

Tashi Choling
Sangha News
December 2018

Sangha Profile
Lama Bruce Newman



***Teaching dharma is Lama Bruce's
happy place***

When Ram Dass' seminal book, *Be Here Now*, was published in 1971, it opened a door for many thousands of people, most of them young, and all searching for spiritual meaning. Bruce Newman was one. In a recent interview, Bruce recalled that hearing a tape of *Be Here Now* was what really got him interested in the dharma. In his early 20s, Bruce traveled to Nepal. The year was 1975. Nepal was full of spiritual

seekers from the US and Europe. After a few months in Dharamsala, Bruce took part in a 20-day vipassana retreat in a neighboring town. The retreat was led by Christopher Titmuss, a former Theravada Buddhist monk. Bruce's experience during that retreat was profound. In fact, it changed his life. "I became completely hooked on meditation," he said about this part of his spiritual journey. "There was some sense of being on a big adventure—that there would be a miraculous meeting with the teacher, getting these teachings, and magical kinds of experiences. I was thinking that all I had to do was get rid of these little obstacles and then there was going to be a fiesta, a smorgasbord of amazing experiences. That was my template for practice for a great many years. It took a long time for those dreams to die. When they did, I was pretty devastated. So, the time we are talking about, I was still very much immersed in those dreams."

By now, Lama Bruce has accumulated 42 years of meditation experience. During some of our visits, he would say, "Well, this has been fun but I have to get back to work," meaning back to the cushion. Meditation practice became Lama Bruce's de facto career. "I didn't have any Plan B," he explained. In Nepal, Bruce met his root guru, Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, and began studying with him, as well as with Thrangu Rinpoche. The great dzogchen master Tulku Orgyen lived nearby. "I didn't see Tulku Orgyen that often, but every word he said is carved into my mind," Bruce noted.

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, who was interested in learning more about Westerners and practicing his English, would sometimes drop by to engage in wide-ranging discussions with Bruce and his roommate Martin.

Bruce began immersing himself in meditation practice. "I believed in the Buddhist teachings, but I had not even a drop of bodhicitta or any idea of what bodhicitta meant," he reported. In 1977, Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche recommended that Bruce return to America, since his health was poor and his father was ill with cancer. Before leaving, Bruce went to speak with Dudjom Rinpoche. "His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche had a house in Kathmandu. Every morning he had an open house. You could go there and see him and someone would translate for you. It was pretty informal. I wish I had realized who he was and what an amazing opportunity it was, but that is another story. I told him I was returning to the West coast and asked him if he would recommend a teacher to study with, and he recommended Gyatrul Rinpoche. I don't think I had even heard of Gyatrul Rinpoche at the time."

Bruce returned to the US in September 1977, went to see his family and then moved to Oakland, where he studied with Gyatrul Rinpoche for the next 2 ½ years. In 1980 he returned to Nepal, living there until 1988. During those eight years, Bruce continued to receive teachings from Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche. He continued to practice while supporting himself as an English teacher working for the

United States Information Service in Kathmandu. Then he left Nepal to enter a four-year retreat at Samye Ling in Scotland. There were 27 men signed up for the retreat and most of them knew each other because they had just finished building the huge Samye Ling temple together. Their building career was still not over. In order to start their retreat, the group had to construct the building they would practice in. "The others were used to physical work, but I was physically fragile. What I couldn't do, someone else had to. It was intense pressure for 7-8 months," Bruce said. The traditional Karma Kagyu retreat had two Nyingma practices added, which made it four years rather than three.



After the retreat was completed, Bruce returned to Tashi Choling in November 1993. Living in a cabin behind Shandor Weiss and Gaea Yudron's house in the Colectin Valley, he continued his meditation practice, which he sometimes calls his "love affair with the dharma." Around this time two things happened that radically changed his

life. First, in 1995 Gyatrul Rinpoche authorized him to teach at Tashi Choling. In addition, after many years of solitary life, Bruce met Susan Bosworth and fell in love. He and Susan have been married for 20 years now.

Lama Bruce teaches classes, retreats, book groups, and the 4-year Marig Munsel program he developed at several centers, including Orgyen Dorje Den, Yeshe Nyingpo Mexico, Dorje Ling in Portland, and Tashi Choling. In addition, he teaches at some of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche's centers in Austria, the UK, and in Leggett, California.

In the Ashland area, some devoted students have been attending his classes for ten years or more. Leslie Levy says she felt very comfortable when she first met Lama Bruce, "as if we were related in another world." She has taken Bruce's four-year Marig Munsel program twice, and is in the midst of the third cycle. Many of Bruce's town classes gather at Leslie's home. "It's so worthwhile for me. He has become my regular teacher." Kate Nehrbass has been going to Bruce's classes for ten years, too. "I love the classes because he's open to almost any question. I just learn so much from that. I know a lot more than I would have any other way. He's very warm—and also very real and honest." Dan Grignon met Lama Bruce nine years ago. "I do find that his ability to understand the subtleties of meditation makes him a wonderful guide. I go to him with all my practice questions. And he is so accessible. It's precious."

Bruce loves teaching. "Teaching the dharma has been the greatest joy of my life. Although I've done many years of practice, the experiences that arise through meditation do not for me equal the joy at seeing others change and knowing that in some small way I've been a catalyst for that change. It's incredibly satisfying and incredibly rewarding. I must have taught thousands of people to follow their breath since 1995! The greatest joy in teaching is, of course, knowing that you are benefiting others."

Gyatrul Rinpoche commented about Lama Bruce's qualities during a teaching at Tashi Choling in 1997. Rinpoche began his remarks in a puzzling way. "There's Bruce, who might be rotten but doesn't smell." There was a sprinkling of laughter at this quixotic remark. Rinpoche continued, "He doesn't have to apply perfume because he has the perfume of discipline, which is a sweet smell. Everyone should try to establish the sweet smell of natural discipline rather than smelling like a skunk and trying to hide it with perfume." Discipline, a long commitment to the dharma, honesty, kindness, and a sometimes surprising sense of humor—that's our Lama Bruce.

P.S. Lama Bruce's book, *A Beginner's Guide to Tibetan Buddhism*, was published by Snow Lion in 2004. Have you read it yet? It's a wonderful read, even if you consider yourself past the beginner stage.

Recently, at his residence
in Half Moon Bay,
Rinpoche enjoyed watching a
video of HH the Dalai Lama



In the Works: An Upcoming Film Series on Death and Dying from a Vajrayana Perspective

In association with [Transitional Life Care](#), a nonprofit founded by Julie Rogers and based in the Bay area, a group of local sangha members are coordinating a film series that will be presented once a month at the Ashland Library starting in February. Death! As popular as the Oscars! More news will be posted in January.

About Sangha News

Sangha News is published bi-monthly and sent out via email with Tashi Choling's monthly newsletter.

The next issue will appear in February. If you have something you would like to contribute, please email Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com

Happy Holidays!



Tashi Choling will be closed for the winter months.

Stay safe, and enjoy the winter season!