

## **THE SNOW LION NEWSLETTER**

Volume 18, Number 4  
Fall 2004 – page 1

### ***The Dzogchen Lighthouse:* Lama Surya Das Begins New Cycle of Dzogchen Retreat**



Lama Surya Das recently consecrated Dzogchen Osel Ling, his new 38-acre retreat center and hermitage on the banks of the peaceful Pedernales River, 45 minutes west of Austin, Texas. In September 2004, he initiated the first in a new cycle of Dzogchen Wisdom 100-Day Retreats. The first group of sixteen experienced students is now in residence in this cloistered monastic retreat, with teachings and practices based on a Dzogchen Heart-Essence (Nyinthik) text by Jigme Lingpa. The retreat will be blessed by the presence of H.H. Drukchen Rinpoche, head of the Drukpa Kagyu School and a Mahamudra and Dzogchen master, who is coming from Nepal.

The Dzogchen and Mahamudra traditions stress naturalness and ordinariness, which often makes it difficult to recognize authentic teachers. Lama Surya Das, who has twice completed the traditional three-year Vajrayana retreat, makes the Buddhist teachings accessible through a remarkable combination of New York accent, contemporary stories, American cultural references, and his sports-loving regular guy-ness. Upon meeting him initially, one would not necessarily think he is a meditation master, chant master, and scholar well-versed in the many religions and their practices and philosophies. Lama Surya Das has been a pioneer in his efforts to bring lamas to the West, and especially in offering authentic Dzogchen practice retreats in America. He is actively involved in interfaith dialogue and social and spiritual activism.

#### ***Please tell us more about the 100-Day Retreat.***

I teach mainly by sharing my practice, mostly based on Tibetan texts and oral pith instructions. I would like to leave behind clear translations, teachings, comments, and pithy personal instructions on each of the main lineage practices as I come to understand and practice them. This year we are doing ngondro, with Dzogchen view and Trekchod meditation.

The focus over the next 10-12 years is going to be on the three extraordinary or particular Dzogchen practices, esoteric, more advanced, direct access practices of Trekchod, Tegal, and Rushen. We will be covering the material of the three-year retreat in these annual autumn Dzogchen Wisdom 100-Day Nyinthik (Heart Essence) retreats.

***Please tell us about Dzogchen Osel Ling.***

Dzogchen Osel Ling-"Dzogchen Lighthouse," or even more specifically "Place from where the light of Dzogchen emanates"-has a residential capacity of only about 20 although the shrine hall (the Drolma Lha-kang or Tara Temple) can accommodate about 80 people. The facilities will be available for individual retreats, teacher retreats, invitational teacher meetings and the like. It is a lovely property with beautiful vistas, large old oaks, deer and other wildlife.

***What other teachings or practices are offered by Dzogchen Center?***

Dzogchen Center is quite active. In addition to developing Dzogchen Osel Ling and organizing the Dzogchen Wisdom 100-Day Retreat, it sponsors four seasonal one- and two-week intensive retreats every year as well as one-day and weekend retreats throughout the country. We also offer weekly local meditation groups in a number of communities, classes, private interviews and spiritual direction, Dharma talks on tape and through publishing, and annual pilgrimages to India and Tibet.

***Please tell us about your teachers.***

My last great personal root lama was Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, who was originally from Kathok Monastery in Kham. I lived with him in a three-year retreat, and we traveled together afterwards. I brought him to the USA to teach twice in the early 90's. Nyoshul Khenpo personally transmitted the lineage's power and blessings to me. His vision especially was that I should teach and emphasize Dzogchen, that it is doable in this lifetime. My other late teachers made pioneering efforts to establish, practice and teach, preserve and spread the Dharma in the world. HH the Sixteenth Karmapa, Kalu Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, HH Dudjom Rinpoche and Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche inspired me in that way. My Khenpo as well as others including Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche got right to the point with people who were interested with good results; they taught directly and they are always present in my teaching. I have dreams of my gurus and yidams - for thirty years it's almost every night. That is a big part of my life. Guru Yoga is a way of life. The guru is always with you; there is no separation, now or later. The Buddha, the guru and oneself -the practitioner disciple-are forever one and inseparable.

***How do devotion and the teacher-student relationship fit into these practices?***

Devotion is a very important part of my practice. Like my personal mentor Tulku Pema Wangyal says, "Devotion is the main practice. Guru Yoga is the main practice." That is true for me. Pictures of all my root teachers are on the main altar at our retreats and at our local Dzogchen Center sitting groups.

Devotion quickly transports us beyond the rational mind to the bigger space of Buddhahness. As I enter Buddha, he enters me.

***sidebar:***

My only thought is of my Lama.  
My only prayer is to realize  
Oneness with his Buddha mind.  
I have no other practice  
Than following the natural flow, freely enjoying  
The sublime freedom of nonaction.  
Meditation beyond fixation,  
Aimless and free from all constrictions and limitations,  
Mingling my mind with his  
In the wisdom of Dharmakaya, naked reality.  
All the intentions of the Buddhas are perfectly fulfilled.  
This is the jeweled essence of my heart's pith instructions  
Placed directly in your hand,  
Like Buddha in the palm of your hand.

--Phukong Tulku Rinpoche