I’m sure many of you have seen the painting of the Wheel of Life. It’s quite a popular painting that you can see in front of almost every Buddhist monastery. In fact, some Buddhist scholars believe that the painting existed prior to Buddha’s statues. This is probably the first ever Buddhist symbol that existed.

The painting is, loosely, a depiction of life. I guess curiosity about life is one big curiosity that we have. But the definition of life is quite a diverse thing so this is something that we have to come to a mutual agreement about. I know many refer to this as the ‘wheel of life’, srid pa ‘khor lo. But, actually, the ‘Tibetan word srid pa is not really ‘life’. Srid pa actually means ‘possible existence’ – maybe it’s existing, maybe it’s not, but it’s possible that it exists. That’s an interpretation of life according to Buddhism. The interpretation itself is quite profound, I think. And then ‘khor lo means ‘the wheel’, ‘the chakra’, ‘the mandala’, which again in itself has some profound significance because when we talk about ‘mandala’ we are talking about chaos; at the same time we are talking about order. So we are talking about a chaotic order about life.

I was asking people about the definition of the word ‘life’ in English. There are many, but one that struck me was ‘coming to life’, ‘becoming animated’. I have a feeling that when we talk about ‘animate’ we are talking about something like consciousness. So, basically, when we talk about ‘life’ I think somehow we are talking about something to do with a mind, consciousness, awareness. Would you agree with that?

So, okay, there’s this question: What is the purpose of life? But before we even talk about the purpose of life, what is life? Now according to Buddhism, life is nothing but a perception, a continuous perception. This has become the major, fundamental subject of Buddhist teachings, which is taught in many different ways, and one way is through painting, I guess. So if you look at the picture, you will see the Buddhist interpretation of life. If you ask a Buddhist, ‘What is life?’ they will say, ‘This is it, this is life.’ Anyway, as I said, life is a perception. A perception of what? Who is the perceiver? The black pig in the centre. It’s very difficult to teach about this. It has been the major subject of Buddhist studies because you have to define what is ignorance. In Buddhism when we judge what is ignorance and what is not ignorance, we don’t judge something as ignorant or evil based on morality or ethics. It has to be judged based on wisdom. So when we talk about ignorance, we are talking about a mind that is at its height of abnormality. When the mind is at its height of normality, then that’s wisdom.

Briefly, how do you define what is normal or what is not normal? Nagarjuna’s definition of what is normal is when something is not dependent. If an entity depends on another entity, then we are never sure whether the colour or the quality of this present entity is actually the ultimate nature because it is dependent on the second entity. There is always a possibility that the second entity can corrupt the first entity. So, likewise, a mind that is dependent on an object, a mind that is dependent on all kinds of education, influence, meditation, is an abnormal mind according to Nagarjuna. So what is a normal mind? When you completely renounce all these objects, all these entities that your mind is totally or partially dependent on.

So for now you can say the pig, which represents our ignorance, is the one that causes all this perception. This is not the best painting. Ideally, the cock and the snake should be vomited out of the pig’s mouth because the pig gives birth to passion, the cock, and aggression, the snake. Now please don’t bring that petty mentality about this being such a politically incorrect thing for a pig to represent ignorance and so on and so forth. This is a useless debate! Please, you have to understand that this is a symbolic teaching. And somehow, I don’t know why, pigs have always been unfortunate. The Buddhists have depicted pigs as the symbol of ignorance and Muslims have even refrained from eating them.

Anyway, the pig represents ignorance. From the ignorance comes hope, which is actually like the mother of passion, and then from the ignorance comes fear, which is like the mother of aggression. So we have three kinds of mental factors. Of course, the original one is the ignorance, which gives birth to aggression and passion. So you can say that these three are what perceives things. We were talking about perception. These three perceive things in so many, many different ways.

Sometimes, out of ignorance comes the hope of wanting to be good. Out of this wanting to be good, a person behaves or manifests in a compassionate and non-violent way. In this case, such a person’s perceptions are more wholesome so you can say that this kind of person experiences perceptions such as the god realm and the asura (or jealous god) realm. Sometimes out of ignorance comes passion or aggression, which creates a lot of havoc – it kills, steals, destroys oneself or others and gives birth to unwholesome, painful, aggressive perceptions. That’s depicted in what we call the ‘three lower realms’ – the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm. So these are the six realms.

Here, there is quite an important message. When Buddhists talk about hell, they are not talking about a concrete place somewhere underneath. And when we talk...
about heaven we are not talking about somewhere where everything works. We are not talking about a place to migrate to, basically. When we talk about going to hell, we are not talking about being punished. I think the concept of punishment is quite a new thing for the Buddhists, actually. Although we may say: ‘If you do such and such bad karma, because of this bad karma you will go to hell’, we are not saying that there is a someone called ‘karma’ which is going to then force you as a punishment to experience the lower realms. As we spoke about before, it’s a perception, depending on your mind, depending on your mental state.

Let’s discuss the six realms. Since the hell realm is the worst, let’s talk about it first so we can get it out of the way. This is really quite profound. In the hell realm all kinds of suffering are depicted. In the centre of the hell realm sits Yamaraja, who is like the Lord of Hell. A Hell’s Angel, I guess, not on a Harley Davidson, but sitting comfortably on the throne made out of skulls. The interesting question is, ‘Who is this guy?’ From many Mahayana texts we know who this is. This is none other than the bodhisattva Manjushri. And who is Manjushri? Manjushri is the symbol of wisdom. So again, here, the Lord of Hell who decides who is to suffer what, so to speak, is actually your own ultimate nature of wisdom sitting there. Then there are things like being burned in the hot hell and being trapped in the ice and snow mountains of the cold hell, and then there are all kinds of animals. There’s one thing I need to tell you. One of the reasons why the Wheel of Life was painted outside the monasteries and on the walls (and was really encouraged even by the Buddha himself) is to teach this very profound Buddhist philosophy of life and perception to more simple-minded farmers or cowherds. So these images on the Wheel of Life are just to communicate to the general audience. The Lord of Hell, Yamaraja, holds a mirror. Again, this is very symbolic - to be free of hell you don’t look for an external source, you look at yourself: meditation such as shamatha meditation or vipashyana meditation.

Now there’s something else quite interesting about the hell realm. Within it you can see a white light going up, which symbolises that hell is also impermanent. It’s not as if once you go to hell then that’s it, there’s no way out. It’s not like that. After all, it’s your perception. If you can change your perception, you can also get out of hell. So there’s a person depicted leaving hell.

Then there’s the animal realm with all kinds of animals. Tibetans have not seen many animals. Australians would do better painting this realm. The animals in the oceans and the animals on the land - I guess they must have forgotten the animals in the sky, like birds.

And then there’s the hungry ghost realm. Beings here have a very big stomach, a very thin neck and a very small mouth and are always hungry and thirsty, looking for food everywhere. Quite interestingly, there are some hungry ghosts sitting there who have jewels, but they are so stingy they don’t give them to other people. Of course not! But they don’t use them for themselves either. They just save them for the next day or the next year.

Then there’s the god realm – castles, dancing girls, beautiful trees that have all sorts of ornaments, people spending life just listening to music, playing music, taking baths, everything is so perfect. And there’s the asura realm. They are as rich as gods, but they have one problem which is fights. They love fighting because they are jealous all the time. For instance, they fight a lot with the gods. This tree is called the wish-fulfilling tree. It actually grows in the asura realm. The jealous gods are busy taking care of this tree but it is so tall, when it bears flowers and fruit, it usually does so up on the top level and only the gods can reach them. So all the jealous gods’ effort in taking care of the tree is wasted. That really triggers so much anger and jealousy, which then creates a lot of fighting between the asura realm and the god realm. Sadly, the gods almost always win, but the jealous gods just don’t give up. They feel that one day they can topple those in the god realm.

In the human realm we see suffering and pain – birth, death, old age, sickness. At the same time we also see people having fun, for instance. We also see people thinking, contemplating and discovering. So we have six realms. Loosely, you can say when the perception comes more from aggression you experience things in a hellish way. When your perception is filtered through attachment, grasping or miserliness, you experience the hungry ghost realm. When your perception is filtered through ignorance, then you experience the animal realm. When you have a lot of pride you are reborn in the god realm. When you have jealousy you are reborn in the asura realm. When you have a lot of passion you are reborn in the human realm.

But the word ‘born’ or ‘reborn’ means a lot. It does not necessarily mean that right now we are all in the human realm and we are not in the other five realms. Depending on what kind of karma we create, we can go to other realms. If the karma to experience the hell realm is the strongest then you will, I guess, change this form and then with another form you will experience a hellish kind of perception. But according to Mahayana Buddhism, the six realms are something that can happen during the course of a day!

(Photograph Stuart MacFarlane)

(The Gentle Voice would like to thank Tom Pengelly and Claire Blaxell for this transcription. The second half of the teaching on the Wheel of Life will be featured in the next issue of the newsletter. It is also available as an audio tape from Siddhartha’s Intent, Southern Door, P.O. Box 1114, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia.)
From 1966 to 1983 Khenpo Sonam Tashi was Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s attendant, accompanying him to his enthronement in Sikkim, residing with him during Rinpoche’s studies at the Royal Chapel Monastery and also studying at Sakya College. Khenpo is the abbot of Chökyi Gyatso Institute in Bhutan and kindly gave this interview without the aid of a translator. He speaks here of his many years caring for the young Khyentse Norbu.

Khenpo, I believe your father knew Lama Sonam Zangpo, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s grandfather?

Yes, I was born in Bhutan in 1952. Most of the people from the area around my home, which is called Choekhor Ling, knew Lama Sonam Zangpo and they invited him to stay in eastern Bhutan. Due to this invitation he agreed to come and was accompanied by his grandson, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. But at that time we didn’t know that Rinpoche is an incarnation of Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. His other grandfather, His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, had named him Khyentse Norbu, so we used the name Khyentse Norbu.

When Khyentse Norbu was very young, about four or five years old, his grandfather Sonam Zangpo (circa 1888 – 1984) told my father that I needed to come and take care of Khyentse Norbu. So I went to his place and stayed there with Rinpoche and his grandfather. I’m very lucky that his grandfather chose me to stay there with him. It was a great blessing.

So you took care of Khyentse Norbu?

Yes, I took care of him very well. And his grandfather trusted that I was taking care of him very well! I was very lucky that they were in that area. While they were there, his grandfather taught Khyentse Norbu how to read and write during meditation breaks, and he also taught me how to read and write. And at the same time, his grandfather taught me how to do the shrine master’s tasks according to both the Kagyü and Nyingma traditions. Rinpoche’s grandfather would do the pujas and I needed to learn how to take the shrine master’s role, the chöpon. So Lama Sonam Zangpo trained me. He also gave me the opportunity to do the foundation
practices of the Kagyü tradition under his instructions. So I finished these practices when I was about fifteen or sixteen.

Then, after that, his grandfather Sonam Zangpo moved to another area called Yong-la Gonpa. It’s the monastery of one of Jigme Lingpa’s disciples, Jigme Küntrol. He moved there to help repair the monastery. Khyentse Norbu moved with him, so I also moved there to take care of Rinpoche. There, Khyentse Norbu went to school – the only school like a western school in that area at the time. A year later he moved to another school in another area. I went everywhere that he went; I had to, because I had to look after him. Anyway, while Rinpoche was at Kanglung School in eastern Bhutan, His Holiness Sakya Trizin recognised him as an emanation of Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. Then the King of Sikkim and Rinpoche’s previous disciples and attendants discussed this and two of his previous attendants came to invite him to his original place in Sikkim. So he left that school to go to Sikkim, and his grandfather wished me to go with him as I was always taking care of him. In that way, I went to Sikkim, too. Khyentse Norbu was about seven or eight then.

When we arrived, there were many beautiful receptions in Gangtok; the King of Sikkim, ministers and many high lamas, especially His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, received him very warmly. At Siliguri they made a special gate and at other areas in Sikkim they also made gates; these led to the peak or Holy Mountain of Sikkim, where the king lived in the Royal Chapel Monastery. That was the first time I'd seen such royal splendour and the first time I had a chance to see His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and the spiritual consort of Rinpoche’s previous incarnation, Khandro Tsering Chödrön. Then, on the auspicious day of 2 September 1968, many people gathered and His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse did the enthronement ceremony.

I was in a new country with new languages and I was very surprised by all this. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse gave many wonderful speeches. He was very happy to receive an incarnation of his own teacher. At that time, too, I saw Tulku Pema Wangyal (the son of Kangyur Rinpoche and brother of Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche, who now lives and teaches at Chanteloube, France), translating a few things into English. That was the first time that I saw a Buddhist monk speak English! At that time I thought how great it would be if I could learn English!

After the enthronement in Sikkim, I had a chance to see high lamas when Rinpoche went to see His Holiness Sixteenth Karmapa at Rumtek, His Holiness Sakya Trizin in Dehra Dun, and when he went to Dharamsala to see His Holiness Dalai Lama. I was with him during these visits so it was a great opportunity for me to be in their presence.

For the next seven years we stayed in the Royal Chapel Monastery, and one of Rinpoche’s attendants and shrine master from his past life, Lama Chogden, became Rinpoche’s first tutor after he was recognised. While Lama Chogden was tutoring Rinpoche, he also taught me how to make tormas in the Khyentse tradition. (These were the tormas I showed you how to make here at Vajradhara Gonpa.)

After a few months Lama Chogden, who was quite elderly, passed away. Rinpoche had several tutors after that, one of whom was Pema Tashi, the umze or puja leader of Choling Monastery in Kham, Tibet. During the time he tutored Rinpoche, Pema Tashi also taught me how to lead a puja and how to sing various puja tunes. After that, Ragong Sota became Rinpoche’s tutor and from him I learned grammar, spelling and so on. During that period we stayed in the Royal Chapel Monastery with Khandro Tsering Chödrön and Tashi Namgyal, the attendant of the late Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. On special days,
Khyentse Yangsi Rinpoche, who reached his eleventh birthday at the end of June, spends most of his year in the tranquil haven of Bhutan, often called the last remaining Buddhist kingdom of the world. It is here that, from around April to November, he is able to settle into a much stricter routine of study and practice, away from the crowds.

Rinpoche’s compound is situated on a hill seven kilometres outside Paro, with a stunning view of the famous Taktsang monastery on the hillside opposite. Khyentse Rinpoche has his own house within the grounds where he stays with his two attendants, his two dogs Yangchen and Akiko, and a baby deer named Johnny.

Rabjam Rinpoche tries to spend as much time as he can in Bhutan with the Yangsi, whilst at the same time working hard to ensure the Shechen monasteries run smoothly in preparation for Khyentse Rinpoche’s future take-over. Khyentse Rinpoche and Rabjam Rinpoche love spending time together; it’s plain to see Rabjam Rinpoche’s relationship with Khyentse Rinpoche is just a continuum of his relationship with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. They are both full of love and respect for each other and miss each other when they’re apart.

Rinpoche’s studies from Monday to Friday with a half-day on Saturday, and shares his class with his two young companions, Dorja Tulku (12) and Tashi Chime (14). Their day is full, starting at six a.m. with morning prayers and prostrations. After breakfast they study Tibetan reading (The Kangyur) from nine till twelve, followed by an hour’s lunch break. Then they have an English language class for two hours followed by ‘teatime’. From half past three to five they study Tibetan writing and grammar, and then in the evening they do their protector practice and evening prayers before bed.

The English class from Monday to Friday includes Maths, Geography, History, Science and Dharma. The class is often full of interesting discussions; we spend more time talking than writing! I try to encourage them to question everything around them and come to their own conclusions. In the beginning some of my western teaching methods caused much amusement and perhaps concern for the older monks. We often sing, act, paint and play games, but I think they’re used to it now!

Rinpoche loves to read and listen to stories, so we often (if they’ve been good!) finish the class with twenty minutes ‘story time’ or I’ll visit him in the evening to read a bedtime story. We’re presently reading The Magician’s Nephew by C.S. Lewis. Rinpoche’s favourite writers are Roald Dahl and Roger Hargreaves (the Mr. Men series) and the three boys are presently writing their own Mr. Men books to add to the collection. Rinpoche’s title is Mr. Old. Maybe one day we’ll get them published!

In the four years I’ve been here we have performed two plays, making all the props and costumes ourselves: Jack in the Beanstalk and Snow White. Everybody joins in and plays a part (even Rabjam Rinpoche!) and we invite all the children from the village to come and watch. Often on Sunday we’ll go for picnics to the riverside or in the forest, and once a year after the ‘dreaded annual exam’ we all pack up and go camping in the forest for two or three days relaxation.

Every day, between five and six, Rinpoche plays basketball and he’s also slowly getting to grips with balance on his brand new bicycle. We sometimes cook together at the weekend or even in class. In the past we’ve made gingerbread men, blueberry cheesecake, toad in the hole, strawberry biscuits and ice-cream. He loves to get his hands messy!

Rinpoche sometimes spends the weekend in Thimpu with Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Ashi Kesang Wangchuk. They have a very close relationship, and it is through her kindness that we are all able to stay and work for Rinpoche here in Bhutan. Rinpoche has a message he would like to pass on to all the Gentle Voice readers:

‘Thanks for reading my news. Do you like it? Thank you for learning Buddhism; thank you for thinking about me. When you learn about Buddhism it might be a little bit hard, but when you get used to it, you’ll start to like it. Good luck. Khyentse Yangsi.’

With warm wishes,

Sally Williams
For twenty-five years His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche’s retreat centre in Dordogne, France, has quietly conducted a succession of traditional three-year retreat programmes for Westerners. Inspired by that example, Vajradhara Gonpa, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s retreat centre in northern New South Wales, Australia, will inaugurate its first three-year retreat under Rinpoche’s direction towards the end of this year.

Three-year retreat is a strenuous programme of intensive contemplative practice based on the motivation to seek realisation for the benefit of others. The gonpa’s seclusion on 800 acres of natural bushland near the Border Ranges National Park and the blessings of nearly twenty years of hosting so many authentic teachers of the Buddhadhharma make it particularly well suited as a venue for such a long-term retreat.

Twenty-five to thirty individuals will undertake this first retreat. Once the retreatants have received empowerments and instructions from Rinpoche at the outset of the retreat, they will practise in four daily sessions, remaining within the retreat boundary for the duration of the three-and-a-half-year training period. Rinpoche will return to give instructions for subsequent stages of the retreat about twice a year. Rinpoche also plans to invite other lineage masters to visit the retreat and teach from time to time. Interested students may arrange to attend the retreat during those times when Rinpoche is giving empowerments and practice instructions.

Rinpoche has explained that the retreat programme will be based on a scaled-down version of a five-year “Eight Chariots” retreat curriculum designed by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö. The “Eight Chariots” refers to the eight lineages of Buddhadhharma transmitted from India to Tibet. During the three and a half years, retreat participants will undertake the preliminary practices (ngöndro), then practise in turn the sadhanas of the three roots – guru, deva, and dakini.

To prepare for this first three-and-a-half-year programme Vajradhara Gonpa has built a retreat house for Rinpoche that will serve as a venue for presenting retreat instructions, and is renovating the dormitory rooms for individual occupancy. At this stage the gonpa has eight self-contained cabins and the plan is to steadily build more cabins for use in future three-year retreats. The second three-year retreat at Vajradhara Gonpa is expected to commence in 2009.

The gonpa was fortunate to recently receive endorsement as a tax-deductible gift recipient. Donations to Rinpoche’s house/teaching facility, as well as other future educational facilities, are now tax deductible. Donations can be made directly to the Vajradhara Gonpa Shedra Building Fund, account 06 2563 10068739, Commonwealth Bank, Kyogle, or mailed to P.O. Box 345, Kyogle, NSW, 2474. As approximately $Aus40,000 is needed to complete the payment for Rinpoche’s house, your generosity will be deeply appreciated.

Your financial assistance can also provide partial sponsorships, matched by the Khyentse Foundation, for some individuals wishing to participate in the three-year retreat and support for renovations to dormitory rooms. For further details please contact Kathie Chodron at vajgonpa@nor.com.au or phone 02 6633 1382.

Vajradhara Gonpa Committee extends sincere thanks to the many people who have already donated generously towards Rinpoche’s house and other numerous projects at Vajradhara Gonpa. Your generosity will benefit many beings.
February: - - - - “The Sword of Wisdom”, swordsmanship display and an introduction to the themes of 2004.
March: - - - - “The Generous Heart”, the spirit of generosity and its effect on us.
April: - - - - “A Warrior’s Discipline”, exploring healthy boundaries through the martial arts.
May: - - - - “A World of Patience”, an introduction to indigenous culture and the strength of patience.
June: - - - - “The Hero’s Effort”, learning self-confidence through circus skills.
July: - - - - Holiday break.
August: - - - - “The Skill of Meditation”, respecting the clarity of our mind with fun and games.
September: - - - “Compassion’s Wisdom” focuses on the wisdom of our heart.
October: - - - - “Putting it all Together” prepares for November’s Open Day.
November: - - - “Siddhartha’s School Open Day”, with presentations, performances, art and information.
December: - - - “End of Year Excursion”, a challenging and exciting day out for all.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche has long expressed his wish to see a school based on Buddhist principles established in the West. Inspired by Rinpoche’s vision, a group was started in June 2003 in northern New South Wales, Australia, which will culminate in the establishment of a full-scale independent school.

The aim is to build an education system with strong emphasis on human values and responsibilities, together with a sophisticated academic approach. There will be exploration of different cultural, religious and philosophical ideas, while enhancing each child’s own belief system, to provide them with much needed support in an ever-changing world. The first stage has been a series of monthly gatherings known as Siddhartha’s School Children’s Days. These were originally held at Vajradhara Gonpa, then more recently at the local Collins Creek Hall. The group has grown from a handful of participants to a regular attendance of between twenty and thirty children from all around the area, some driving for an hour and a half to take part. A highlight of the early children’s day activities was a performance of the locally written play Asanga and Maitreya at Vajradhara Gonpa in front of Rinpoche and a group of over 100 guests. It was a great success and a tremendous thrill for the brave young performers.

A group of dedicated parents and friends have developed a full and exciting programme with activities such as martial arts, story-telling, music, visual arts and games. It is designed to teach about the recognition of our individual qualities and strengths and to be a fun and uplifting experience for both participants and the many helpers who take part. Each month a different quality is examined in detail and methods are explored to help integrate this quality into daily life. Special guests such as martial artists, circus acrobats and medieval sword fighters have been invited to inspire the children with their skills and to demonstrate the importance of that month’s quality in achieving one’s goals.

For all the people involved it is a very inspiring project, which causes us to think deeply about our values and how to integrate them into an education system. We would like to thank Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche for his inspiration and encouragement as well as the dedicated volunteers whose tireless efforts bring this wonderful project into reality.

Simon Thomas
“Would Kathryn and I like to spend three months in Bhutan, sleeping on the floor with twenty strangers whose names I can’t pronounce, while he disappears up a yak trail six hours away, not even accessible by carrier pigeon? Of course, Mal doesn’t put it quite like that. Not at first. He says Rinpoche is making a new movie, bigger and more sophisticated than *The Cup* and this time set in Bhutan.” With these words writer Bunty Avieson sets the scene for her adventurous journey to Bhutan in 2002 with her eight-month-old daughter Kathryn and partner Mal Watson, who co-produced *Travellers & Magicians* for Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche.

While Mal is away in the countryside supervising the shoot, Bunty and Kathryn live with four Bhutanese sisters and their families in Thimpu, the capital city. *A Baby in a Backpack to Bhutan* is dedicated to Kathryn and to these four luminous women whom Bunty describes with such love and sensitivity. She is touched by their kindness towards two complete strangers and their unbridled welcome of her and Kathryn into the family. At the start of her stay she describes them in this way.

When I find out the English translations of the sisters’ names, I’m dumbfounded. Before, I was nervous about mispronouncing them, now I’m completely intimidated about speaking to these exalted people at all.

The eldest sister is Karma Yangki, which means ‘Activity of Spaciousness’. The next sister is Phuntsho Wangmo, ‘Powerful Mother of Excellent Abundance’. Beautiful Karma Chokyi is ‘Activity of the Dharma’. And Wesel Wangmo, the kind, loving sister who looks after Kathryn most of the time, is ‘Powerful Mother of Luminosity’. According to the *Australian Women’s Weekly Book of Names*, Bunty means ‘pet lamb’. It just doesn’t compare.

For a few days I try thinking of the women in these terms. Good morning, Activity of Spaciousness, isn’t it a beautiful morning? Good afternoon, Powerful Mother of Luminosity, how’s Kathryn’s nappy rash? It transforms every exchange into something verging on the divine.

Living in this hospitable and generous household, Bunty learns about life in contemporary Bhutan, a country moving cautiously towards democracy, but one that has great reverence for its king and royal family. She depicts excursions to a local temple to help a crying baby sleep and to an oracle for advice on family matters. There are encounters with *gomchen*, serious Buddhist practitioners who have spent their lives meditating and studying (and now acting in a scene from *Travellers & Magicians*), and meetings with twelve of the nation’s most eminent and learned scholars who are developing a national language. Above all, a vivid portrait emerges of her kind-hearted, accomplished hosts, women who embody the old and new that is Bhutan.

This is a lively, humorous and heartfelt account of life in one of the world’s most intriguing countries. Bunty Avieson worked for twenty years as a journalist on newspapers and magazines in Australia and Britain. In 2000 she took up writing full-time, with crime thrillers such as *Apartment 255*, *The Affair* and *The Wrong Door* to her credit. *A Baby in a Backpack to Bhutan* is her first non-fiction work and is published by Pan Macmillan Australia.
Wangchuk Rinpoche walked out of Tibet to see the incarnation of his previous master. Rinpoche asked me to guide Khenpo Kunga Wangchuk on a pilgrimage to the holy lands in India. So I did that and accompanied him to see other rinpoches and other places in India.

Then in 1984 Rinpoche sent me to Dharamsala to study at the Dialectics School there, to do teacher training. Then, in 1985, he sent me to eastern Bhutan to study astrology and I spent one year at Tshangkhar Monastery there.

After that Rinpoche wanted to set up the Chökyi Gyatso Institute in eastern Bhutan and in 1986 I became the abbot of that institute. His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche held the first exams and my students offered their knowledge to him at Thimpu in Bhutan. And at that time he gave me the title of khenpo. He then gave me the scholar’s hat according to Tibetan tradition. Some years later I realised that he had written, advising me of working towards this goal. Later I realised it had come true!

So I’ve been looking after that institute until now, especially from 1986 to 1996, when I was the only teacher and was always there. In 1991 the institute moved to Dewathang because it’s easier for transport and to get food and hospital services. Rinpoche’s grandfather Lama Sonam Zangpo had founded a monastery there. After the move to Dewathang I realised that Lama Sonam Zangpo had prophesised this. He’d said that in the future a shedra would be built and monks from all over would come to study Buddhism there. I felt very blessed to be able to fulfill the wish of another of my root gurus. After that Rinpoche sent more khenpos and teachers to the institute. So now I can relax and travel a little bit!
MADHYAMAKAVATARA IN SYDNEY

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche will teach the first in a series of annual teachings on Chandrakirti’s Madhyamakavatara, an Introduction to the Middle Way, in Sydney from 7 to 16 January 2005. This is one of Buddhism’s key philosophical expositions – an opportunity not to be missed! Details of the event are to be advised. For enquiries please email jillrobi@bigpond.com.

KHYENTSE FOUNDATION

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s vision for the Khyentse Foundation is quickly becoming reality. As the goal of $US2,800,000 for its Endowment for Monastic Education approaches, significant disbursements to the Dzongsar Institutes have already begun, gradually taking care of Rinpoche’s financial responsibilities to the monasteries. After the remaining $US300,000 has been raised, focus will turn to the Publications and Scholarship Funds. Regarding publications, several exciting meetings have taken place in the U.S.A. between the foundation and Gene Smith of the Tibetan Buddhist Research Project. Much synergy was found between the two and momentum is building to set up printing centres in Bhutan and India in the near future. And hundreds of students have downloaded Rinpoche’s new Ngöndro Manual: Advice on How to Practise, available free of charge at the Khyentse Foundation website (www.khyentsefoundation.org).

The foundation is happy to announce that it will be partially sponsoring a number of the three-year retreatants in Australia for the duration of the retreat. (If you would like to make a matching sponsorship, please contact Kathie Chodron on 02 6633 1382 or vajgonpa@nor.com.au.) And Rinpoche announced to an astonished and grateful crowd in San Francisco that students who attended the first two years of his Madhyamakavatara series there would be invited to attend the second two years free of charge.

All of this activity is made possible with the help of Rinpoche’s friends and supporters. The Investment Committee, led by Bel Pedrosa, has made excellent progress this year, which has allowed the foundation to start putting funds to work. The foundation hopes to attract more new subscribers to the matching funds programme made possible by a group of anonymous donors who match every dollar donated on a recurring monthly or quarterly basis.

SPRING SEMINAR AT VAJRADHARA GONPA

This year’s spring seminar from 16 to 26 September will feature teachings by Changling Rinpoche, including teachings on deity yoga, as well as part II of The Great Medicine, a spiritual poem of profound and succinct instruction on developing the two aspects of bodhicitta. Part II will emphasise the ultimate truth according to the Madhyamika viewpoint. For more information about this seminar, and also about Buddhist courses in Kyogle and Lismore, please phone 02 6633 1382 or email vajgonpa@nor.com.au.

THE GREAT ART RAFFLE

Here’s another way to support the activities of Vajradhara Gonpa, in particular the preparations for the three-year retreat! The Great Art Raffle offers eighteen beautiful prizes, including three calligraphies by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Ani Lodrö Palmo and May Gu, six artworks by Joan Ross, Raphael Zimmerman, Tineke Adolphus, Beth Norling and Ray Dargan, and much more. The raffle will be drawn on 1 November 2004 and all prize-winners will be notified. To find out how to buy your $5 tickets or, better still, to sell a book of tickets to your friends, contact Vajradhara Gonpa on 02 6633 1382 or email vajgonpa@nor.com.au for details.

SIDDHARTHA’S SCHOOL CHILDREN’S DAY

Siddhartha’s School provides a programme based on Buddhist principles such as wisdom, compassion, courage and awareness, recognising that these qualities are fundamental to the nature of every human being. In a respectful and inquisitive atmosphere, children’s individual growth is nurtured, allowing them to discover their own strengths and connection to the world. The programme runs one day each month for primary-school aged children, offering a variety of activities including the martial arts, story-telling, drama, music, meditation, visual arts and games. For more information, or to be added to our mailing list, please contact Eva Thomas on 02 6633 1257 or evasimon@dnet.aunz.com or Ari Summa on 02 6621 2193 or ari_danapati@yahoo.com.au. Bookings are essential and can be made with Eva.
BUDDHA DOWN UNDER

Buddha Down Under, New Zealand, was established by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche in April 2003. Our group meets monthly on the tenth day of the Tibetan calendar in Auckland to offer a Shower of Blessings with tsog. Please email buddhadownunder@ihug.co.nz for more information or call Ani Dianne on 09 424 3334.

PRACTICE FOR SYDNEY-SIDERS

Shamatha meditation is held once a fortnight on Wednesday at 7.30 p.m. at the dance studio of Darlinghurst Public School at the corner of Liverpool Street and Barcom Avenue, Darlinghurst. Phone Chris Conlon on 02 9360 1304 or Hugo Croci on 0402 894 871 for further details. A Tsasum Drildrup tsog is held on the tenth day of the lunar calendar. Please contact Rati on 0400 841 553 for details.

PRACTICE IN ADELAIDE

A Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro practice is held on the first Sunday of every month, starting at 2 p.m. A Tsasum Drildrup practice takes place on the third Sunday of every month, also starting at 2 p.m. Please phone Tineke Adolphus on 08 8362 7553 for details about the venues.

IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

A Tsasum Drildrup tsog is held each month on Guru Rinpoche day. Shamatha meditation is held on Monday evening at 7.30 p.m. Please ring Pamela Croci on 02 4757 2339 for further information about these and about the Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro practice in the Blue Mountains.

NEW CONTACT FOR TAPES

Anna Vlajkovic is the new contact person for ordering recordings of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche’s teachings. CDs of Rinpoche’s latest teaching in Sydney, “How to Look for Guru and How to Be Student”, are now available. You can reach Anna on 02 9518 1363 or email annavla@yahoo.com. Siddhartha’s Intent would like to thank Carol Weaver for all her help over recent years in editing, copying and distributing the tapes with such calm and efficiency.

BYRON BAY BUDDHISTS

Over the past six months bbb has hosted teachings by Hogan San, Ngakpa Karma Rinpoche and Khenpo Ngawang Damchoe, and a public talk on bodhicitta by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. The Byron Bay Community Centre venue was filled to capacity for Rinpoche’s recent talk and many people took refuge and bodhisattva vows at the end of the evening. Byron Bay Buddhists runs a regular programme of meditation sessions and study groups at 1/22 Fawcett Street, Brunswick Heads. Shamatha meditation, suitable for beginners as well as established meditators, is held every Wednesday from 6 to 7 p.m. For further details about this, the Madhyamika study group and other Buddhist courses, please email bbb@mullum.com.au or phone/fax bbb on 02 6685 1646. For information about the Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro practice on the third Sunday of every month, please phone Christina Peebles on 02 6688 2055.

PLEASE NOTE: Because of its sacred content, please treat this newsletter with respect. Should you need to dispose of it, please burn it, rather than throwing it away.