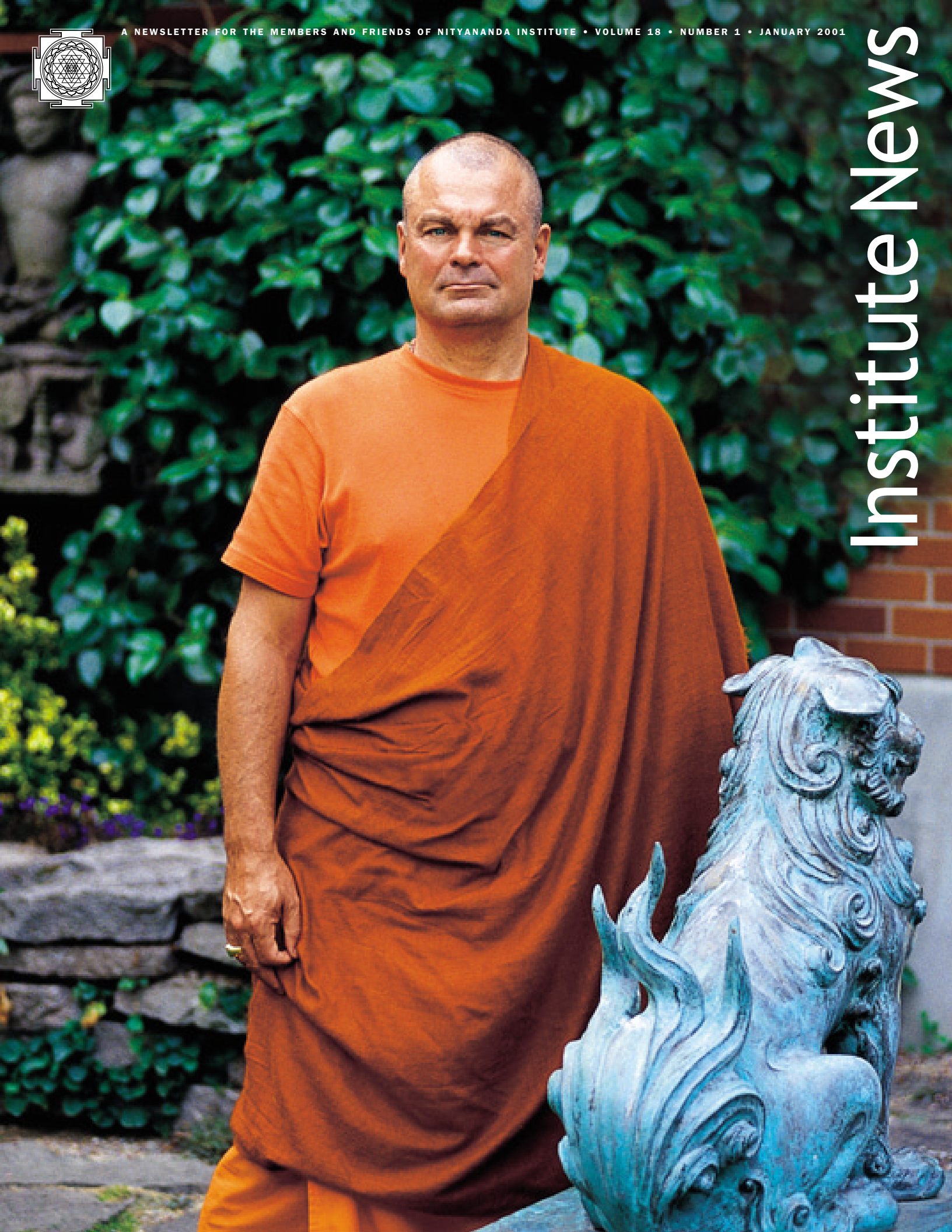




Institute News



From the Editors

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for our spiritual teacher, Swami Chetanananda. In his company, we are continuously reminded of the beauty that lies within each person and is the source of life. His presence in our lives is the most extraordinary gift.

Swamiji is completely devoted to his teachers and to spiritual growth—his own growth, that of his students, and that of everyone with whom he interacts. A remarkable quality of this devotion is his openness to and appreciation for all of life, while remaining deeply attuned to the source from which that diversity arises. His life is a constant demonstration of what it means to be a great student and a great teacher.

This newsletter opens with a beautiful exposition by Swamiji of the spiritual practice he lives and teaches. In the articles that follow, you can read about some of the specific programs and people that make up the Institute community, including Swamiji's work with Professor Sanderson on the Parā puja; a concert by Ustad Ali Akbar Khan at our July retreat; the Institute's hatha yoga program; and our study of the Tibetan Buddhist practice of Chöd with Wangdu Lama Rinpoche.

Nityananda Institute and everything about it—the breadth and depth of spiritual practice available, the diversity and richness of the people who participate—are the result of years of devoted work by Swamiji. For this, and his endlessly inspiring companionship, we are deeply grateful.

The Religion of Love

by Swami Chetanananda

It can be said that there are two kinds of religion—the religion of the law and the religion of love. The religion of the law tells us what to do and what not to do. The assumption is that there is some kind of penalty for not doing. The religion of the law requires an enforcer and punishment if we do not go along with it.

The religion of love, on the other hand, is not about condemnation. It is about constant encouragement to live in harmony first with oneself, and then from that harmony with oneself, to live in harmony with the earth, the sky, everything with which we share this planet. The religion of love is about being in harmony with all the cycles of life and death that are the creative expression of earth and sky, and everything in between.

In India initially, the religion of the Vedas was the religion of love. It was a religion that honored the earth, the creative spirit within people, and the whole of the life process of individual human beings and of humanity. This early religion of love encompassed within it an understanding of the nature of ultimate reality as well as of the needs of individual people, and this religion wanted to respond to those needs. As a result, a ritual process arose, and for several thousand years, the technology of Indian culture was a ritual technology—how to do rituals that had an effect, that worked.

In the quest for rituals that had some power, rules came up because the person who did the ritual was supposed to be in the proper state to make the ritual work. This meant defining the proper state, which was determined to be a state of purity that excluded certain forms of behavior. In this way, a set of rules came

about, and eventually those rules grew as various traditions sought to demonstrate that their rituals were more powerful than others.

A kind of spiritual athleticism developed: “This tradition is more powerful because the people in it live a more stringent life.” At that point much of the love went out of this religion, because the focus was on rules, on power. Backbiting occurred over who was living the rules and who was not.

Through the quest for power, then, the religion of the law emerged and became crystallized. It was a way in which people could have some assurances about other people. Today, there are some religious communities that even have rules about trust and love. But how can trust be legislated? How can love be legislated?

The religion of the law seeks to assure people of the authenticity of the product: “This is a real product because all the proper preparation has gone into it.” But the religion of love is not about mass anything. The religion of love recognizes the uniqueness of every human being. We are all people, and so in this case uniqueness is not about difference. It is about unique genealogies, unique stresses and strains that we bring to the moment when we awaken to the fact that there has to be more to life than stress and strain. And in that moment of awakening—in that contemplation—the religion of the law begins to look unsatisfactory, because it is not helpful in responding to the question: “What more is there to life than strain, and how can I get past the strain to be loving in my life?”

For example, I used to be a strict vegetarian until I went to my parents’ house for dinner one evening and told



my mother I could not eat a dish, because it was not vegetarian, that she had lovingly prepared for me. She broke down in tears. The law of purity I was following was failing me in an important moment when my mother was trying to do something to express her caring.

Caring is more important than any rule. An honest interchange dissolves any other consideration. Better to deal with confusing and difficult interpersonal experiences, if there are honesty and caring in them—an authentic sharing—than to run from the upset and disturbance that come with interpersonal dynamics. How can we understand people and have compassion for them if we are running from human interaction?

Energy can be wasted in the process of interpersonal experience. Such experience, while full of caring, may also be full of chaos and clutter. Many religious rules, such as celibacy, are established to save us from that clutter. But as people who are growing and are concerned to be compassionate toward and understanding of everyone’s experience, we establish a connection, we maintain that connection, and we whittle away at everything that exists that is not supportive of pure, honest interchange between us and anybody.

(continued on page 4)

THE PARĀ PUJA

Pujas are ritualized practices of offering and worship traditional to both Shaivism and Buddhism. Over the past few years, Swamiji has talked frequently about the importance of pujas as vehicles to further spiritual growth, and he has introduced the Chöd puja to the Institute practice. He has also talked extensively about the Parā puja and performed it on several occasions this fall in Portland.

The Parā puja was the highest ritual practice in the Trika tradition. It is, however, no longer practiced in India. After much painstaking work with the Shaiva texts, Professor Alexis Sanderson, a renowned Sanskrit scholar from Oxford University who has been a regular visiting lecturer at the Institute, has succeeded in reconstructing the various elements of this puja. The work he has done on the Parā puja is superb.

Swamiji's own teachings about the Parā puja have been among his most eloquent and inspiring. The puja is a highly refined and aesthetically elegant practice. Swamiji has described it as a ritual in which we make offerings of everything that is sweet and fine, and expand and strengthen our connection to the place within ourselves from which that sweetness and fineness arises.

Swamiji and Alexis have been engaged in an ongoing dialogue on the Parā puja for several years, and are currently working on the details of the initiation. In future programs, Swamiji will instruct us how to perform the Parā puja and give us the initiation. Nityananda Institute will then be the only place in the world where this puja is practiced.

—Michelle Lawson

Religion of Love *continued from page 3*

There is an Indian text that talks about the “light of the way of the renunciate.” The book lists rules to protect the renunciate from human experience. At the deepest level, these rules are intended to support, through the promotion of a simple life, the renunciate's effort to come to an understanding whereby the interconnectedness of all human beings is recognized. This understanding is of the highest. And yet, instead of shedding light, the rules in the book build walls that block understanding.

In a world of which we are intimately a part—and we are all intimately a part of the world—how can we renounce anything anyway? What renunciation is there? If we are unique individuals, then there is no rule that is going to fit anyone.

At first in a creative endeavor, there can be a place for guidelines. When a person learns to play the piano, there is a proper way to begin to touch the keys. But as an artist grows, the rules usually get in the way of creative expression. So there are advisories that are appropriate for us to listen to, but instead of having a head full of rules, it is better to be considerate people—considerate of the diversity and uniqueness that exist around us, considerate of the fact that there are no rules that can encompass all that diversity. The religion of love is about the nourishment it takes for people to awaken to the possibilities that exist within them.

The religion of love calls us to accept our humanity. Only when we accept ourselves can we begin to accept other people and respect the uniqueness of every human being. Conversely, if the law conditions us to close our minds and hearts to anybody for any reason, how will we ever come to a complete understanding and acceptance of ourselves?

We are all interconnected. We are unique and interconnected at the same time. The interconnectedness of human beings is interconnected to the environ-

*If a master takes up
residence in your heart,
you can not surround him with walls.
Even if you were a universe
filled with bright stars,
he might sigh and feel cramped.
So once his tent goes up
and the flags start to wave,
crack the vessel of your life.*

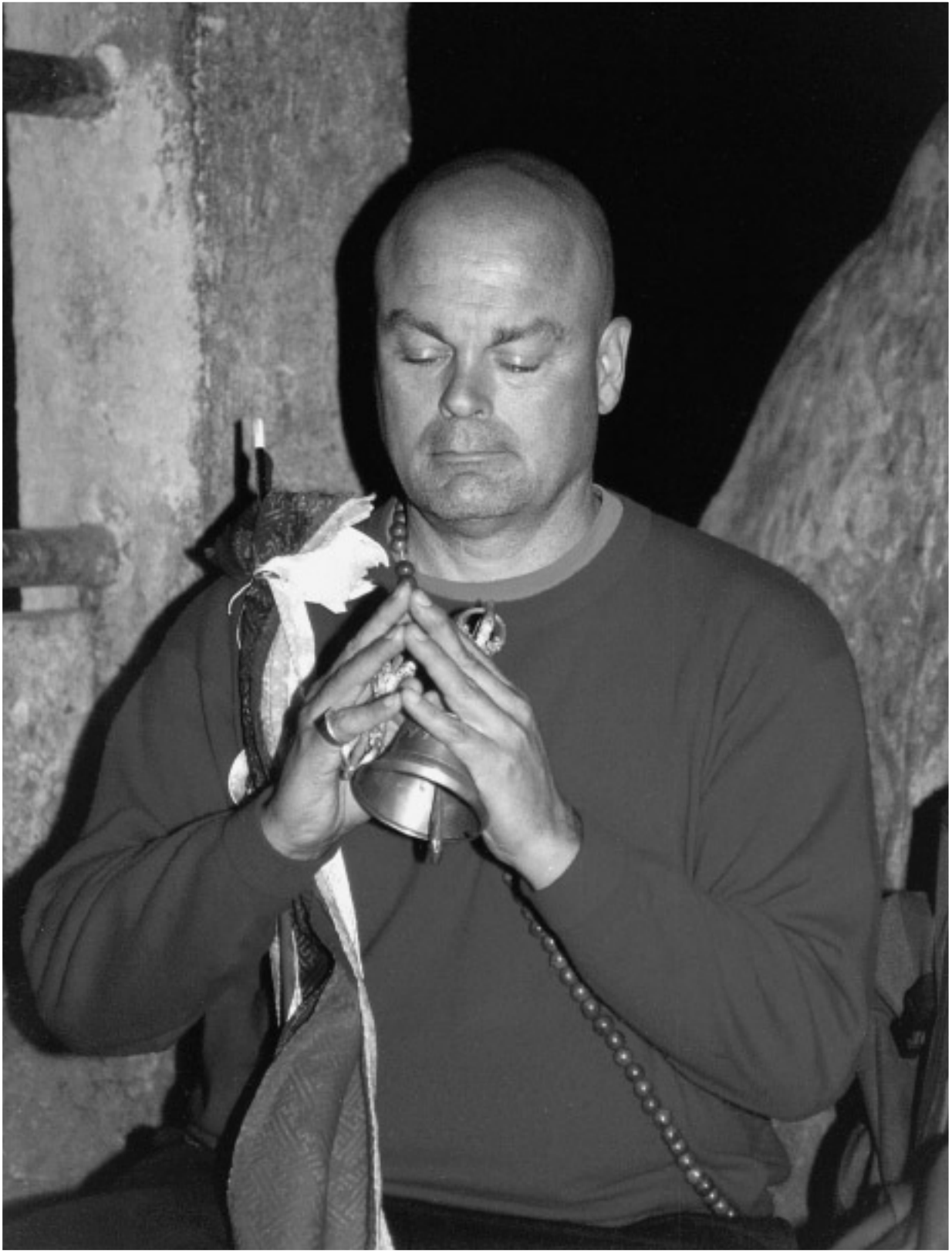
CAROL MEDALIE ROSENBERG

ment of the planet, which is interconnected to the environment of the universe, which is interconnected to...there is no boundary. It is all one. The problem with rules is that they make us think that there is reality to duality, that this over here is the right thing to do but that over there is not. The rules tell us that there is a separate “this,” a separate “that,” when the reality is that this and that are completely interconnected.

When we have the capacity to focus on the essential energy that is underneath every kind of confusion, then we come to recognize the whole world as a curtain of light. The confusion is because we keep trying to make solid something that never was and never will be solid. We try to put something that is fluid and in motion into a box, and it will not stay in the box. We keep trying to put energy—love—in a box.

I am deeply grateful to my parents, who are Catholic, for my learning at an early age that the key is to love God. As a child, I tried to love God with all my heart, and in wondering what I was loving, I discovered that the love itself was God. We can go within ourself and open our heart and find love there, and we can allow that love to rise up within us, and we can deeply feel that God is

(continued on page 8)



Maestro Ali Akbar Khan Performs at July Retreat

by Duncan Soule



"I've never seen another human being who can become the music. And in whose company the music comes from everywhere."

—SWAMIJI, JULY 2000

One of the highlights of our July retreat was a concert of Indian classical music performed by Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, master of the sarod. He was accompanied by Pandit Swapan Chaudhuri on tabla, his son Alam Khan on sarod, and his wife, Mary Khan, on tanpura. Khansahib learned the sarod from his father, Padmavibhushan Acharya Baba Allauddin Khansahib, starting at age three. He first performed in the United States in 1955 and made the first commercial recording of Indian classical music later that year. He has performed throughout the world and has received many awards and honors for his work. When he is not on tour, Khansahib maintains a busy schedule of composing, archiving, and teaching at the Ali Akbar College of Music in San Rafael, California.

Unlike European classical music, the music of India is largely improvised

around a particular melody, scale, and rhythmic pattern. The music is never planned in advance. The pieces in a concert are chosen by Khansahib just before the performance, based on the time of day and the mood of the moment. As a result, it is not possible for the musicians to practice specific melodies in advance. They must be ready for anything. Khansahib routinely spends the day before a concert preparing himself by becoming very quiet and deeply open, so that he can be attuned to the highest vibration and make that experience available to us through his music.

The concert in Portland started with a piece called Hembihag, written by Khansahib's father. The mood of this *rag* is peace, pathos, and joy. It is based on a scale similar to the major scale in western classical music. It began with a long *alap*, a slow solo section played with great beauty and depth by Khansahib. Right from the start, Khansahib's amazing artistry and mastery of his instrument were revealed.

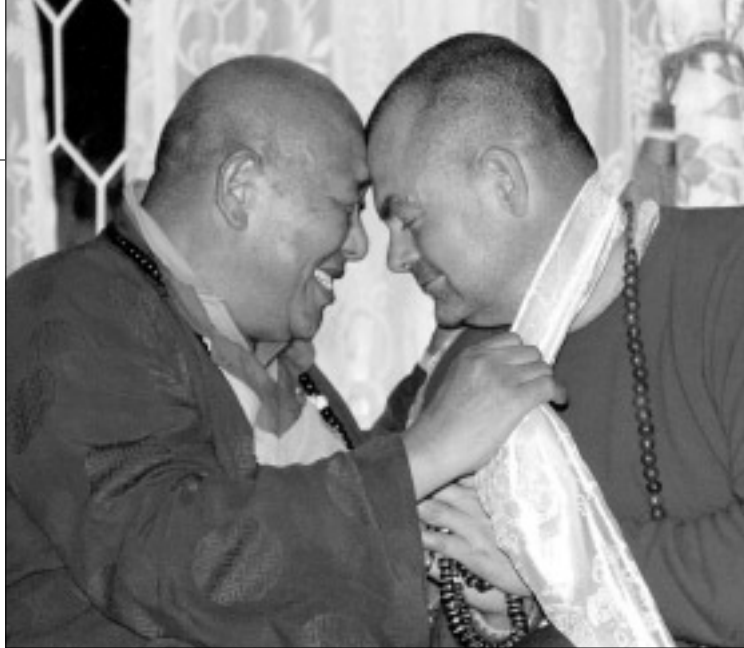
He was soon joined by Alam, who played a counterpart to his father's melody. It was a very sweet interaction, providing clear evidence of Alam's emerging skill and musicianship. As in our meditation practice, the student's attunement to the teacher is a vital part of the interaction, and the means by which the indescribable can be transmitted from teacher to student. Throughout the rest of the evening, there was a wonderful musical interplay between Khansahib and his son. At times Alam would reflect the melody played by his

(continued on page 11)



Lama Tsering Wangdu Rinpoche has returned to Portland this fall, and we are extremely grateful to him for sharing his Chöd, Chum, and Phowa practices. It is a rare privilege to study Tibetan tantric practices with an authentic master and to spend an extended period of time with him.

Wangdu Lama was born in 1936 in the village of Langkor in West Dingri, Tibet. At age 12, he began studying at Nadrag Monastery with Nadrag Rinpoche, a Nyingma lama from whom he received the transmission for the Phowa practice and the Chöd empowerment. He then completed the traditional sadhana of practicing Chöd in 108 cremation grounds over a period of three months and ten days. Upon completion of the Chöd retreat, Nadrag Rinpoche acknowledged his accomplishment in the practice and sent him to Nepal on pilgrimage. Wangdu Lama arrived in Nepal in 1958, and eventually settled in the Tibetan refugee camp in Jawalakiel, Kathmandu, where he lives today. He has trained with and practiced with highly respected Nyingma lamas such as Dudjom Rinpoche, Chatral Rinpoche, and Urygen Tulku Rinpoche. Wangdu Lama is well known in Kathmandu for the efficacy of his healings and special pujas.



Our Thanks to WANGDU LAMA RINPOCHE



by **Michelle Lawson**

Swamiji was introduced to Wangdu Lama in 1998 by some Tibetan friends who described him as “unusual.”

Upon meeting, both Swamiji and Wangdu Lama felt an immediate and powerful connection between them. At the time, Wangdu Lama thought he did not have long to live, and so he asked Swamiji to carry on the lineage of his practice. Swamiji agreed. When Wangdu Lama’s health improved, Swamiji invited



him to Portland to teach us his practice.

Last year Wangdu Lama spent six months in Portland teaching Institute mem-

bers the Chöd and Phowa. The Phowa is a method for uplifting consciousness which can be practiced as a part of the Chöd, or to help uplift the consciousness of those who are dying or who have passed on. During the Phowa transmission, which was given over several consecutive evenings, Wangdu Lama trained

us in the visualizations, chant, and melody for the practice.

Wangdu Lama also gave the complete cycle of Chöd initiation, which in Tibetan Buddhism traditionally consists of three parts. The first is the initiation itself. The purpose of a tantric initiation is to prepare the student to undertake a particular practice. The initiation includes a formal ritual, but the heart of it is the sharing of an inner experience between the teacher and the student. The second part of the cycle is the reading of the text for the practice, in which the hearing of the syllables is believed to transmit the inner meaning. The final step is oral instruction: an explanation of the text and the details of the practice. Wangdu Lama’s instruction included his commentary on the practice as well as question and answer sessions.

Wangdu Lama is visiting the Institute until late January, and he will be returning next May in time for the Dalai Lama’s visit. His English is improving rapidly. In addition to working with Institute students on Chöd, Phowa, and Chum, he is performing pujas for both the Institute and the local Tibetan community. He says he likes America very much. We, in turn, are delighted to have the company of such a profoundly accomplished practitioner.



A SACRED DANCE: STUDYING THE CHUM

by Laurie Saunders and Mira Ames

The practice of Chöd traditionally begins with a sacred dance called the Chum. When Wangdu Lama first visited the Institute last year, he gave demonstrations and left detailed instructions for the Chum. Since then, several groups have begun studying the dance, with the help of Monica O’Neal. During Wangdu Lama’s current visit, he has been further refining our practice of the dance.

The central purpose of the Chum is to prepare oneself, and the space one is in, for the Chöd practice. In this respect, the Chum is far more than a dance: it is a sophisticated and beautiful spiritual discipline in and of itself. As Swamiji has said, “While dancing to purify the ground and subdue the place, we are bringing our hearts and minds into a peaceful and compassionate place.”

To this end, the Chum includes physical movements as well as playing a damaru (hand-drum) and kangling (thighbone trumpet), song, mantra, visualization, and conscious breath circulation. All of these elements are incorporated into the dance as a whole, which has nine parts: Walk of Subduing the Place, Dance of Five Directions, Dance of Phurbas, Dance of Cross Vajras, Walk of Fire, Walk of Dakas, Walk of Dakinis, Walk of Mahasiddhas, and Walk of the Snake.

In each of these sections, the dancer moves in large circles, creating a mandala on the ground where the Chöd is to be performed. Each section has a different purpose. For example, the Walk of Subduing the Place dispels obstacles that would prevent the Chöd from occurring in that particular place. In the Dance of the Five Directions, the dancer cultivates the attitudes of surrender and the five paramitas: compassion, joy, kindness, equanimity, and bodhicitta. The Dance of Phurbas drives down the stakes that anchor the practitioner in these attitudes and subdue the ego.

Institute members who are learning the Chum have found it to be a challenging, engaging, and joyful practice, that has deepened their experience not only of Chöd, but of meditation as well. At a recent retreat, Swamiji said, “The ultimate fearless yogi is a person who is able to dance with all the confusion and uncertainty that presents itself in front of us . . . a person who can love everything.” For many centuries, devoted practitioners have used Chöd and Chum to develop this capacity in themselves. However, there are very few people who still practice these ancient traditions today. That we have the opportunity to do so, is remarkable.

Religion of Love *continued from page 4*

in our life. We come to know that the love in us, at the center of our heart, is the Life in us, and that this is God. It occurred to me as a child that if God were my Father, there could not be much, if anything, I could do to close His heart to me forever.

Through our spiritual practice, we become clear about the love within us. That love clarifies our understanding about our interconnectedness with all the diverse manifestations of that love—with everyone and everything around us. There really are no rules that can help us to do that. Our spiritual practice is what we can do at any moment to refer to that loving, sweet, fine, rich, and profoundly fulfilling place inside us. The connection to that place is the source of all peace and happiness. It is the source of every kind of knowledge and understanding, enlightenment and liberation.

The inspiration that rises up inside us, when we begin to refer to the love in us, is not going to be in any way mundane. A creative life makes available a dimension of understanding of each other and a capacity for sharing that are not a usual experience. In the midst of that sharing, of that interconnectedness, every one of us also has a unique life process that makes us in some sense deeply alone. Our process is never like anybody else’s. And we have to take responsibility for that and accept it and appreciate it, so that we can rise within ourself to a level of understanding whereby we respect, and have compassion and love for, other human beings. We have a place we can always go where peace exists, where there is relief from the pain and struggle of confusion. We can always go there, to that place inside us, where some happiness and a great deal of light can be found.

Going to that place within again and again dissolves every molecule of confusion. We become one with, we merge into, that love that exists within us, as it grows, becomes powerful, and transforms us into the truest thing we can be. ▼

Beyond the Physical: Hatha Yoga at Nityananda Institute

by Rachel Gaffney

Last spring, when you and I were celebrating the return of sunlight, Don Erskine stepped off a curb, fell full force onto his knee and splintered his kneecap. Two days later, crutching his way back from the doctor's, he slipped, twisted, and fell, fracturing his other kneecap more agonizingly than the first. Don is an unusually dedicated, hardworking, disciplined person. If you ask him what he wants to be able to do when he is fully recovered, high on his list is to return to classes at the Movement Center, Nityananda Institute's yoga studio.

Catherine Fixe is a young, fit, and talented woman who yearns for depth of understanding. Her life is pressured and challenging. She wants both the physical stamina to meet those pressures and the perspective to keep her balanced. Central to both goals is her attendance at the Institute's yoga classes.

I tell these stories not only because they illustrate the satisfaction of our students, but because they speak more broadly about what makes the Institute's yoga program so remarkable. Catherine and Don represent vastly different needs. One has serious injury-related restrictions. One has an athletic nature and spiritual longing. And while there are many wonderful schools of yoga in the world, to find one that answers to such a broad range of students with the depth the Institute offers is a challenging task. But here we have such a program.

The Movement Center offers a wide variety of classes and workshops, from beginning to

advanced levels—from back basics to prenatal to inversions. The style of hatha yoga we teach emphasizes breath awareness, adaptation of poses to suit the individual, and inner focus. This individualized approach makes hatha yoga accessible enough physically that students can experience the spiritual dimension. Our programs are further distinguished by the quality of our teachers and their teachers. Movement Center instructors are devoted to their students and their own practices. And they have been taught by a master of yoga, Swami Chetanananda, as well as by many other gifted yoga teachers.

Our instructors bring a wealth of experience and education to their teaching. Cumulatively, we have many years of teaching and graduate health training on our staff. But degrees and experience don't amount to more than shells unless teachers care for their students and dedicate themselves to their own practices. These two elements bring life and love to a class. These give students models to emulate, mentors to rely on, and fellow travelers from whom to seek direction.

How do our teachers express their care? They practice devotedly. They spend hands-on time with individual students, even when classes are full. They volunteer their time to develop and deliver the wide range of classes and workshops offered. They work together to improve what they teach and how they teach. In short, they give of themselves.

But our teachers haven't come this far with-

out extraordinary guidance. Swami Chetanananda's input into the hatha yoga program has been its inspiration. He has shaped the understanding and the content. In his usual expansive way, he has brought the finest yoga teachers to train the Institute teachers. It is Swamiji who recognized the power of the Viniyoga tradition taught by Desikachar, based on the work of his father, Krishnamacharya. It is Swamiji who arranged for teachers in that tradition as well as the Iyengar tradition and others to visit the Institute and train our teachers, sometimes for weeks at a time. And it is Swamiji who powers the spiritual emphasis of our classes.

Which takes us to the last point . . . the beginning and ending point, in fact, of our hatha yoga program. Without spiritual grounding, yoga can veer quickly towards gymnastics. Without understanding that your body is a tool to know God, without devoting yourself to contact with the subtlest, sublime life force housed within you, yoga is no longer yoga.

Nityananda Institute's yoga program extends from the love of spirituality that powers the very Institute itself. That, when all is said and done, is what makes it the remarkable service it is and the joyous event that so many of us owe thanks for.

Three people in particular deserve special mention for their contributions to the Movement Center: Ruth Knight, Pamela Rico, and Constance Monte. Thank you for your hard work, dedication, and devotion to our students and teachers.

THE MOVEMENT CENTER
HOSTS WORKSHOP BY

ERICH SCHIFFMAN

by Gretchen Kreiger

This summer, Erich Schiffman offered a hatha yoga teacher training course at the Movement Center. The workshop was a tremendous success, drawing students from the local community, all over the states, and as far away as Japan.

The nine-day course provided a basic framework for students of hatha yoga who were interested in teaching. During the seminar, Erich covered a wide range of topics, including creating a teaching style unique to each person's experience; sequencing of postures within a class; strategies for instructing a large, diverse group of students; pranayama—the science of breath; and meditation—the heart of any deep hatha yoga practice.

Leslie Bogart, a long-time teacher of Viniyoga, was a guest lecturer at the workshop and provided a clear strategy for dealing with injured students. She covered basics of anatomy and how best to support rehabilitation.

Erich Schiffman has been a student of yoga since childhood, and a teacher of hatha yoga for many years. He has created an award-winning videotape, written a book that serves as an indispensable guide to hatha yoga practice, and published numerous articles. But aside from these outstanding credentials, Erich's style of teaching, his encouraging presence, and his own enjoyment of yoga make him a remarkable teacher.

We were very fortunate to have Erich teach a workshop under our very own roof. He kindly allowed Institute yoga teachers to drop in on his practice sessions. All who attended learned a tremendous amount and were motivated to further deepen their own practices. We thank Swamiji for sponsoring this event, and we thank Erich for graciously including us in his teaching.

Erich Schiffman has written *Yoga: The Spirit and Practice of Moving Into Stillness*, and created a best-selling video, *Yoga Mind and Body*.

Friends of Nityananda
Institute

The mission of Friends of the Institute is to provide resources to Nityananda Institute through donations, in-kind gifts, volunteer programs, and cost saving initiatives. The Institute depends on donations for a significant part of its annual operating expenses. Each year generous contributions by Friends have greatly enriched our spiritual community and environment. For more information about current Friends projects or how you can become a Friend, please contact Michelle Lawson michlaw@europa.com or Patty Slote pattys@teleport.com.

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Institute News

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Nityananda Institute promotes the recognition of the creative resource within each of us by supporting individuals in their exploration of the human spirit and its expression in the world.

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Dr. Robert Svoboda
Lectures at the Institute

by Leslie Goldstein

In August, the Institute was honored to sponsor Dr. Robert Svoboda, who presented three lectures on "Adhyatmika Kundali: The Serpent Power and Spiritual Development."

Dr. Svoboda is the author of *Aghora: The Left Hand of God*, *Aghora II: Kundalini*, *Aghora III: The Law of Karma*, and books on Ayurveda and astrology. He is the only westerner ever to graduate with a bachelor of Ayurvedic medicine and surgery, and to be licensed to practice medicine in India. He is on the faculty and the board of the Ayurvedic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with Dr. Vasant Lad.

His astute understanding of Indian culture enables Dr. Svoboda to extract and convey the essence of ancient, complex myths and tales in plain, everyday English. He charmed and delighted his audience with the clarity and ease of his presentation, his adept storytelling skills, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge. We very much enjoyed his visit and hope he will return soon.

Ali Akbar Khan *continued from page 6*

father in a lower register, and at times he would take the lead, creating his own variations on the theme.

After the alap, the sarod players were joined by Swapan on tabla. The music was never crowded or cluttered, reflecting the innate sensitivity of the musicians. As the tempo increased, Swapan got a chance to demonstrate his virtuosity and artistry as a soloist. He played some wonderfully fast and intricate passages without ever losing the subtlety and grace of the music. The *rag* ended with a series of dramatic exchanges between the players during which one literally felt the music take wing and fly.

After a short intermission, Khansahib returned to play a *rag* called Pilu, a light classical piece designated for the late afternoon or evening. Included in this performance was what Khansahib calls a “Ragmala” or garland of *ragas*, which links a number of related melodies to the principal melody of the piece, giving the musicians a wealth of melodic textures to draw from. The scale of Pilu is similar to the minor scale in western music. It began with a plaintive alap, started by Khansahib and embellished by Alam. Then Swapan joined in, and together they took us through varied musical landscapes, from sweet and introspective to fiery and intense.

As the piece came to a close, the audience jumped to its feet with joy and appreciation. We had all been given an experience of divine love, transmitted through the hands of a master musician. As Swamiji said the morning after the concert, “Listening to him is like listening to a mantra or prayer. Every one of us is still buzzing from the vibration of the music, and what an exalted vibration it is. It’s just so beautiful.” We thank Khansahib, Swapan, Alam, and Mary for an unforgettable evening, and look forward to their return to Portland next year. ▼

GESHE KALSANG DAMDUL RETURNS TO PORTLAND

by Michelle Lawson

We were very pleased this summer to welcome from Dharamsala one of our favorite guests—the Venerable Geshe Kalsang Damdul (also known as “Geshe-la”). Geshe-la arrived in late July, in time for Swamiji’s birthday, and stayed through October. He has been a regular visitor to Portland since 1989, and this was his second year with us at the Institute.

One of Geshe-la’s main responsibilities this year has been to oversee the preparations for the Dalai Lama’s visit. He has been helping the Northwest Tibetan Cultural Association plan the program in Portland, and also assisting those who are arranging His Holiness’ visit to Los Angeles.

The Dalai Lama will be in Portland from May 13 through May 15, 2001.

Recently, Geshe-la visited Atlanta to set up an exchange program between Emory College and the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics (IBD) in Dharamsala. Geshe-la is the Assistant Director of the IBD, and has been an administrator there since 1987. The IBD is highly regarded and unique among Tibetan Buddhist higher educational institutions. In addition to courses in Buddhist logic, metaphysics, and scripture, it offers courses in Tibetan literature and poetry, and western philosophy and political science. Training in scriptures occurs through dialectics, a method of debate that is characteristic of the Gelugpa school of Buddhism.



Geshe-la is also actively involved with the Tibetan community in Portland. He very much enjoyed the time he spent with the children at their summer camp, where he taught language, culture, and Buddhist logic as well as the Dharma. This year the camp was especially well attended, with more than 30 students participating.

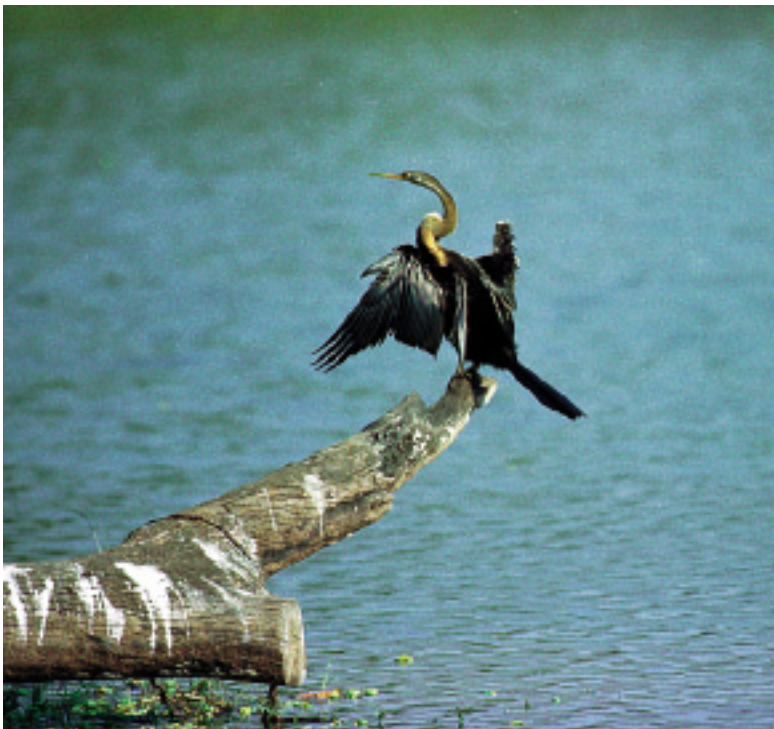
For his western Buddhist students living in Portland, Geshe-la offered two weekend retreats, as well as weekly classes on

Shantideva’s *Bodhicaryavatara* (or, “A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life”). At Nityananda Institute, study groups have been working with this text, and Geshe-la joined them for several lively and informative question and answer sessions.

Geshe-la looks forward to spending more time at the Institute in the future. He finds this community special for many reasons. He admires our openness to incorporating aspects of other traditions into our practice. He has tremendous regard for Swamiji, and has been engaged in a dialogue with him comparing various aspects of the Buddhist and Shaiva traditions. Finally, he appreciates the quality of the environment, and particularly the fact that, in his own words, “there is a lot of joy within the community.” Anyone who has spent time with Geshe-la has found that he himself is a fine expression of that same joy.



See this issue on the Institute Website www.nityanandainstitute.org



**Photographs from Chitwan
National Forest, Nepal
by Swami Chetanananda**