



Ani Tsultrim and Ani Legshe

SANGHA SPOTLIGHT: Ani Legshe and Ani Tsultrim

by Gary Farrell

There is something inherently beautiful about our elders. Perhaps it's their wisdom accrued from a lifetime of spiritual practice and adventure. Such is the case of two of our precious Anis here at Tashi Choling, Ani Legshe and Ani Tsultrim.

Ani Legshe, the elder of the two, was born in Chicago in 1934. Her father was from France and died from tuberculosis when she was only 4 years old. Ani Legshe, then named Diane Everett, also contracted the disease, but survived. Her mother moved the family to California where Ani graduated from a parochial high school in Fresno. In the years to

come, Ani Legshe supported herself as a bookkeeper.

The earlier chapters of Ani Legshe's life read like a romantic novel. There were dozens of very eligible bachelors who courted Ani Legshe along with many proposals of marriage. While living in Hawaii, Ani Legshe dated President Barack Obama's father. In India, Ani was courted by an Indian maharaja, who bestowed upon her many precious stones and jewelry. Also among Ani Legshe's suitors was an undercover CIA agent and a bank robber. Through it all, Ani Legshe learned to refuse these suitors and their proposals.

In 1972, Ani Legshe went back to college at San Francisco State University. It was there that Ani heard a lecture by Dr. Ajari, a Vajrayana teacher from Russia, whose teachings penetrated her heart like a diamond arrow. Soon Ani Legshe made her way into Dr. Ajari's inner circle. Dr. Ajari founded a self-supporting community of students who were living in an old Victorian flat in the Fillmore area. There she encountered a very important friend with whom she continued her life-long spiritual journey, even after Dr. Ajari's death in 1993. Her name was Marilyn Costello, now known as Ani Tsultrim.

Ani Tsultrim was born in Salt Lake City, Utah during World War II when

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her father was fighting overseas. Her mother decided to move the family to Pasadena, California where they were raised in a pacifist Brethren Church community. Later Ani and family returned to their Scandinavian Lutheran roots, but a big church scandal forced Ani to reconsider her spiritual path.

Soon on her own, Ani Tsultrim moved to New York City where she supported herself as a cocktail waitress and go-go dancer. She spent a year in Spain teaching English. Due to her limited Spanish, she was not that good at it. Then she returned to New York City, moving into the East Village. Her spiritual roots were nurtured by the bohemian atmosphere of the village, encounters with the Buddhist author Alan Watts, and the emergence of the radical left.

Ani Tsultrim joined an underground film-making group fighting for economic and racial justice and against the war in Vietnam. The group had close ties to the Black Panther movement and Students for Democratic Society (SDS). They began documenting the Revolution as it unfolded. She was part of the radicals who occupied Columbia University and was tear-gassed while participating in the SDS protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Back in New York, Ani Tsultrim grew discontented with the radical left movement when, at a meeting, a leader began advocating taking up arms against the government. Despite Ani's fearlessness, she had an aversion to violence, and



Dr. Ajari (on the right) with Lama Anagarika Govinda

felt too many of the leaders were egotistical male college drop-outs. She left the group in 1969. An old friend encouraged her to return back to San Francisco to meet a very interesting spiritual teacher named Dr. Ajari. Dr. Ajari was descended from a long line of Mongolian and Siberian Vajrayana Buddhists. He had recently emigrated from Russia. Dr. Ajari also went to Japan where

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he studied extensively with masters of the Ten Dai, Shingon, and Shugendo traditions. He did a 3-year retreat in Japan with Shugendo masters. The fire ceremony was a central part of their practice, as was mountain “yogic hiking.”

Now centered in San Francisco, Dr. Ajari forbade his students to smoke, drink alcohol, or take drugs and encouraged them to become vegetarians. He taught “fire-walking” at which Ani Tsultrim and Ani Legshe were particularly adept. It was during this time in 1972 that Ani Legshe joined Dr. Ajari’s group and donned the robes and mountain-climbing garb that he had created. When Ani Legshe presented Dr. Ajari the precious jewels given to her by the maharaja many years earlier, Dr. Ajari drove the group to a cliff above the ocean and threw the jewels into the Pacific as an offering to the nagas.

Dr. Ajari and his community developed a business of manufacturing and selling futons and Japanese bedding. Using its profits, Dr. Ajari supported the efforts of a number of Tibetan lamas who first arrived in the Bay Area in the mid 1970s. He became a pivotal support system for Gyatrul Rinpoche and Sangye Khandro who were centered in Oakland at that time.

Dr. Ajari died in 1993. His remains are in a stupa at Tashi Choling’s

Amitabha Garden. Both Ani Legshe and Ani Tsultrim had lost track of Gyatrul Rinpoche, and were shocked to discover that he was teaching in the old Townsend Street center in San Francisco just blocks away from them. They took refuge with Gyatrul Rinpoche and later began Tröma Nagmo practice with Sangye Khandro.



In 2010, both women flew to Namdroling Monastery in India where they were ordained. Shortly thereafter, they moved to Hornbrook, California to be close to their beloved teachers.

In the past few years, Ani Legshe has developed Alzheimer’s and Ani

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Tsultrim has taken on the responsibility of being her caregiver. As Ani Legshe's memory fades, we trust that her beautiful light and story will be an inspiration to many. We are thankful that she continues to have such a caring and devoted friend in Ani Tsultrim.



POSTSCRIPT about helping

On August 28th, Gyatrul Rinpoche sent a letter via email asking that the sangha help Ani Tsultrim and Ani Legshe with shopping, cleaning, visiting, and recycling. Financial donations are also needed. The following link to a Caring Bridge site provides a calendar and describes more about what's needed. <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/ani-legshe>

People can also be in touch with Ani Tsultrim directly with questions and to coordinate shopping, cleaning, visiting, etc., by phone at [\(530\) 261-1156](tel:5302611156) or email at mandarava332@gmail.com.



Christy Sloan is now Ani Dolma

We Have a New Nun!

On August 7, Christy Sloan was ordained as a novice nun at the Palyul Retreat Center in upstate New York.

Her ordination name is Thubten Chonid Dolma and she will go by Ani Dolma. "I had a very gradual awareness of wanting to be ordained," she said. "Four years ago I took lay ordination and started thinking about becoming a novice nun. I talked with Ani Yeshe about it as we drive back and forth to pujas together. I am very happy to be ordained. I have a feeling as if I have always been ordained," she said.

As we welcome Ani Dolma into her new role in the sangha, let's take time to congratulate her for joining our growing tribe of Anis.

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Khenchen Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche's Teachings on Reincarnation

by Gary Farrell

Two hundred and fifty people packed the Ashland Springs Hotel Conference room August 6-7 to hear one of the most important Buddhist teachers of our time. Khenchen Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche, who has overseen monastic education at Larung Gar, Tibet's largest monastery, for more than twenty years, producing successive generations of accomplished students.

Khenchen has traveled extensively within China and Tibet to teach dharma, advocate protection of all living beings, and promote environmental awareness and education. Additionally, he has committed himself to a deep understanding of Western science and philosophy, utilizing

contemporary methods to disseminate Buddhist culture. His Chinese/Tibetan publications include: *Buddhism: Superstition or Wisdom?*, *The Heart Sutra and Quantum Physics*, and *The Secret Code for Unlocking Tibetan Buddhism*.

How does such an accomplished master find time in his busy schedule to come to Ashland and Tashi Choling? It was during Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam's 2015 trip to Tibet and China that the initial connection took place at Larung Gar. Khenchen Tsultrim Lodro said he would go to the place that Khenpo Jigme Phunstok went. The idea was supported by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, spiritual director of Tashi Choling. Thus, the stage was set for this extraordinary event.

The topic of Khenchen's teaching was reincarnation. Throughout the teaching, Khenchen wove strands from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and bardo teachings, along with recent scientific research conducted into past-life memory and reincarnation. The result was a tapestry of beauty, revealing in exquisite detail the dying and death process along with rebirth. Concluding his Ashland teachings, Khenchen stated that we all have worries and a good 70% are useless worries about things that never happen. Death, however, is a useful worry and knowledge of death is of

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vital importance. What ceases to exist are superficial things, but our fundamental essence continues. Thus, we should make time to prepare ourselves for this great journey so that we can make use of our death in a happy way.

Khenchen's Visit to Tashi Choling

by Lisbeth LaCoste



Photo: Susan Goldberg

Approximately 100 people attended Khenchen Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche's full moon day teachings, and judging from the smiles on all the faces, everyone was happy to be taking part in this wonderful opportunity at Tashi Choling. Khenchen Rinpoche provided inspiring teachings on the meaning of refuge and bodhicitta and guided everyone through taking the vows, carefully explaining exactly what vows were being taken and

how to maintain them. Many new students took vows for the very first time, and older students were able to renew their vows. We practiced the Shakyamuni Buddha puja and made dedication and aspiration prayers together. What a wonderful day!

The time and effort offered by our local sangha family were an essential part of presenting this event. It took many people doing many tasks over several days to prepare for this single day's event. Thanks to all who helped! Every offering of time and service was equally valuable: from serving the lama and his entourage to bringing beautiful flowers and creating flower arrangements; from cleaning all the bathrooms, inside and out, to doing tsog shopping and preparations; from cleaning the residence, East Wing, and temple to weed-whacking the parking areas, mowing, tidying the grounds, and cleaning the outside shrines; from doing road repairs to laying out an inviting spread of snacks for our many guests; from setting up the temple beforehand to putting it all back together again afterwards; from making tormas to making parking signs; from choponing during the ceremony to helping with parking, registration, and seating; from attending to sangha members with physical challenges to lighting candle offerings and serving lama tea; from monitoring video and audio feeds to preparing, distributing, and collecting

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practice materials. *All* of the many activities that go into making a *single* day's event like this possible can only be accomplished through the unified efforts of many sangha members offering their precious time and service. So thank you, one and all, for all you did to make the day go so smoothly. Thank you, sangha family, and let's all remember to dedicate our merit!

Report on Improvements at Amitabha Memorial Garden

by Gaea Yudron

The other day when I went to visit Philip Thomas, we headed up to the Amitabha Memorial Garden. Richard Schwindt and Philip have been working for months to make the area much more accessible and beautiful.



Longtime sangha members Richard Schwindt and Philip Thomas have been working to improve the Amitabha Memorial Garden



View of Nai-yuine Ding's memorial, with retaining wall and tsakang in background

The road that leads in to the garden has been rocked and sanded, as has a newly created parking area above the Amitabha area. The grounds surrounding the Amitabha Pavilion

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have been leveled, rocked, and sanded. A retaining wall has been constructed behind the Pavilion, and another wall has been created between the two tsakangs (structures designed to hold ashes of the deceased in the form of tsa tsas). Philip and Richard have also developed pathways within the garden that are smooth and easy to navigate. Future plans include adding landscaping with trees, herbs, and deer-proof flowers.

“I wanted to create a blank canvas,” Philip said of the work that has been done thus far. “We’ve got to take care of finishing what Rinpoche started. This is meant to be a respectful, peaceful environment. Now we can make it really pretty with flowers, and there’s room for stupas to be placed here in the future, too.”

Through Philip and Richard’s vision and hard work, the Amitabha Memorial Garden has been significantly improved and prepared for further beautification.

Many thanks to these two longtime sangha members for their inspiring offering.



SANGHA CLASSIFIEDS

Wanted: Part Time Virtual Assistant

5 -7 hours weekly, flexible schedule.
Please contact:

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THE NEXT ISSUE OF SANGHA NEWS WILL APPEAR IN DECEMBER

Please email your suggestions or news for the December issue to gaea.laughing@gmail.com by November 15th.

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LAST BUT NOT LEAST: CARTOON CORNER!

