

# THREE VIEWS FROM EKAJATI

## Jampa Dorje



### VAJRA DANCE MANDALA ODYSSEY

Five weeks should be enough time to overcome all obstacles and paint the dance mandala. I am a volunteer at Tara Mandala, a Tibetan Buddhist retreat center, located near Pagosa Springs, Colorado. I glue together several lengths of a building material called tyvec and then cut the tyvec to fit the circular dance platform. I start at the center and paint outward, laying down a coat of color—Jade Green, Royal Blue, Medallion Yellow, Summer Red—straightening the lines, cutting the darker colors into the lighter in increasingly larger circles. I follow my plan. I'm adding color to another ring, now, cutting in the fifth ring, the green against the red, roughly one hundred feet of curved line along the outside, when it starts to rain, and the rain makes the paint run, and I have to roll up the mandala. There's not much I can do but head for cover. When the storm subsides, I unroll the mandala and look at the splattered mess—blue and yellow making a yucky green, red and yellow making an awful orange. This is not my plan.

This is a lesson in impermanence. When it dries, I'll repaint it. And it dries, and I repaint it. And I'm proud of my work. The next morning, after our work meeting, I take my teacher, Tsultrim, up the hill to show her the mandala, the luxurious colors, the clear lines. I'm gesticulating with both hands as we crest the hill and see the mandala scrunched up in the middle of the platform with a coat of frost still glistening in the morning sunlight. We approach quietly and look at this tossed and twisted agony of a shape. I can see the paint is cracked and peeling, and my eyes well with tears when Tsultrim says, "You'll just have to start over."

Yes, Marpa. And Milarepa puts his rocks back where he got them and begins another building. I stretch out the mandala and put down more rocks around the edge and get out my pocket knife and start scraping the torn paint and sanding the edges and filling the gaps with caulk and coating the patches with primer and repainting the color and making the lines clean.

At the next work meeting, I report that in another day, if the weather holds, I'll be back to where I was three weeks earlier. The weather does hold, and I paint my way into the outer rings. Then, one morning on my way to practice, I look down the hill and realize the mandala is missing. I run down the hill to the dance platform and discover an upturned can of paint still dripping through the boards and the mandala and the plastic milk container with the other cans of paint in a heap in a ditch by the pond. I pull it up and find another mess of spilled paint and twisted fabric.

Yes, Marpa, I know, put the rocks back and begin again. This must be an important test of some kind. Tsultrim suggests I do the Long Protectors' Practice. The Dharmapalas, the mountain gods, are unhappy with me and don't want me disturbing things in this location. I had better get myself aligned with the forces at play if I'm ever going to finish this project. So, I sit by our stupa, a reliquary, and burn juniper and do the practice every day. "Eight classes, all-powerful guardians, I speak to you, please accept these clouds of desirable objects, filling the sky! Magnify all that is wholesome, pacify all that is bad! Be of service day and night and fulfill my wishes, easily, swiftly!"

I spread out the mandala and secure it with strips of lath, which is what I should have done in the first place. Only there's no *should*. I'm learning, and now I know, and now it's done, and I clean up the mess and start again. The mandala is covered with patches of white paint and looks apoplectic when Tsultrim returns from a trip to Santa Fe.

She looks at my work and says, "It doesn't seem to have changed."

I say, "Yes, Tsultrim, it has changed; believe me, it has changed. I just haven't made any headway."

I clean up the patches and straighten out the lines. I must have painted nearly a mile of lines by now. The paint is drying, and the mandala is finally stable. I've been doing the protectors practice, and the mountain gods seem peaceful. I have put a heavy rock, shaped like a heart, in the center to keep the occasional breeze from making the mandala plane and take off for the wide, blue yonder, but the rock has scraped the surface of the white paint. I'm repainting it just as heavy clouds roll over Ekajati Peak.

It doesn't rain right away, but in the middle of the night it breaks loose with flashes of lightning and blasts of thunder. I know it's raining hard because there's a river running through my tent, blowing in from the unprotected side. And the mandala? I don't want to think about it. I give it a quick glance on my way to practice. That's enough. I can see something is wrong. It seems to be covered with a misty vapor.

After practice, I go down to the platform to sweep off the rain and do a set of Qigong exercises. The white paint from the center circle has spread over half the colors and is still floating in the

pools of rainwater. Yes, Marpa, I know, nothing lasts. Clean it up, and chill, dude. I swab up most of the paint and let the rest dry. It only requires a light coat of each color to bring back the luster. If the weather permits, I'll be on track in a day or so. I'm three-fourths done, and there's still a week before the arrival of Namkai Norbu Rinpoche and Prima Mi.

More rain. I rush off to find a tarp. I don't want a repeat of the last fiasco, so I put the tarp over the wet paint, not noticing the tar on the flip side of the tarp. When I pull the tarp up after the rain has subsided, there are black splotches scattered over most of my near perfectly painted center designs. Oh well, this cleans up with gasoline, which lifts the tar but also lifts some of the soft paint and leaves yellowish smudges. I add another coat of paint. This painting is beginning to have a lot of character, a texture and patina like an old masterpiece from so many repairs.

Kim, a Dharma sister, helps me paint the black lines that divide the mandala into sections. We've laid down two strips of masking tape leaving about an inch for the black lines. We've painted two lines, and I'm laying down the third set of tapes, when we discover if you pull up the tape, the paint comes with it. Kim is beside herself. It's a sweltering day on the platform, and we're blowing it. Kim is pulling her hair. I try to soothe her, but she is inconsolable. I decide that it's best to shut up.

Yelling obscenities and tears bursting from her eyes, Kim grabs a brush and paints all the lines without any tape, one after another, one brush width, right on, no error, straight as I could want them. What might have taken all day takes 20 minutes, and all I have to do is patch a few spots, retouch the lines, and were done. Voilá.

Rinpoche arrives the next day, and there is not a cloud in the sky. "Bene, bene," he says, "very hard work, very good. Bene." Prima Mi is with him, and she will teach the Vajra Dances. She looks at the mandala and says that it is very beautiful.

There are twelve of us plus Prima Mi. Nine women and three men will learn to dance The Dance of the Liberation of the Six Lokas and The Dance of Three Vajras. These dances are not performances. They are Dzogchen meditation practices, which integrate sound and movement. Prima Mi is not sure this is going to work. She has never taught these practices under such conditions.

She wants to start early, but in the morning there is frost on the mandala. This melts, and then we mop up the water. We have to dance barefooted because our shoes scrape the paint and our socks get soaked. Soon, it's too hot for bare feet on the dark colors; the winds whip us; the lightening cracks on the hilltops; and we're not at all sure we can survive the elements. But we are unanimous we want to learn these dances.

I bring a box covered in black plastic to house our shoes, so they won't get wet, and I bring a clean tarp to huddle under when it pores. Others bring water bottles and incense and a tape recorder. A crystal ball is put in the center of the mandala to represent the Dharmakaya, the absolute. It's perfect, and we're captive. Wilderness, fresh air, and a heaven of wildflowers surround us. No distractions obstruct the path. We have the mandala beneath us. We are ready to enter the immutable space of Vajrasattva and purify the six realms of beings, leaving our worldly cares behind and liberating the God Realms, the Realms of the Asuras, the Humans, the Animals, the Hungry Ghosts and the Hell Realms. And so, our training begins.

## SUMMER IDYLL

Lightning flashes, and there's a loud clap of thunder close to town, so the management at The Springs asks us to leave because there's the risk of lightning striking us in the hot pools. The man at the desk gives us a rain check and says we may have to wait more than an hour, so we decide to go have dinner. Jack, Marta, Susan, Horse, Tommy, and I meet at the Hunan Chinese Restaurant in the plaza at the far end of town. We have just finished the ten-day Family Retreat, and we are trying to integrate back into the life of Pagosa Springs.

Until a few years ago, Pagosa Springs was a one-stoplight town. These days Pagosa Springs has two stoplights and is one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. Nestled in the mountains near Wolf Creek Pass, Pagosa Springs is near the Continental Divide. This is where east meets west. The headwaters of the Colorado River run west towards the Gulf of California, and the Arkansas River runs east to join the Mississippi, which eventually empties into the Gulf of Mexico. The area south of the San Juan Mountains falls within the Four Corners area of the United States and is geographically a part of the Southwest. Here are high mountain valleys covered with wildflowers and more wildflowers. This is where all the wildflowers go when they die—a heaven for wildflowers.

Pagosa Springs was settled around a deep, sulfur hot spring next to the San Juan River. The town's name comes from "pagoosh," a Ute word some of the locals say means healing water and others, stinky water. I've overheard a teenager refer to Pagosa as "Rotteneggville." This stinky, healing water does smell a little weird until you get used to the odor.

This was a health spa long before recorded history. An Anasazi kiva can be found at nearby Chimney Rock. In the 1880's, the ownership of the springs was contested by the Utes and the Navajo. The Utes chose a U.S. Cavalry Scout to challenge a Navajo warrior. The Navajo was defeated in a knife fight, and the Ute tribe became the nominal custodians for Uncle Sam. Today, there is a postmodern bath house being built at The Springs, an eclectic blend of Frontier Saloon, Mexican Adobe, and Roman Villa with a touch of neon—a style architect Julia Donaho calls "Southwest Renaissance."

Mountain meadows were an incentive for cattle drives, and a settlement around the springs was inevitable. With snowcapped mountains to the north and to the east and with 14,000-foot pyramidal Pagosa Peak rising above town, and with the effulgence of sunsets on the massive granite wall of the Continental Divide, this is one of the most scenically beautiful spots in the world.

Tara Mandala is 15 miles from town, our land wedged between the San Juan Forest and the Ute Reservation. We awake each morning by the conch being blown. The staff holds a Green Tara practice in the yurt, and everyone is invited to attend. There is just enough time after practice to do a set of the Five Tibetans exercises on the dance platform before the breakfast conch sounds.

We meet for breakfast beneath the mother tree, a giant box elder that shelters the kitchen. The

kitchen evolves. This year there is a bar across the refrigerators and a double set of hooks on the cabinet doors to prevent raccoons from ransacking the foodstuffs. Each year there seems to be a special animal that makes its presence felt. Last year it was a badger, the year before, a bobcat. The chipmunks, however, are perennial. They get so fat from eating dropped food that their bellies drag on the ground. And the snakes catch the fat chipmunks without effort. A perfect food chain. Tara Mandala is a lucky place to be reborn in the animal realm.

The family retreat has several parts. The adults receive teachings by Carol Fitzpatrick on Green Tara and by Lorain Fox Davis on the medicine wheel. White Horse Hubble is to lead a vision quest, and the teens will be led on an overnight hike by Lorain's daughter, Cris, who is an experienced Outreach leader. Also, there is a plan to build a cob oven.

Robert Francis Johnson has a metaphysical approach to building a cob oven. Clay, sand and straw are the essential ingredients. Wisdom, strength and beauty are the metaphorical supports. A firm foundation is essential to erect any edifice. On a rock foundation is placed a mound of wet sand, called the *void*.

Loving hands mold layers of cob to create the oven around this void. There is no smokestack on a cob oven. The proportion of the door size to the chamber after the void has been removed allows for the fire to kindle and the smoke to escape.

Cob ovens are used throughout the world to bake bread. At the highest temperature, the cook can bake pizza, and at lower temperatures, start yogurt. The cob is prepared in a similar manner to pressing grapes. Cob people, young and old, remove their shoes, join hands and mix the ingredients with their feet. In the process of building this oven, a chain of friendship beams outward to heaven and inward to the central abyss.

Men and women, boys and girls, all with legends. In the marrow of our lives our dreams fly, while overhead the clouds in a larger current move across the sky.

I listen in prayer and look up through the branches of the box elder. The camp is stirred with frantic search plans for a boy lost while returning from the overnight hike. David and Damchü have ridden out to look for him on horseback. The voices of those searching on foot crisscross on walky-talkies. While we are in the prayer circle, Carol envisions the boy seated under a tree along the trail. Later, David tells us that he followed footprints he spotted along a dirt road and found the boy exactly where Carol had seen him in her mind's eye. The boy said he was not really lost. He had overshot the trail he was looking for and was backtracking his way to camp when he was found. So much can happen to us in a minute.

Horse and Lorain are both trained in the Lokota tradition but by different teachers. Their styles of teaching being different, they have to work out their routine. At the sweat lodge, Lorain leads the pipe ceremony, and Horse drums during the sweat. Before the sweat, Horse brings out a Tanka, a buffalo skull with the horns wrapped in red cloth, one side painted with red and white stripes and the other side of the skull painted yellow with white dots. Horse holds the Tanka above his head, and he psychically transforms himself into the whole beast. Lorain tells us about having recently attended a gathering of the pipe holders where the bundle with the pipe from the time of White Buffalo Woman was opened, an event that hadn't happen for many years, and that all the pipes were touched to the original pipe to rejuvenate the lineage. Tommy, Horse's

assistant, holds Lorain's pipe for each of us to smoke, and then we enter the lodge.

There are four rounds to the sweat, one for those being born, one for the young, one for adults, and one for the aged. We are all invited to pray and partake in song. Lorain adds a lot of water at the end of each round, which raises the humidity considerably, and Horse drums with passion. Sometimes, I feel like I'm the victim of a sweat, that the red man wants to give the white man the "full treatment." The ceremony this afternoon, however, is nothing if not inviting, even when Horse jokes that Grandma Lorain will throw the whole bucket of water on the hot stones to "cool us off." I can feel the power of tradition in my cells.

Water was a teacher this year. The season started off fine, but by the end of the family retreat, the well seemed to have dried up. We added more solar panels to increase the flow of electricity to the pump. We added another ten feet of hose and lowered the pump. We bought a new pump. Finally, it was discovered that the well had been incorrectly cased and that we would have to drill a new well. As the well diggers were backed up with projects, we solved our problem for the summer by filling a large storage tank with water hauled from town, and then we poured the water into the well so it could be pumped up the hill to the holding tank. With gravity flow, we had pressure in the pipes. It was a long way around in order to get back a short distance correctly and many climbs up the hill to see if the tank was full. "Fire is water falling upwards," says sage Heraclitus.

Water? What water? The water isn't a problem for the seasoned veterans of Adzom Paylo Rinpoche's Intensive Longchen Nyinthig Retreat. These people get so deep into practice that they become one with the elements. "Sometimes I don't know what is going on," says Steve, "but I just relax and let it happen, figuring, what the heck, everything is everywhere."

As below, so above. The night sky is fine, and the conjunction of Mars in Scorpius is mindblowing. (Mars being the esoteric ruler of Scorpius.) This summer, Mars is closer to Earth than is usual, and it is also in proximity to Antares, a red star in the tail of the Scorpion, which is sometimes referred to as Mars's rival. All in all, a powerful visual and symbolic configuration portending great spiritual accomplishment. Or not.

I overhear: "Everything arises from emptiness." Robert Olander is wearing his baseball cap and Mac MacCarthy has on his battered straw cowboy hat, a short-stop for Buddha and a cowboy yogi having a quiet metaphysical talk, early in the morning—the dew on the grass is singing. Every blade of grass is liberated, and the grasshoppers are jumping for joy.

Sharon stands by the port-a-potty with a bucket and a broom. A high lama and a low lama, she wears the hat of assistant retreat coordinator and that of chief latrine supervisor. She is compassion in action.

I watch Robert Petit waltz with a board. His hands move gracefully, touching the corners, edging the board into place. He uses a cordless screw gun, which has an entirely different rhythm than a hammer. I'm nostalgic for the rap rap rap of a hammer, although screws do hold the wood firmly. Today, the process is to screw and glue—anything to prevent the erosion of barbarous

time. Robert stands back and scrutinizes his project, pulls out his tape measure, looks for his square, picks up his pencil, makes another measurement, takes another step in his carpenter's dance.

We have not one Head Cook but two: James and Brian are the two-headed cook. Their assistants are Vanessa and Roy. They rise with the sun to stir up something delicious, always reaching far enough to find their joy. Breakfast over, lunches are packed, and the retreatants leave in a caravan for Hidden Valley to do their practices. The day is poised in exultation.

And night time is a time for song and dance. After the Riwo Sangchod Retreat, we party at Tsultrim's and David's new house. Tulku Sang-ngag feels expansive and dances the Warrior Dance of King Gesar, jabbing at the air with an African spear. Ani Tersing tries to translate one of the tulku's poems. Although her English falters, the beauty of her voice is star-flecked. She knows more than she knows she knows. "Red bird...big bird...a vulture...eating dead people on the mountain." We are inspired to sing 'Blackbird Singing' and, much to David's chagrin, 'Row, Row, Row Your Boat' and, then, 'Om Tare Tutare' to flute and drum. Given the right rhythm, even the dead can dance.

So many decisions, so much chance for derision—the deadly wind of praise and blame. Birget's luscious Tara statue stands before the throne, but Tulku Sang-ngag says he would prefer it stood on the altar with the mandala offering placed in a lower position. However, he does not mention which direction the Tara statue should stand on the altar. Should it face the lama when he's teaching or should it face the entrance? We opt for Tara facing the throne, and Rinpoche laughs uproariously when he enters the yurt and finds he must prostrate to Tara's posterior.

Tulku Sang-ngag meets life with humor and forbearing. He was incarcerated in Chinese prisons for ten years, and while he was there he received many teachings from great lamas. He relates how happy he was when he discovered the blissful state of samadhi and could enter it while he was working at cutting logs, but how this got him into trouble with the guards and the beatings he received. He teaches us how to enter this state with the breathing exercise called chölen, but while he is teaching this practice, a pickup arrives, and the port-a-potty man begins pumping out the honey box. Tulku Sang-ngag is explaining how the seed syllable in the crown chakra melts into nectar when the odor of excrement wafts through the meditation yurt. Eyes roll, noses lift, but everyone seems determined to maintain their composure as they realize the essential unity of the relative and the absolute. Then, Tulku Sang-ngag laughs, and we join him in our appreciation of the irony in this occurrence.

I drift in infinite space, or no space, an illusion of myself in an obscure place, a floating reflection. Emptiness holds me up. And so, what is the next thing to see?

Marta and I are driving along Trujillo Road and see big drops of rain spaced a foot apart turning to hail. Next, a fat, jagged lightning bolt appears to shoot right into town. "Wow, look at that," exclaims Marta. When we get to the Tara Mandala office, Jack is standing in the doorway waving a newsletter, airing the acrid smell of burned electrical wiring from the room. He says, "Sparks flew out of the postage machine and the fax. The computers are down, and the lights are out.

The lightning must have struck pretty close.” La Plata Electric Co. is soon on the scene, working on a pole up the street, and after the lights come on, the main computer starts up but can’t boot its programs and won’t shut off, which doesn’t bode well for getting any work done in the office today.

Back on the land, everything is peace. I enter the quiet where flies buzz and leaves rustle in their immortality. The silence ends at a yellow bird, a Western Tanager—I looked him up—atop a stalk of last year’s mullein. Each moment has its own climax.

Tsultrim is in a year-long personal retreat, but she makes a brief appearance to attend Adzom Rinpoche’s teachings. We are instructed to avoid eye contact and not to ask for interviews, but near the end of the teaching cycle, the situation loosens up, and I get a chance to relay a few messages from the sangha in California. Tsultrim says I must take the Sky-like Nature of Mind Retreat, that it will be good for my practice. I tell her I have to keep working on the layout of *A Brief Biography of Golchen Tulku*, but she insists, and I know by the way she looks at me, a look from the molecular level, that she knows best. I’m afraid of *shamata* practice because I don’t think I can sit for lengthy periods in one-pointed meditation, but what I find is that I enjoy these sessions, that my years of tantric training have served me well. My body has been trained to sit. A teacher is the source of all accomplishments. I am blessed by having Tsultrim for my teacher. During pointing out instructions by Tsok Nyi Rinpoche, a fly flies in my mouth, and I wonder if I will ever get it. Stabilize in *rigpa*, that is. I’m sitting, and then the fly flies in, and I sit with this fly in my mouth, all revved up, but I’m sitting still, and the fly walks out of my mouth and along my upper lip and onto my nose and then buzzes off into space, and I am left feeling empty and a trifle confused. During the question-and-answer period, I ask Rinpoche, “If I am sitting in *rigpa* and the fly is inside me, is the fly in *rigpa*?” Rinpoche says, “We’ll have to ask the fly.”

Samsara is an airport surrounding a delayed flight. I’m stretched out with my eyes closed listening to the travelers and the intercom in the Phoenix Airport: “...want my money back...” “...want to be in San Francisco, now...” “...really no reason for this...” “...is it really raining there?...” “will my luggage arrive?...” “...will the pilots for flight 2807 please report to Gate A6?...” All this inside me.

Now, standing in the family room of my house near Sebastopol, looking into the middle distance, a newspaper at my feet, I’m conscious of the upside down headlines, of the world going topsy-turvy, and things getting desperate, as I reflect on the limpid, blue sky of a summer idyll.

## THE LAMA & THE CARPENTER

Around midnight, I am called to fix the Lama’s bed. He has come home late, after phoning his students in China, and, somehow, he has knocked his bed loose from its moorings. I had made up the bed, and I had made sure the bed frame was level. The tent is on a slight slope, and I

had leveled the frame with small blocks of 2x4. The path is visible in the moonlight, so I make my way from my tent to the shed near the kitchen where the tools are stored. I gather up some more blocks, a hammer, a few nails, and my level, and I wend my way through the scrub oak to Adzom's tent. Adzom Paylo Rinpoche is a big man, well over six foot tall. He's going to be hard on the furniture.

I can see his bulk sitting on the bed. The tent flaps are tied back, and I can see the zipper is pulled loose from its tracks, which is not unusual. The tent repairs often exceed the fees we receive from the tent rentals. There is a battery-powered lamp in the tent, and it casts a feeble light, but I can see the bed has a radical tilt. Anne Klein is seated on a cushion on the floor; she will translate. Anne says, "The bed is lower at this end, and Rinpoche can't sleep with his head lower than his feet, and if he turns the other way, his feet will be pointed towards Tara." I take off my shoes and bow in obeisance, and Adzom motions me to sit.

I push back the covers on the bed and put my level on the frame, and, sure enough, it is way out of kilter. Adzom is curious, and he climbs down and sits on the floor next to me. He asks to see the level, so I hand it over to him, and while he is occupied, I go around to the other side of the bed and look at the legs. The bed has slid off the blocks. I set them back under the legs, and when I look up, I see that Adzom is moving the level back and forth, this way and that, with a big smile on his face.

I take the tool from him and again lay it along the edge of the bed frame, so he can see that the bubble is in the middle of the glass tube, which indicates that the structure is level. Adzom gets really excited. "I understand; I understand," he says. "I am very smart." He's like a big kid with a new toy. I start to collect my things, but Anne asks me if I would like to stay and have an interview. I hadn't planned on this, as I am not registered for this retreat. I came to Tara Mandala to do karma yoga, but since I am here, I say, "Sure, why not?" The smell of incense is heavy. The lamp casts a shadow off the statue of Tara on the wall of the tent. I am high in the Rocky Mountains sitting at the feet of a master. This could be Tibet a thousand years ago. I sit down again, and Adzom climbs back up on his bed. He looks at me, and his eyes roll back in his head, and he asks me, "Do you want my mind essence?"

This dude is serious. "Yes," I say, "yes, I most certainly do." He asks me a question that relates to my body, energy, and mind. I feel this question could be answered in a number of ways, but lately I have been working more with my energy because I have prostate cancer, and cancer is said to be caused by an interruption of the energy field, a possible break in the immunity system, so energy is of paramount importance to me, and I tell him so. Adzom says I should meditate on this and come back in a couple of days. I stand and bow and pick up my tools. As I am leaving, he says, "I might have to steal your level."

A couple days later, I am in Pagosa Springs, and I stop at the hardware store and look for a small level, something Adzom can pack in his suitcase. I find a short carpenter's level with replaceable bevels made by Stanley, not as classy as the antique I use, which was patented in 1896, but more portable. It will serve the purpose. Near the levels, are metal squares of different sizes, and next to them are brass plumb bobs.

I have an idea. I am a Past Master of the Order of Freemasons, and the secrets of Masonry are transmitted through the use sign of and symbol, just as in Dzogchen. And, just as in Buddhism there are the three jewels: the Guru, the Dharma, and the Sangha, in a Lodge of Masons there

are three objects that are called the movable jewels: the Plumb, the Square, and the Level. These are the working tools of a Fellowcraft Mason. So, I buy these tools to present to Adzom Rinpoche.

I know I risk being disemboweled and having my organs thrown to the beasts of the field for revealing Masonic secrets, especially as I will have to communicate them through the translations of a woman, but, damn me, I am frustrated by these limitations. It is traditional to maintain secrecy in esoteric matters, and I will not reveal the secrets of how to enter and open a lodge; I will only show Adzom the parallels between a set of symbols in the two traditions. There is great importance in forging links between minds of different cultures. Adzom is a buddha, who is leading me to enlightenment, and I have a rare opportunity to share some of my experience with him and enter into the field of his wisdom.

A gana puja, a feast, is planned for the next day because it's Padmasambhava's birthday and a full moon as well. This is an auspicious day to practice, and all benefits of practice will be greatly multiplied. Tsultrim gives me a traditional Tibetan text and asks me to make five copies for those who can read Tibetan. A text like this is long and narrow and printed on both sides of the page, the back side reversed from the front side, and there are no Arabic numerals to follow. The text appears to be 100 pages. This is going to take some time.

After dinner, I get a ride to town. I warm up the copy machine, and I figure out a procedure to keep the pages in order. I'll run one page at a time on legal size paper because if I try to do more, I'll get confused. I begin with the first page and run five copies. I make a small mark on the right corner of the top copy in pencil and turn the master over and place the five copies in the tray and run the other side. Then I cut them to size and lay them out on the counter face down. I repeat the process with the next page and the next. The text has corrections made with small squares of gold leaf, and on the back of one page there are some odd, rather childish drawings—a design which at first seems to be a bottle with flowers, then becomes psychedelic, abstract and mazelike in pattern. Adzom was a child tulku. Maybe these were done by him when he was a youngster.

It's getting late, going on midnight. Where is my ride? I phone camp, but no one picks up the phone in the kitchen, so I keep printing. If nothing else, I'll hike back. It's only 15 miles. Shouldn't take but four or five hours. I'll make it in time for the puja. However, I realize I don't have a coat. What could I use to keep warm? I look around, but all I can find is a door cover with an eternal knot embroidered on it. I envision myself walking all night wrapped in a door cover, carrying a box of Tibetan texts along the county road. Then, I'm hiking the last three miles up the forest service road, and I encounter a mountain lion in the dark. All that will be found of me are shreds of the door covering, the scattered texts, and a leg bone, which will make a good thigh bone trumpet. Heroic fantasy. The stuff of legends. Wish I knew how to do yogic fast walking. I try phoning again, and this time someone does pick up. Brian, our cook. He says Gwen is still at Tsultrim's house, waiting for Adzom to finish phoning China, but that he will come and get me. If I'm lucky, I will get a few hours sleep before the puja.

I'm always thrilled when I awake, and the sun is shining, and it's a new day. What a miracle! It doesn't take long for things to get weird, but for a while I am in awe and grateful. And so, when the bees start stinging the people climbing the hillside to the site of the puja, everything seems to be about normal. A couple of us rush back to the kitchen to fetch some *Benadryl* and baking

soda. The sun is starting to shine down with some real intensity, and I'm sweating profusely, as I struggle back up the hill. Everyone calms down once we start administering plasters of baking soda and applying *Benadryl* to the wounds.

Rinpoche arrives. His assistant, Lama Gyurme Tsering, has a video camera and is documenting the event. I shoot a picture of him—a lama in his robes with a video camera—a classic cultural cross-over. The sun is beating down harder now. This is going to be an ordeal. There is not any protection from the blazing sun, and Adzom will recite the whole text because he is a Dharma machine. We are fried by the time the practice is dedicated, and we are on the verge of heat stroke by the time Adzom starts discussing his vision of a temple on this site. I was right; he is a temple builder, and I know he needs a plumb, a square and a level.

I spend the rest of the day napping. I have dinner and go back to bed. I sleep through the night, and although I make it to practice the next morning, I go right back to bed and again sleep through to the next morning. I am definitely drained. I will have to pace myself to regain my momentum. So, I have come to this, a place of exhaustion, and how was I to know? So easy to use up one's reserves. Adzom is in my dreams. We are walking together about a foot off the ground. He is giving me instructions about fast walking. He says it's not about developing speed. The trick is in keeping my feet close to the ground so I appear to be walking and not flying, which is really what is happening. I awake doing the Tara action mantra.

Tsultrim wants me to make the Green Tara practice into a chapbook. She is having another translator, Erik Drew, and Anne both go over her rendition. Tsultrim's way of translating is poetic, Anne's is more academic, and Erik's is very literal. Getting them to agree is going to be an interesting process, and getting the book finished before the end of the retreat will take some finesse.

Added to this, Adzom wants to learn how to can peaches. Tsultrim is telling him how, step by step. Erik is translating. Adzom is taking notes, and he is also giving Tsultrim a short version of the Tara practice, which he wants included at the end of the main text. It's only a few lines long, and the action mantra is imbedded in the verse. Adzom is giving it out word by word, and Tsultrim writes each word down in phonetic Tibetan, and Erik translates it into English. Then, Tsultrim gives another step in the process of canning peaches, and Erik translates that into Tibetan, and Adzom writes it down in his notebook. Adzom then gives another line of the Tara practice, and Tsultrim writes that down, and Erik translates.

*OM CHAG TSAL JETSUN TARE*

*OM* Homage to Jetsun *TARE* Goddess

Wash jars, rinse. Place jars in hot water.

*TU TA RA E YI DUNG WA KUNCHOB*

*TU TA RA E* Save from all suffering

Pack the sliced peaches into hot jars.

*TUGJE TOGMED TURE PALMO*

Unimpeded compassion *TURE* Glorious One

Leave one finger of space at top of jar.

*DAK LA DRUPCHOK TSOL CHIK SWA HA*

Grant me the ultimate siddhi *SWA HA*

Cover with boiling sryup, leaving headspace.

I call this the Tara-Peach transmission. I sit outside the tent, chuckling to myself, waiting for the text to emerge, so I can run off another edition of the book.

More doubts. More signs. I've been told. I've been shown. It has been pointed out, the path, the fruit. I see a little dog. I wonder why he doesn't have a tail. I wonder why he hasn't any hair. I wonder why he doesn't have any eyes. I wonder why he doesn't have a head. I wonder why he doesn't have any feet. I not only wonder why but how he is trotting down the path. Without any doubt, this must be a lama's dog. As Jigme Lingpa writes, "Through examples, one recognizes the meaning. Through signs, one comes to believe."

And when will a sign appear? I'm walking up a trail, deep in conversation with Debbie. We are talking about *tigles*, tiny rainbow spheres, when I see a little flash of light shooting down the trail, and before I can change my pace, a young chipmunk has run under my boot, and I have crushed its spine. It is writhing in the dust, quivering spasmodically, and blood is running from its mouth. I tell Debbie to walk on ahead, as I don't think she will want to watch what I am going to do.

I have lived on farms. It is reasonable to put a suffering animal out of its misery. More people are coming up the trail, so I carry the chipmunk over into the trees, where I can dispatch it quickly. A blow to the head with a rock, and the creature lies still. I dig a small hole, put in a few leaves, just to make a cushion, I guess, and lay the body of the chipmunk in its grave. I say an appropriate mantra, cover the chipmunk with earth, and place a cobble on top.

Adzom has been giving interviews to all the retreatants and separating everyone into two streams. The majority are in an advanced group doing Yeshe Lama practices in Hidden Valley. These practices are led by Anne and her husband, Harvey, and Tsultrim. I keep on with my karma yoga, but I notice there are only a few students sitting with Adzom Rinpoche. They meet at his tent, and he teaches them the preliminary practices of Ngöndro. I have seen pictures of Adzom teaching in Tibet. He teaches the multitudes, 40,000 people at a pop. The pictures show a valley full of nomads, men, women, children and monks and nuns and lamas and merchants, all camped out to hear Adzom. Looks like a Grateful Dead concert.

I get permission to sit in. During one Dharma talk, the subject of killing comes up, the difference between accidental and intentional acts of killing, so I tell of my experience with the chipmunk, and Adzom says, the first act was accidental and did not involve me in the karma of the chipmunk in a negative way, but that my intentional act of "putting it out of its misery" was more serious in its repercussions, that I should have left it to "burn out its karma" without interfering in the process. Such is the difference between the East and the West. My chances of being reincarnated as a chipmunk are very good, indeed.

A humorous occurrence in one talk. We are studying the Ngöndro text, and Erik suddenly chokes, and says that we shouldn't say the next line, because there is a mistake in the phonetic Tibetan. A word is misspelled, which has then become a colloquial term, so that the line reads "naturally arising Fuck Body."

Lama Gyurme has been having stomach cramps. He has been to the local clinic, but they can't

find anything. The cramps persist, so I am asked to take him, with Harvey to translate, to Mercy Hospital in Durango. Sitting in the emergency room lobby, I wait for the Lama. An obese lady to my left, wearing shorts and a tee-shirt, paints her toes copper. A tall Indian in formal dress, a set of tails, no less, with his hair tied back in a braid, a turquoise and bone necklace, dark glasses and cowboy boots, paces the floor. A tough-looking guy with a tattoo of a dragon on his calf, with his right eye mangled, bounces a baby on his knee. *Aliens 3* is on the TV. Which realm is this? Which planet am I on?

The doctors can find nothing wrong with Lama Gyurme, so we head back to Tara Mandala. On the road home, we pass through the small village of Gem, and I point to a twenty foot stack of elk antlers in front of a shop, probably a tannery, where there is a sign, "The Buck Stops Here." The Lama's eyes get really big, and his automatic mantra machine kicks into overdrive. Within a mile, a huge rainbow arcs across the road. "Man, Tsering," I say, "you liberated a whole herd of dead elk."

Next day, I am walking down the trail past his tent on my way to deliver some photos to Harvey, and I notice Lama Gyurme on his hands and knees spitting up white foam. He is coughing and sweating and seems to have knots in his shoulders when I put my arm around him. I am patting him on the back, offering words of comfort, and he sees I have packs of photographs in the plastic bag I am carrying. He loves photos. I decide Harvey won't mind if I show them to him, and we are looking through them, when I hear my name called from behind. I look around, and there is Adzom motioning me to come toward him.

Lama Gyurme gets up and walks ahead of me, and I stoop down to put the photos back in the bag, but Adzom motions me to leave the stuff where it is and to hurry. I follow the trail down by the portable toilet, and there is Tsering again on his hands and knees with the dry heaves. Adzom points to a rock and moves his hand in a circle. I remove the rock. He hands me a sharp stick, and I dig. I hear chanting in the meditation yurt on the hill. It is daylight, but it is also, oddly, like a long night.

He points to another spot, and I dig. Still nothing. He crouches down while I am digging, and the stick flips up a big clod of dirt on his robes. I freak out, thinking I have sullied the Lama, but he ignores this and points to a new place to dig. At this point, Adzom's sister, Ani Sherab Rinpoche, appears, and she takes the stick from me and walks a few steps away, looking at the ground, and then comes back and hands the stick to me and points to a place right next to where I had originally started to dig. I dig again in this spot, and this time a piece of paper appears.

I think, "Good Lord, we've discovered an earth treasure from Padmasambhava." At this point, the chanting in the yurt reaches a crescendo, and I can see ink marks bleeding on the damp paper. The paper, however seems to be a regular sheet of typing paper, folded over maybe three times and not the yellow scrolls with the secret dakini script. I'm hesitant. I'm not sure I want to unfold this dark treasure and find out it is an advertisement for a 2-for-1 sale at City Market.

I start to pick up the paper, but Ani Sherab stops me, and both Adzom and Tsering, who have come up close, turn their hands up and wiggle their fingers. I am not sure what they want, but Ani Sherab is holding the piece of paper between two sticks, and I guess they want me to build a fire to burn the thing. I have a pack of matches, and I strike one, and Ani Sherab holds the paper over the flame, but the paper is too damp, and it won't burn.

I build a small fire with leaves and twigs. A wind begins, then vanishes. I blow on the flames, as

the paper catches and curls like a question. It seems Lama Gyurme's nausea is gone. He is rapt in attention and makes sure every last piece is burned to ash, and then he stirs the ashes. I look up and see Adzom doing some kind of a lama shuffle. At the sight of him dancing in his robes and tennis shoes, I can't help but laugh. We all look at each other and laugh and turn our hands up and shrug and leave our separate ways. The sky is full of rainbow light. I don't know what this was all about, but I think we got rid of something bad. You never know what you might dig up in America, old gum wrappers, hidden *termas*.

The next morning, I am called from breakfast to fix the Lama's bed. He has broken a couple of boards. I get my tools, and I take along the plumb, level, and square I want to give to Rinpoche. Adzom is eating breakfast at a table under the awning, so I go in and look under the bed and see that the screws that hold the brace that supports the cross structure has given way on one side. I remove the covers from the bed and turn the frame on its side, and, in doing so, I bump against the alter and tip some water out of the offering bowls, which spills on a notebook. The top page is soaked, and I grab my handkerchief to wipe it up before the ink runs, but I am too late, and I smear the letters. I hope this is only a few insignificant notes and not a sacred transmission from Jigme Lingpa.

I finish my repairs and put the bed back together, just as Adzom returns. I point to the mess I made, but he doesn't seem disturbed. He sits on his bed and bounces a couple of times and smiles. Anne is nearby, and I ask her if she will translate for me. I tell him that I have some tools I would like to give him, and that it occurred to me that he might like to know the esoteric significance of these tools. I tell him that I don't presume to be teaching him, but that I feel compelled to share some of my knowledge with him. He smiles broadly and asks me to sit.

I give him, in turn, a small plastic level, a metal square, and a brass plumb with a string. I explain that the Level is symbolic of equality, the Square of morality, and the Plumb teaches rectitude of conduct. The plumb is an instrument used by operative masons to raise perpendiculars, the square to square their work, and the level to lay horizontals. However, in Speculative Masonry, the Plumb admonishes us to walk upright in life, squaring our actions by the Square of Virtue, and to remember that we are traveling on the Level of Time towards that Temple in Heaven not made by human hands. Anne does her best to translate this into Tibetan, and I ask her to tell him that these allegorical ideas parallel a similar concept in Anu Yoga about the inseparableness of the Jnanasattva and the Samayasattva. Adzom nods with enthusiasm, and he says it is unusual for him to be giving mind training while receiving training in carpentry in return.

When my little talk is over, Adzom asks me if I have meditated on his last mind-training question. I tell him I finally understand, and I give him a new answer. He gives me further private instructions, and when I leave, I realize he has turned me around again. I am walking up the trail to the stupa, when it hits me. I am completely aware but not "thinking." I am just there, everywhere, on the trail, in the universe.

that presence  
that is all  
that is  
given each  
breath

Tears shoot out of my eyes—I can help it—I have such gratitude for what has been revealed to me. I lean my head against the upper part of the stupa. A dakini comes around from the other side of the stupa, and asks me what is wrong, and I say, “I just feel incredibly blessed.”

“Yes,” she says, “the stupa is a powerful, living entity, giving off its blessings. It’s a wonderful place to cry.”