TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

We are very delighted to know that a new institute of Tibetan religion and culture ‘Ligmincha Institute’ has been established in Virginia, U.S.A. through dedicated efforts of Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche with spiritual guidance from Kyabje Menri Trizin Lungtog Tenpai Nyima and the Most Venerable Lopon Tenzin Namdak of Menri Monastery, Dolanji, India. We recognize the establishment of this institute as an important step towards the preservation and promotion of Tibetan religion and culture in general and the ancient Tibetan tradition of Bön in particular.

The Bön tradition is an undisputed and important known source of the Tibetan cultural heritage, and has always remained an integral part of Tibetan life for over two millennia. Today it is one of the five major religious traditions of Tibet striving for survival after the unprecedented national tragedy of Tibet in 1959. Like four other traditions, the Bön tradition has been able to re-establish its main seat, Menri Monastery, and continue its traditional study program in exile.

Nevertheless, ever since it became a less known tradition and its followers became a minority group within Tibetan society, the Bön tradition has virtually been surviving as the most endangered religious tradition of Tibet. We are therefore greatly indebted to all those who contributed to the survival of the Bön tradition.

Today when there is growing worldwide interest in the spiritual traditions of Tibet, the Bön tradition is being rediscovered, not only as a profound indigenous tradition of Tibet, but also as an authentic source of many traditional sciences and histories of Tibet.

In view of the above facts, the establishment of the Ligmincha Institute is a timely need for Bön and Tibetan culture at large under the current circumstances. We therefore recommend by this letter to all who are concerned to kindly provide all assistance and cooperation that may be necessary in the fulfillment of the aims and objectives of the Ligmincha Institute.

Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, the President and Director of the Institute, who graduated as Geshe in 1986 from the Bönpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji, India, is a highly qualified master in the Bön tradition and in general Tibetan studies. Due recognition given to Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche as a qualified master of Bön and Tibetan studies will also be highly appreciated.
condensed these teachings into a seven-year program of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzog Chen, which takes into consideration the needs of the Western student—all the while maintaining the purity of these teachings.

In Bön—Sutra, Tantra, and Dzog Chen are widely practiced. Also of importance though, are the healing arts and ceremonial practices for both the dead and the living. Therefore the Institute will teach the ‘Southern Treasure of the Nine Ways of Bön’ which includes the indigenous teachings.

These traditional native teachings are in danger of becoming extinct if not cultivated. The Bön teachings have remained more isolated than the philosophical teachings of Buddhism. Therefore their careful preservation is something on which I place the highest value.

Tenzin Rinpoche is from the first group of Geshes graduated from the Bön Dialectic School. There he had a number of years of experience teaching and in administrative work. During that time he was president of the school for a number of years, instituting programs still in effect today. Since his childhood he has shown a special ability in Dzog Chen meditative practice, as well as a keen understanding of Western ways. Therefore I confidently support the Ligmincha Institute and look forward to all forms of collaboration.

Yoga, Art, and Joy of Collaboration

This past September a Yantra Yoga retreat and a celebration of the performing arts in Richmond brought together members of Ligmincha Institute and the Dzogchen Community of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche for a weekend of practice and collaborative art. Ligmincha Institute invited Michael Katz to come down from New York City to teach a weekend of Norbu Rinpoche’s Yantra Yoga. At the same time, Cheryl Pallant had organized what she called “To Take Place: A Sunset Celebration” at the fountain lake in Byrd park. She invited dancers, musician, poets, painters, and all manner of performing artists. As luck would have it, she had invited our dear vajra brother, Chuck Stein, from Barrytown New York, as well as Anthony Curtis and a band of drummers from Ligmincha. Ligmincha Institute hosted our vajra brothers from the North for a weekend.

Michael Katz, instructed a small but dedicated group at Ligmincha on Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. Although some of us had been lucky enough to be instructed earlier by Fabio Andrico at Tsegyalgar and by Tom Garnett in Washington, as a group we were not very accomplished at this vigorous moving yoga. Yantra Yoga is based on the instructions Vairocana wrote in the eighth century and transmitted in an unbroken lineage to Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and his students in our time. The goal of Yantra is to find oneself in the natural state by doing movements that harmonize one’s breath, body, and mind. Michael instructed us in Tsigjong, which helps to activate the joints, in Lung Sang, which purifies the prana, in T sadul, which activates the channels and chakras, and in the basic asanas. It was a strenuous weekend. We moved and stretched our stiff muscles; we breathed according to the sequences of movements;
we shouted “HA” and kicked or threw our fists. Sometimes we fell over, and sometimes we laughed when we should have been holding our breaths. We sweated and laughed quite a lot as we attempted the difficult moves and sequences. In regulating our energies, we found that we entered a state of great bliss and clarity that made us value these great teachings and our chance to collaborate with our friends from the Dzogchen Community.

The Sunset Celebration drew several hundred spectators (and a handful of Dzogchen practitioners) to the lake at Byrd park. It seemed a wonderful choice to hold the event at the lake, because the spectators strolled around the lake in kind of natural circumnambulation, some going clockwise, some counterclockwise. There were many dancers, some doing contact improvisation in groups of two to five. There were puppeteers playing guitar in dog suits for children. There were many musical groups. Chuck Stein and Anthony Curtis performed together, Chuck doing spontaneous sound poetry as Anthony improvised electric guitar counterpoint. Anthony’s guitar styles ranged from Bach to Buck to Beethoven and even Jimmy Hendrix. Chuck spoke unknown languages, sometimes screaming and exhorting, sometimes cajoling and charming his listeners—to do what, they had no idea. A group including Michael Katz and Victor Tornico that varied from three to four to nearly twenty accompanied them with tabla, drums, gongs, and other percussion instruments in true tribal fashion. Many onlookers joined in. I wish you all could have been there. At the end of the event, as it got dark and all the other performers left the area, this group continued to play and dance, unwilling to let the group collaboration end too soon. All of us who spent the weekend together found ourselves learning again how important—how inspiring collaboration among individuals can be. We especially look forward to working with our vajra brothers and sisters in the Dzogchen community whenever the opportunity presents itself. A la la ho.

— Joan Kalyan-Curtis

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**Tibetan Studies Conference Held in Fagernes, Norway**

The sixth conference of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) was convened at the scenic resort of Fagernes, Norway on August 21st through 28th, 1992. The conference was organized by Professor Per Kvaerne, a leading European scholar of Bonpo studies, on behalf of the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo, Norway, and the Norwegian Committee for Tibet. Scholars of Tibetan Studies came from many countries of Europe, from the United States, as well as from several countries of Asia: India, Japan, China, and even Tibet itself. Many interesting papers were presented by about 180 scholars attending the conference and their papers covered many different areas relating to Tibet, including philosophy, religion, literature, ancient and modern history, anthropology, social studies, art, linguistics, geography, and ecology. Plenary sessions were held in the mornings and parallel sessions for more specialized fields in the afternoons. Members of the Tibet Committee opened the conference with native Tibetan folk songs and dances.

Through the efforts of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche in collaboration with Dr. Samten Karmay, a meeting of all scholars interested in Bon studies was held in a separate session during the conference. This meeting was chaired by Professor A-M. Blondeau of Paris. Tibetologists in attendance reported on their current and future researches into the traditions and history of Bon. In this way, it became possible for the various scholars working in the field of Bon studies to be aware of each other’s current projects and research. Moreover, the prospect of future collaboration among scholars in this field was established. In the order of their reports, the scholars attending this meeting were: Dr. Samten Karmay (France), Prof. Per Kvaerne (Norway), Prof. Michael Aris (England), Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche (USA), Geshe Namgyal Nyima (India), Inger Olsensorn (Sweden), Dr. Krystyna Cech (England), Prof. Tadasu Mitsushima (Japan), Dr. Michael Walter (USA), Dr. Mireille Helffer (France), Prof. Tsering Thar (Italy), Dr. Alice Egred (Hungary), Dr. Andrea Loseries (Austria), Dr. Daniel Martin (Israel), Dr. Charles Ramble (France), M. Robert May (England), Dr. Roger Greatrex (Sweden), Dr. Hildegard Demberger (Austria), Dr. Géza Bethlenfalvy (Hungary), Prof. John Reynolds (USA), Dr. Giacomella Orofino (Italy), Dr. Rohit Vohra (Luxembourg), Prof. Katsumi Mimmaki (Japan), Prof. Janet Gyatso (USA), Dr. Donatella Rossi (Italy), Dr. Ayako Sakakane (Japan), and Prof. Anne Marie Blondeau (France).

It is evident that the interest in Bon studies is growing. At the fourth conference of IATS held at Munich, Germany there were less than fifteen persons attending the special Bon studies meeting and very few papers were given on topics relating to Bon. At the fifth conference held at Narita, Japan there was no session at all for Bon studies, and again, very few papers. However, more than thirty scholars attended the special session at Fagernes. The Religion Session on Thursday afternoon was devoted
Dzogchen Teachings at the Allenwood Correctional Center in Pennsylvania

On the 10th and 11th of June I had the good fortune of accompanying Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche to the Federal Prison Camp (FPC) at Allenwood, Pennsylvania where he presented two days of Dzogchen teachings and practices to a unique group of practitioners.

Upon our arrival at the Allenwood FPC we were warmly greeted by Ms. Elizabeth Thurman, a young Afro-American woman, who is currently one of the chaplains at this institution. She leads religious services, acts as a spiritual counselor and serves as a religious coordinator for the ten or more different denominations that are active in Allenwood. We were told that from the total inmate population of about nine hundred at this institution, different spiritual faiths conducted organized teachings and practices that varied in size from several hundred Protestant Christians, to eight or ten Buddhists and native Americans. Ms. Thurman was extremely helpful in arranging these teachings and showed a genuine warmth and interest in both the teachings and in being of help to the inmates. This was demonstrated not only by words but by the fact that the teachings were given in an old church on the grounds normally off-limits to the inmates. Thus in order for the teachings to be given she was required to be present with the group and away from her normal working office. In very many ways, without her warm support, these teachings would not have been possible.

The physical setting of the Allenwood FPC appeared much as any typical two-year college campus. There were numerous low brick dormitories, a gymnasium, playing fields, other larger study and work buildings, and vast lawns, all set in the beautiful rolling hills of western Pennsylvania. Because Allenwood is at the lowest level of security within the

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Federal prison system, the Allenwood camp has no walls or fences. All the constraints for the inmates exist therefore only at the mental level. One’s behavior is conditioned by the knowledge that other prisons allow less freedom and that any attempted escape will result in an automatic three months to one year extension in sentence time. It is interesting that at this camp inmates had been convicted primarily of non-violent mental crimes. We were told that over sixty percent of the inmates were doing time for drug related crimes with sentences of five years or less.

Although the first impression of the Allenwood FPC is one of openness and freedom, as we remained there, it became more apparent how regulated and controlled the conditions were. Everywhere aspects of regulation and limitation differed from what one experiences in ordinary daily life. Ranging from the principal limitation that no one could leave the grounds to smaller details regarding getting up, eating, working, and places of walking, all aspects of life were very tightly regulated. This loss of freedom seemed to generate frustration and internal anger. There were few acceptable outlets other than sports and negative talk. In this unique setting, how much one’s “outlook” is determined and influenced by one’s “state of mind” was very clearly presented.

In this situation it was striking to hear Tenzin W angyal Rinpoche present the D zogchen teaching of self-liberation to the eight inmates who had made the necessary arrangements to attend this two-day retreat. Immediately upon meeting the individuals I was struck by just how “normal” everyone was in their external appearance. Somehow, in my mind, I must have been expecting some kind of slow, dumb, thick human who would exhibit obvious signs of hostile behavior. This was not the situation at all. Everyone appeared just the same as anyone else who would come to a retreat of this nature. They all had a high degree of intelligence and social understanding and seemed just like very normal people who had somehow been caught up in some behavior unacceptable to the society in which they lived. In this prison setting the group have begun to follow the Buddhist teachings, principally those of the Dzogchen master Namkhai N orbu Rinpoche, under the guidance of one of his long-time students who had found himself caught up in this particular situation. They were particularly honored to have a master such as Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche come to teach them directly.

As most of the group were new or recent to the D zogchen teachings, T enzin W angyal Rinpoche emphasized the foundational preliminary practices used to create a solid base upon which to work with the Dzogchen perspective. During the teaching sessions on the first day a detailed presentation on the basic practice of the “Short Meditation Session in Six Parts” was given to provide the group with a firm group practice. In between the teachings T enzin W angyal Rinpoche had a private conference with each participant providing them with the time for more personal instruction.

In the evening after the teachings one of the group who works in the woodshop, where furniture is built to sell to government offices, was able to construct the sticks and mount the white symbol that T enzin W angyal Rinpoche had brought for them. Thus the second morning’s teaching was devoted to the concentration practice of fixation upon the white symbol. After the practice was explained it was then applied in several sessions. We then were able to lunch with the group in the facility dining hall where the food was quite good, including a fresh salad bar as well as a hot food service.

After completing the remaining private interviews T enzin W angyal Rinpoche used the teaching session to eloquently present an overview of the Dzogchen teachings as the path to self-liberation and how this “liberation” could be applied even in situations...
such as this prison camp with all its oppressive confinement. He pointed out that our condition and circumstances are always limited whether we choose to recognize this or not; despite the fact that we normally feel that our self-chosen limitations are better than those society or life imposes upon us.

One of the most interesting aspects of this teaching was Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche’s comparison of his life and living situation at the monastery where he was trained with that of the inmates’ life and living situation at this prison. He told them how his life in the monastery had also been very regulated and constrained and filled from morning to night rules and procedures. In comparison, he pointed out, the actual physical environment at the camp was superior to the food and housing conditions of the monastery. While acknowledging that the very important aspect of freedom of choice was lacking, still working with the realities of the situation, one could choose to either be resentful and resist the situation (the seemingly dominant mode of expression at the prison), or one could try to find some ways to use the situation advantageously. If a shift in mental outlook could be generated, then it could be possible to see the positive part of this outer-imposed “retreat” from the ordinary pressures of life and to turn it into an opportunity to practice these teachings upon the spiritual path of self-liberation.

In fact it seems that many of this group of inmate practitioners are doing just that. Currently they meet for group practice five nights a week for an hour, and many are doing other basic practices in their free time in the evenings. It seemed that for several of them these teachings were almost some sort of “life line” that would help to prevent them from drowning in the sea of prison life.

This attitude contrasts with that of many Dzogchen practitioners I know who, distracted and pressed by time, find it hard to practice even once a week. In many ways it was inspiring to see how inmates were applying the teachings under less than ideal conditions. Many inmates were ripe for the teachings, insofar as they could realize that they are now paying a high price for what might be described as particular self-generated circular behavior patterns. They demonstrated a genuine openness and receptivity for the teachings. Insights now have the opportunity to generate positive changes in their lives.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche’s visit to the Allenwood FPC seemed like a breath of fresh air to the inmates and an inspiration in reaffirming that someone “out there” cared. It also seemed beneficial to their status as a seriously practicing religious group, that might have been misunderstood and undervalued in comparison with the more mainstream denominations. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche made an excellent impression upon the religious coordinator of the prison and established a base for further Dzogchen teachings there. He was also able to establish a channel for providing Dzogchen teaching materials (books, tapes, videos, etc.) to be sent to this group of practitioners. These teachings, we may hope, will benefit the retreatants and those undergoing similar forced retreats from “normal” living.

— Pūruchā Ananda

1993 Summer Retreat—First Year of the Seven Year Program

A. Introduction to the First Year Program
B. Teaching and Practice Schedule
C. Teacher
D. Retreat Dates and Daily Schedule
E. Tibetan Language Class
F. Reading List
G. Fees, Pre-Registration, and Final Registration
H. Attendance at the Summer Program
I. Location of the Retreat
J. Lodging

A. Introduction to the First Year Program

The Ligmincha Institute and its staff is pleased to announce the first summer retreat. Attendance in this program is open to all interested individuals at two levels of participation: (a) a certificate training program for which regular attendance is expected and also the completion of written examinations, and (b) a non-certificate program where attendance may be more intermittent and for which no written examination is required.

Although the principal focus and emphasis of the seven year program is the study of the theory and practice of Dzogchen, the preliminary study of the Sutra system in Bon and Buddhism provides a necessary foundation for the higher teachings of Tantra and Dzogchen. However, out of the vast body of Sutra teachings only that material which is useful and applicable to the conditions of Western life will be emphasized. This includes the psychology of the states of consciousness and the philosophical critique of our distorted and erroneous views of reality. This material provides us with a basic vocabulary to discuss the mind and its operations at various levels, and also a critical method for eliminating our wrong ideas concerning the nature of reality.

Although the primordial natural state of Dzogchen has been present at the core of our being since the very beginning, it has been overshadowed and obscured by certain adventitious obscurations. These obscurations are both emotional and intellectual, and because of the obscurations we do not recognize our inherent enlightened nature. The study and practice of the Sutra system provides the methodology for removing these layers of obscurations. Once these clouds are dissolved and removed, we can dwell in the presence of the sunlight of the natural state of Dzogchen.

This retreat will provide an opportunity for serious students to complete their Ngondro practice. The Ngondro
or preliminaries is optional but it provides a firm foundation for more advanced meditation practices and for our spiritual practice in general.

**B. Teaching and Practice Schedule**

The teachings presented in the first summer program all belong to the Sutra system of Bön and Buddhism and they provide the foundation for the higher teachings and practices of Tantra and Dzogchen. Although one does not have to be first a Sutra practitioner when practicing Dzogchen, the Sutra teachings provide us with a basic vocabulary to talk about the mind and how it works.

From June 11 to June 29 the philosophical concepts (Grub-mtha'), regarding the ultimate nature of reality according to the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools are examined. These philosophies provide a radical critique of our distorted common view of the world and help to purify our minds at the conceptual level, eliminating our wrong views regarding the substantial nature of reality. The evening meditation practice will focus on applying the insights of Vaibhashika and Sautrantika in our meditation.

From July 2 to July 23 the teaching will focus on the basic psychology (D√blo-rig), of Bön and Buddhism which represents a phenomenology of consciousness, a precise description of states of consciousness and how they dynamically interrelate. Again the evening meditation sessions will reflect the meditation practices of the Sutra system, including shamatha or zhine or calm abiding, and vipashyana or higher insight. Certificate students will be given written tests midterm and at the conclusion of the (Grub-mtha') and (D√blo-rig) courses of studies.

From July 25 to August 10 the teachings will deal with the first two causal ways among the Nine Ways of Bön according to the Southern Treasures system. The practices considered here include divination, astrological calculation, soul retrieval, healing rituals, and the various ways of relating to nature spirits. These causal ways represent the shamanic side of Bön which pertains to working with energies at the worldly level. This is the first time these shamanic methods have been taught in the West. It is planned to invite some shamanic Native American Indian practitioners to perform their ceremonies at this time because of the close relationship of Bön with Native American traditions.

**C. Teachers**

The resident Lama Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, his teacher Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, and Khenpo Nima Wangyal Rinpoche will be the instructors during the first year of the seven year program at the 1993 retreat. Also, we plan to invite different teachers from India and Nepal to teach during subsequent years of the seven year program. Within a few years time, we hope that some of the Sutra material will be taught by the senior students who have been previously trained.

**D. Retreat Dates and Daily Schedule**

**Retreat Dates**

June 10—Final registration and fee payment (9:00 am-4:30 pm) and settling in during the day with the inaugural address at 5:00 pm

June 11-29—(Grub-mtha', philosophy teachings) A systematic analysis of our conventional and erroneous ideas concerning reality

June 30-July 1—Break

July 2-23—(D√blo-rig, psychology teachings) Examination of various states of consciousness and their contents

July 24—Break

July 25-August 10—(Phywa-gshen) and (shàng-gshen) Teachings on the first two causal ways of Bön, the indigenous and shamanic teachings of Tibet concerning nature spirits and healing

August 11—Ganapuja and conclusion

**Daily Schedule**

6:30-7:30 am—Early morning practice: zhine meditation, space meditation, and contemplation (rigpa)

7:30-8:00 am—Breakfast

8:00-9:30 am—Morning teaching

9:30-10:00 am—Tea break

10:00-11:30 am—Meditation practice: Ngondro or preliminary practices, and other forms of individual meditation practices

12:00-1:00 pm—Lunch

1:00-3:00 pm—Free time: Rest, individual study

3:00-4:30 pm—Afternoon teaching

4:30-5:00 pm—Tea break

5:00-6:30 pm—Tibetan language, or preliminary, or independent study, or a time when people can meet and share experiences

7:00-8:00 pm—Dinner
8:00-9:00 pm—Evening Practice: Meditation related to the teachings where the emphasis is on meditations related to the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika teachings, and the practices will vary from day to day.

E. Tibetan Language Class

There will be the opportunity to attend a class in the Tibetan language and its literature during the summer retreat. Such classes, which are optional, would be both for the beginner and the advanced student. If you would be interested in attending such a class please let the staff of the Institute know in advance. For those interested in how to pronounce practices in Tibetan, the opportunity will be provided at the retreat.

F. Reading List

Although study materials translated from the Tibetan texts of the Bönpo tradition will be made available for students of the summer retreats, the following books may be purchased and studied in advance of the retreat. This preparation is highly recommended and will make your studies more meaningful and less hectic at the retreat.

(1) For the (b) Knowledge and Liberation, by Geshe Lhundup Sopa, Snow Lion; especially pp. 11-74 and pp. 75-146.

(2) For the (b) Knowledge and Liberation, by Geshe Lhundup Sopa, Snow Lion; pp. 11-74 and pp. 75-146.

(3) For the shamanic teachings of Bön found among the Nine Ways of Bön, please read:

- The Nine Ways of Bön, by David Snellgrove, Shambhala; the first two chapters on (S Nang-ghsen Teg-pa) and (sNang-ghsen Teg-pa).

G. Fees, Pre-Registration, and Final Registration

A two-tiered fee schedule follows:

- For the entire two-month stay the fee is one thousand, eight hundred U.S. dollars ($1,800) per person.
- For a stay of less than two months the fee is forty U.S. dollars ($40) per day per person.

The fee includes the teachings, lodging, three meals per day, handouts, additional speakers, plus coffee, tea and snacks during the breaks.

One third of the total fee is payable upon pre-registration which closes sixty days prior to the retreat on April 10, 1993. This one-third fee of six hundred dollars ($600), along with a completed pre-registration form, should arrive at the Institute by April 10, 1993. Pre-registration forms are available of material that the student has missed. Everyone is encouraged to call the Institute from time to time to discover what programs and activities are available.

There is no provision to offer the seven year program only by correspondence, because transmission can only take place in the context of face to face encounter between teacher and student. But once personal contact has been made with the teacher, then arrangements can be made for independent study. In such a case, the student’s program will be worked out on an individual basis in consultation with the teacher.

No one should feel that she or he is too old or ill-prepared educationally for this seven year program. In actual fact, the program is only fourteen months extending over a seven year period: four months of Sutra studies, four months of Tantra studies, and six months of Dzogchen studies. Every effort has been made by the Institute and its staff to condense the retreat teachings to the essence of Sutra, Tantra, and Dzogchen, eliminating what is marginal and extraneous, and also eliminating whatever has no application in the context of our lives in the West. Seven years is not such a long time and, in any event, seven years would pass by in our lives even if we do not avail ourselves of the

Summer Program

Those who are enrolled in the certificate training program should try to attend as much of the summer retreat program as possible. A determination of eligibility for a certificate will depend upon successful completion of the course. Those who are non-certificate students may attend as much of the retreat as they find of interest to them. However, casual visits of only one day are to be discouraged. One should plan to stay at the retreat for at least a full weekend or otherwise at least three days or longer. Tapes and transcripts will be available of material that the student has missed. Everyone is encouraged to call the Institute from time to time to discover what programs and activities are available.

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opportunity to study and practice the teachings of Dzogchen.

I. Location of the 1993 Retreat

The program will run from June 11 through August 11, 1993 with final registration (9:00 am-4:30 pm) and the Inaugural Address (5:00 pm) occurring on June 10, 1993. Students should plan to arrive a day or two early in order to get settled prior to the start of the teachings. The first year program will be conducted at a beautiful location consisting of three hundred acres of land nestled in a valley near Woodstock, New York in the rolling foothills of the Catskill mountains. One of the buildings on the land contains a large shrine room in which the teachings will be conducted. Locally the place is known as 'Big Indian.' The location is about a two and a half hour drive from New York City, also, there is direct bus service from New York City to Big Indian.

Specific directions to the retreat site along with pertinent transportation information will be provided in the next issue of the newsletter sometime in March of 1993 (Spring 93 issue).

Bön Shamanism Workshop

The Workshop in Bön Shamanism held in June 1992 in Barrytown, New York at the home of George and Susan Quasha, convened by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche had two purposes: 1. to inaugurate Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's project of giving teachings from the Four Causal Vehicles of Bön. (Of the Nine Ways of Bön, these first four paths are not concerned with spiritual realization but deal in a dualistic framework from the cares of ordinary life); 2. to enable Rinpoche to make connections with American practitioners of Shamanic paths.

The four days in Barrytown were attended by guest Shamanic practitioners, members of the Dzogchen Community, students of Rinpoche, and other persons interested in the connections between Bön and Shamanic traditions.

The first two days were devoted to a presentation by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche of an overview of the Four Causal Vehicles. The study of the Bön Causal Vehicles, besides its intrinsic interest, is useful for practitioners of both Bön and Tibetan Buddhism, because we can understand through them aspects of Buddhism that are unique to Tibet. Practices involving Tormas, the five elements, and Long Life Deities, for instance, originate in Bön traditions and only really make sense in relation to them.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche did not give instructions in any of the practices he outlined but presented a general overview of the nature and history of the Four Causal Vehicles. His presentation was based on a text by Shardza Rinpoche, who obtained the Rainbow Body in 1934 and was one of the Masters of Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche's teacher Changchub Dorje.

Though all of the Four Causal Vehicles were mentioned and discussed, most of the emphasis was placed on the First Vehicle, the (ṣekṣa-pa phywa-gshen theg-pa), The Vehicle of Wealth. Wealth here means richness of life including abundance of food, clothing, happiness, and joy. The "View" (Vødl-ta) of this vehicle is the dualistic view of ordinary samsaric life; that is, practitioners of the Vehicle of Wealth are people who see life as divided between good and evil, desirable and undesirable circumstances. Everything we encounter is considered to involve contact with positive or negative forces or beings, gods or demons. In general, we feel that we are in a condition of incompleteness or poverty and thus we seek "wealth" to bring us to completion. Wealth is thus understood subjectively as whatever, for each person, would bring a sense of sufficiency. The practices of the Vehicle of Wealth help us work with this condition of things. The basis of the (ṣekṣa-pa phywa-gshen theg-pa), however, even though dualistic, is compassion— we undertake practices out of recognition of our own and other beings' sufferings, and with...
the intent to bring relief.

The vehicle of Wealth presents four kinds of practices: Divination, Astrology, Ritual, and Medical Diagnosis. Our sessions dealt primarily with Divination and Ritual.

There are numerous systems of divination in Bön. Some of these involve highly complex procedures, are connected to the Higher Bön traditions, and require erudition and study as well as expertise in visualization and ritual. In the Zang-Zhung Ju Tshig, for instance, practitioners manipulate 360 knotted threads, each knot corresponding with one of the 360 retinues of Meri. Besides these complex systems, however, there are more humble methods that are used by uneducated persons.

Divination in all cases involves contact with a deity who rules the divinatory practice. The personal connection between the practitioner and the deity is the source of success of the divination. The individual’s clarity in connection with the deity grows with familiarity over the course of a lifetime. These are thus many persons who, though having no sophisticated training, nonetheless have established powerful contact with divinatory spirits and are thus very expert in their use.

Besides forms of divination involving external manipulation of such objects as knots and threads, there are practices that involve the direct use of the senses, comparable to the practice of “skrying” in the west—the practitioner sees images relevant to the problem situation in a mirror or in a black substance applied to the finger nail. There is a method used by Bön medical practitioners that involves fashioning a statuette of a little man and investing it ceremonially. The practitioner carries this little man about with him and the little man talks to the practitioner, providing him with information he needs.

In general, divination is applied to situations where more ordinary ways of understanding and dealing with our problems are inapplicable. In our own society, for instance, we consult medical doctors for ailments that have physical causes and psychotherapists where our mental anguish derives from ordinary confusions. But Bön holds that there are disturbances to our life-forces that these ordinary methods of treatment are powerless to address. There is, for instance, a class of “spiritual” entities called D’on (gdon) who create disharmony in our beings when they are provoked. They are provoked when, for example, we disturb the earth with construction projects, industrial pollution, or inattention to the qualities of nature where we dwell. Divination can be used to discern whether our particular problem is in fact caused by such provocations and, if it is, precisely what sort of action must be taken to propitiate the disturbed spirits. Usually this action will be a prescribed ritual involving the familiar elements of Tibetan Ceremony: Sadhana texts, mantras, offerings, tormas, mudras, mandalas and so forth.

Divination may also reveal a condition of “loss of soul” caused by shocks of various kinds, contact with negative circumstances, or physical weakness from disease. When we experience a sudden shock, for instance, our “soul” entity may be frightened out of our body, or our soul-energy may be seized by various demonic entities who have need of that energy.

Practices are prescribed for “retrieving” the absent soul and its energy, or for making offerings to “buy back” the absent soul from the entities that have absconded with it. There are also Sadhanas for compelling the return of the soul through the use of wrathful transformation practices and magical threats.

When we can see in a person’s pallor the signs of approaching death, sometimes the soul has left the body, though the person’s life force (Tseyinu-pa) has not yet completely drained away. It may still be possible to summon the soul’s return by ritual means and thus prolong the person’s life.

Tibetans are fond of keeping a turquoise stone on a cord around their neck as a personal amulet. These stones serve as an abiding place for the soul entity. When soul-loss is suffered, the use of these stones becomes an important element in the ritual practices undertaken to bring the soul back.

The second two days of the retreat were spent in conversation between Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, guest practitioners of contemporary Shamanism, and members of the community involved with healing and therapy.

On day three, the guests were Sandra Ingerman, the author of “Soul Retrieval,” now practicing counseling in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Christina Stack, a practitioner of soul retrieval, artist, and spiritual counselor living in the Hudson Valley of New York. The soul retrieval process as practiced by Sandra and Christina originates with Sandra. Through techniques learned from Michael Harner, she made contact with her personal guardian spirits and was taught soul retrieval by them. Soul retrieval involves the practitioner’s undertaking of shamanic journeys on the behalf of clients with various presenting symptoms or problems. On these journeys the practitioner locates the soul of the client in “non-ordinary reality” and helps the soul return to the client’s body. The discussions involved comparison between this process and the similar aspects of Bön Shamanism and Bön and Buddhist Long-Life practices. In Long-Life practices especially, aspects of the individual’s vital energy, having left the person’s body, can be summoned back from the four directions with the help of ritual and visualization.

There was also much discussion about the different conceptions of “soul,” “spirit,” and “mind” in Bön and Buddhist thought and in the working concepts that these practitioners of modern shamanic journeying employ. Sandra Ingerman expressed her thoughts that the “soul” is that aspect of a being which undergoes experiences, learns and grows during the course of life. The soul passes to “the other side” at death or when it is a victim of various traumatic experiences during life. The “spirit” in contrast, is the “god-essence,” the aspect of one’s being that is already perfect,
already in possession of ultimate wisdom, and is finally the source of the wisdom that is acquired by the soul during its sojourn in the body. It was observed that this conception of the spirit as contrasted with soul is similar to the Dzogchen view of the nature of mind as contrasted with moving mind.

There was also a discussion between Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Sandra, Christina, and the psychotherapists about the need in our society for rescuing persons suffering from various sorts of spiritual crises from conventional psychiatric, psychotherapeutic, and medical interpretations and treatments of their condition. Sandra maintained that much mental as well as physical disease throughout the modern world is symptomatic of "soul loss" and can be treated by the Soul Retrieval and related processes. It was also clear that where an individual is suffering from explicitly spiritual confusions and problems, treatment by persons who have neither familiarity with, nor sympathy for, the experiences the troubled person is undergoing, can be very harmful.

On the final day of the workshop Michael Harner stopped by for a brief session with Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and the other participants. He was on his way to Bearsville, New York where he conducts his training seminars in Shamanic practices. Michael Harner is a leading exponent of what I have been calling the "neo-shamanic" movement. He talked about the nature of the process of learning shamanic skills and emphasized that the source of this learning is the guardian spirits themselves, usually in the form of power
In addition to his duties as resident teacher of 'The Ligmincha Institute' Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche teaches and gives lectures concerning shamanism and philosophy at Rice University, Houston, Texas. There he also collaborates with Prof. Anne C. Klein in the translation of certain very precious Bön sacred texts. Additionally, he works closely with Prof. Anne C. Klein and Dr. Harvey B. Aronson in giving continuing education classes. Rinpoche, Prof. Klein, and Dr. Aronson will present a series of continuing education classes sometime in January 1993. Information concerning these classes can be obtained from the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University. These classes are:

(I) ‘Tibetan Culture and the West: A Personal Account’ Prof. Klein,

(II) ‘Autobiography of a Lama’ Rinpoche,

(III-IV) ‘Background and Symbolism of Shamanic Traditions’ Rinpoche,

(V) ‘Visions of Monastic Life’ Rinpoche,

(VI-VII) ‘Meditative and Artistic Traditions’ Rinpoche,

(VIII) ‘Cultural Context, Psychology, and Spirituality’ Dr. Aronson.

Rinpoche's 1993 Schedule

Jan 29-31: C.G. Jung Center, Houston, Texas - Tel: (713) 524-8253
Feb 13-14: Open Center, NYC, NY - Tel: (212) 219-2527

Feb 27-28: Albuquerque, NM - Dzogchen teachings - Call Lar and Paige Short - Tel: (505) 898-0363
Mar 6-7: Six-Loka's Practice - Richmond, VA - Call Ligmincha
Mar 19-21: Intro to Dzogchen - Charlottesville, VA - Call Ligmincha
Apr 3-4: Dzogchen Teachings - Richmond, VA - Call Ligmincha
Apr 23-25: Bön Shamanism Workshop - Washington, D.C. - Call Kiva - Tel: (703) 582-3574
May 8-9: Boston, MA - Call Martin Leventhal - Tel: (617) 332-4967
May 29-30: Dzogchen Teachings - Richmond, VA - Call Ligmincha
Jun 10-Aug 11: 1993 Summer Retreat - near Woodstock, NY - Call Ligmincha