



South Florida Kagyu News

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Kagyu Tashi Chö Dzong • Kagyu Yönten Gatsal Chöling • Kagyu Gyurme Gatsal Chöling

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Dharma Centers in South Florida

When the Very Venerable Lama Norlha first came to South Florida in December 1996, he was surprised and moved to find that many people requested he start a Dharma center here. While empowerments had previously been given in the area, there had been no follow-up. Dharma students had little opportunity to learn the philosophy of Buddhism, practice basic meditation, and learn to perform practices specific to the initiations received. Importantly, they had no opportunity to work closely with a teacher who was available to them at all times.

To try to remedy the situation, Lama Norlha left Ani Karma Chötso in Hollywood, Florida, to begin teachings. Initially, classes took place in spaces rented by the hour and on the beach. However, by the time Lama Norlha returned in 1997, a small house had been rented, its living room transformed into a *lhakang* (shrine room). The first Dharma center had its tentative beginnings and Lama gave it the name Kagyu Shedrup Chöling, the Kagyu Dharma Center of Study and Practice.

Ani Karma Chötso also taught in other areas of South Florida, with the result that there are now four groups of practitioners, each with a Dharma name: Kagyu Tashi Chö Dzong in South Miami; Yönten Gatsal Chöling in Big Pine Key; Key West is home to Gyurme Gatsal Chöling. However, none of these "centers" has a physical place for continuous teaching, practice, nor a traditional Buddhist shrine. And now the Hollywood center is out-growing its space which is small even for weekly gatherings so, of course, whenever teachers visit, a larger room must be rented.

Where do we go from here?

The need for the Dharma centers to own property in South Florida is becoming more and more apparent. We need an appropriate place for the teaching of the Dharma, and a place to meditate together. Rituals for different practices should be taught, requiring a fairly large shrine. And, central to the practices which lead to attaining enlightenment is the accumulation of merit. A Dharma center facilitates this because any activity to care for the center, from polishing shrine bowls to making butterlamps to washing dishes, allows the student to gain merit.

Another very effective way to accumulate merit is to build a stupa. Traditionally included in every Buddhist center or monastery are representations of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. The body is represented by statues, the speech by the collection of scriptures and the enlightened mind of the Buddha is represented by the stupa.

The Buddha himself showed his disciples the basic design for the stupa by folding his robe into a square with three levels, then putting his begging bowl upside down on top of the robe, then his walking stick on top of the begging bowl. The structure was to be built in order to house the relics from the body of the Buddha after he passed into parinirvana and to provide a place of worship for Buddhists.

The Venerable Lama Norlha has emphasized the need to build a stupa in Florida because it will have such a great impact on negative forces through the many blessed substances sealed inside and through the symbolism of each part of the structure. The positive effect can be so strong as to help protect the area from tropical storms, tornadoes and hurricanes. It is also said that simply by physically seeing a stupa, a connection is made towards the attainment of enlightenment in future lives.



Lama Norlha in Key West.

Photo by Tania Lara.

Although land has been offered for the construction of a stupa, it was not possible to take advantage of the offer. The experience, however, reinforced in all our minds the need for the Dharma centers to own their own land in order to build this sacred structure.

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Buddhists in South Florida

Summer the Whale

by Deidre Rudiger

You may have read about her in the newspaper or you may have seen her on TV -- Summer, the baby pygmy sperm whale stranded in Key West on summer solstice 2000. Here we are now at autumn solstice and Summer is still here.

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Summer the Whale

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I have been fortunate enough to be a part of her life as one of the many volunteers who keep her company around the clock. Through storms and starry nights, high tides and low tides, baking days and magical sunrises, Summer continues to amaze us and has beat the odds of her survival many times over.



Deidre Rudiger and Ani Karma Chötso share a special moment with Summer. - - Photo by Louise Lee.

The people who are in charge of her care have been very grateful to have Karma Chötso visit with her, and feel that it may even be beneficial. The other miracle baby dolphin who survived a stranding this past winter received blessings from the Venerable Lama Norlha, and is really doing great.

To me, these strandings do not seem to be random occurrences but rather have the sparks of Bodhisattva activity. The stranded marine animals bring out much love and compassion from us that I don't believe would be possible in our cozy daily lives. We are moved to be with Summer completely without any regard for our own comfort.

One of the things I had to give up was doing my daily meditation practice in the comfort of my shrine room. On my way to Summer I start my Chenrezi practice, continue it while I'm with her, and add Mahakala to protect us. Medicine Buddha is for when she is being fed or while I give her tummy rubs and Green Tara to keep her spirit strong or when lightning storms are all around us. I recite Vajrasattva's hundred-syllable mantra when I'm cleaning the seaweed out of her lagoon and then say the prayers to the Lamas and Manjushri's mantra, dedicating the merit at the end.

I call her Dharma Whale because her connection to the Dharma is so evident, especially when Karma Chötso is chanting Medicine Buddha and Summer is bobbing her head to the cadence, and then circumnavigates Karma Chötso before she leaves the water.

We have shared some very amazing times together, especially full moon nights when I discovered not only what a water moon is, but what a whale moon is, and the rarity of ever seeing one. Both Karma Chötso and I came up with the one word to describe Summer and that is love. She is the embodiment of pure, open expansive love.

Kagyü Dharma in South Florida

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A center would need one main hall for the shrine, where teachings can be given to large audiences and where practices can be done by the entire Sangha. However, in order to make it a *living* Dharma center, students and practitioners should be in residence. Karma Chötso believes it would be very practical and livable to have a series of apartments for members to rent or purchase. There could be private space for the resident teacher, and one for visiting Lamas, but there would also be living space for those who want very seriously to study and practice daily. If there were enough apartments, the Center could have one or two set aside to be rented for short periods of time during the season. This way practitioners from other parts of the country who want to spend their vacations in the warmth and sun of Florida, could do retreats during their vacations or simply spend their vacation in a place conducive to the study and practice of the Dharma. Not only would this arrangement help make the Center financially solvent, but it would also mean the South Florida Centers would be offering a service to Dharma practitioners nationwide.

At the moment, none of the South Florida Kagyü centers founded by Lama Norlha have the finances to begin looking for a physically appropriate place for a center. Members have checked out various sites, but without working capital, there is no point in going shopping. The decision has been made to put together an "exploration fund," allowing us to actively search for property and, once found, have the down payment and all funds for purchase readily available. Our goal is to raise \$100,000 towards the purchase of the center and the construction of a stupa.

If you would like to participate at any level in the activities of providing the first Kagyü Dharma center in South Florida, in the procuring of a site, and the building of the very first stupa in Florida, please use the enclosed Donation Form. Even if you can't be here, your tax-deductible donation will accumulate merit for you and would be enormously appreciated by the Sangha. And let us know if you would like to spend your vacations on the sunny beaches of South Florida and still have a place to study and practice the Dharma.

FUNDRAISING EVENT

AUCTION OF FINE ART

March, 2001 • Miami, Florida

sponsored by

KSC & The Heart of Giving

Proceeds to benefit the funds for buying land and
for building stupas in South Florida

Dharma Practice in Daily Life

Due to the request of students for a way to remain mindful of their practice during each day, Ani Karma Chötso periodically gives homework to do in-between teachings sessions. This will be an ongoing section of our newsletter.

This homework has come about because a student told me that she is a "total movie junkie." Thinking about that brought me to the conclusion that it isn't so much that we're movie junkies, we are illusion junkies.

It's difficult for us to accept the view that what we experience is an illusion, because the world presents itself to our senses in a very physical way. For that reason, homework this week will be to take a good look at something we know from the beginning is an illusion, that is, movies.

Everyone knows that in movies the actors are not really the characters they're portraying. Events we see on the screen are not really happening. We all know that if an actor gets shot in a movie, he gets up and walks off the set afterwards. We know that this is illusion from beginning to end.

So everyone is to watch one movie this week. But you have to watch it my way -- being totally mindful of what's going on with you, rather than getting lost in it. You are to try to monitor your own mental and physical state and watch how you are being manipulated by what you see on the screen.

You may notice that the music accompanying a scene is very emotional. Sometimes you may be holding your breath, every muscle in your body fearfully tense and tight because the movie is so scary. Remember that the producers and directors know how to make a movie so that human beings respond. Recognize that you're reacting because you've allowed yourself to be seduced by someone else's illusion, emotionally, verbally, mentally, physically -- body, speech and mind. The sad thing is that we think this is fun. We think of our responses - the laughter and the crying and the fear and anxiety - as entertainment. We don't see that we're just getting involved in suffering.

After watching a movie with constant mindfulness, come back and report your experience. So far one student said that when he started watching the movie mindfully it took all the fun out of it. A report from another student: "I tried and had to shut it off after ten minutes. I knew I couldn't do it and I didn't want to waste the next couple of hours of my life."

Watching movies isn't necessarily bad or good, but when you watch without mindfulness, without learning, without growing, you may be wasting your time. Think of it this way. When you are watching movies or TV you are not writing, painting, playing music, reading, making movies, planting trees and flowers, working, or being creative in other ways. You certainly aren't meditating.

Check Out Our New Website
<http://www.kagyusfla.org>

Schedule of Coming Events

Annual KSC Yard Sale

December 9 & 10, 2000

Donation of sale items appreciated.

Benefit Christmas Concert

Dr. Robert Gastón, tenor

Look for upcoming announcement of concert date.

The Union of Mahamudra & Dzogchen

January 24 - January 28, 2001

Hollywood, Florida

Seminar taught by Ani Karma Chötso including meditation sessions on the beach and butterlamp offerings.

Please call or email KSC to receive a registration form.

Celebration of Losar, the Tibetan New Year

February 24, 2001

KSC, Hollywood Florida

Offerings, chanting, and silent meditation for peace throughout the New Year.

The Very Venerable Lama Norlha

will visit all South Florida centers
after the Losar holidays.

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The South Florida Kagyu Centers will present
ART BY AMERICAN BUDDHISTS

at Woodenhead Gallery, Key West, Florida.

This show will exhibit only works by American
artists who are practicing the Dharma.

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*Look for upcoming
announcement of exact dates.*

*May the teachings of study (she) and practice (drup)
fill the entire world.*

*May emptiness with compassion for a heart
arise in all sentient beings.*

*May Ani Karma Chötso's activity for the benefit of others
become immeasurable,*

*And may all beings realize
the equality of samsara and nirvana.*

SARVA MANGALAM!

*-- The Very Venerable Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche
who visited Kagyu Shedrup Chöling in July, 1999*



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