
Tashi Choling Sangha News August 2019

Sangha Spotlight: Ani Nyima



Ani Nyima in the East Wing kitchen
Photo by Gaea Yudron

Ani Nyima, also known as Rebecca Wood, was born in Utah and raised as a Mormon. “I naturally resonated with stories of Jesus; but in my

adolescence, some of the church’s stances didn’t make sense to me,” she said, recalling that stage of her life journey. When in college, she read *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda’s chronicle of his life. One phrase riveted her: “Find a teacher.” For many years, Ani Nyima searched for a teacher and a spiritual path.

While she was raising her three children, Ani Nyima lived in Crestone, Colorado, a place well-known as home for many spiritual groups. She was close to a Carmelite group that she found to be “vibrant, alive, and magnetizing.” Then she became a zen practitioner, but after finishing a three-month retreat, realized that zen was not her path.

Meanwhile, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche’s sangha was building retreat cabins up on the mountain. Ani Nyima had never met Dzigar Kongtrul, but as it happened, the only visible hermitage was in a clear line with her meditation room. When she got up at 4am to practice, she saw what appeared to be a meditation light in that cabin. When she went to bed at night, the meditation light was still on up there. Her curiosity grew. Who was it up there? And one morning, as she likes to say, “Rinpoche’s light rolled down the mountain and cracked my heart open.” She went to a Sunday talk at Kongtrul Rinpoche’s Crestone center. From his hermitage, he was giving a live talk through a phone link. Ani says she never really heard a single word of the talk because upon seeing Kongtrul Rinpoche’s

photo, "I had an inner meltdown. I was irretrievably hooked." Not long after, she took refuge.

On September 11, 2001, Ani was driving out of Crestone with all her possessions loaded onto a flatbed truck. She was heading for Ashland, to be close to her daughter and grandchild. Being close to Tashi Choling was a bonus. "I was very fortunate because I joined in the first Marig Munsel program that Lama Bruce Newman offered soon after I arrived. It was an effective formation, and I was blessed to be part of it."



Ani Nyima was ordained by His Holiness Penor Rinpoche in 2007 at the age of 63 at the Palyul retreat center in upstate New York. She hadn't considered becoming a nun until someone asked Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, "What do you think about Westerners becoming ordained?" Dzigar Kongtrul replied that ordination was fine if it was the right thing for the person. This had an immediate effect on Ani Nyima. "I felt zapped in every cell of my body," she said, describing the energy that

coursed through her. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, along with Yangthang Rinpoche and Gyatrul Rinpoche, supported her ordination wishes. "Ordination is the best choice I ever made in my life. It's not for everyone, but even taking temporary vows for a day is a great practice support," she commented. "Wearing robes enables a quality of connection with others that I value. I've had a few uncomfortable experiences, but mostly people are open to me, not because of me but because of what I represent, because of the robes. Being ordained helps keep my day-to-day activities dharma-focused and may even be (finger's crossed) loosening my "me first" mentality."

After becoming a nun, Ani spent the next six years living at Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's seat in Ward, Colorado, where she cooked for events and teachers, served as a housekeeper, and helped host dharma programs. She also values the time cooking for and retreating with Pema Chodron at Gampo Abbey and Kongtrul Rinpoche's retreat centers. "I would still be in Colorado, but the center is at 9,000 feet and the altitude became too taxing for my lungs," she noted. Ani Nyima returned to southern Oregon and now lives in the Colestin Valley, a few miles away from Tashi Choling. She remains active in Mangala Shri Bhuti, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche's organization, leading ngondro classes and providing meditation instruction in person and by phone. Dzigar Kongtrul's sangha is far flung, and some members practice together on Dakini and Guru Rinpoche days using a video

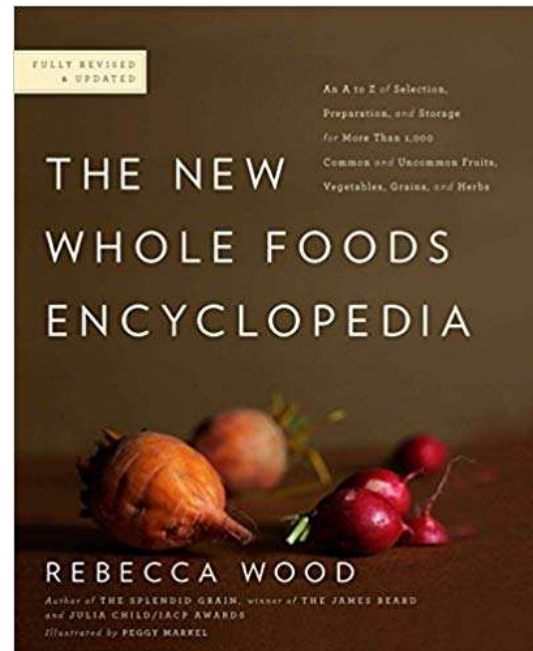
conferencing program. Ani serves as chopen for these online pujas, and she sometimes travels to be with Dzigar Kongtrul at teachings he gives in Leggett, California and other locations.

Ani is also naturally involved with the ordained sangha associated with Tashi Choling, who gather for *sojong*, a renewal of vows practice, every new and full moon. “I am grateful to be part of the robed sangha at Tashi Choling. It’s a supportive community,” she said.

Over the years, she has participated in retreats and teachings, cooked for Gyatrul Rinpoche, Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam, and for retreats. “Cooking and serving is a role I take a lot of pleasure in,” she said. That is not so surprising considering how many years Ani Nyima has been involved with food as a support for health and wellbeing. Looking at how that all began takes us back many years, to the era of Woodstock

(In case you are wondering, yes, she was there!).

In 1969, Ani Nyima developed an interest in the medicinal and energetic properties of food, and she began studying macrobiotics in Boston with the famed teacher Michio Kushi. In 1972, Kushi sent her to London to help set up a macrobiotic center. While in the UK, she studied at the School of Traditional Chinese Medicine in 1973-1974. During this time, she evolved into a teacher and writer.



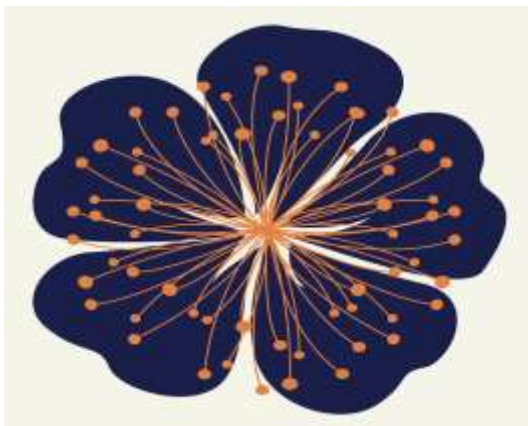
“How do we use foods medicinally? That has remained my focus,” she noted. Her popular book, *The New Whole Foods Encyclopedia*, has been in print for 32 years, and her book, *The Splendid Grain*, won both the Julia Child (IACP) and James Beard Cookbook Awards.

“I am fortunate to be able to work from home, and that gives me lots of time for practice and retreat,” she said. You can learn more about Ani’s engagement with food as medicine at her website, www.rebeccawood.com, where she offers information and services related to health and wellbeing.

Wedding News

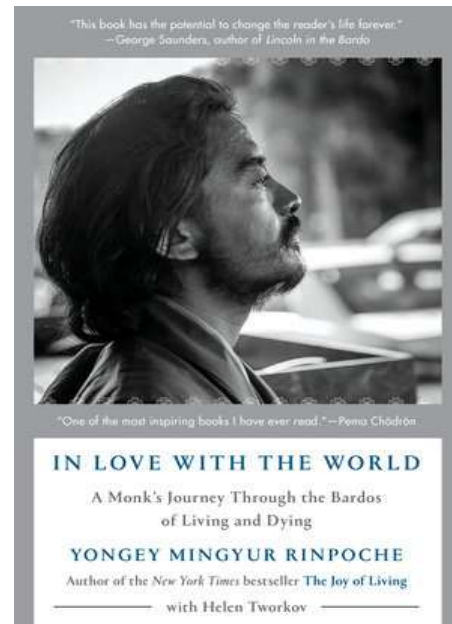


Samantha Cheney and David Gelfand married on June 22nd at Tashi Choling in the presence of family and friends. Lingtrul Rinpoche officiated at the ceremony. Wishing the newlyweds much happiness: May their marriage fulfill them and may they bring benefit to others.



About Books

In Love with the World,
by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche
with Helen Tworlov



“One of the most inspiring books I have ever read,” says Pema Chodron on the front cover of this book, and I completely agree. I just finished reading it for the second time. It’s a spellbinding story, one full of profound dharma insights.

From childhood on, Mingyur Rinpoche, the youngest son of Tulku Urgyen, wanted to go on a wandering retreat, unaccompanied and unknown. Of course, this was something quite different from his protected lifestyle amid family and disciples. The book is an account of that adventure, which included nearly dying.

In my enthusiasm, I talked about the book to others and found that

several people I knew were reading it, so I asked for their comments.

Derek Ridler was struck by Mingyur Rinpoche's "uncompromising commitment to free himself of the seductive titles, trappings, and privileges that go with his illustrious position."

Derek said, "It is rare for a high incarnate lama to speak of the very human problems and troubles they experience on the path. His openness about his anxiety, fear, and panic I found to be most refreshing, and something that empowers us ordinary mortals. In the face of his very human struggles, it is inspiring that he took rather simple body focused mindfulness and basic compassion practices to stabilize awareness, rather than resorting to esoteric Vajrayana practices. And finally, his emphasis on the ultimate power of unconditional love."

Ani Rich Heigh commented, "He was able to take each moment and see it as a tool to reconnect with the nature of mind. In describing the experience of dying, he showed death as a natural part of life--instead of holding on or being attached, death as something to look forward to."

Kate Maxfield described the book as "Fabulous, one of the best dharma books I've read. I will return to it again and again. It's a book you could give to someone who doesn't know much about the dharma. The descriptions he gives of meditation are so good. When he's talking about the dissolution of the elements, he writes with so much

kindness and softness. It's so welcoming, not like death is something out there that's going to happen to us, but a process that can be followed step by step. He speaks heart to heart with the reader. It's so intimate. It really touched my heart."



Most Precious Friend: The Life and Wisdom Activities of Gyatrul Rinpoche

Most Precious Friend, the upcoming book about Rinpoche's life, continues to progress well. The book now has a Facebook page ([Facebook Page for Most Precious Friend](#)), which allows exposure to a broad dharma audience. Not all readers use Facebook, so we will include excerpts here in the Sangha News, too.

The photo on the next page showing Rinpoche's root guru, Tulku Natsok Rangdrol, was found during a 1987 trip that Rinpoche and Sangye took to Tibet with several students, including Dominique Shelton and

Doug Col. Doug used Photoshop to improve the quality of the image, a copy of which can be seen in the altar at Tashi Choling.

-- Gaea Yudron



Tulku Natsok Rangdrol and Sangye Gon

Gyatrul Rinpoche's root guru, Tulku Natsok Rangdrol, was one of five emanations of the renowned master Dudjom Lingpa. Tulku Natsok directed Rinpoche's training during the many years they spent together traveling and practicing in eastern Tibet. Tulku Natsok asked his uncle, Sangye Gon, to become Gyatrul Rinpoche's teacher or tutor.

Sangye Gon had received his name as a newborn baby when the great treasure revealer, Dudjom Lingpa, passed through his village. Rinpoche said, "I lived with Sangye Gön. He would get up very, very early, maybe 3am, to do his practice, including

many prostrations. I could hear the rumble of his recitations as I slept. Then he would wake me up and we would have breakfast, followed by my reading lessons.

"Sangye Gon was an amazing practitioner," Rinpoche recalled. "He did nyungne practice unceasingly for forty years. He did his nyungne practice in a two-day cycle, which means one day he would be talking and eating, the next day no eating or talking after lunch. He did many millions of Mani mantra in his life. That is the kind of lama he was. He never stopped practicing. He was always chanting. In the early morning, he practiced. Then after breakfast, he taught me how to read for half an hour. Then he went to practice again," Rinpoche said.

Sangye Gon was devoted to Chenrezig, the Buddha of Compassion, whom he called the White Man. Chenrezig, riding on a white horse, appeared regularly to Sangye Gon, giving him prophecies.

During the years that Gyatrul Rinpoche was with Sangye Gon, his aged tutor's white hair turned black again and teeth that had been missing grew in again. "That's absolutely true," Rinpoche affirmed. "His wrinkles became smooth again, his white hair disappeared and black hair appeared. His missing teeth grew in. Maybe nobody will believe me, but I saw it with my own eyes."

About Sangha News

Sangha News appears bi-monthly. The next issue will be published in October. You are welcome to share book or movie reviews, cartoons, poetry, or news. Please email material to editor Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com by September 10th.

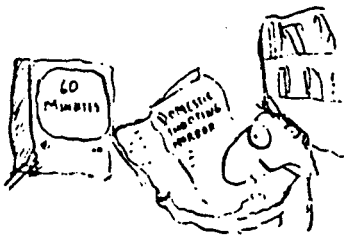


On the family trip to nirvana

Cartoon Corner

Leunig

In my life I had
accumulated many things
in my head.....
Too MANY THINGS...!



OVERLOOKING MY LIFE SO FAR

Memories, tunes, facts.
fears, visions, loves...
etc. etc...as many
as possible



In a fertile mind such
things will interbreed.
mongrel visions are born
... hybrid memories...
inbred, idiot love....
It gets very CONFUSING



I decided it was
time for a good
cleanup so I emptied
it all out of my head
and pushed it up in
a big heap to sort
it out.



There it was... everything
that was me, all in a big
jumbled heap. I walked
around it. What a mess...!



Then suddenly I saw
it in silhouette and
realized what it was....
IT WAS A HEAP...
A SIMPLE HEAP...
you don't sort it out.
you climb it... you climb
it because it is there...



Excitedly I clambered
to the summit and
raised a flag. I was
now looking beyond
everything that I
knew.



THE VIEW
WAS
SIMPLY
MAGNIFICENT

