



Kootenay
Shambhala
Meditation
Centre

NEWSLETTER • August 2008

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“Meditation shows us how to keep the mind in one place long enough to appreciate our surroundings.”

—SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE
Contemplation for July 14, 2008
www.mipham.com

WELCOME

The Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre is part of an international community of meditation centres founded by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, and now led by his son and lineage holder, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

Our Centre offers free meditation instruction, a clearly defined path of practice and study, a range of community activities and more. All our offerings are meant to help people of all kinds awaken their innate wisdom, compassion and sense of irony.

We invite you to enjoy this journey of discovery.

For the most up-to-date and complete information about the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, please visit our website at www.nelsonbuddha.com or contact us at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

REGULAR PUBLIC EVENTS

Everyone is welcome to attend these events. Participation is free of charge. (Donations are gratefully accepted.) For the latest schedule information, go to the Clickable Calendar on our website.

Meditation Practice

Sundays, 9 am - noon

Mondays, 7 - 8 pm

Thursdays, 5:15 - 6:15 pm

These sessions highlight the Shambhala community's core practice—mindfulness-awareness meditation—in both sitting and walking forms. Most sessions start and

end with chants. Sunday sessions include mid-morning refreshments and, occasionally, short teachings and/or maitri bhavana healing practice. Participants are welcome to come and go as they choose.

Open House

Mondays, 7 - 9:30 pm

Our Open House program offers a friendly introduction to meditation practice, Shambhala Buddhist teachings and our community. • **7 pm:** Meditation instruction and practice (introductory instruction is available at 7 pm; follow-up instruction, at 7:30 pm) • **8 pm:** Talk and discussion • **9 pm:** Tea

Sadhana of Mahamudra

New and full moon days (this month, August 1, 16 & 30), 7 - 8 pm

The Sadhana of Mahamudra is a text written by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. It embodies a way of invoking the energy and wisdom of the Kagyü and Nyingma schools of Tibetan Buddhism and cutting through all forms of dogmatism. The practice involves chanting the text and relaxing into the atmosphere that doing so creates.

TIDBITS

Fall programming

Our fall program schedule continues to fill out. One program not to be missed is “The Sacred Ordinary: Meditation in Everyday Life” with Lama Phil Karl, an introductory weekend in late September highly recommended for practitioners at *all* levels. For more info go to the Programs area on our website.

GENEROSITY POLICY

Our Generosity Policy allows everyone to participate fully in the life of our Centre regardless of his or her ability to contribute financially. It states:

The Kootenay Shambhala Meditation Centre thrives due to the generosity of its program participants, friends and members. Recognizing that generosity, trust and openness are interconnected, we offer all of our programs on a suggested-donation basis and welcome participants to donate less or more than the suggested amounts as they choose.

To learn how you can make a donation, please go to the Donations page on our website.

MEDITATION INSTRUCTION

Mindfulness-awareness meditation is the basis of all Shambhala activity. Originating from Shakyamuni Buddha over 2,500 years ago, this practice is the art of resting the mind, opening the heart and appreciating what it is to be fully human.

Free instruction in this practice is perhaps our Centre's most valuable offering. We offer introductory instruction to newcomers and follow-up instruction to other practitioners on Monday evenings, as part of our Open House program, and at other times by appointment. We encourage anyone curious about the path of meditation to work regularly with a meditation instructor.

Shambhala meditation instructors are senior Shambhala Buddhist practitioners specially trained and authorized to help people deepen and expand their conceptual and experiential understanding of meditation.

For more information, visit the Meditation area on our website or contact our Meditation Instruction Coordinator, Lynn Dragone, at 250-352-1964 or info@nelsonbuddha.com.

CORE PATH PROGRAMS

As currently presented at the Kootenay Shambhala Centre, the core Shambhala Buddhist path consists of three interconnected elements, each grounded in mindfulness-awareness meditation.

- **Buddhist Study** is offered primarily through the Shambhala School of Buddhist Studies, a curriculum of weeknight courses and weekend programs that presents a thorough introduction to Buddhism in general and Tibetan Buddhism in particular.
- **Shambhala Training** is a sequence of weekend workshops that emphasizes embodying bravery, gentleness and wakeful intelligence in every sphere of human activity.
- **Contemplative Arts** are a vehicle for integrating mindfulness and awareness into everyday life.

We welcome everyone to explore these offerings to the degree s/he wants. Altogether, this training is a big part of the preparation students require to attend Shambhala seminars and other advanced programs and engage in subtler practice and study. Upcoming core path programs are listed below.

For more information about the Shambhala Buddhist path, visit our website or contact Jim Northcote at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

CONTEMPLATIVE ARTS

Space, Form & Passion: The Mischief of Awareness in Movement & Stillness With Rick Merrill

August 6 - 9, 10 am - 1 pm

All welcome • Suggested donation: \$125

The premise of this four-part movement workshop is that everyone has a body-mind that is awake, curious, perfectly suited to embody wisdom, warmth and play. So, the workshop is appropriate for anyone, regardless of her/his dance or movement experience.

The program will foster a non-judgmental, supportive atmosphere for exploring our physicality, loosening up assumptions held in our bodies, and inviting greater intimacy with everyday life. By learning to appreciate our immediate experience, the richness of our sensory world, we find the confidence to be, simply, as we are, free to live our lives with a playful sense of dance.

The program will include:

- Individual and collaborative exercises in improvisation and composition for exploring aspects of our physicality: movement and stillness, space and form, intuition and knowing, communication and relationship
- Discussions to help us integrate experience of these aspects into our daily lives. (Please bring a journal or notebook to record your impressions during the program.)

RICK MERRILL began dancing with Barbara Dilley and Arawana Hayashi at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado in 1974. He later studied and performed with many teachers and artists in New York City. For many years he directed and performed with his own group based in NYC and Barcelona, Spain. He has taught dancers, actors and children at universities, experimental schools and festivals throughout the U.S. and Europe. He is particularly interested in movement and dance, improvisation and performance as practices that highlight awareness, compassion and humor and remind us they are inseparable from everyday life. Rick is a student of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. He lives in Bellingham, Washington.

For more information, visit the Programs area on our website or contact Lynn Dragone at 250-352-1964 or info@nelsonbuddha.com. You can register online.

This newsletter describes only some of what's happening at our Centre. For the most up-to-date and complete listing of our programs and events, please visit our website at www.nelsonbuddha.com.

LOOKING CLOSER

The Art of Chanting

By Russell Rodgers

This column is part of a series meant to help interested practitioners deepen their understanding of the purpose and meaning of Shambhala Buddhist chants. The other columns in the series are available on the About Our Newsletter page on our website.

RUSSELL RODGERS is a senior member of the Kootenay Shambhala Centre. He has been practicing and studying in the Shambhala Buddhist tradition for about 30 years.

People from different centres tend to chant differently. This is natural, because different styles evolve over time in more or less isolated groups of people. However,

there are some points that I think are worth paying attention to. One of them is related to proclamation and the other is related to breath control.

Firstly, the chants should be done with a sense of proclamation. The chants contain the distilled wisdom of great lineage masters. If one does them with a sense of proclamation, then the resulting energy means that there is more chance that their true meanings will sink in. In Tibetan monasteries, a lot of artistry goes into how the chants are done. They use large and small horns, cymbals, large drums, bells and damarus. Tibetan chant leaders train to develop their voices so that sound resonates in their body cavities to produce deep, rich, harmonic tones. There are often specific tunes associated with each chant. This kind of elaboration isn't practical in our own non-monastic environments, but just having a sense of proclamation can go a long way.

Especially if one is an *umdze* (chant leader), it is good to learn some breath control. A natural tendency is to take a breath at the end of each sentence. However, if one does that, momentum can be lost as the assembled chanters wait for the *umdze* to start up again. The resulting gap can become longer and longer until the chant starts to drag.

If the *umdze* takes his or her breath before the end of a sentence or paragraph, then the chant can proceed at an even pace without dragging. When the end of a sentence is reached, the *umdze* is ready to lead the assembly through the potential dead spot without hesitating to take a breath.

Some *umdzes* do not have strong voices, or perhaps they are simply shy about projecting the voices that they do have. In this case others in the assembly often unconsciously start to lead without actually paying attention to the *umdze*. The chanting then breaks up into disharmonious sections in different parts of the room. People in the assembly can help by putting extra awareness on whatever they can hear of the *umdze's* voice. If they know the chants by heart, they can even try to read the *umdze's* lips so that the assembly remains synchronized. In any case, the *umdze* is the one to follow, not the person with the loudest voice. (For some unknown reason, that person is often the one paying least attention to the *umdze*.) If the *umdze* takes their seat and develops a sense of proclamation and leadership, it's easier for everyone.

As *umdzes* and chanters develop more experience, further refinements are possible. In the beginning of a chanting session, an *umdze* may have to be more assertive until the assembly picks up on the desired

ping. Later, the umdze may be able relax a bit and listen for the pitch and tones of different people in the assembly, and by using his or her own voice, bring out harmonies and cadences that will make a nice chanting session.

Especially with longer liturgies like the *Sadhana of Mahamudra* and other long sadhana practices, it is good to choose a pitch that works for everyone. Sometimes in long chants, the pitch of the voices goes lower and lower. Low pitches tend to be more tiring for most people, so the umdze can vary the pitch of different sections, making most of them higher. There is some room for creativity here, and if people are aware of and in tune with each other's voices, there can be effects similar to singing.

Sometimes, in doing the chants, one might choose to emphasize mindfulness of speech—the emotive sounds coming out of one's mouth. In this case the emphasis is not on the conceptual content, but on the sense of present awareness of the sounds. The sounds themselves are empty of any ascribed meaning, just pure sounds that have basic goodness in their pure nature. Vajrayana practitioners might hear this described as "all sounds are mantra."

When one is finished with a chanting session, it is customary to keep chant booklets on the zabuton mat and off the floor. This is similar to the practice of putting dharma books on the highest shelf, or not covering them up with old newspapers on a coffee table. If one has a sense that the material in the chants is talking to one's own basic goodness, or pure being, then there will likely be an attitude of sacredness and respect. Keeping chants or other dharma materials in a higher place is a practice for ordering one's priorities in life. If one treats those materials with respect, then one sets in motion a larger pattern of prioritizing that makes it easier to choose beneficial courses of action that will help one on the path.

If one is practicing at home, one can be flexible about which chants to do, depending on one's time and inclination. It is always good to make a connection to the lineage, or perhaps to remind oneself of the protector principle.

The material in the chants is subtle, and one should not expect to understand the chants simply by reading about them, although that is a good start. The chants raise issues and questions that require contemplation over time. Sitting practice is necessary in order to integrate them fully into one's own being. Sometimes, after years of exposure to a particular section, one will have a sense

of "Aha—that's what it means!" That is why we follow a particular path—we sort of know about things on the path because they have been described, and because of that we know where to look. But when we do arrive, it is still a totally deep and fresh experience.

COMMUNITY

The Kootenay Shambhala Centre is home to a wonderfully diverse and vibrant community of about 35 members. We share a connection to mindfulness-awareness meditation and the aspiration to create a wakeful, joyful society. There are many ways to get involved—attending meditation practice sessions and celebrations, joining in recreational activities, taking courses, working with a meditation instructor, and volunteering, to name a few. We invite and appreciate everyone's participation!

To learn how you can join in, visit the Programs area on our website, subscribe to one or both of our email lists, or contact Lynn Dragone or Jim Northcote (or any other Centre member) at info@nelsonbuddha.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Everyone is invited to become a member of the Kootenay Shambhala Centre. Membership is a way to express appreciation for what Shambhala provides and help make it available to others.

Membership involves supporting the community in three main ways:

- Practicing mindfulness-awareness meditation
- Volunteering
- Providing financial support

Membership also brings several privileges. For more information, please go to the Membership page on our website or contact our Membership Coordinator, Lynn Dragone, at 250-352-1964 or info@nelsonbuddha.com.