



Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation Inc. Newsletter Autumn 2007

ZASEP TULKU RINPOCHE

Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation has a long-standing relationship with the Venerable Zasep Tulku Rinpoche, a meditation master of the Gelugpa Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Rinpoche received his training under some of the most competent Buddhist masters in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion of that country. Later on in India he graduated from Varanasi Sanskrit University with an Acharya degree and spent 18 months in Thailand at the request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He first came to Australia in 1977 and taught for three years before leaving for Canada. He has established Buddhist centres and taught throughout North America. Rinpoche has also been the Spiritual Director of Dorje Ling Retreat Centre (formerly Illusion Farm) in Tasmania for many years. He is recognised as the 13th incarnation of the great Kagyu teacher Lama Chabdak who lived in the Kham region of Eastern Tibet and founded Zuru Gumpa 600 years ago. Rinpoche is known for his gentle compassion and good humoured wisdom.



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TASHI CHOLING DHARMA FOUNDATION

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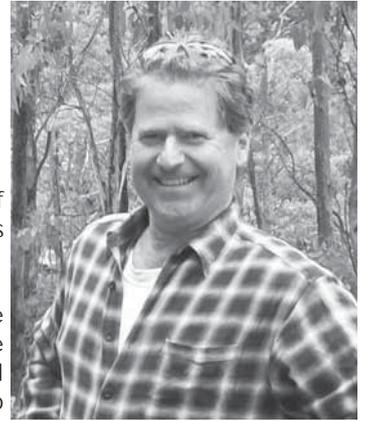
Our regular meditation meetings are held at 7.30 - 9.00 pm every Tuesday above Gould's Naturopathica in Liverpool St Hobart. All welcome. Those who wish can stay for a cuppa and a chat after our meetings.

AUTUMN PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dear friends
What a year!

We started the year with a wonderful increase in our committee. As a result the level of participation in managing retreats with visiting teachers and the affairs of Dorje Ling has become energetic to say the least.

This year there have been three retreats with Maurice Oliver, two in North Hobart and one at Tara Nivas. Maurice donated all the proceeds of the retreats to the building fund for the Dorje Ling retreat centre. Thank you Maurice for your great generosity. We also benefited from a visit by Sonia Moriceau, whose visit was facilitated by Sue Gregory. Thank you so much Sue, for introducing us to Sonia. Most recently about twenty students enjoyed an Easter retreat at Dorje Ling with Khandro Thrinlay Chodon, a most inspiring and gifted female teacher and practitioner. What a breath of fresh female air! The Dakini's warm breath permeated our beautiful dharma home for an Easter that was remarkable for it's calm, warm and steady weather. Khandro-la told me she was displaying her Tara aspect, hence the fine weather ... we may in the future experience her more wrathful face ... so please do not always expect fine weather when she visits us again!! Word has it Khandro-la would love to return again in future years. We have Anna Crotty to thank for 'taking a punt', and coming up trumps. Thanks love!



For the rest of the year we are planning to run an urban retreat in Hobart with Tarchin Hearn in September and a retreat with Zasep Tulku Rinpoche at Dorje Ling in late October. We hope you can join us for some of these opportunities to sit with gifted teachers.

Another important contribution to general awareness raising was our sponsorship of a screening of Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth", as part of an amazing series of screenings held at the State Theatre in North Hobart. A friend, John Hebblewhite was instrumental in organizing and encouraging the screenings and a huge congratulation must go to him. He showed what one person can do when they feel passionately about an issue.

Last, but not least, and on this same theme, I would like to throw oceans of blessings and mountains of flowers on the head and heart of our dear Anna Crotty. For those of you who know what she has been up to, you will no doubt agree with my feeling. For those who do not know, please visit the web-site of Tents for Peace and find out ... and help in any way you can. This is not the place to go into great detail, but I would just like to encourage you to become more acquainted with some of Anna's work. I am still flying from the incredible concert with the master sitar player, Kahil Gudaz, she organised at St David's Cathedral on the 28th of April. More power to you Anna!

To finish this report I would like to share with you the news of the passing of Acharya Umeshwarananda Avadhuta, recently known as Acharya Roy or just plain Acharya. He was my first and perhaps most significant guru and I offer my heart prayers to meet you again and again in all our lives to come. Thank you for pointing me to the clearlight of mind.

- *Guy Turnbull.*

'AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH'

And an extraordinary possibility

Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation has recently been part of a really significant local community initiative to inspire understanding and personal action on climate change.



Late last year builder John Hebblewhite decided he wanted to help as many people as possible see the Al Gore movie 'An Inconvenient Truth' in which Gore lays out the science (and politics) of climate change. Community organisations, businesses and individuals all contributed to fund ten free screenings of the film. Many of the State Cinema screenings were standing room only and the session sponsored by TCDF was really well supported.

By dint of being involved in helping organise these screenings I've seen the film 6 times and I am still moved by it. But I 'm more moved by the grassroots community response that is growing. There are householders in many communities getting together to change their lifestyles - doing simple but significant thing like changing to compact fluorescents, sharing rides to work, walking their kids to school, growing their own food, reducing their consumption, lobbying their politicians.....

There is a chance we will pull off the changes that need to happen around the planet in time to prevent really harmful climate change. As a field for wholesome dharma in action, sharing in this work is a gift for us all. Call me at work if you want some ideas on how you can do more. (6234 5566)

- *Margaret Steadman*

TASHI CHOLING MONTHLY PROGRAM

1st Tuesday of every month

Practice of Green Tara – Green Tara is the embodiment of that aspect of awakened mind which manifests as compassionate activity. This energy of compassionate activity is available to each and every one of us and the practice of this sadhana helps us to bring that forth within our own mindstream. Green Tara is said to be the most accessible of all the “deities”, a protective energy and presence that is available to anyone who calls upon it. Born from a teardrop shed by Avalokiteshvara, or Chenrezig, she is the active, compassionate and skilful response to the depth of suffering in the world. Sadhana practice is led by senior sangha members.

2nd, 3rd and 4th Tuesday of every month

We will be presenting a varied program, sometimes a teaching, sometimes a discussion, and sometimes a recording of a teacher, along with a time for meditation practice.

DORJE LING – DIAMOND GROUND, HEART PLACE

“A little bit goes a long way”, as the saying goes, and this is as true for the upkeep and maintenance, materially and energetically, of our beautiful Dorje Ling Retreat Centre, as it is for anything else.

Regular working bees are held at Dorje Ling, and many of you have taken part in these often laughter-filled group occasions helping to complete many of the quite large tasks which always need doing at such a place. Simply doing things with others makes any task, even the most difficult, seem easier. In this way, over the years, Rinpoche’s house has been completed, white stone zen gardens have been established, and trees felled and split for firewood, to name but a very few. But sometimes working bee dates don’t fit with the schedule, or the dynamic and spirited chaos of a working bee weekend doesn’t appeal.

Dorje Ling needs another kind of energetic input as well, if it is to truly realise its potential as a supportive and conducive place for healing and contemplation for beings who go there. It needs people to go there to do their own meditation practice, in between the working bees and the big courses., even just for a few days or a weekend, from time to time. This inner work done there without question supports the more physical “outer” side of Dorje Ling, it is a kind of magic that when practice is being done in a place, the other things needed for that place to function well flow more smoothly.

There is a fee for staying at Dorje Ling to do a retreat, this fee covers the cost of gas and wood and contributes to the cost of generally maintaining the centre. Financially contributing to the costs of the centre really helps. But if you find this cost prevents you spending time in retreat at Dorje Ling, then there is another way. The Committee is really open to an arrangement wherein the cost of staying at the centre to do retreat can be waived in return for contributing an agreed amount of “karma (or dana) yoga” to the centre each day. Of course, even if you are a paying retreatant, a small amount of time given to some of the many maintenance tasks at the centre each day can actually really support your retreat work. Giving your physical energy to the place which so beautifully supports your retreat. The paramita of generosity, in action.

Small amounts of time doing tasks at the centre each day makes a surprisingly big difference to the upkeep and appearance of the centre. And any time spent in meditation and retreat makes a great contribution to the maintenance of that glorious timeless and gentle heart spaciousness we all find so precious at Dorje Ling. Dorje Ling needs both from us. Please consider spending time there, meditating and caring for the land. Contact any of the Committee members if you wish to do so.

Sue Willey

Personal Retreats/Working Bees at Dorje Ling

Interested in doing a personal retreat at Dorje Ling? Want to do your bit to maintain Dorje Ling but can’t make it up to a group working bee?

Dorje Ling is available for personal retreats. There is a charge of \$25 per day, or \$140 per week. Alternatively, you can engage in a minimum of two hours karma yoga helping maintain the buildings or grounds and stay free!

To organise your own personal retreat or working bee at Dorje Ling contact Anna Crotty on 6234 7427

KARMA YOGA - JULY WORKING BEE AT DORJE LING

To spur you on in your karma yoga, Kirsten Mayer is coordinating the group working bees we need to have before Ven. Zasep TR arrives later this year.

Given that Tarchin Hearn will be here in September, a working bee or two in July and/or August would be ideal.

As a start, Kirsten is calling for as many hands as possible on Friday night 13th, July – Sunday 15th July.

Please contact Kirsten on 0413 535 950 or at kirstenmayer@yahoo.com if you can attend on 13-15th July, or if to propose another date that suits.

MORE DORJE LING NEWS

Dorje Ling Caretaker's Report

Hello one and all,



As I sit here in my cabin writing the "Dorje Ling news" it is raining softly, but consistently. It is my favourite sound to sleep by especially when I'm warm and dry. Day two of steady rain, in actual fact, with close to 20 mls received already. As the news on water supply in all parts of Australia has been pretty grim I am most grateful there are at least some Tassie forests still in communication with the clouds.



Also I would imagine with all the very soul supporting energy still lingering from the most recent retreat gathering it isn't any wonder that the place has received some soil nourishment. Another coup to Anna Crotty to find the amazing entities that she does. I am impressed and will always be in awe of her capabilities.

Thanks to all who did a super clean up before the royal party arrived. Very impressive, and for one brief moment I thought that the rubber tyres had (like Elvis) left the building, until I found them well hidden behind the barn.

I do hope that everyone who visited the retreat enjoyed the experience, that the grounds were up to par, the infrastructure supportive, the swing exciting (even a little scary), the canoes a joy and every little thing in perfect order. I stay posted and look forward to our next adventure.

Love and light from ME ... John

Dakinis in the Garden - Working Bee 24th/25th March

Kate and I drove up together on Friday night, weaving in and out of the edge of a thunderstorm on the outskirts of Hobart. We had Kirsten's mantra of "share the journey with sangha friends!" in our minds as we chatted and laughed our way up to Lorinna. Neither of us were very clear about the exact roads to take, but we rested in the knowledge that all roads lead to Lorinna, and that awareness brings joy wherever you look.



We arrived and snuggled into bed in the purple house just as the rain started falling on the tin roof. The next morning we leisurely waited for people to arrive before starting on any tasks, it was a handy excuse that we needed direction, so you can picture us doing yoga, eating porridge, drinking cups of tea and lapping up Lorinna sunshine. Anna arrived around lunchtime and the three of us took stock of the working bee. The rules of engagement seemed to be: planning together creates cohesion and direction, letting go of expectations allows space for spontaneity, and the kettle must always be on!

We visited our retreatant Andrea who had been working really hard around the centre. We discovered she was studying teachers from the same lineage as Khandro-la so it seemed a perfect situation to have her presence prepare Dorje Ling for the Easter retreat. Not only that but between the four of us the place got a good hit of female strength and energy! Anna, Kate and myself got busy in the garden, and we spent the weekend weeding and mulching the gompa garden, mulching the main garden with manure and pea straw Anna had been squirreling away, fixing the possum-proof fence after a certain whipper snipper accident (!!), and creating a large spiral-shaped garden for flowers, vegies, whatever!

Of course, there was always time for a cup of tea and some chocolate and story telling.

As always it was wonderfully restorative to be up at Dorje Ling, and putting energy into the land. It was equally joyful to be with such strong and inspiring women, people whom I look to with respect and almost anticipation, seeing the wisdom they have embraced in the course of their lives, and feeling the support of our spiritual community.

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha: three legs of the tripod. And in the case of the latter, we've got it going on!

- Chani

TENTS4PEACE

Assist us to overcome the terror of poverty through sponsorship.

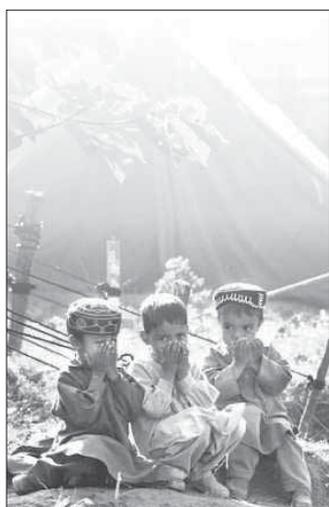
The 'Tents4Peace' Project was initiated by Anna Crotty and Ann Giblin in response to the devastation caused by the earthquakes in Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2005. Eventually 1060 tents, distributed by the Fred Hollows Foundation, were provided for people made homeless in the earthquake. Some were later used as makeshift hospitals and schools. Thousands of lives were saved by donations from ordinary Australians, many of whom generously gave beyond their means.



Tents4Peace are currently constructing housing for these children, (many of whom are orphaned), and for some widowed mothers. Widows have no status in Afghanistan.

Sponsor a child or widow for \$35 a month

The Tents4Peace sponsorship program pairs every child/widow sponsor with an individual child/widow BUT your monthly contributions do so much more than helping a single child/widow.



Combined with the gifts of other sponsors, your gift helps to improve the quality of life of the whole community in which your sponsored child or widow lives. In this way your sponsorship will give the child or widow a real sense of contribution and interconnectedness with the people who form part of their community. It is a reciprocal arrangement between child/widow and community and leads to independence and self sufficiency in the long term.

We have now approximately 50 widows and children who need immediate and urgent sponsorship before Tents4Peace can relocate them back to Afghanistan from the dreadful conditions in the refugee camps of Peshawar in Pakistan. These children and their mothers have been through so much and, as one widow told Tents4Peace:

"Each day I wake up and it brings me one day closer to seeing my homeland if you good people help me and my three daughters. Before I used to wake up and my heart was STONE, now I have hope." - Widow from the Nasir Bagh Camp Pakistan January 2007.

Please assist us in the sponsorship of these traumatised women and children whose only hope is our promise.

If you decide to sponsor, Tents4Peace will provide you with information on your sponsored child/widow, such as photograph, information on their situation and history, opportunity and guidelines for your ongoing relationship, and ongoing report of the child/widow development.

Please see www.tents4peace.com or annacrotty@yahoo.com.au or phone 03 6234 7427 for more information.

ALL FUNDS DONATED OR RAISED GO DIRECTLY AND COMPLETELY INTO TENTS 4 PEACE PROJECTS.



ANNA IN AFGHANISTAN WITH A LOCAL WOMAN AND LOCAL CHILDREN

RETREAT WITH KHANDRO THRLINLAY CHODRON

Attending Easter retreat with Khandro Thrinlay Chodron was a very precious Dharma treat for myself, and, I am sure, for all others who attended this heart warming and spiritually uplifting four day teaching. Khandro-la spoke many times during her visit to Tasmania of her desire to touch and open the hearts of those who make connection with her, and she certainly achieved this over the four days at Dorje Ling with her generous and delightful openness and clarity in sharing her understanding and experience in the Tibetan Buddhist Path.



There were many highlights on this retreat, moments that lifted us from the mundane to a deep connection with the spiritually healing energy that is ever present at Dorje Ling. Khandro-la's experience in living and studying in the West enabled her to speak in a readily accessible manner, bringing the often seemingly mystical and 'foreign' Tibetan Yogic Traditions into the lived experience of the here and now. Khandro-la inspired us with stories of the famed Tibetan Yogi Milarepa and gave us instruction in a short daily Tara practice. Khandro-la blessed us with her beautiful singing voice as she shared inspirational songs and practices that have been passed down to her through her family since childhood. Khandro-la also talked in depth about the feminine and masculine qualities

that live within us all, and how we can best nurture and cultivate these qualities in ways that create peace and harmony, rather than harm and destruction.



A candle light offering for the dead was held on Friday night in honour of Khandro-la's late husband, His Holiness the IXth Shabdrung of Bhutan and for all others who had lost friends and loved ones. With Khandro-la's gift for spontaneous, profound teachings, this offering became a pointing out instruction on the nature of mind. Khandro-

la also used her skills in psychotherapeutic techniques on this retreat, inviting participants to connect with their own psychic wounds through an exploration of forgiveness, using the example of Milarepa as inspiration and guide. This exercise was deeply moving and healing for many of us, providing the means to a genuine opening and softening of the heart.

Above all else I would have to say that this retreat was one of the most fun and joyful that I have ever experienced. Music, laughter and delicious food (thank you Guy) were ever present and the children delighted us with an evening performance in the Zen Garden. Spontaneous Tara Dancing followed a traditional fire puja, complete with the raising of Prayer Flags across the grassed area in order to bring prosperity and blessings to Dorje Ling – I am sure all who were there would agree that this was an amazing feat of ingenuity and co-operation!



It was refreshing to feel the children as an integral part of this retreat experience and Khandro-la expressed a wish that more children be present when she returns to run another retreat next year.

The most poignant moment for me was when, at the final gathering during which we were all invited to express a wish from the heart as a final blessing, four year old Finn, grandson of Anna Crotty, after careful consideration, announced with heartfelt sincerity "I wish that this was our home because it is so lovely here."

- Diane Pitman

Special thanks to Anna Crotty for hosting Khandro-la and her brother Jigme as well as organising the Hobart teachings and Dorje Ling retreat. Anna was also instrumental in looking after the kids at Dorje Ling and making them feel so at home.

Thanks as well to Sue Willey and Diane Pitman for helping Khandro-la during her stay at Dorje Ling.

- Editor

TARCHIN HEARN RETURNING IN OCTOBER

Tarchin Hearn will be visiting Tasmania again later this year.

The exact details of this visit, which will be from the 17th of September until the 8th of October, are still a work in progress but he will present an urban retreat on the general theme of 'Dharma Straight from the Heart.' Exploring profundity and practicality wherever we find ourselves this will run over 2 weeks involving roughly part of a weekend, 2 evenings per week and a Saturday morning. It promises to be an opportunity to integrate our dharma aspirations into the nitty gritty of family and work life.



TARCHIN HEARN

There are other ideas for workshops, so watch this space for further details. Ideas being mooted at the moment include: 'Facing the class and caring for yourself,' specifically for educators; 'between denial and despair,' being active and staying sane; and walks on the mountain.

Margaret Steadman

MY MOTHER (BY TARCHIN HEARN)

(written 17 days before she died)

Her hands

Lying on the white sheet.

Bony, shrunken flesh

A skeletal form.

Skin soft like velvet or the surface of a young rose petal moments after the last drops of night dew have evaporated.

So warm, pouring out heat like a star going nova.

So fragile, blotchy and veined.

A recording of a hundred billion touchings.

Tools of such knowledge.

Drawing, and building,

and grasping, and healing,

and loving, and defending,

and holding, and steadying,

and guiding, and enquiring,

and picking, and scratching,

and pleasuring, and offering,

and comforting.

Washing clothes and dishes and houses;

preparing tens of thousands of meals;

popping in thermometers and putting on bandages;

driving cars and counting money.

Holding pens and pencils

and books

and musical instruments

and hammers and screwdrivers

and saws and secateurs.

Eighty-four years of constant handling,

servants of knowing

— an inconceivably vast journey of becoming

now resting on a clean white sheet.

Amazing these hands

leading into thin arms and even thinner bony body.

This flower of the universe entering the last chapter of visible existence.

All our lives we hold back something.

And now in the last supper of our days

We begin to loosen, and prepare to give everything,

to flow, to bend, to let go into this streaming of mystery.

Mum, I gaze on you —the you in my mind —

and merge with myriad tributaries of contemplation.

Your soft, hot, bony, pain filled body.

Your suchness — immeasurable weaving of planet unfolding

and histories of people,

Curiosity manifest in human form.

Determination to endure

I feel your suchness as part of my own streaming is-ness

Together with everyone

let's release into all that is beauty and vast

This creative, flowing, loving of all that is.

**IF YOU ARE
INTERESTED IN
OR HAVE IDEAS
REGARDING THE
WORKSHOP FOR
EDUCATORS PLEASE
CONTACT PAMELA
MEARS ON 6234 8766**



HOUSE IN SOUTH HOBART.

Do you or someone you know of want to sell some land or a house in South Hobart or Waterworks Rd, Dynnyrne? Or would you like a home there yourself? Or would you like to split your own home into two?

Kirsten Mayer is a sangha member who would love to create a home which is very environmentally friendly in South Hobart or Waterworks Rd. Ideally, the home would also be good for the community, maybe with a community garden or even another private co-housing? So much better if created with some fellow Buddhists and friends! Please call Kirsten Mayer on 0413 535 950 if you have any ideas or interest.

MAURICE OLIVER RETREAT AT TARA NIVAS

The Tara Nivas retreat on the weekend 9-12 March was a perfect blend of good teachings and good company, in a lovely environment Maurice Oliver guided meditations and discussions on the Heart Sutra, and the ceaseless and futile search to find the Self in mind and body.

Zasep Rinpoche's way of teaching has strongly influenced Maurice who somehow communicates Rinpoche's kindness and sense of humour along with his own clear analysis of the great teachings.

The peaceful surroundings helped to build calm, and many of us felt we had made very good progress in our understanding of the Heart Sutra.

A kind and generous group made for good company at the end of each day, including Kirsten Mayer's parents who showed a wonderful open-mindedness in embracing a new view of the world. Guy's brilliant cooking was one of the high points of the weekend. A big thank you from the Darwin visitor to the group.

- Amanda Buckley

Maurice's Koonya retreat went really well. Thanks to Maurice for the great teachings. People commented how they were really illuminated by his teachings, and I felt the same! Thanks to Guy too for the awesome food. We had 16 attendees including my parents who enjoyed themselves immensely. They were absolutely showered with warmth and love from the Sangha. Thank you all so much on their behalf.



I forgot to thank all the participants at the time for coming along and making it so wonderful. Sharing time with the Sangha is like lying back on a bed of the softest down cushions: ever so warm, so delicate and soft, and so delightfully relaxing! What a wonderful bunch of people you all are!

- Kirsten Mayer



Thank you to everyone for such a lovely retreat. A perfect balance of natural beauty, teachings, silence, dawn light, yoga, being cooked for, resting, laughing and hanging out with the nicest bunch of kindred spirits. Now that is a holiday. More of them I say. Thanks everyone.

- Kate McNicol

Echoing Kirsten, Kate and Amanda's comments about the Koonya retreat with Maurice: it's all true! It was a timely reminder of "effort while relaxed" and also just how tough that cushion can be on my busy brain! It looks like we

will be able to tuck away about \$1000 into the Dorje Ling funds as proceeds from the re-treat. Doubly good.

- Keith O'Hara

PEACE TO ALL BEINGS

The following was one of the practices that Sonia Moriceau used during her program in Tasmania.

Peace to all beings,
may all beings be well and happy and free from fear.

Peace to all beings,
whether near or far, whether known or unknown,
real or imaginary, visible or invisible,
born or yet to be born,
may all beings be well and happy and free from fear.

Peace to all beings,
within and beyond the imaginations,
in the world of ideas,
in the world of memories,
and in the world of dreams,
may all beings be well and happy and free from fear.

Peace in all elements,
of earth and air and fire and water,

fulfilled in space,
peace,
peace in all universes, from the smallest
cells in the body,
to the greatest galaxies in space,
peace and light rising.

Peace to all beings
within each being here,
those beings that are of the past,
and those that are yet to be in the future,
may all beings be well and happy and free from fear.

Peace and love and comfort and ease to all those in
need,
may they all be well and happy and free from fear.

John Garrie Roshi

More teachings and information about Sonia can be found at www.soniamoriceau.org



Sonia Moriceau

SONIA MORICEAU

Where does emotion come from? How do they relate to the elements?

Early in 2007 Sonia Moriceau gave a weekend workshop in Hobart. It was a wonderful workshop on letting go through the power of presence. Following this, I attended her 2 week retreat at Wangapeka, New Zealand. The benefits of the learnings have been profound for me personally and for my work as a complementary health therapist, coach and organisational facilitator. However, rather than talk about my experiences, I have selected some paragraphs from the notes I took at Wangapeka, in the hope that you can gain a taste of the quality and depth of Sonia's teachings. And the good news is, if you didn't get to see her this time she would like to come back in late January, early February 2009.



SONIA AND SUE

Here are some notes below and my humbles apologies to Sonia and also to the readers if at times my notes taking has at times not been adequate. In fact, it may be easier to read them as separate paragraphs.

Emotion is a thought in motion. Mind in movement. Where mind is coming from.

The aim is to look directly at awareness as it is experiencing emotion, not at the self experiencing it. You drop the thinker and the self. There is just awareness. There is no - one, but there is awareness. So if you use your mind to focus directly on the awareness, the thoughts and emotions drop off and there is luminosity. You have to ground, work with all the elements (water, earth, fire, air, space), so that e.g. when you mediating on space you are alert, not day dreaming or ungrounded. Have all your 'ingredients' (water, earth, fire, air, etc) in the right proportion (i.e. the elements in balance) so you can study the mind and begin to realise its emptiness. (A definition of an Arahat is someone who has all the elements in balance and can maintain them that way).

You will be no wiser in terms of your "embodiment" by reading 1,000 books. You have to do the work in the bod. Insight brings you to 'how did a thought start in the body' i.e. with which element did it start? An emotion will be triggered by an imbalance in one of the elements. So track your thoughts back to the actual trigger - the thought/feeling - then to the actual sensation in the body. At that level we can work with the raw sensation in the body, and that is where change is lasting. These are all tools towards the insights of the mind as emptiness. When we "achieve" that we see the thoughts/emotions as not really existing.

When a big "issue" arises for you, your buttons are being pushed, what element is getting out of hand. Notice your button being pushed and through mindfulness of the elements you don't feed it so strongly for so long. Anger is not anger. It does not exist. We all have a totally different experience of it. It is just "fire". So how do we channel it usefully?

Anger is something that shoots up and out suddenly even when we try to squash it. Similarly, in Europe, dandelions shoot up through the pavement cracks, often despite all attempts to eradicate them. Do we say the dandelion is angry? No. Yet it is using the same energy, the same power, to find a tiny crack to shoot out. The energy is energy - used for growing or used for destruction, it is the same energy. If it was not allowed to come out/be expressed it would shrivel.

In us, when energy is not used, we can become 'bonsai.' You can see repressed bonsai energy in people who are trying to stop it coming out. The energy can be used skillfully as wrath to "cut through" unhelpful patterns/habits/thoughts. This is very different than using anger. You can make real changes through really developing the tools to do this.

If the aspiration is truly to benefit others, you cannot do it with anger in your being. To really do this, I have to let go of what I think of as anger, and use the energy of fire. But you need to carry this through into everything you do. It means not kicking the cat or squashing mosquitoes. The vows support in this aspiration.

When someone comes into your life with more fire, the element that they are in at that moment is not compatible with your element at that moment. Rather than thinking, I don't like them because the element is affecting your body in a way that is not helpful, can you adapt by being more earthed, more grounded while you are around that person. This is an example of skillfully working with the emotions through awareness of the elements.

When you work with the elements you heal old issues at a deeper level, even though you thought you'd let go.

So, begin observing ...

Note how you feel on a day of absence of fire, e.g. it's raining. How is the element of a particular day affecting you? Each of the elements will have an effect, for example, on a hot day you may need more water and air elements to keep the body/mind in balance or it will get sluggish. Also the food you eat on a particular day will affect your balance of the elements and therefore how you respond to the words and deeds of others.

I have come away from the retreat more aware of the effects of particular food and weather patterns on my body, mind and emotions. There really isn't any body home. Just the elements ... and awareness.

- Sue Gregory

For further information and enquiries about Sonia or to be added to Sue's mailing list please phone 0419 1197 44.