



THE WHEEL OF TIMES

E-VAM INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER

World as Interpretation

Traleq Kyabgon Rinpoche

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The topic that we are going to discuss is entitled as 'World as Interpretation'. From the Dzogchen point of view the other Buddhist schools of thought such as Hinayana, Mahayana and Tantra are seen as different ways of approaching a certain particular problem. The approach of Hinayana is seen as the approach of renunciation, which means that a person who practises Hinayana is particularly pre-occupied with the idea of renouncement so that the person is able to devote his or her life to spiritual practice completely. And in this particular case renunciation has to do

with renouncing certain situations in one's life that are seen as hindrances to one's spiritual goal and therefore the person may choose to become either monk or nun. So the idea of monk-hood or nun-hood is particularly predominant.

The approach of Mahayana, on the other hand, is described as the approach of purification. And in this context the orientation of that particular practitioner is not towards renunciation as much as towards purifying one's consciousness, and also the idea of expanding oneself in the social environment in terms of helping others

and so forth. Therefore, the idea of bodhisattva is such an important role because as a Mahayanist, one is supposed to live in the world. Because it is taken for granted that we live with others and as we live in an intra-subjective world, then the best approach to take is that of trying to help others as much as one can. And that kind of act itself is seen as a purification process of one's mind and eventually development of bodhichitta.

The Tantric practice is seen as the approach of transformation or transmutation. In this particular practice, the practitioner is not trying to purify particularly through the development of bodhichitta and through the understanding of emptiness, but the person is rather trying to work with the energy of the emotions, so that the emotions that one experiences are no longer seen as something destructive, something that one needs to get rid of or purified, but rather transmuted as you would transmute lead into gold in alchemical terms. So something that in base is transmuted into something that is sublime and constructive.

And lastly the Dzogchen practice is known as the approach of self-liberation which means that the practitioner is not even trying to transmute something that is base into something sublime. But rather the person's approach is that of directly confronting the situation that presents itself to the person. So that whatever one experiences, is seen for what it is, and therefore whatever problem one may have thought existed in the past, all of a sudden begins to present itself no longer as a problem anymore, because the problem begins to get resolved on the spot, so to speak. This is why it is known as the path of self-liberation.

The idea of self-liberation is developed, mainly because in the Dzogchen tradition there is no particular set view, as such. The

practitioners of Dzogchen do not put forward a particular philosophical view, as others have done. So the idea that exists within the Dzogchen tradition is that all the Buddhist schools of thought, the varieties of views that are being put forward in those schools, as well as the views of other religious traditions and so forth are just simply seen as different views based upon different value systems. All the views are seen as relative because there is no such thing as absolute view, because there is no absolute knowledge. If we look into that further, that sort of conclusion has been drawn mainly because when we start to look at our experience of the world, then we do not experience anything that is eternal, or eternal essences or things, or whatever, but we always see a process of change,

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flux and the juxtaposition of varieties of forces interacting amongst things so that the things are brought into a process. When we start to look at the whole thing in that way, when we begin to look at the temporality of the whole situation then what we have seen or what we have known, also becomes relative. Because what we have known and seen in the past has been exterminated, or has gone extinct, and something new has replaced that. So even if we look at something that seems to be fairly stable, seems to have some kind of persistence in time, if we look at that close enough the seeming persistence of that particular thing or object, or whatever it might be, turns out to be not persistent at all. So there is absolutely nothing that has not gone

through change, no matter how gradual the change may happen to be.

So when we start to look at it that way, then the whole concept of identity, the whole concept of thinghood, the whole concept of person, the whole concept of the agent and action is completely thrown into chaos, if you like. Because usually we like to think that a person, as a person, has some identity. The person who is born on the 27th January 1955 is the same as the person who is living currently in 1986, but if we start to look at the whole gradual process, the person is the same, but in fact the person is not really the same, because the person has completely changed. And sometimes we like to think, yes, but physically I may have changed, but mentally there is something inside me which is totally solid and is not like a material object, therefore it must persist, because it has been there before I was born and it will be persisting when I die, if you believe in reincarnation. Even then, even within us, as far as consciousness goes, there is nothing that does not change.

Then when we start to look at it that way then when we start to think, ‘well how come we make this division between mind and body. And how come we have this concept of the thing, concept of objects and concept of a stable world and so forth’, we begin to realise all this is based upon interpretation. It is a conceptual construction which does not correspond to the reality of things at all.

In developing this kind of attitude, we begin to realise that any kind of view we might cultivate can only be relative. And any kind of knowledge that we might accumulate can only be relative, mainly because we have no knowledge of the thing that is persistent, that does not go out of extinction. Mainly because whatever we experience, whatever we know of is relational, and therefore is completely relative. So if what we

know of is relative then the knowledge itself must be relative as well, it must follow, we can't know of something that is relative and then feel that the knowledge itself must be something eternal and something immutable. So therefore it is said that in Dzogchen the only view that one can develop is that of, in some ways what we might call perspectivism – all views, all attitudes are only a perspective that we have in relation to a particular thing or event, whatever the case may be.

So this kind of attitude does not lead to nihilism, as people might think. Sometimes people get frightened because if that is the case then we can no longer think in terms of good and evil, and if we can't think of things in terms of good and evil, then our whole moral structure will be thrown out the window and we will revert back to barbarism. But, it gives the opportunity for the person to have a different perspective on even morality. We were talking about knowledge and now even if we look at the whole thing in terms of morality, the relativism of morality does not lead to amoral situations because normally a lot of our moral belief systems are grounded in religious and metaphysical views, whereby sometimes it has been said that human beings are amoral by nature. Therefore, morality has given us a gift from the heavens, so if we don't take that gift then we are missing out on something extraordinarily precious. But in this particular context, morality is not defined in terms of abiding by rules, regulations and oughts and ought nots, but rather based more on the person's honesty. The person's honesty comes about through the realisation that one no longer need to deceive oneself by pretending to be moral, or by pretending to abide by certain rules and regulations that are set out for you by others, rather one tends to take full responsibility for oneself. You see, when you start to

abide by rules and regulations that are set out for you by others it may be easy to be moral, but yet at the same time it is extremely difficult to be honest. And sometimes, even in some of the Christian scriptures, I think it was St Paul or somebody who said that you should be kind to your enemies, because if you are kind to your enemies the better person you become the more the enemies suffer in their hell. So that is why you need to be compassionate and do all kinds of other things.



There are a lot of things like that, even in Buddhism, I suppose, whereby the whole idea of the morality is based on reward and punishment, so we become like the Pavlovian dog, where if we go about doing certain things then we will be rewarded, if we don't go about doing certain things then we will be punished. We don't become moral, because we have decided that is the best course of action to take, but rather out of fear, because we don't want to be punished because we don't desire punishment and a lot of our

whole structure in our society and elsewhere is based on that sort of thing too. From childhood we grow up like that. When parents tell you that you should do this, you should not do that, if you follow that instruction then you get rewarded and if you don't then you get punished.

So basically in the Dzogchen teachings there are no strict rules, and mainly because good and evil are not seen, again, as independent sort of things as part of the feature of the world but rather they are part of one's own psychological state of mind, and so good and evil are not eternal principles, but rather subjected to time, based upon historical and temporal events and so forth, so therefore they are not seen as absolute. And the other thing is that it also gives meaning to life because instead of leading this whole thing to nihilism where all values are thrown away, it gives us a real meaning of life. It gives us the opportunity to go back to life, to go back to the condition that we are already in, instead of trying to get out of it, trying to go somewhere else. And the meaning of life is found within life itself. You see what we normally do is, we try to find the meaning of life from outside and therefore we need to have a concept of god or we need to find certain immutable principles so that our life can be made into a meaningful existence. So in this particular case the whole thing is reversed, the meaning of life cannot be found by constructing all kinds of metaphysical and transcendental concepts, but rather by trying to become more in touch with our own existence, by coming in touch with who we are, as we say. And again if you look at this whole idea of who we are, what we are, normally everyone says, 'I want to find out who I am, what I am', but what people try to do is again, they try to look for something they have never found before, something that they

have never experienced before, and therefore they start to sort of develop all kinds of concepts like immutable soul, and some kind of divine spark that is residing in part of the mind or whatever may be the case. And all that is again taken away because, you see, what one has to do is not try to find out who we are by trying to delve into something whereby we have got no idea of what we are looking for. The concept of who we are is based upon who we are as it is a 'given now', you see, normally

that we don't know about, whatever may be the case, it is not so much that the unconscious is hidden underneath, and then there is the consciousness of the surface. It is a metaphor, it does not mean that unconsciousness is literally underneath the consciousness particularly, or even when we say 'our true nature', it does not mean that true nature is somehow hidden inside our heart and if someone was to perform surgery on you they don't find anything called true nature or

particular context is understood as emptiness. So what that means, I have already described that to you in relation to the fact that there is nothing that is absolute, that whatever we experience is relative and that nothing really persists forever and we can turn our attention inside and that's what we find. We direct our attention outward and that's what we find. So everything is relative, therefore it is empty. Sometimes people understand it as being something different from what we normally experience. But emptiness is nothing other than the very fact of relativity of things, because things are dependent upon each other, interdependent as Nagarjuna has expounded in relation to *Pratītyasamutpāda*, interdependent origination.

Nature has to do with the fact that because things are empty, because things are dependent upon each other, then things never come to cease, that process must go on. Because things are dynamic, that process continues to manifest. So in the Dzogchen context again, it has been said that when we start to meditate, even when we understand this whole idea of emptiness, it does not mean that we stop using concepts, but rather because we understand that our concepts, ideas, thoughts and so forth are not real in themselves, it gives us further impetus for us to be able to use our thoughts, ideas and concepts incessantly and to our advantage.

The last one is called the energy which has to do with the idea that whatever experiences we might be having, all this dynamic process that we have been talking about is totally potent, there is a lot of potency in terms of our experience of the whole thing, so it is not devoid of potency, or devoid of power, if you like. So those three concepts are related with what I have already said. Those three elements are the aspect of the ground, of the starting point, that's how things actually are. That is how things exist. ■



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what we do is try to ignore certain aspects of ourselves, and we try to cultivate other aspects of ourselves, and we haven't really got any particular idea about who we are.

So in the Dzogchen context, the discovery of who we are has to deal with the fact that just simply trying to get more in touch with ourselves, not necessarily in order to pull away all the layers and layers of different things that are supposed to veil our true nature, so to speak, but rather try to see things that we have not really looked into. So really when people say there are unconscious processes

whatever in your heart. It is not so like we do not have to understand that in spatial terms. So basically what it means is to be able to have a holistic idea about ourselves, to be able to see our good aspects and bad aspects and try to understand that so that we can have a uniform idea about who we are.

This leads to the idea that is presented in the Dzogchen teachings called 'Essence, Nature and Energy'. Essence means, unlike again, like metaphysical concept of essences, which is supposed to reside in the inner core of things. Essence in this

Buddhist Summer School



In 2018 Buddhist Summer School turns 35, not bad in a short-attention world where consumables have a short shelf life. Old enough for a mid-life crisis, Buddhist Summer School is the gift that keep on gapping, as tricky Buddhists are wont to say.

Created by Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche way back in the Orwellian year 1984, what keeps it going? For one, it's forever new: the founding idea is that there are always new approaches to the universe of meaning that is Buddhism, with its 84,000 entry points mirroring our 84,000 delusions and varieties of suffering. Yet it's a perennial, the little black dress of Buddhism, never out of style, wearable anywhere.

That's because it's a sampler of the world of Buddhism, an opportunity to dip a midsummer toe, at just the moment midsummer doldrums turn to douleur, and an urge to find out if there's more to life than hangin'. By that third week of Jan the spark of curiosity reignites, despite the heat. The desire to hold up a mirror to life returns: what is life for?

A recent public opinion poll asked

people if they agree with the statement: "On the whole, religion causes more suffering than benefit in the world." Almost two thirds of Australians agree, one of the highest percentages worldwide. Yet 49% of Australians tell pollsters "I am interested in having a more spiritual dimension in my daily life." In Britain pollsters found only 8% of people call themselves religious, while 15% define themselves as spiritual, 10% as both spiritual and religious, while all the rest say: "none of the above."

This is us. That tension between spirituality and religion, a distinction that would baffle our grandparents, is where we are at, searching but fearful of being trapped in dogma. That is why Buddhist Summer School thrives, a perennial bloomer. It is the perfect way to check out what the Buddhists say and do, without having to sign on to anything, subscribe to any dogma. It's a window to the endless diversity of Buddhism, to discover that Buddhists don't do One Way stuff, or insist you need to be saved. Far from imposing morality, Buddhism continues to grow, discovering new ways to turn the

mind in the direction of awakening. For some, the path is through words, for others, it may be art, dance, calligraphy, flower arranging, poetry, yoga, music: the Buddhist Summer School has it all. Especially sitting silently, quietly holding up that mirror to yourself and your habits.

In its early years Buddhist Summer School was at the overtly secular University College, wedged between the spires of the Christian colleges on one side, and Melbourne Cemetery on the other. In 1996 Traleg Rinpoche bought his rural seat, Maitripa Contemplative Centre, in the forested hills at the start of the Great Dividing Range above Healesville, 55 kms east of Melbourne. The Buddhist Summer School migrated bush, making it a daytrip or residential option. Just right for working through that tension between spirituality and religion, which could just be yet another illusion. That leaves 83,999 to go, so maybe you need a short cut to awakening, rather than work methodically through all the delusions. You can find those short cuts to clarifying the natural state at Buddhist Summer School too. ■

Gabriel Lafitte

Guru Yoga and A Guided Tour of Hell

with Sam & Ivan Bercholz



In May this year, E-Vam was fortunate enough to host a visit by Sam Bercholz and his son Ivan. Sam presented two sets of teachings: one on the notion of guru yoga and the other based on his newly published book, *A Guided Tour of Hell*. Sam's talks were inspiring. Having himself faced the passing of his two main teachers and also being a close friend of Traleg Rinpoche, Sam's encouragement to work with guru yoga as a means of maintaining our connection with Traleg Rinpoche and enlightened mind in general was especially poignant. His message as a delok was quite surprising. Rather than the 'this is where you could end up' type message one expects when hearing of a visit to hell in a near death experience, his focus was on the presence of a Buddha even in the lowest of hell realms. The take home message was then one of great hope.

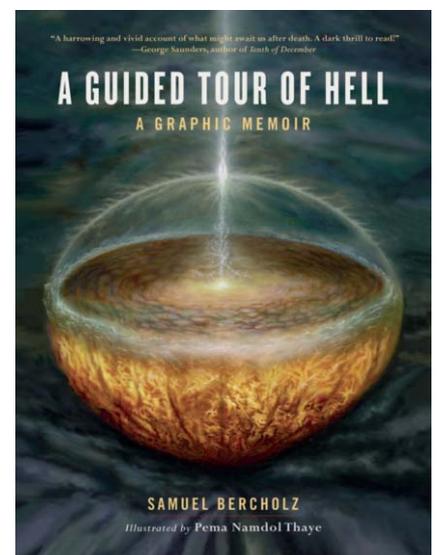
To leave such teachings feeling that even in the midst of great suffering, there is a path to awakening based on recognition of the marks of liberation gave a sense of relief. In addition, it helped strengthen the determination to relax into recognizing those manifestations of innate wisdom for what they are.

Sam and Ivan were also generous enough to invite attendees of the guru yoga retreat to join them in a trip to Uluru. For those fortunate enough to have been able to attend, this was a great opportunity to practice in one of Australia's most spiritual locations. It also gave the chance to get to know Ivan and appreciate his internalization of teachings from Thinley Norbu Rinpoche with whom he spent so much time.

The message gained from Sam overall during his visit this year was one of encouragement to appreciate

the teachings we have had and continue to work with them. It was, however, tinged with a sense of urgency. As is pointed out in his book, *'the hellish inclinations of the ordinary mind are not reserved for exceptionally bad people'*. ■

Lyn Hutchison



Maintenance at Maitripa



I haven't spent as much time at Maitripa this year but it's always a homecoming of sorts when I do. Maybe it's the calming atmosphere or maybe it's because the property always looks so good, which is remarkable considering the small number of people involved in its care.

The highlight in terms of maintenance is the annual audit, however working as a team this year made the whole process more enjoyable. Dave Bennett and I checked out the gas, water, pumps etc, and surprisingly before long it was all done... until next year.

Larger tasks have probably been put on the back burner this year as smaller issues arose ie: doors that wouldn't open or were scraping due to changes in weather conditions, but all were easily fixed. Some high pressure cleaning of the stupa and fountain soon cleared away the build up of dirt and grime. It's great to have some easy jobs. Even the firming up of the steps on the side entrance to the lower block was straightforward, which was all very unusual because things at Maitripa are seldom

straightforward due to the age of the buildings.

Meantime, Dave has been working out with Maitripa's new chain saw removing some unsightly dead trees in the lower paddock and giving that area a more scenic view rather than a ghostly line up of trees. It almost looks as though we could start selling picnic baskets soon.

Importantly, now the internet has two access points giving coverage to the café, upper and middle residential blocks as well as the dining area, lounge, Rinpoche's room and book shop. Not a bad start, although bandwidth does present certain limitations due to our location.

A new commercial-grade refrigerator has just arrived and replaced a few tired old units that were promptly put out to pasture. A doorframe had to be removed in order to move it into the kitchen but nothing was going to deter Daniel, Mike, Dave and myself from retiring those old clunkers.

Another new acquisition also includes an AEG diesel generator for the pump house. I'm sure Michael

Neighbour might like his own generator back as he has certainly been very generous and patient while it's been in use and doing a great job. We just have to get the new one down to the creek. Sounds like a lot of fun doesn't it. Anyone??

Also worth a mention are the 13 new safety steps that lead down to the pump house. Previously that area close to the main road would get very slippery and Dave and I are pretty happy with those improvements. The old pump house too, was not much better than a lean-to and has now been upgraded to a steel shed. This has brought it into the 21st century with a professional new look. Thanks to Lisa for having organized that.

The café, when not used as a second kitchen for groups, still serves coffee to those who find that meditation or yoga doesn't quite cut it and find solace in good dharmic conversation and caffeine. For those with a sweet tooth – well, it wouldn't be a retreat without chocolate cake. At least not a retreat as we know it. Bon Appetite.... ■

Bill Howes

E-Vam Governance

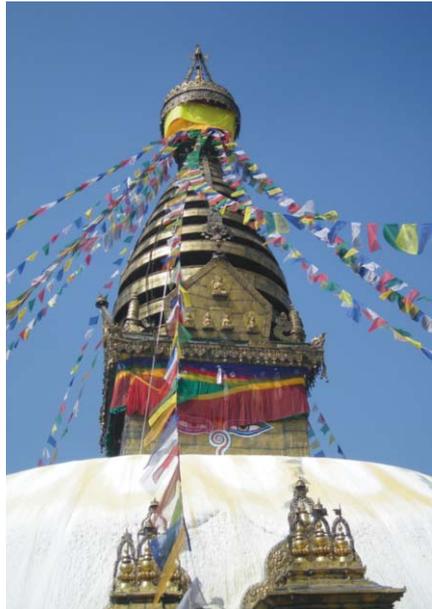
The Board is currently composed of Mark Dawson (appointed November 2017 AGM replacing Anthony Cramer), Andrew Donovan, Kal Kingi and Lena Turnbull.

The Board is required to meet monthly under the Rules, which it does by Skype conference with an occasional face to face meeting.

The work of the board is two-fold, to set a plan and a budget for the year and then to monitor implementation of the plan and compliance (financial management, regulatory etc.).

A board members' duty is to act in the best interests of E-Vam, guided by our Purpose Statement. The board works as a team rather as individuals and are held collectively accountable and liable.

Work in 2016-17 focused on budget setting, developing a new financial reporting model, insurance, banking arrangements, marketing, staffing and volunteer management. In 2018-19, the focus will be on



promoting programs and the Maitripa Centre, capital building projects, volunteer management and continued governance improvements. The board will also be providing more regular updates to the community on the activities of the centre.

After community consultation, the Board is proposing to continue with

the Governing Director role, with a focus on community liaison. It is important to ensure that the work of E-Vam does not rely on any one person or group of people so the board continues to encourage members to consider nominating or seeking nomination to the board at the annual general meeting each year (usually November). There are also opportunities to get involved with the Board through projects before considering a board role. Please feel free to contact me or any board member to discuss further.

Finally, we would like to very warmly thank Anthony Cramer for his time on the Board, he has very ably and generously dealt with our financial and banking arrangements as Treasurer, while having a considered and valuable voice on all other board matters. ■

*Andrew Donovan
Secretary*

VAJRASATTVA – A CHARIOT OF GREAT MERIT



The E-Vam Staff continue to gather monthly for Vajrasattva Puja in accordance with Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche's wishes.

In May this year, Ivan Bercholz generously spent time guiding us through the puja and providing detailed instructions on the various roles and ritual details associated with performing the practice, including some additional instructions we have not learned previously. We are now learning

and clarifying drums, cymbals and finer details of the umze, choepen and dorje lopon roles.

There is some real momentum going at present. Tremendous benefit and enjoyment will be available as we enthusiastically embrace the limited remaining opportunities we have to come together and learn, absorb and implement this rare and precious practice. ■

Michael Neighbour



E-VAM INSTITUTE

ETHICS · CONCENTRATION · WISDOM

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