



Kootenay  
Shambhala  
Meditation  
Centre

## NEWSLETTER • February 2009

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“Contemplating love gives us the biggest of minds.”

—SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE  
Contemplation for January 19th, 2009  
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 join us in celebrating 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](http://www.nelsonbuddha.com) or contact us at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto: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

**On (or near) new and full moon days (this month, February 8 & 24), 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

#### Our new blog

We're delighted to report the launch of our new blog, titled (surprise!) "Kootenay Shambhala Blog." This blog is part of our ongoing effort to provide user-friendly ways for members, friends and anyone else interested in us to deepen our connections with each other, with our Centre, with the global Shambhala mandala, and with the wider world. In short, it's a place for anything that helps us build genuine community. Check it out (it's linked in the main menu on our website), and share your heart!

(Though our blog and website altogether reduce the need for this newsletter, we plan to continue to publish the newsletter, in part because it serves as an introductory handout for newcomers to our Centre.)

## New weekly parents/infants meditation group

We just introduced a new weekly group providing opportunities for parents with infants to receive shamatha (“calm abiding”) meditation instruction and practice with their infants present. The group, called “Calm Abiding Together” and led by Lynn Dragone and Sohan Ko, meets on Thursdays, from 10:30 am to 12 pm. Discussions follow practice. Drop-ins are welcome. For more information, go to the Programs area on our website or contact Lynn at 250-352-1964.

## “Children in Shambhala” program set to return

On March 1st we’re bringing back an expanded (!) “Children in Shambhala” program; it’s scheduled to run every Sunday, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Intended mainly for children of parents participating in our Sunday morning meditation practice, the program will offer a playful introduction to Shambhala, with age-appropriate guided activities to nurture body, mind and heart. For more information go to the Programs area on our website or contact Lynn Dragone at 250-352-1964.

## Our annual summer meditation retreat

This year’s Kootenay Public Weekthün, our annual one-week summer meditation retreat at Senge Ling, our retreat land near Nelson, is scheduled for Saturday, June 27th - Sunday, July 5th. Senior Kootenay Shambhala Centre member Russell Rodgers will lead the program. Stay tuned for more information.

## GENEROSITY POLICY

Our Generosity Policy allows anyone 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 Tim Albert, our Meditation Instruction Coordinator, at 250-357-2497 or [eldoradocreek@netidea.com](mailto:eldoradocreek@netidea.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](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

**SHAMBHALA SCHOOL OF BUDDHIST STUDIES**  
**Mahayana & the Bodhisattva Vow**  
**With Cameron & Robin Higgins**  
**Thursdays, February 5 - 26, 6:30 - 8:30 pm**  
**All welcome • Online participation possible**  
**Suggested donation: \$50**

The entrance into the mahayana, the “great vehicle” of deep insight and vast action, is marked by taking the courageous vow of the bodhisattva. Through this vow, we dedicate our life and practice toward complete awakening and the benefit of all beings.

The liturgy of the vow serves as the core contemplative component for this four-class course in conjunction with the practice of rousing bodhichitta, or awakened heart. The course is open to anyone and is required preparation for those aspiring to take the bodhisattva vow.

The Kootenay Shambhala Centre will provide an opportunity to take the bodhisattva vow, with Acharya Jenny Warwick, on April 19th, 2009. If you're interested, stay tuned for details.

For more information, go to the Programs area on our website or contact Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## OTHER PROGRAMS/EVENTS

**February Open House Talks**  
**Mondays, 8 - 9 pm**  
**All welcome • Free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)**

Our Open House program offers a friendly introduction to meditation practice, Shambhala Buddhist teachings and our community. Typically, senior or intermediate Shambhala Centre members present the teachings in talk-and-discussion format. Upcoming talks are listed below. For the latest schedule information, go to the Clickable Calendar on our website.

**Monday, February 2**  
VIDEO: "Troublemakers," with Pema Chödrön (followed by a discussion led by Candace Batycki)

**Monday, February 9**  
“Befriending Our Demons,” with Jim Northcote

**Monday, February 16**  
“Dön Practice: When Your Karma Attacks You,” with Russell Rodgers

**Monday, February 23**  
VIDEO: “Surrendering Your Aggression,” with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (followed by a discussion led by Lynn Dragone)

**Winter Practice Intensive**  
**February 14 - 23**  
**All welcome • Free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)**

This program coincides with the end of the Tibetan lunar calendar year. According to Tibetan tradition, the year's end tends to be cluttered with accumulated personal, social and environmental chaos. So it's the perfect time to slow down, intensify awareness and reconnect with our fundamental nature in the company of other practitioners.

Each practice day, except Mondays, February 16<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, will end with a half-hour devoted to chanting our usual closing chants plus repetitions of *Pacifying the Turmoil of the Mamos*, a chant recited to purify and transform accumulated negativity.

For more information, go to the Programs area on our website or contact Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

**Neutral Day Deep-Cleaning Party**  
**Tuesday, February 24, 12 - 4 pm**  
**All welcome • Suggested donation: Elbow grease**

The day before Shambhala Day is considered a “Neutral Day.” It is traditionally a time to clean and refresh one's physical environment—home, shrine etc.—in preparation for the coming year.

At the Kootenay Shambhala Centre on Tuesday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, from 12 to 4 PM, we're holding this year's Neutral Day Deep-Cleaning Party, with good music, good food, good company and good work!

Come enjoy building community and gain a little merit on the side. For more information, go to the Programs area on our website or contact Lynn Dragone or Jim Northcote at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).

## Shambhala Day 2009: Year of the Earth

Ox

Wednesday, February 25

All welcome • Free of charge (donations gratefully accepted)

Shambhala Day marks the beginning of the new year. It is the Shambhala community's most important holiday. Based on the traditional Tibetan New Year's celebration of Losar, the day is calculated astrologically according to the Tibetan lunar calendar.

Around the globe, people gather in their local centres to practice, enjoy good food, socialize, and celebrate. The day's highlight is the annual Shambhala Day address by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, which is broadcast to every Shambhala Centre in the world.

Watch for details in the Programs area on our website.

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*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 the Programs area on our website.*

## ELSEWHERE IN SHAMBHALA

*For information about programs and events taking place in the wider Shambhala world—or about any other aspect of the community—please visit [www.shambhala.org](http://www.shambhala.org).*

## LOOKING CLOSER

### Going Further into *Nowness*

By Russell Rodgers

*RUSSELL RODGERS has been a student of Buddhism for 34 years and has taught at the Kootenay Shambhala Centre for most of that time. He is the author of Essays on the Shambhala Buddhist Chants, which is available as a PDF file at:*

*[nelson.shambhala.org/documents/EssaysOnShambhalaBuddhistChants.pdf](http://nelson.shambhala.org/documents/EssaysOnShambhalaBuddhistChants.pdf)*

*His essays written for this newsletter are available on the "About Our Newsletter" page on our website.*

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For Buddhists, *nowness* is a big deal. Sometimes, however, *ideas* about *nowness* get in the way. Ram Das started it all with his famous 1960s slogan "Be Here Now." But a little knowledge can sometimes be misleading. Sometimes people encounter advanced teachings containing statements that sound as though all

you have to do is just "be here now," just as Ram Das indicated. That's true, as far as it goes. But then, if one really wants to be fair to the advanced teachings, one has to go further into the idea of *nowness* so that one knows what those advanced teachings are talking about. In this essay, we'll look at *nowness* in terms of *frequency*, *duration* and *depth*.

First, we'll look at *frequency*. How frequently does *nowness* happen in your experience? Does it happen randomly and infrequently, or does it happen often during the day? Do you have any influence over how often it happens? Traditionally, some sort of discipline is necessary to set the stage for recognizing *nowness*. One pursues this discipline in formal meditation. Meditation works partly by reducing the tendency to obscure *nowness* with thoughts. It also trains one to recognize the mind of *nowness* when it naturally happens. Keeping track of the breath in shamatha meditation doesn't necessarily mean that one is experiencing *nowness*. For instance, a machine could count breaths without being aware of *nowness* as such. In a human mind practicing correct shamatha meditation, however, there is a sense of *knowing* *nowness* when it occurs. At first this recognition is fleeting and vague. One might simply have a sense that one's world is a little lighter and brighter. As this *self-aware* quality of mind becomes more and more noticeable, dependence on formal meditation technique lessens as one begins to recognize *nowness* more and more powerfully and frequently in the rest of one's life.

How *long* do your experiences of *nowness* last? Do they last for a moment, or do they extend for long periods of time? Do these long durations of *nowness* carry over into post-meditation? Experienced meditators know that the only way to significantly increase the duration of *nowness* is through regular formal practice. One has to shift the balance of allegiance from the stream of thoughts towards those self-aware moments of *nowness*. This shift of allegiance happens slowly, over years of practice. Without it, the power and momentum of our habitual thoughts almost immediately obscure *nowness* as soon as it happens. Typically, *nowness* ends when one begins to think about it, or even to try to cultivate it. In order to extend *nowness*, one has to learn to relax properly and open to it. Proper intention, relaxation and opening are an extremely subtle balance, and this takes a while to achieve. If one relaxes in the wrong way, then one will lose one's mindfulness altogether. If one opens to *nowness* properly, one can simply rest there for longer and longer periods of time.

When some people talk about *nowness*, it is as though they have discovered the simple secret to enlightenment, and having discovered that secret intellectually, they can

relax. It's true that nowness is the key to enlightenment. But it's not that simple. Nowness has *depths*. Some teachers say that when most beginning meditators experience a seeming nowness of still mind, they are actually resting in subtle ignorance. They are resting in a subtle but still obscuring *thought* of themselves as meditators experiencing nowness.

From the Hinayana point of view, the idea of a self is derived from collections of memories, labels, feelings, emotions and sensations. Not only is the idea of a self just a thought, but its relationship to the shifting world around us results in the thoughts that plague us in meditation and cause suffering in the rest of our life. For a practitioner of the Hinayana, nowness results from clearing the thicket of self-based thoughts and resting in a grounded and earthy experience of the real world. Thoughts and disturbing emotions clear up, and a sense of clarity and peace emerges. However nowness at this level still has a sense of duality and an impression that there is a traveler on the path. There is a real world that is "outer" with respect to an "inner," experiencing aspect. Some religious traditions consider this inner aspect to be a soul. With Buddhist meditators at this level of nowness, there is more a sense of a vague, subtle presence or watcher.

On the Mahayana level of fruition, nowness might be experienced without the dualistic sense of inner and outer, subject and object. What had manifested as "outer" becomes empty appearances in the mind. Here, the mind itself is experienced as empty, vast and capable of manifesting all experience. Barriers fall and one might have a sense of intimate connection with all sentient beings, followed by naturally arising compassion. The result is experience without an experiencer: empty and groundless, but full of appearances.

The Vajrayana level of nowness is similar to the Mahayana level, except that there is more emphasis on what mind *is*, as opposed to what it *isn't*. For descriptions of this level of nowness we might refer to *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*:

*In the boundless space of suchness,  
In the play of the great light,  
All the miracles of sight, sound and mind  
Are the five wisdoms and the five buddhas.  
This is the mandala which is never arranged but is  
always complete.  
It is the great bliss, primeval and all-pervading...  
Nothing whatever, but everything arises from it,  
Yet it reveals the spontaneous play of the mandala...*

*...Every movement of the mind  
Becomes bliss and emptiness;  
All polarity disappears  
When the mind emerges into nakedness.  
This is the mandala in which  
The six senses are self-liberated.  
On seeing your face I am overjoyed.  
Now pain and pleasure alike have become  
Ornaments which it is pleasant to wear.*

The Vajrayana pays special attention to the display aspect of mind as well as its emptiness. The descriptive language includes words like "great bliss, primeval and all-pervading," "boundless space of suchness," and "pain and pleasure alike have become ornaments which it is pleasant to wear." There is a sense of power to nowness in the Vajrayana.

Because the display of mind has finally been realized and accepted, the Vajrayana teachings can make use of this display in creative ways. In the Hinayana and even in the Mahayana approaches to nowness, there was a fear that the display of mind, which includes thoughts and perceptions, would obscure nowness. In the Vajrayana, the powerful displays of mind have been recognized in nowness as the display of buddha-nature. Therefore, with the help of a qualified guru, these displays can be used to lead confused beings back to their own basic nature. The Vajrayana channels this display into the forms of deities that powerfully symbolize that buddha-nature. With practice, using these symbols, it becomes possible for the practitioner to experience their buddha-nature in nowness.

For someone who is working at the Hinayana level of nowness, the nowness of the Vajrayana, with its strange deities, looks like just another religion. It looks as though nowness has been submerged in an exotic-looking but fundamentally conventional religiosity. In fact, nowness has just been extended to its fullest depths, enabling the display of the mind to stop being a hindrance and become a genuine tool.

## 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 the Kootenay Shambhala Blog or one or both of our email lists, or contact Lynn Dragone, Cameron Wenaus or Jim Northcote (or any other Centre member) at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto: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 Cameron Wenaus, our Membership Coordinator, at [info@nelsonbuddha.com](mailto:info@nelsonbuddha.com).