

Tashi Choling

Sangha News

June 2020

Sangha Profile: Diane Taudvin



Diane Taudvin grew up in a little village in Rhode Island, a setting she describes as “just about idyllic.” Everything was within walking distance. There was a pony pastured next door, and wonderful woods to wander in and explore. The church was just up the hill and the library was nearby. Diane’s family attended the New England Oak Lawn Baptist Church, which was very liberal. At the age of 12, she was baptized in a tank of water located under the church altar. She found the event to be euphoric. By high school graduation, Diane had read the whole Bible once and the New Testament twice. After

high school, she enrolled at Brown University, where she got a B.A. in Art and English.

Then, she moved to Cambridge, and the pace of her life shifted. She began to explore many forms of religion and spirituality from different parts of the world. One night, she found herself having dinner with a group of people seated on cushions at a low Japanese table. The person sitting next to her was Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Diane had never read any of his books, and the meeting had no lasting resonance in her life. However, there was some kind of karmic connection with Vajrayana Buddhism. One day in a spiritual bookstore, she picked up a copy of *The Way of the White Clouds* by Anagarika Govinda. When the book fell open to a photograph of a Chenrezig statue, she burst out crying. It was completely unexpected, and quite uncharacteristic, something that had never happened before. Mystified and curious, she bought the book.

One of Diane’s hopes was to join the Peace Corps, a venture that beckoned as a meaningful way to help others. After she met Sam Lieberman at a Sufi gathering in Cambridge, the Peace Corps dream gathered momentum. She and Sam married, joined the Peace Corps, and went to Morocco. Sam had already spent three years in Morocco and knew the language. He got trained as a surveyor on this second trip, but there was no Peace Corps position open for Diane. Because of the culture, she was quite limited in what she could do or where she could go

unaccompanied. She studied Arabic, went to the marketplace, read a lot of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry, wrote poetry, and tried to make the best of the experience. Religion permeated everything in Morocco. She found it moving to hear the hauntingly beautiful call to prayer broadcast out five times each day. When she got pregnant, she and Sam returned to America. They moved to Ashland in 1975 when their son Noah was six months old. Three years later, their son Eli was born.

Sam was working at the Ashland Food Co-op. So was Gaea Laughingbird (now Yudron). "I remember standing on the corner of B and Pioneer talking with Gaea one day. Gaea said that she and Shandor were going to bring Gyatrul Rinpoche here. I asked Gaea, 'Is he your teacher?' Without any doubt, she replied, 'Oh yes.' I thought, 'Oh, how great!'" The conversation reawakened her spiritual yearning, something that had gotten put aside for a few years. It seemed that an ordinary person could actually find a spiritual guide.

Not long after, Diane saw Gyatrul Rinpoche with Shandor Weiss at a performance of the Pickle Family Circus. She wondered, "Does he think the Pickle Family Circus is funny?" That night, Diane had a dream. She was sitting next to Rinpoche with a small group of people in the Himalayan Mountains. An enlightened being who looked like Chenrezig was speaking to Rinpoche, advising him about the way he was handling his students. He was correcting Rinpoche or giving

suggestions to Rinpoche. Diane was watching Rinpoche's reaction. Rinpoche had no reaction. There was no ripple of defensiveness. He was like a clear lake or an open sky. He was modeling complete humility, with no ego. In the dream, Rinpoche's way of being touched her deeply. She felt overwhelmed. Enthusiastically, she hugged Rinpoche and said, "I'm so glad you're here. He hugged her back and told her, "I'm so glad you're here, too." When she woke, Diane knew that Rinpoche was her teacher. It was wonderful, and also terrifying. What would it mean to have a teacher? Settling into that took about two years.



Diane began to attend Rinpoche's teachings. "They were like a geyser of truth. Everything felt right. I began to trust everything he said." She took refuge during a 10-day teaching Rinpoche gave on the medium length Tersar ngondro. The dharma center was on Second Street then, where Smithfield's Restaurant is now. Diane's father had died suddenly when she was 15. One of the few things she had of his was a beautiful white silk scarf, which she offered to Rinpoche when she took refuge. He returned many people's khatas, but kept the one Diane offered. It seemed only right. "He is my spiritual father," she said.

Diane's interest in natural health led her to become licensed as a massage therapist. Then she went on to study Jin Shin Do and process-oriented psychology. For over 19 years, she has been working with bioresonance therapy, a form of energy medicine. Her Bicom testing machine uses homeopathic and biological samples to neutralize toxins and strengthen overall health. "It's tuning up the body with resonance, just like tuning up a piano," she said.



During our interview, Diane remembered calling the temple one day. Rinpoche answered, and Diane began griping about her life. Rinpoche stopped her and asked her bluntly, "Are you ready to die?" That provided food for thought. "One of my goals is to be ready to die," she said. "I hope I am getting to the point that when death knocks at the door, I can smile and say 'Let's go!'"



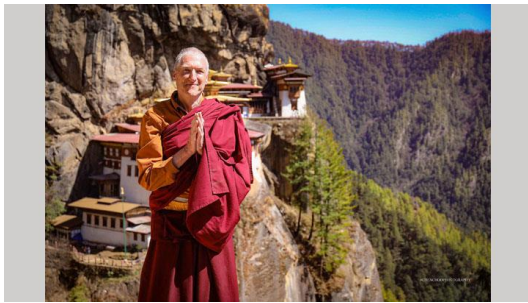
Meanwhile, life continues to knock at the door. About seven years ago, Diane and her neighbor Regen Armstrong began to walk their dogs together. They both enjoyed many of the same things, and liked each other's company. As time went on, their relationship deepened. "Regen is one of the most nonjudgmental people I have ever met," Diane said. "He doesn't criticize anyone. He is very open, helpful, and jolly. One of my favorite qualities of his is that he thinks my jokes are funny!" Three years ago, with H.H. Getse Rinpoche officiating, Diane married Regen at the Tashi Choling temple. The couple settled into a cozy, artful, semi-rural home with their three dogs: Merlin, Sadie, and Luna. They have a big yard with lots of room for gardening. It's a lovely place with roses, peonies, daisies, herbs, fruit and nut trees, and vibrant vegetable beds--a rich mandala offering, filled with birds, under a beautiful big sky.

Editor's Note:

Jampal/Clark Hansen has been guiding Dorje Ling in Portland for over 30 years. He wrote the following essay when Oregon Public Broadcasting asked listeners to share their experience during the current pandemic. Thanks to Ani Yeshe for suggesting that Sangha News share Jampal's reflections.

A Postcard from the Edge of the Pandemic

by Jampal/ Clark Hansen



Jampal in Bhutan

From the vantage point on the edge of this hilltop monastery, I gaze across the valley to the distant snow-covered Cascade Mountains. It is a tranquil view filled with the exuberance of spring but belies the turbulence of the encroaching pandemic.

One year ago, I returned from a journey through the Himalayan mountains of Bhutan and immediately went to my doctor for a neurological problem. Her diagnosis: ALS. She labeled me a slow progressor. (I recalled when I was young and my teachers in grade school would say that to my parents, it would piss me off, but now I felt relief!) By November, I could no longer drive and my doctor told me I would need

to organize a group of people to help me get to medical appointments, obtain food, and prepare for the inevitable. The Buddhist sangha here rallied in a spectacular fashion for this solitary monastic resident at this center I run. (Actually, it runs me.) With as many as 10 medical appointments a day, that assistance was crucial, and I felt so fortunate to have such a wonderful community of friends! Then the pandemic came.

There were several close calls with Covid-19 in January and February. The one FDA-approved treatment for ALS calls for daily infusions, which I was receiving through OHSU. But with the rapid spread of the virus, I questioned the risk I was taking, spending long periods of time at the cancer center in a room full of people with compromised immune systems. My doctor agreed and put the infusions on hold until I could safely return. Having been off this treatment for almost 2 months, I am now seeing a noticeable progression taking place but have no recourse.

It might seem like a depressing situation, but I really feel very fortunate in so many ways. Even though we have had to cancel the practices and classes at this center, there is a core group of friends in this community who continue to provide vital assistance (though there has been some risk from a few who have had the virus and one friend who has died). And there could hardly be a more beautiful place to spend my time than this perch overlooking Forest Park, the valleys below, and the mountains in the distance.

Since last November I've only been able to go to essential appointments and get food. Now, with the rest of society in a similar situation I feel, oddly, less alone. Though there are far fewer activities and people here now, much time is spent consoling people who are anxious about the pandemic or have suffered losses. It's something I can easily relate to in my current situation. Fortunately, I have guides, mostly Tibetan lamas, who have much training and experience in these areas and have been happy to help me.



Stupa at Dorje Ling

Looking for examples of courage in this region from people who rose to meet difficult challenges in troubling times, I recall some of the inspirational stories I was told when I was an oral historian at the Oregon Historical Society. It gives me a feeling that we can find in ourselves as a society the strength and resources to come through this challenging time together and thrive.

May we all find health and happiness!

Postscript: Ani Yeshe sent a note with a few additional things that Jampal told her after he learned we were going to share his article here in Sangha News.

"... But I'm hoping that people will not think that I am suffering from this dilemma. Yes, it can be frustrating to wake up in the morning and find that something I could do yesterday I cannot do today. I just make the adjustments to work around the situation and adapt in whatever way I can.

I am so fortunate in so many ways. I do not experience any pain, it has not affected me mentally or emotionally, I have an amazing medical team and a wonderful community of friends who support me. Most importantly, the Dharma has trained me for this very moment. As it is said, "pain is inevitable, suffering is optional."

All of this has brought me so much closer to my loving friends and a much deeper appreciation for the precious human rebirth."



About Sangha News

The next issue will appear in August. If you have material to share, please email editor Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com by July 10th. Wishing you well!