A Sanctuary for Teaching and Realization
By Erik Pema Kunsang

In this life, I have seen a lot of shrine halls, including the ancient Tibetan temples of Jokhang, Samye, and Tramdruk, amazing places that are part of our priceless world heritage. With their wonderful statues and architecture, they inspire us to connect with the Buddha’s teachings and to understand their depth. In our time, the importance of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling equals those legendary temples by giving all of us the opportunity to receive and practice the Buddha’s teachings.

Continued on page 2...
Reflections by Dr. Thomas Doctor

In October 1988, I came to Kathmandu for the first time—basically to renew my Indian visa so that I could continue my Sanskrit and Vedanta studies in India. While in Kathmandu, I thought I should try to find out what Buddhists had to say about Vedanta, since by then I had heard a fair amount of criticism the other way. So from my hotel off Durbar Square I bicycled out to Boudhanath, and during my visit to the great stupa, I asked my philosophy questions.

The morning came and another day of deep blue October skies began. I bicycled back to Boudhanan and found my way to Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling. The man from yesterday was not there when I came, nor did he show up while I waited. It was getting time for the lama’s teaching so I decided to just follow the others and climb the stairs. In his audience room above the temple hall, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche was teaching the Jewel Ornament of Liberation. I signed up for the seminar, and although I never asked that question to Rinpoche, a few days later I took refuge in the Three Jewels. I never saw the young American man again... But I often think of him—his friendly, blond man who spoke Tibetan in that little bookshop on the Boudha Road, at sunset on that day in October in 1988. What if I had never met him? I feel like I owe him my life. At times I even catch myself wondering whether he was human after all.

Reflections Connections Context

When I came from my village to Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling, I was nine years old. I remember a little bit about the journey to Kathmandu; it was very, very difficult! In some places, you could not even walk, you would have to crawl along slowly and carefully and there were no bridges across the rivers, only two sticks to walk across! Most of the time while we traveled, my father carried me on his back to keep me safe from danger.

When we reached the lower hills, I remember I saw a car for the first time and I was really scared of it. When we arrived at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling, I became a monk; Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche did the hair-cutting ceremony for me and my brother. At that time, there were six young boys from our village in Nubri. Now, only me and my older brother are left.

When we waited in front of the temple hall, I bicycled back to town, happy and excited to know that I had good reason to come back the next day.

Reflections Connections Context

When I remember these things I think: how easily I might just have cycled back to my guesthouse, never to return. Petty blind choices and merciless coincidence typically decide the way things turn out. And at the same time, I feel so terribly lucky that I was able to find my way. There is shock and exuberance, fear and joy—all in the same moment. I’m not a saved soul, but I feel that I know what it means to be one... Perhaps you know what I mean.

In any case, each of us has a story of this sort, and there are so many of us. So many different lives, and yet we all found our way to Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling. And so we keep finding that which one otherwise hardly dares dream. Our monastery is a fountain of goodness and fortune, and don’t they say the only way to keep good fortune is by sharing it? So I tell myself: let’s build back even better. In body, speech, and mind.

Reflections Connections Context

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche personally supervised the building of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling and all its artwork. Besides being a meditation master of the highest caliber, he was also a fine calligrapher and excellent sculptor. On one occasion in 1975, I watched him make a statue of the goddess Tseringma, riding a snow lion. This masterpiece, simply outstanding, is kept in a small annex-chapel at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling. He built the figure up from nothing, adding a bit of clay here and there, as if he saw the goddess before him in person, only needing to copy her. It was almost miraculous to see his hands conjure this beautiful figure out of thin air. Every time I think of Tseringma, I remember his gracefulness and gentle attention to detail.

Years later, the yogi and expert painter Gyantse Lhadri was called upon to paint original frescoes on the walls in the main hall. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche decided the layout, making sure that all the buddhas and deities of the most important practices were included. I especially love the paintings of the deities of the most important practices were connected to Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling. It is the residence of my true dharma family, my home and the place where I was given the fortune to translate for thousands of people. Every atom in the temple hall is saturated with the blessings of our lineage masters. A true sanctuary for teaching and realization, it has inspired people to take the path to liberation and enlightenment. I pray that this activity will continue for thousands of years.

Reflections Connections Context

The Ka-Nying shrine hall has been blessed by nearly all the greatest masters of our time. Here I witnessed them give Dzogchen transmission and profound advice on spiritual practice. Thousands of meditators took the bodhisattva vow and participated in the yearly grand assembly practices. In 1980, the monastery hosted the first autumn seminar of Rangjung Yeshe Institute. Since then, people from all countries have gathered around Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche and Tsaikey Chokling Rinpoche to gain a deeper understanding of their lives and the nature of mind.

For over forty years, my life has been closely connected to Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling. It is the residence of my true dharma family, my home and the place where I was given the fortune to translate for thousands of people. Every atom in the temple hall is saturated with the blessings of our lineage masters. A true sanctuary for teaching and realization, it has inspired people to take the path to liberation and enlightenment. I pray that this activity will continue for thousands of years.
International and Local statue makers and they make beautiful statues, but my eyes have been spoiled by these statues at our gompa! I really feel there is something different and special about them. This must be since they were made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and blessed by so many Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu lamas. I feel very sad now that the lhakhang is damaged. In the moment when the earthquake came, my fear came up—never even remembered to go out of my room! I just held my altar and all of my books were falling on my head. My friends said later, “You are so stupid! Why didn’t you come outside?” It wasn’t until I heard them calling me from downstairs that I remembered, and that’s when I went out of my room. My mindfulness was totally lost at that moment. After that though, I only thought about the monastery. Everyone was the same way, thinking, “What is going to happen to our monastery?” We would see the lhakhang moving, swelling back and forth, as the aftershocks came. It made a painful impression on us. We thought, “When is the lhakhang going to collapse in on itself from all of these aftershocks?”

Actually, it’s a very big problem that this old lhakhang is not big enough for everyone. When we had big pujas, many students could not come inside. We need a much bigger one, of better quality. But, sadly, our minds are still with this old lhakhang one hundred percent. We really love and have faith in this building. We have spent many years here, and received so many blessings. Now, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche says they will take it down, but they will try to preserve the statues. We feel this is the right thing to do since a lot of effort went into making this building, not only money. It’s a very special place.

I feel the lhakhang and the statues inside are really special. When I was young, I didn’t know they were made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, although, they were not fully made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. When I look at other statues, I never feel a feeling like when I look at these statues; the shape and design of these are really special.

There are, of course, many famous Nepali statue makers and they make beautiful statues, but my eyes have been spoiled by these statues at our gompa! I really feel there is something different and special about them. This must be since they were made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and blessed by so many Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu lamas. I feel very sad now that the lhakhang is damaged. In the moment when the earthquake came, my fear came up—never even remembered to go out of my room! I just held my altar and all of my books were falling on my head. My friends said later, “You are so stupid! Why didn’t you come outside?” It wasn’t until I heard them calling me from downstairs that I remembered, and that’s when I went out of my room. My mindfulness was totally lost at that moment. After that though, I only thought about the monastery. Everyone was the same way, thinking, “What is going to happen to our monastery?” We would see the lhakhang moving, swelling back and forth, as the aftershocks came. It made a painful impression on us. We thought, “When is the lhakhang going to collapse in on itself from all of these aftershocks?”

Actually, it’s a very big problem that this old lhakhang is not big enough for everyone. When we had big pujas, many students could not come inside. We need a much bigger one, of better quality. But, sadly, our minds are still with this old lhakhang one hundred percent. We really love and have faith in this building. We have spent many years here, and received so many blessings. Now, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche says they will take it down, but they will try to preserve the statues. We feel this is the right thing to do since a lot of effort went into making this building, not only money. It’s a very special place.

I feel the lhakhang and the statues inside are really special. When I was young, I didn’t know they were made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, although, they were not fully made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. When I look at other statues, I never feel a feeling like when I look at these statues; the shape and design of these are really special.

There are, of course, many famous Nepali statue makers and they make beautiful

At the time I first arrived, the lhakhang and the gompa looked the same as they do now, but there were no paintings on the walls. The painting and gold were added much later. One very famous painter, a student of Dudjom Rinpoche, Gyantse Lhadri, came to paint all the images on the walls.

A short time after I became a monk, there was a big puja going on, maybe a drubchen; it was our first one. I was still not used to being at the gompa or being a monk. Back in my village we used to eat six times a day, but, at the gompa, we ate only three times a day. Oh, we felt very hungry! At puja time, we would offer pau roti (Nepali bread) for the tsok feast offering. Then, two days after the offering, we would get to eat this bread. Even though we were small, and would rather play, we were so happy to sit in the puja because of this! The bread was hard and stale, but it didn’t matter; we would dip it in our tea and tear it apart with our teeth. The older monks would tease us so much for doing this, for eating like this.

I feel the lhakhang and the statues inside are really special. When I was young, I didn’t know they were made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, although, they were not fully made by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. When I look at other statues, I never feel a feeling like when I look at these statues; the shape and design of these are really special.

There are, of course, many famous Nepali statue makers and they make beautiful
Practicing Generosity on #GivingTuesday

For the second year in a row, RYI took part in the international day of giving, Giving Tuesday. The movement was started four years ago in the United States to bring balance to the rampant pre-holiday consumerism that occurs each year. The aim of the day is to turn your mind toward the practice of generosity, in whatever way that manifests for you or your organization.

In the wake of the earthquakes last spring, blood banks in Kathmandu experienced a severe shortage, and every donation to RYI went to support those unfortunate enough to be in hospital. To replenish supplies, RYI collaborated with the Nepal Red Cross Society to facilitate a blood donation drive in Boudha. Many RYI students came out to support the event, and the monks, who were studying for their yearly exams which were to be held the following day, also came to donate and support others in doing so.

Blood donation is an easy way to help those in need and the NRCS’s professional, organized staff made the process enjoyable. Nurses screened every potential donor by asking a series of health-related questions and taking blood pressure readings. These steps assured that each donor was eligible to give. Actual donations took between five and seven minutes, and RYI and Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling provided tea, snacks, and juice which gave donors a boost after their donation.

Because scientists have yet to create synthetic blood, the real thing is the only answer for those who need a transfusion, or support after an accident or surgery. Thus, blood donations literally save lives. This year, forty-three donors practiced generosity. Since each donation can save three lives, our donors helped save 129 lives this year. Blood banks need your generosity all year round—please consider donating in your area!

Reconstructing Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery

Built by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and consecrated by the 16th Karmapa, Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery has been a place of spiritual inspiration, education, and blessing for over forty years. Many of the greatest masters of our time have giving teachings and empowerments in its main shrine hall and the monastery has served as RYI’s remarkable home since its establishment in 1997.

In 2015, April’s 7.8 earthquake caused catastrophic damage to the whole building complex and assessments by expert architects and structural engineers have revealed widespread cracks throughout its main load-bearing structures. The monastery must therefore be taken down and rebuilt, and retrofitting work is also needed on the new monks’ quarters to the Northwest of the site.

Although the Ka-Nying community has suffered a great loss, rebuilding will provide an opportunity to build a stronger monastery large enough to accommodate the increasing number of monastic and lay practitioners wishing to take part in various events throughout the year.

The process of designing a new master plan for the monastery is being led by Dutch architect Peter Oudshoorn in consultation with local building contractors and the monastery’s lamas and senior monks. Six design options have been prepared to date and these are being used to help stimulate discussions about the design priorities of the monks and members of the wider sangha.

To quote Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, “I would like to have all people who have a connection with the existing lhakhang and monastery to be able to give their input.”

A key challenge ahead is preserving the three magnificent statues in the lhakhang that were made by hand from clay by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. So many people feel such a strong connection to them that it is seen as important that they be preserved and feature prominently in the new design.

Finalization of the masterplan was completed in Spring 2016 with detailed design work and construction of the new monastery due to start shortly afterwards. Should you wish to support the rebuilding efforts, please consider joining the monastery’s pledge to rebuild campaign (www.shedrubfund.org). Your support will be greatly appreciated.

For more information regarding the process of reconstruction, and to meet the architect responsible for the vision, please visit: http://levekunst.com/architecting-a-temple-complex/.
On December 15, 2015, five RYI students attended the graduation convocation at Kathmandu University (KU) in Dhulikhel. This past year, thirteen students graduated with BA degrees and two with MA degrees in Buddhist Studies. At the start of the ceremony, K.P. Oli, Nepal’s prime minister and the keynote speaker, along with a procession of robed university scholars were heralded with trumpets and drums. After Prime Minister Oli’s welcome speech, the handing out of diplomas began.

Rangjung Yeshe students ascended to the podium to receive their diplomas and a congratulatory handshake. A joyous feeling pervaded the air as proud students reflected on their accomplishments and considered their next steps in life. As the ceremony concluded, the graduates enthusiastically threw their mortarboards into the air. Afterward, the RYI group retired to enjoy a meal together at a nearby restaurant with the Himalayas as the spectacular backdrop.

This grand ceremony was a fitting way to celebrate the achievement of obtaining one’s academic degree at KU; the culmination of all the effort spent studying for quizzes, late-night drilling of Tibetan vocabulary, reading books and articles, and sweating over essays. When the time comes to graduate, RYI heartily recommends that every graduate attends.

Next year is a big year for RYI—its official twentieth anniversary! Originally envisioned by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and founded by Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, Rangjung Yeshe Institute began hosting yearly seminars in 1980. In 1997, RYI became a formal institution of higher education for those wishing to deepen their understanding of Buddhist philosophy and practice, as well as to learn Buddhist languages. Five years later, RYI entered into a close partnership with Kathmandu University, and the Centre for Buddhist Studies began offering undergraduate degrees in Buddhist Studies, adding MA degrees in 2006.

We now turn our focus toward celebrating two decades of providing an opportunity for the study and practice of the Dharma to flourish. To mark this occasion, we are assembling a commemorative booklet to be offered to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche. We invite all students, faculty, staff, alumni, senior academic advisors, and visiting professors of the past and present to help us in this effort by:

- Sending us some of the photographs that you took during your time here at RYI with a line or two describing the approximate month and year and what was happening.
- Writing a few words about your experience at RYI—this can be as a letter, poem, essay, song, or other form of artistic expression.

There’s an easy way for you to submit your memories; to fill out a form to submit your contribution enter this URL: http://bit.ly/RYIturns20 Images and literary submissions can also be sent to ryiturns20@gmail.com. When sending your items, please remember to mention your name, when you studied at RYI and what program you studied in. Please note that these items may also be used on social media, on RYI’s website, and in other print material.

We welcome your submissions and look forward to sharing the project when it is complete.

---

**Symposium on Buddhist Studies**

**Transnational Buddhism: Philosophical, Anthropological, and Historical Perspectives**

**March 25 - 26, 2017 - Kathmandu, Nepal**

**For updates please see:** www.ryi.org/symposium or email: admin@ryi.org
With Aspiring Translators In Mind:
The Dharmachakra Translation Committee

Founded by Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche in 2006, the Dharmachakra Translation Committee (DTC) was established to coordinate the translation efforts of a growing number of skilled translators emerging from the international study program at Rangjung Yeshe Institute. Since then, the committee expanded organically and today consists of a talented group of translators, editors, and graphic artists committed to the task of translating the Buddhist classics into English and other languages.

DTC is presently working on a number of translations of important scriptures containing the Buddha’s words as they are expressed in the sutras and tantras, as well as pivotal Indian and Tibetan commentaries on these texts. To date, the committee has completed translations of more than 6,000 Tibetan pages from over thirty sutras and tantras and more than twenty treatises by Tibetan masters.

“No complications have arisen so far, only benefits. This is possible because of the shared background and aspirations everyone, which makes a flexible and dynamic working environment.”
—Dr. Thomas Doctor

After the committee was established, initial efforts were focused on the translation into English of the traditional curriculum of the Kagyu and Nyingma monasteries: the “Thirteen Great Scriptures” of classical Indian Buddhism together with their commentaries. The committee began with the Five Treatises of Maitreya, texts which are included in the Thirteen Great Scriptures. The first of these volumes, Middle Beyond Extremes, was published in 2007, followed by Distinguishing Phenomena from Their Intrinsic Nature and Ornament of the Great Vehicle Sutras in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Other translation groups have translated the other two texts, to complete the set of five. Thomas Doctor, one of the original committee members, comments, “This is a major achievement to translate these texts. We are happy that we were able to contribute to that.”

In addition to these works, the committee also aims to translate selected texts from the writings of the Karmapas as well as the works of the masters of the Rime Tradition: Jamgon Kongtrul, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, and Chokgyur Lingpa.

DTC has also been actively involved with the 84000 project, which aims to translate the entire Tibetan Kangyur into English. One can, of course, work with the 84000 project as an individual—there is no need to work through the team framework used by the DTC, but many chose to do so. “Perhaps it is because it is enjoyable to work as a team on such projects; many eyes and brains make for good translations. Rinpoche said it was important to have a committee rather than a collection of individuals,” says Thomas Doctor. “I am now convinced about the advantages of working in a team.”

The DTC’s framework is as follows. New translators are supported by a practical, open-format working relationship which begins with an aspiring translator sending a translation sample—no one starts unless they have proven expertise. Mentor translators then work collaboratively with new ones. Since the mentor translator is responsible for the final work, quality issues are dealt with effectively; if the new translator is not ready, it will show in this process. Constructive feedback will then be given, and the aspiring translator can continue to train and come back to the team at a later time when he or she is ready.

Ideas for translation projects are not limited to DTC members. Anyone is welcome to propose an idea, perhaps with thoughts about a funding source, and if accepted it can become a DTC project.

For more information, or to contact DTC, visit their website: dharmachakra.net.
Just as I settle onto my cushion, the windows of the temporary assembly hall rattle with the introductory phrases of sound—this marks the start of the eighth day of this year’s Ngakso Drupchen (the great accomplishment practice of tantric mending and purification). The practice, revealed by Terton Chokgyur Dechen Lingpa (1829-1870) more than 150 years ago, serves to mend and purify broken commitments through communal confession rituals, and by revealing the twelve manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) and other deities.

This year, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche requested the staff of RYI to cancel classes so everyone who wished to do so could attend the drupchen for one full day. Many of us joined in, grateful for the opportunity. The power generated by the practice, the skill involved, and the humility with which it is executed serve as reminders that the monastic sangha are indeed the upholders of the Dharma.

Everyone present supports the ceremony; each person who participates has a job, and each job sustains the whole. Our responsibility as students, staff, and faculty was to listen, observe, and participate according to our abilities. At the start of the drupchen, Rinpoche approached the gathered RYI students and said, “Study is number one, but practice is best.” Jack DeTar, a second year BA student, says, “I think Rinpoche invited us to the drupchen to show us the culmination of our studies.”

Translator Training Program student Shireen Patell, says, “The drupchen embodies all that we are studying and more—and participating in it at whatever level allows for a profound experience of study, contemplation, and meditation, situated in the assembly hall with the sangha rather than the classroom.”

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche invited the RYI community to the ceremony to illustrate this link between study and practice, but also to remind us that we must work together to preserve and maintain access to opportunities for both study and practice for all who are interested.

“If you don’t learn about it you can’t practice it!”  
- Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche
Cacophony filled the hallway outside of RYI’s classroom five on the morning of Saturday, December 5, 2015. The powerful sound was the voices of fifty participants—RYI students, staff, faculty, and other Boudha community members, both international and local—reciting the words of the Buddha, participating in the first worldwide online resounding. Through the magic of technology, thirty-two groups from around the world connected via the internet to read aloud the words of the Buddha together. In this way, hundreds acknowledged the work of the 84000 project in facilitating the translation of the Kangyur into the English language.

A “resounding” is an ancient practice where monastics read the entire 70,000 pages of the Tibetan Buddhist Kangyur, the words of the Buddha, simultaneously. The written words become actively transformed into the sound of the voices of practitioners. The point? To promote the reading, hearing, and learning the actual words of the Buddha. The practice can be thought of as a means for sending the words of the Buddha into the universe as a blessing to the world, and as a means for making merit.

The resounding in December, organized by 84000 and hosted by RYI, drew its inspiration from this practice with a bit of a twist—the sutras read are part of the collection of newly translated works from the Tibetan Kangyur, and they were resounded in English.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche joined the various groups via internet at the beginning of the event, and spoke about the importance of setting one’s motivation properly for such a practice: generating the wish that the practice benefit others. Rinpoche noted that “You are directly getting in touch with Shakyamuni Buddha himself… when reading the sutras.”

Miguel Sawaya, a translator working with DharmaChakra Translation Committee on the 84000 project, attended the resounding. “Participating today made me aware of the possibility that English speakers could now have access to these sutras. It’s really cool; for me, more than anything, it was significant to be able to do a traditional practice like the monastics do with the Kangyur. The translation work that has been done is what makes it possible to do that in English.”

Miguel completed RYI’s Translator Training Program in 2011 and has been working as an oral interpreter and Tibetan language instructor at RYI. He is one example of the connection between Khyentse Foundation and the 84000 project’s work, and the community studying and practicing at RYI.

A number of the translators who work on 84000 translation projects received their training in Tibetan language and translation at RYI, and RYI continues to work in partnership with the Khyentse Foundation to provide training for promising translators of written texts.

For more information about 84000, please visit 84000.co.
Monastery construction continues - the top (third floor) of Pal Thubten Ling Monastery in Lumbini is nearing completion. The roof has been installed and some of the walls are being put up. Recently, eight almost life-sized Bodhisattvas were delivered, and will be installed in the Lumbini 1000 Buddha Temple. We invite you all to get involved in some way with supporting this project. Please visit www.shedrub.org for details.

Did You Know?

Auditing a class at RYI

Have you ever wondered what it’s like to study at RYI? Many students currently enrolled in our various programs started with just a small taste of what classes are like. Study requires a time commitment, and with that in mind, RYI offers interested students up to one week of auditing classes for free. Perhaps you are planning to come to Nepal soon for a cultural tour, for trekking in the beautiful Himalayas, to make a connection with vibrant Tibetan culture, or to join a seminar on Buddhism. If that’s the case, call RYI and visit the main office. You can register to audit certain classes anytime we are in session. The office staff can also advise you about which classes you may find most beneficial for your interests.

Come visit; we would love to see you!