



THE SHAMBHALA MEDITATION
CENTER
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JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2005

ON TAKING REFUGE

By Newcomb Greenleaf

I recently had the good fortune to teach a weekend class on *The Three Jewels* at the Shambhala Center, starting the second cycle of the new curriculum of the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies. As always, teaching the dharma proved a bracing experience, which challenged and strengthened my understanding. But I did not expect that my view of taking refuge would be so dramatically altered.

My view had been that refuge was a ceremony in which you publicly became a Buddhist, acknowledging to yourself, to the preceptor, and your friends that your life had taken a different direction. You took refuge in the three jewels—Buddha, dharma, and sangha—rather than in money, beauty, power, fame, possessions, love, entertainment, sex, or family. It is a ceremony that has come down to us from the Buddha himself across 2500 years, and plays a central role in all Buddhist traditions.

I recalled how the Vidyadhara Chögyam Trungpa had emphasized the ceremony itself, focusing on one special moment:

The third time you say "I take refuge in the sangha," the preceptor snaps his fingers. That is the moment of real transmission. At that moment the sperm, so to speak, enters your system and you become part of the lineage. ... At that particular point, the energy, the power, and the blessing of basic sanity that has existed in the lineage for twenty-five hundred years, in an unbroken tradition and discipline from the time of Buddha, enters your system, and you finally become a full-fledged follower of Buddhadharma. You are a living future Buddha at that point.

While I knew that as your dharma practice progresses along the path, the meaning of refuge changes and deepens, and that many Buddhist practices begin with a recitation of the refuge mantra, I didn't yet view taking refuge as a *practice* in its own right, one that continues throughout the path. That is, until I became acquainted with the beautiful little pamphlet *Arousing the Motivation for True Freedom from Samsara* by Sakyong Mipham, which is now given to all who take refuge with a Shambhala preceptor, and is available (locally at the Samadhi Store) to those who took refuge previously.

Arousing the Motivation is a formal practice, a simple

sadhana, which the Sakyong recommends be done daily:

The point of this practice is to strengthen your commitment to the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. Morning is a good time for formal practice. If you wish, you may sit in front of a shrine on which you have placed a statue of the Buddha and offerings of incense and light. Chant the words aloud or read them silently. You can also use this practice at any time, anywhere, to contemplate your connection to the three jewels. The most important thing is to do it.

In preparing to teach *The Three Jewels* class, I did this practice every morning, and it has remained a regular part of my morning ritual.

If refuge is a practice that you begin to do formally after the ceremony, we can also see that the process begins much earlier. You start to take refuge in the Buddha when you connect with the enlightened presence of a teacher whom you meet or hear of. You start to take refuge in the dharma when you learn truths of the Buddhist teachings through study or experience. You start to take refuge in the sangha when you join with others in a common commitment to travel a path of awakening. This can happen long before you learn to repeat the mantra:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the dharma.

I take refuge in the sangha.

How does the meaning of refuge deepen as one travels the Buddhist path? The flavor of the change is illustrated by the following Theravadin formulation, intended for advanced students.

I take refuge in the Buddha by resting in the emptiness of original mind, free from any reference or defining characteristic.

I take refuge in the Dharma by opening to the clarity of original mind, the natural awareness that knows what experience is and how experience arises.

I take refuge in the Sangha when I am one with the unimpeded arising and subsiding of experience, free from the three poisons of passion, aggression, and ignorance.



My own refuge ceremony was somewhat spontaneous. I was anything but an advanced student—indeed all the members of the year-old Austin Dharmadhatu (now Shambhala Center) were quite new to the dharma when the Vidyadhara visited in 1975. In Boulder I had heard older students talk about taking refuge, but I had very little notion of what it meant. Out of the blue, the Vidyadhara turned to me and said “I think it’s time for you to take refuge.” I asked a few simple questions and was satisfied that it was something I wanted to do, and the ceremony took place in the Dharmadhatu shrine room.

For many years I felt somewhat ambivalent about the way in which I had taken refuge. Certainly there was something special about being given refuge in an impromptu private ceremony for two. When the Vidyadhara snapped his fingers, the “sperm” of the energy and basic sanity of the lineage *did* seem to enter my system, where it continues to take root and grow. But I often wondered whether it would have taken root and grown more robustly if the ground had been prepared with study and contemplation, if I had actively chosen to take refuge rather than having it thrust upon me. These concerns have been eased by viewing refuge as a lifelong practice, in which I choose to rely on the Buddha, dharma, and sangha over and over and over. In the words of Sakyong Mipham:

If I am truly to call myself a Buddhist, I will hold the three jewels in my heart continually, reflecting on them as my life's blood. I will take refuge at every opportunity. I will always aspire to embody the three jewels. When I do so, I can joyously proclaim that I am a child of the Buddha, a student of the dharma, a friend of the sangha, and a warrior of Shambhala. Having taken refuge, I rejoice.

The word *refuge* can seem wrong if considered in the context of taking refuge in a shelter or safe haven. The meaning may be better expressed by observing that when you take refuge, you become a *refugee*, someone who is leaving behind what has become intolerable and journeying into the unknown.

Center Activities

Center Study Programs

MEDITATION sessions are held Wednesdays and Thursdays from 6-7 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.

NYINTHUNS occur the first Sunday of every month from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m. with an hour lunch and then

from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m.

STROKE PRACTICE will start happening during regular sitting hours in the office at the Center!

THE KHANDRO RINPOCHE study group will meet again January 11th. The Study Group meets each month on the 2nd & 4th Tuesdays at 6:45 PM. The text is "Treasury of Precious Qualities" by Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, and the selection Khandro Rinpoche recommends from her Gateway Curriculum. New & Old students welcome. No charge. For more info, call Vicki Schaefer @ 633-3939 or Joan Kydd @ 748-0330.

THE KEN MCLEOD group will begin to meet again this month. The schedule will be announced. The group will continue to study from *Wake Up To Your Life*.

TAI CHI is taught and practiced on Tuesday nights from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

Education Winter and Spring Schedule

LOJONG : Training the Mind will be taught by Wayne Schoech and Susan Shaw as a series of 5 consecutive Thursday evening classes beginning January 13th. The course will conclude with a one-day intensive on Sunday, February 20th.

Lojong or "mind training" cultivates one's realization in emptiness and compassion, the essential qualities of the bodhisattva warrior. This practice-oriented course will explore the mahayana slogans of Atisha, the 10th century Indian master whose teachings left a deep imprint on all Tibetan lineages. These slogans are tools to develop openness and skill in helping others and are as helpful today as they were 1000 years ago. The contemplative practice of *tonglen* (exchanging self for others) will also be emphasized in conjunction with day-to-day application of the mind training slogans. Class readings will come from *Training the Mind* by Chogyam Trungpa; *The Great Path of Awakening* by Jamgon Kongtrul; and *Tonglen: The Path of Transformation* by Pema Chodron. All three books are available at Samadhi Store. To prepare for the first class on January 13th, please read *Training the Mind*, pp. 1-10 and *The Great Path of Awakening*, pp. 1-9.

If you have an ongoing meditation practice and have taken any previous course in the SSBS curriculum, you are welcome to register for this course. Please sign up at the Center or contact Susan (748-8730) or Wayne (748-3948).

SHAMBHALA LEVEL II will be presented in White River Junction on January 21st to 23rd. Please call Beth Latchis at (802) 457-3363 if interested in attending.

THE SEED SYLLABLES, a class for vajrayana students,

will be presented by Chris Magnus on the weekend of February 26th and 27th.

LINEAGE and DEVOTION will be taught by Suzann Duquette and Newcomb Geenleaf. This class is from Cycle II on Thursday nights March 3-31, with a day long intensive to be scheduled.

FOUR FOUNDATIONS of MINDFULNESS will be directed by Judy Lief. This class, from the Second Cycle of Shambhala Buddhist Studies, will be presented on the weekend of May 13-15.

Shambhala Congress will run from Feb 13th 18th 2005. A new Council at the Congress is being formed with a member from every Shambhala center. The Center will financially assist a member in their attendance of the Congress.

Shambhala Ball will take place on February 12th, the Saturday after Shambhala Day. Barry Rossinoff is planning this festive ball in anticipation of the Year of the Wood Rooster.

The Shrines, Guru Chair and Umdze Platforms were built by Michael Leszczynski and Eric Herminghausen. The platforms give the shrines, the guru chair, and the umdze seat a majestic discipline. Thanks for the great work!

New Positions on the Executive Committee have been filled by Catherine Clark as *PRACTICE* coordinator and by Michael Taney as *FINANCE* coordinator. Many thanks to outgoing Emily McAdoo and Oscar Garcia for their work in Finance and Practice.

Executive Committee will meet on Tuesday, January 11th, at 6:30 pm at the Center.

Executive Committee

Coordinators: Tune Faulkner & Newcomb Greenleaf

Practice: Catherine Clark

Library: Michael Beauregard

Finance: Michael Taney

Facilities: Michael Leszczynski

Publicity: Sandy Raynor

Study: Anne Stevens

Secretary/Editor: David Horton

Rusung: Michael Taney

Membership: Barry Rossinoff

Shambhala Training: Sophie Cohen and open position

Newsletter Layout: David Wilde

ARTICLES AND NEWS submissions to the Newsletter are welcome. Please send any news and dharma relevant articles to David Horton @dryder47@verizon.net.





Shambhala Meditation Center of St. Johnsbury

January 2005

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
					1	2 _9:00am-noon, _1:00-4:00pm nyinthun
3 _6:00pm yoga	4 _5:00-6:30pm Tai Chi _6:45pm Khandro Rinpoche study group	5 _6:00-7:00pm silent sitting	6 _9:00am yoga _6:00-7:00pm sitting and chants	7	8	9 _11:00-12:00am sitting and chants
10 _noon Mahamudra sadhana _6:00pm yoga	11 _5:00-6:30pm Tai Chi _6:30pm Executive Committee mtg.	12 _6:00-7:00pm silent sitting	13 _9:00am yoga _6:00-7:00pm sitting and chants _7:10pm Lojong class	14	15	16 _11:00-12:00am sitting and chants
17 _6:00pm yoga	18 _5:00-6:30pm Tai Chi _6:45pm Khandro Rinpoche study group	19 _6:00-7:00pm silent sitting	20 _9:00am yoga _6:00-7:00pm sitting and chants _7:10pm Lojong class	21	22	23 _11:00-12:00am sitting and chants
24 _6:00pm yoga	25 _5:00-6:30pm Tai Chi _6:00pm Mahamudra sadhana	26 _6:00-7:00pm silent sitting	27 _9:00am yoga _6:00-7:00pm sitting and chants _7:10pm Lojong class	28	29	30
31 _6:00pm yoga						