading long pieces of paper. There was a big window in the background. A voice said, "You're falling behind in your class. You need to learn meditation." The sound of a bell ringing woke her. Not wasting any time, that morning Alexis went to the phone book to search for meditation gatherings and found Transcendental

Meditation or TM. At twelve she couldn't drive yet, so for the next two years, her mother drove her to TM meditation gatherings. The TM gatherings were not exactly right somehow. At the age of twelve Alexis might not have understood how to describe what was missing, but she recognized that she was seeking something more.



Two years ago on the Internet, Alexis found this photo taken at a nunnery in Sikkim. It is just like the scene in her childhood dream.

Just before turning seventeen, Alexis entered Princeton University. There she met a wonderful group of lamas from Geshe Wangyal's center in New Jersey, one of the first Tibetan Buddhist centers in the country. With them, she studied Tibetan language and history. The lamas did not teach about mantras, but Alexis found the Vajrasattva mantra in a book and memorized it. She graduated from Princeton in 1981 with a BA in Asian language and history and a minor in Mayan archeology.

Her parents might have been hoping that she would develop an academic career. She did contemplate getting a Ph.D. in southern Buddhist studies, but all the professors she wanted to study with were on sabbatical. She

also longed to go to Nepal, but as her life unfolded, she lived in Bangkok for the next three years. She worked as an editor at a Thai research institute, creating reports for the UN. Her office looked out on the government snake farm, where snakes were milked for their venom. In Thailand, she was able to do retreat in a Thai forest temple, but travel to Nepal was on the back burner until many years later.

Returning to the US in 1983, Alexis made her home in Manhattan, where she worked as an editor for a major book publishing company. One day she went to a talk given by Sogyal Rinpoche. Afterwards, Sogyal Rinpoche asked her, "Are you coming to our Thanksgiving retreat?" Alexis wasn't sure about going, but the universe kindly provided her with some signs. First, the ceiling in her apartment fell. Then she lost her job. She got the message and went to the Troma retreat in California. Many lamas were there, including Chagdud Rinpoche and Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche. Alexis took refuge with Dzogchen Rinpoche. A double rainbow filled the sky at the end of the retreat.

The following year, Alexis moved to Kagyu Droden Kunchab, Kalu Rinpoche's center in San Francisco. Many of the center's students went into first three-year retreat soon after her arrival, and she became the umzed, creating practice texts and making tormas for the center's very busy practice schedule, something she did until 1991. During that time, she was ordained as a novice nun for five years. After 1991 she moved back and forth for six years between

KDK and the Bodhisattva Institute, its sister center in Tucson, Arizona.

Alexis really wanted to do a three-year retreat. She prepared to enter three-year retreat three times, which in itself shows tremendous commitment. However, each time, the final divination for her entering retreat was negative. "I was fully expecting and ready to go. Of course, it was shocking and disorienting," she said. Being a committed dharma warrior, she continued on her path.



Lama Pema Dorje Rinpoche

Then Alexis received a divination from Lama Dawa that Pema Dorje Rinpoche was her teacher. In 2005, she met Pema Dorje Rinpoche and began to study with him. Living in a tent in the backyard of Pema Dorje Rinpoche's Oakland center, she formatted and typed all his practice books. She also learned how to sew dharma garments. "He was kind and ineffable, a perfect Dudjom master," Alexis said. For the next several years, Alexis traveled with Pema Dorje Rinpoche, visiting many

pilgrimage places, assisting him wherever he taught, and doing retreat in Nepal.

Alexis began to visit Tashi Choling around 2005, staying on Brad and Tara Boucher's land during teachings and dzogchen retreats, where she put her expertise at sewing dharma garments to good use. In 2015, she moved to the Colestain Valley, and she now lives in a cozy cabin not far from the temple with her beloved dog Bandit, a one-year old Belgian Malinois.

Alexis describes the Tashi Choling sangha as a "long haul crew" and says that the first time she visited, she was "stunned by the authentic presence and maturity" of the sangha. In Alexis' view, Tashi Choling is "just like a pure land. Every time I go into that shrine room, the purity and power is equal to anything on this earth." After her arrival on the scene, Alexis began to play the drum at pujas, and can often be found in the torma room making tormas, something she has had a great deal of experience doing.

Alexis heard and appreciated Gyatrul Rinpoche's teachings during retreats that she attended, and she appreciated Rinpoche's book, *Generating the Deity*, but she never had any personal contact with Rinpoche. One day, the two did come face to face. Rinpoche asked Alexis for her name. She told him, and immediately Rinpoche conferred a wonderful nickname on her—Elixir.

E ma ho! How wonderful to have Elixir in our midst!



The Noble Sangha, this precious human life

I've always felt that each person's life story is a wonderful architecture, full of mystery, tenderness, challenge, and depth. There's usually humor and some epiphanies, too. Sometimes both at once!

When I began producing Sangha News in April 2017, I was hoping that as we learned more about each other's life stories, we might come to even more closeness and harmony. We are fortunate to be in the same mandala, journeying together.

Occasionally, I get an email from someone telling me how much they love reading the profiles. Of course that makes me happy. Writing about sangha brothers and sisters is a beautiful experience for me. Thank you to each person who has made this offering. May we continue to progress together, supporting and caring for and about each other in a loving way.

Recent Gatherings

Two birthday parties occurred recently. Both celebrated nuns in our sangha. One marked Ani Legshe's 86th birthday, and one celebrated Ani Riom's 80th birthday. Both parties were well-attended and happy occasions.

Ani Riom's party was held at Sauce. Many sangha members dropped by and stayed for an especially delicious carrot cake baked by Vesna Tratensek.



Ani Riom greets some of her well-wishers, including longtime friend Mahdu Coats..



Here, Ani Baba, Ani Tsultrim, Ani Yeshe, and Ani Riom sit for a photo together

Ani Legshe's party was held at her home in Hornbrook. Ani Legshe has had dementia for several years and

Ani Tsultrim has been caring for her, with the help of other caregivers. Some of the caregivers joined sangha for a delicious feast and tender recognition of Ani Legshe.



Ani Tsultrim and Ani Legshe at Ani Legshe's celebration

Bodhisattva Activity Takes Many Forms

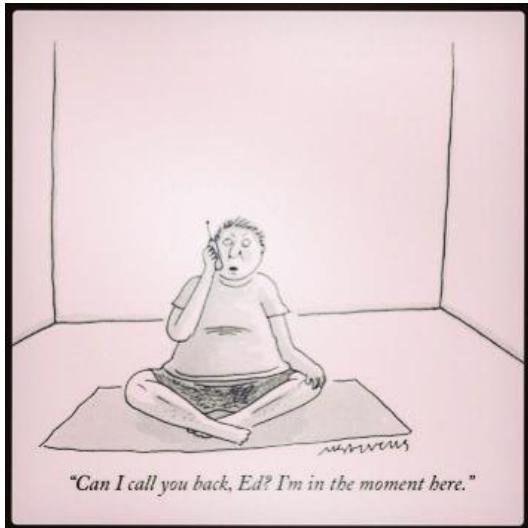


Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche greeted Chris Abbey at the Vajrakilaya retreat last fall

Our dear sangha member Chris Abbey has had multiple sclerosis for many years, and recently she has been dealing with other health issues that have kept her even more immobilized and isolated than before. Please take a moment to give her a call or text her.

Chris is a very courageous, funny, and intelligent woman. If you don't know her yet, don't let that be an obstacle to getting to know her. Give her a call or send her a text from time to time. If you call and she doesn't answer, just leave her a message. She will get back to you. Her number is 541-301-2924.

Cartoon Corner: The Present Moment



ideas, book reviews, cartoons, poetry, photos, and art are welcome. Please contact gaea.laughing@gmail.com by May 10th.

A Blast from the Past!



Gyatru Rinpoche and some of his young friends, with Philip Thomas sitting nearby.



About Sangha News

Gaea Yudron, editor

Sangha News appears bi-monthly. The next issue will be published in June. Your article