

TLC FORUM EXPLORES DEATH AND DYING

by Gaea Yudron

Julie Rogers, who was a part of the Tashi Chöling local sangha for many years, returned to the area to lead a forum on death and dying in early July.

Julie is the founding director of Transitional Life Care (TLC), a nonprofit that offers valuable resources and tools to support Vajrayana practitioners and others at the time of dying. The forum attracted 25 people, the majority of whom were dharma practitioners.

Pointing out that death is a “most poignant and powerful juncture in our lifetime,” Julie went on to share a quote from Lama Tharchin Rinpoche, who said, “The point of dharma is to die professionally. Good luck with the white light!”

Julie recalled a conversation she had with Gyatrul Rinpoche in 1996. She was saying to Rinpoche, “I think we need a group to help people in the sangha when they are dying.” Not missing a beat, Rinpoche replied, “You do it!” Julie was shocked by that notion, and says she procrastinated for a few years.

But then with help from Gyatrul Rinpoche and Lama Yeshe Nyima, she wrote *“Instructions for the Transitional State: A Guide for Families and Friends of Vajrayana Buddhists.”* The manual was used as a reference during the forum.

In the day-long gathering, both secular and spiritual areas important in preparing for death were reviewed. Items such as the Advanced Directive, POLST, Medical Power of Attorney, writing a will and engaging hospice services were covered, among others.



Julie Rogers

In addition, Julie presented a variety of other material on creating a peaceful, conducive environment for the dying person, practices that can be done during that time, caring for the body after death, and preparing the body for cremation.

Some of the information came from Lama Sonam Tsering, based on a teaching by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche.

Many of those present have known each other for many years. This created an atmosphere of warmth and openness. During the day, the names and death experiences of several sangha members were shared, and this was very touching.

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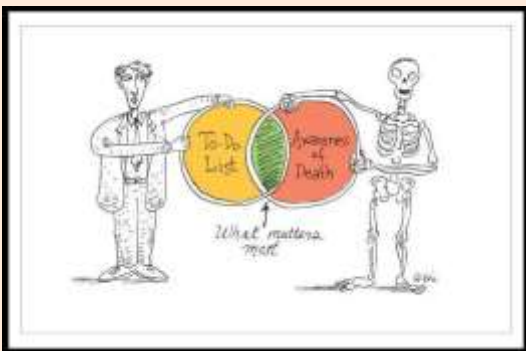
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Nurse Deirdre Goldberg and geriatric care manager Susan Bosworth added interesting and useful material about hospice, palliative care, and other medical concerns. We watched a 7-minute video in which Lama Sonam Tsering demonstrated the traditional way of wrapping a body after death. There was much relevant practitioner-oriented material shared.

Julie plans to revise and augment the instruction manual soon in order to include additional material she has collected since its publication.

She would like to return to the Ashland area with the goal of developing a group who are well prepared to help others in the dying process.

The TLC project has a new website, and its address is:
<http://tlc.transitionallifecare.org/>



His Holiness Getse Rinpoche and Lingtrul Rinpoche were both present during the Dorsem Lama Chodpa retreat in July



Offerings were made to the lamas at the end of the retreat



Visitors came from many places to practice. Rodger Evans arrived from Ensenada and was a wonderful helper

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SANGHA SPOTLIGHT

Susan Goldberg

by Gary Farrell

The renowned Buddhist author and teacher Alan Wallace once said in a lecture that those individuals who are attracted to the Vajrayana form of Buddhism tend to be “creative types.” Certainly one would agree that Tashi Chöling has its share of creative folks. One shining jewel within our particular sangha is Susan Goldberg.



Susan Goldberg

Susan was born in Peoria, Illinois, which she describes as a good place to grow up but not to live. The daughter of a professor of economics, Susan’s higher education took place in a number of institutions, including Northwestern University where she majored in English literature and minored in film. While she loved reading books and the writing requirements for her degree, she realized at some point she would need to find a job. Increasingly she felt drawn toward making a career in film production and enrolled at the School of the Arts

Institute of Chicago, where the creative process of filmmaking was nurtured. She also attended Columbia College where the technical nuts and bolts of filmmaking was emphasized.

At this time, Susan felt that the Hollywood film industry was antithetical to what she believed in, so she decided to become an ethnographic documentary filmmaker instead -- anywhere but in Los Angeles. The gravitational pull of Hollywood and Los Angeles was just too strong, however, so Susan moved to L.A. with the idea that there was nothing wrong with a good story told well, and that she could hold onto her values while living in “Hollywood Babylon.” She ended up working as a script reader, evaluating new screenplays submitted to production companies. Perhaps her greatest achievement in the field has been her discovery of the classic film, “The Shawshank Redemption.”

So how did this Hollywood script reader find the dharma? It all began when as a high school student she was allowed to enroll in a college course. She chose Comparative Religion. The class was reading Huston Smith’s renowned *World Religions* book and she came across the word Avalokitesvara. “Just reading that word lit something mysterious inside me,” she said. Initially, she resisted this pull to becoming a Buddhist because of what she (erroneously) felt would involve extreme detachment, and she wasn’t ready for that. While in

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L.A., she joined Joan Halifax's Ojai Foundation where she studied shamanism. These were sacred techniques that helped her open the door to the Great Mystery, she added.

Still, that flame burned inside her. When she had the chance, she encountered Chagdud Rinpoche and the flame grew. Then, the ten-day empowerment of the Kalachakra given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama stoked the fire further. She underwent the she-dur ceremony with Ngakpa Yeshe Dorje Rinpoche, all contributing to an increasing realization that she was on the royal road to the center of her heart. Still something was missing. She had not found her teacher. Then, a friend who joined her for an Asia adventure introduced her to Ken McLeod, a senior student of Kalu Rinpoche, and his translator. Ken laid a very solid Mahayana foundation for her that further primed her pump. What was it that resulted in this cosmopolitan Hollywood script reader migrating north to Ashland and Tashi Chöling?

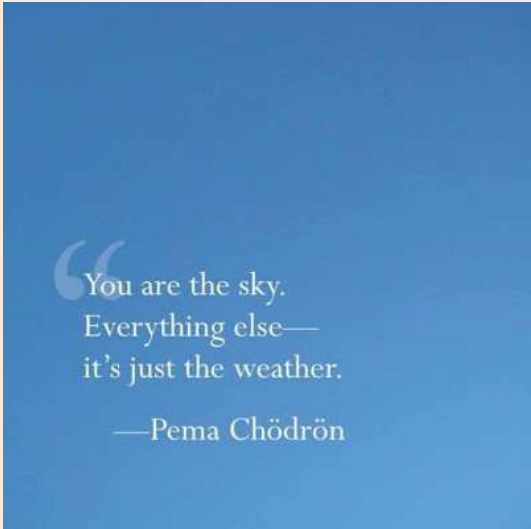
It was in 2008 when Susan met Gyatrul Rinpoche in Ojai (thanks to Sondra Bennett, aka "Grandma"). Gyatrul Rinpoche totally magnetized Susan – he was the real deal. She fell in love and, at every opportunity, began driving to Ojai, Orgyen Dorje Den, and Tashi Chöling to receive his teachings.

This long distance spiritual relationship was bridged by a near tragic event. While driving on the L.A. freeway in 2010, she was

slammed by a big-rig and carried the length of a football field. Her car was totaled but remarkably Susan walked away, shaken but alive. She considers this one of those pivotal "non-ordinary" events that created a sea-change in her life. She felt a true calling to move north to be with Rinpoche and to be at Tashi Chöling.

Since her move here in 2010, Susan has juggled her job of telecommuting as a script reader, while immersing herself in many dharma activities at the temple. Her favorite activity is serving tea to the lamas and helping with video documentation. She also provides lodging logistics for retreatants and does retreat registration. She enjoys organizing Tormapalooza and provides Rinpoche with an endless stream of videos of the ongoing activities at the temple.

Now, with Gyatrul Rinpoche not physically present, Susan has come to realize that her commitment is not just to Rinpoche, but to her own practice and to the sangha and to Tashi Chöling.



“You are the sky.
Everything else—
it's just the weather.
—Pema Chödrön

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LIGHT OF BEROTSANA

by Gary Farrell

Many of us long-time students of the dharma recall how back in the 1970s, if one were to go to the Tibetan Buddhist section of the library or bookstore, one would scarcely find any books on the subject. There were translations by Guenther, Tucci, Snellgrove, and of course Lama Govinda's books that stoked our thirst for more.



Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam

Today we are living in the midst of a true Renaissance with translation of so many extraordinary Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, commentaries and practice manuals. We are fortunate to have here at Tashi Chöling two of the world's

foremost Tibetan translators in Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam. Their formation of Light of Berotsana (LOB) Translation Group and collaborations in translating the dharma tradition of Tibet has resulted in dozens of priceless teachings being made available. Almost forty percent of their translated works are shipped overseas, indicating a truly international need for these translations. Light of Berotsana continues to disseminate volumes of precious teachings, root-texts, commentaries, practice texts, and recordings every year. I recently caught up with Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam to ask them what their most influential Dharma book has been.

Sangye Khandro was part of that relatively small first wave of westerners who journeyed to India and Nepal back in the early 1970s to learn the language and sit at the feet of Tibetan masters. She recalls how big an impact access to the few English translations available then became for her.

There was, however, one text that became a real game-changer for her and her life's trajectory: *The Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*, a compilation of teachings given by her first teacher, Geshe Ngawang Dargye. "It answered every question I had about Absolute and Relative Truth," she said. When asked what more recent dharma writings have influenced her, she cited Thinley Norbu Rinpoche's books, particularly *White Sail* and *Cascading Waterfall of Nectar*.

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Lama Chonam, who has dedicated his life to translating core Tibetan Buddhist teachings with LOB, stated that perhaps the most seminal writings he encountered early on were those of Patrul Rinpoche. Lama Chonam was just 16 years old, living in the monastery in Golok, and Patrul Rinpoche's teachings became a watershed for deepening his understanding of the dharma.

When asked what has been the most breathtaking translation experience of his career, Lama Chonam said the *Guhyagarbha Tantra*, a series of translations that resulted from precious teachings given by Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche over many years. Lama Chonam, Sangye Khandro, and the LOB team completed and published three books and eight transcripts. For Lama Chonam, this series has been the most demanding and rewarding of his efforts.

Sangye Khandro agrees. All of the voluminous transcripts from Khenpo Namdrol's multi-year presentations of Omniscient Longchenpa's *Thorough Dispelling of Darkness Throughout the Ten Directions* has been the highlight of her work. She gave equal importance to the *Tsig Don Rinpoche'i, Dzod*, (Precious Treasury of Genuine Meaning) published by Light of Berotsana in 2015.

So what's currently "in-the-oven" and about to be released by the LOB translators? According to the two of them, there will be four books released within the next year or so.

They include:

The Biography of Patrul Rinpoche entitled A Vase of Nectar to Inspire the Faithful. Translated by Lama Chonam and Timothy Hinkle.

Chetsun Nyingtik book: A compilation of works including the commentary written by Kongrol Lodru Tayei; the root text by Jamgyon Khyentse Wangpo called, *Vision's and Revelations,* and Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche's commentary on the Chetsun Nyingtig.

The *Epic of Gesar of Ling*, Vol. 2 (or book 4 in Tibetan) entitled *The Battle of Düd and Ling*, translated by Lama Chonam and Jane Hawes (these are magnificent hardback gold-stamped volumes with slip covers, also available in paperback). In this forthcoming work, Gesar, now King, wages war on Maras surrounding Tibet.

Yeshe Lama: This new publication will offer a revised root text accompanied by Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche's comprehensive commentary given over a six week period in the winter of 2014 at his center in Pharping, Nepal.

The Buddha and the great masters throughout history have always urged their followers to read, contemplate, and meditate on and with these teachings. Today, if we were to revisit that library or bookstore that had only a half-dozen or so titles back in the 1970s, we

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would find perhaps a hundred translations. Thankfully for all of us in the Tashi Chöling mandala, some of the most magnificent, important, and hard-core Buddhist works being published today are being done right here in this enchanted mountain valley below Mt. Ashland. Let us give thanks to Gyatrul Rinpoche, Sangye Khandro, and Lama Chonam for advancing in so many ways our understanding of the sublime Buddhadharma.

IMPROVEMENT AND BEAUTIFICATION OF THE AMITABHA SITE

Philip Thomas and Richard Schwindt are hard at work making the Amitabha site more easily accessible and beautiful. "It was a job that needed to be done for some time," Philip commented. The parking lot has been graveled, the road into the site has been improved, and the plaza surrounding the Amitabha Pavilion has been leveled and rocked to make it more easily navigable. A 4-foot high retaining wall is in the process of being built. Trees and landscaping plants are also included in the design, which Philip developed several years ago.

A big thank you to these two vintage sangha members who continue to contribute in such meaningful ways!

And....yes, of course you can help them. Just contact Philip at 541-301-3578 to accumulate some merit.



Compassion

**Calligraphy by the 17th
Karmapa**

**The next issue of Sangha News
will appear in October. Please
send articles and flashes of
insight to
gaea.laughing@gmail.com by
September 15th.**

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The Antidote

self is just a habit
self is just a habit
self is just a habit
self is just a habit

intone the sacred syllables
unlock the secret inner light
intone the sacred syllables
unlock the secret inner light

I prostrate myself
I prostrate myself
I prostrate myself
I prostrate myself

Guru, you are the key
Guru, you are the key.

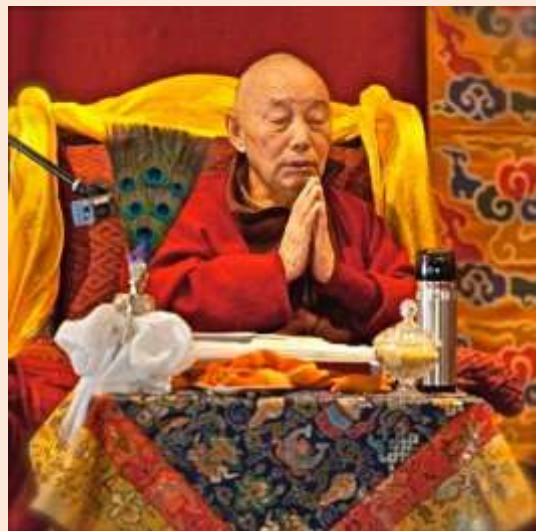
--- Sarah Rose

This poem was written by our dear sangha sister Sarah Rose, who passed away in 2005.

The poem originally appeared in *Like an Echo*, a collection of contemporary Buddhist poetry edited by Julie Rogers and Diane Taudvin, published in 1993.



Gyatrul Rinpoche sits on the railroad tracks near the retreat land in the early Eighties



Praying in the temple at Tashi Chöling