



The Shambhala Meditation Center of St. Johnsbury

AUGUST Newsletter 2006

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Cosmic Landscapes: The World in a Garden

By David Wilde

In the garden of earthly delights, man joins heaven and earth to form a portion of paradise. The landscaping for places where humans dwell will seem most suitable and appealing when it fully reflects the range of play of energies in our world. In the true garden of earthly delights, everything is acknowledged and properly accommodated. There is a certain practicality that combines with comfort in the light of day where providing a balanced environment of a ground that is rich and supportive is a counterpoint to elements of spaciousness and vision.

Most gardens will supply the enticing, teeming bed of colorful flowers for a feeling of being bathed and clothed in a bejeweled world of nurturing diversity. But will that be properly balanced by an upliftedness arising from elements of reserved spaciousness, relationships with tall plantings, connections to the verticality of nearby domestic structures or long vistas defined? In the smaller garden this sense of expansiveness may be more in the nature of a suggestion such as upright, narrow bushes, elevated areas, a dwarfed tree, an arbor, a trellis with vines ascending or a framed view of some distant scene.

Putting these two aspects together is the vision and work of mankind as warrior in a garden, revealing the interplay of the universe through trees, greenery and flowers. Symbol and evidence of this activity, paths bring elements into relation and traverse the course between where we arise and linger and where we see ourselves disappearing, connecting all harmoniously. Seats, resting spots and lawns are places to relax and contemplate the fruition

of our understanding made manifest in horticultural display. It is very important that both the stillness and movement within the landscape be fully and functionally available.

Certain forms within the garden/landscape can automatically join heaven and earth by their presence. A sculpture or statue can complement and focuses the energy present. A fountain or bird bath raises the vital energy from the earth and mixes it with the sky or offers it to passing birdies. A mandala pattern such as a knot garden or gazing globe brings a feeling of serenity in reflection of the interplay and connectedness of things. This adornment, arrangement and admiration of the phenomenal world is at the heart of the creative urge to construct a garden or landscaping venue.

If you are interested in going into this in further depth and detail, you may want to have a look at the book *Landscape as Spirit* by Martin Mosko who created the inner courtyard rock garden at Karmê Chöling under the supervision of Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. Don't let Marty's marvelously elaborated statements and gardens overwhelm you. They are a wonderful inspiration, but you could do it all yourself in the little area by the steps to your house, joining heaven and earth with a gardener's trowel.

The Dharma in Literature

By Jane Alper

In "The Long-Distance Client", a story by Allegra Goodman published in the *New Yorker* last summer, Mel, a middle-aged man, injures his back at work. He has left his university job to take a position with a hectic-paced computer company in Cambridge, lured by the promise of becoming a "gazillionaire."



The story centers on his pain—the agony caused by his back injury, his estrangement from his wife who has become a disciple of a Hasidic rabbi Mel despises, and his growing realization that his job is in danger.

Mel's wife tries to offer spiritual solace. At one point she reads him a passage from rabbinic literature:

Consider all the riches in the world, all its beauties and pleasures. How much greater is the Holy One Blessed Be He than these.

Consider all the suffering in the world, all its difficulties, poverty, and pain. How much greater is the Holy One Blessed Be He than these.

Mel responds sarcastically. His only relief is provided by Bobby, an effective and maddeningly unreliable healer who responds with equanimity to Mel's pain and his own; Bobby has cancelled appointments to care for his dying wife.

Allegra Goodman probably didn't intend to write a Jewish treatment of the Four Noble Truths, but I believe that is what she has done.

Then there is the play about a king so deluded by arrogance that he cannot distinguish between those who love him and those who wish him harm. In the course of the play he loses everything he believed to be essential to his existence—his power, his dignity, his home, his friends and family, and finally his reason. In his madness he understands his essential nature as a human being: “a poor, bare, forked animal,” and simultaneously becomes aware of the suffering of his fellow creatures:

*Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this!*

Shakespeare certainly did not have Mahayana

Buddhism in mind when he wrote King Lear. Buddhism was virtually unknown in Europe until after the British colonized India and south Asia in the nineteenth century. Yet I have not found anywhere a clearer illustration of the inseparability of emptiness and compassion.

I could go on providing examples. James Joyce wrote a story, “Araby”, about a boy disappointed by a long-awaited bazaar where he hoped to buy a gift for the girl he adores. At the end of the story, he has a sudden vision of himself as “a creature driven and derided by vanity,” vanity being another word for samsara. William Butler Yeats wrote a poem, “Lapis Lazuli” celebrating impermanence: All things fall and are built again/ And those who build them again are gay.

The point, I think, is not that somehow Buddhism has deeply influenced Western literature but that dharma means truth—not Buddhist truth but human truth accessible to anyone who looks closely, which is what good writers do. I think it would be interesting and illuminating to explore further the illustrations of Buddhadharma in literature written by people who have had no formal exposure to it.

Kar mē Chöling Community Meeting

Tuesday, August 15 at 6:00pm

The Shambhala Center of St. Johnsbury will host KCL Director Bill Brauer who will address the local Shambhala Community on current and prospective situations. Some members of the KCL Board of Directors will be on hand to join in answering questions and leading a discussion period following the presentation.

Fall Classes and Programs

This fall the Saint Johnsbury Shambhala Center will offer the introductory class in the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies, “Taming the Mind”. This course, together with its companion course “Walking the Bodhisattva Path”, introduces a student to the view and practice of Hinayana and Mahayana buddhism.

These courses are based on a three-week seminar taught by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche at Karmê Chöling in November 1999.

In "Taming the Mind", Rinpoche presents the hinayana path of renouncing samsara and the joy of developing discipline on the path that leads to liberation. He emphasizes the importance of having the confidence that comes from understanding what we are doing, and presents the path in a vast, multiple lifetimes perspective.

During this course, students are also introduced to the practice of contemplation and specifically the contemplation of the four reminders.

Please talk with you Meditation Instructor about taking or repeating this class, and mark the following dates on your calendars.

TAMING THE MIND, Thursday evenings after sitting beginning September 7 through October 5, and ending with an all-day session on Saturday, October 7. \$50/\$40 for members.

MAHAYANA AND THE BODHISATTVA VOW weekend program is being offered September 22-24, taught by Suzann Duquette. \$75/\$60 for members, with lunch provided on Saturday and Sunday.

LIFE OF THE BUDDHA, Thursday evenings after sitting beginning January 4 through February 1, and ending with an all-day session on Saturday, October 3. \$50/\$40 for members.

Membership reminder

Our membership policy was amended earlier this year and anyone wishing to become a member does not need to fill out an application. Simply tell either co-director of your wish to be a member and review the commitment you make in doing so with them. Membership entitles one to a discount on classes and programs at the Center

staff changes

DORJE KASUNG: A hearty thank-you to Michael Taney for years of loyal service. Michael has recently retired as the Rusung of the Khampa Squad and the Dorje Kasung representative on the Shambhala Council.

Welcome to our new Rusung, Sara Demetry. Sara has recently accepted the appointment by our Regimental and Regional Dorje Kasung Commanders.

SHAMBHALA COUNCIL: Linda Warner has retired as Secretary to the Shambhala Council. Warm thanks for her service in this capacity.

PRACTICE: Welcome to Oscar Garcia as the new Practice Coordinator and to Julie Swan as the new Meditation Instructor Coordinator. These are interim appointments by the Directors and are expected to be approved at the next Shambhala Council meeting. They join Jane Alper who has done a great job at scheduling the Practice Rota, and Alan Boye who, with Julie Swan act as our Shrinekeepers. Julie will continue to help Alan in this capacity. The recent appointments complete the formation of a functioning Practice Department.

Center Staff

Shambhala Council	
Co-directors: Gerry Haase and Ric Walter	
Education: Marybeth Furr	Shambhala Training: Caroline DeMaio
Finance: Vickie Schafer	Health & Well-being: Merle Thompson
Rusung: Sara Demetry	Hospitality: Ken Campos
Service Personnel	
Rota: Jane Alper	M.I. Coordinator: Julie Swan
Décor: Suellyn Whittington	Practice Coordinator: Oscar Garcia
Recycling: Sandy Raynor	Communications: David Wilde
Librarian: Ken Campos	Shrinekeepers: Alan Boye & Julie Swan
contact information is available at www.stjshambhala.org/personnel	
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