

Tashi Choling Sangha News December 2020



This year, many activities we once took for granted have not been available because of the pandemic. Tashi Choling has been closed for many months. We have not been able to practice together in the temple, but fortunately, pujas and teachings have continued via Zoom.

Thanks to Sangye Khandro, Lama Chonam, Keith LaCoste, Lisbeth LaCoste, and Ani Baba, we have had a rich practice and learning experience. We are grateful for their dedication. Broadcasting practices via Zoom means that many more have been able to participate. People from all over the world have joined in. *E ma ho!* How marvelous.

As this year ends, let's continue to pray for those who have lost their lives, and pray for positive change for all beings now and in the coming new year. May peace and wellbeing prevail.



Brad Boucher stands near the Thangtong Gyalpo statue on his land

Sangha Profile: Brad Boucher

Brad Boucher grew up on the east coast and attended the University of New Hampshire, where he majored in botany and psychology and minored in science and philosophy. He took some restaurant management courses during college but didn't find them engaging enough, so he decided to focus on liberal arts instead. However, restaurants turned out to be a persistent theme. At 15, Brad's first real job was in a restaurant, and during his early life, he worked at more than 20. It was an easy, accessible way to make money.

In early 1989, he was working at Balboa Café in San Francisco. In the fascinating way that karma works, one of his co-

workers was Charles Frahm, who later became Lama Yeshe.



In 1989, Brad was 22. That summer, he returned to the East coast and signed on with a modeling agency in Boston. Traveling to London on an assignment gave him a glimpse of the affluent, hedonistic lifestyle of the beautiful people. It was an eye opener. On the one hand, it seemed that life couldn't get any better. On the other, it was obviously suffused with suffering. He had another modeling job scheduled in the south of France, but a suspicious customs agent at Heathrow Airport determined by examining Brad's day planner that he was not vacationing but working, (illegally), and he had to return to the USA.

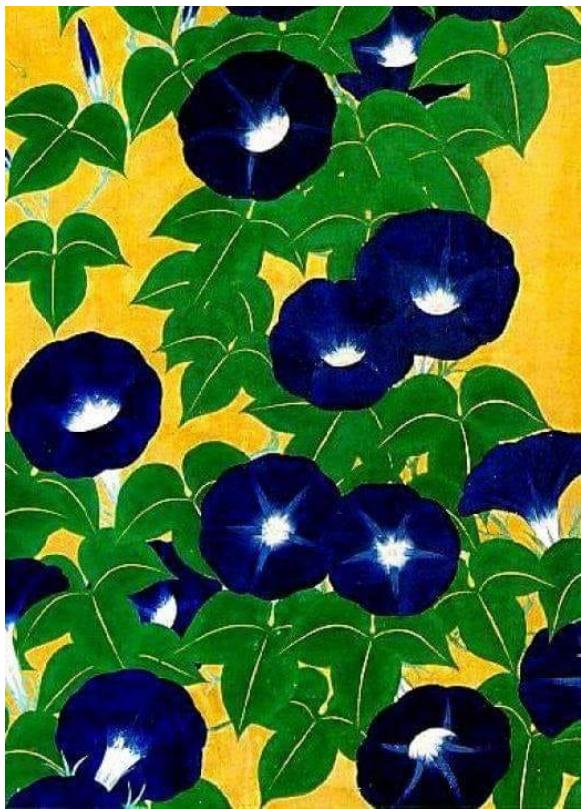
Reading Ram Dass' seminal book *Be Here Now*, Brad felt a longing to connect with something that provided a sense of direction and meaning. He decided to return to the West Coast to visit some ashrams in the Bay area. During that trip, he heard that the Dalai Lama was giving a talk at the Civic Center in San Jose. Arriving there, he discovered that tickets were sold out. But thanks to his good luck, he found a line of people waiting to go into the building and joined it, which

led him to become an usher for the event. That day, he bumped into his former co-worker at Balboa Café, Charles Frahm/Lama Yeshe. "Why are you here?" Brad asked and learned then about Lama Yeshe's dharma center. Not long after, he moved to the West Coast and began to attend events at Lama Yeshe's center. One day, he met Gyatral Rinpoche at Kris Yang's house in Pinole. "Oh Bread," Rinpoche said, giving his impression of the new arrival. "Everyone wants to eat you up." So it began.

Living in San Francisco, Brad did modeling and worked in a restaurant. He also began to apprentice at a woodworking shop in the Haight. It was a craft that appealed to his artistic nature. He learned fast and began to build needed items for Lama Yeshe's center. In 1991, he and his then-partner Maura had a son, Zachary. When Brad moved to the Colestin Valley in early 1994, he began looking for land. He had no luck and spoke with Gyatral Rinpoche about it one day. Rinpoche pointed south and said, "Try down there." Brad soon discovered a parcel of land for sale in the southern part of the valley. It's where he still lives many years later. For four years, he rented a woodshop there, where he lived and worked. Then he and the landowners moved into a lease-to-buy agreement. During this time, he founded Grace Furniture, whose elegant designs were featured in national magazines. Although he was working 70-80 hours a week on the venture, lack of sufficient capital to build the company kept Brad on a high-pressure search for financing.

in 1996, Brad married Tara Thomas. Over the next years, their three children, Sage, Jade, and Chloe appeared. In the late 90s, Brad and Lama Yeshe began

envisioning Heaven and Earth, a living and working environment for practitioners and retreatants. A group of Rinpoche's students were supportive of the vision. Brad and Lama Yeshe often spoke with Rinpoche about their dreams for Heaven and Earth. One day in 2001, Rinpoche offered them a Thangtong Gyalpo statue. The statue was placed on a knoll on Brad and Tara's land, and this year it was beautifully painted under the direction of renowned artist Tulku Jamyang Rinpoche.



Those years with a new marriage and a growing family were electric with ambitious, visionary goals, both in terms of Heaven and Earth and Grace Furniture. But significant difficulties arose. "There were so many dark junctures," Brad said. "I would go to Gyatrul Rinpoche. He would always give me something. Once he told me, 'You're halfway across the ocean; it is just as far

to go back.'" During this dark period, Brad worked on building projects at Tashi Choling, designing and building the Vimalamitra Pavilion and new roofs for two floors of the temple. During construction, Rinpoche often appeared. One day he told Brad, "Patience is your shield. And your hammer." In the midst of the financial crash of 2008, Brad was bankrupt and his family was on food stamps. It was clear that something had to change. He and Tara began to talk about shifting their attention away from Grace Furniture and opening a restaurant. Rinpoche had already told Tara, "Your karma is a restaurant."

Researching one space in the Ashland Shopping Center, they sat in their parked car and counted how many people went into the nearby bagel shop and Mexican restaurant. Traffic was brisk; they decided that they might be able to make it work financially. Brad began designing furniture for the restaurant and Tara developed a starting menu which featured dishes they often ate at home—dahl, chicken curry, lamb curry. They named the restaurant Sauce Whole Food Café. It was an immediate hit and continues to be very popular and successful many years later. "It was transformational for our family," Brad said of the venture, whose success afforded a welcome financial stability.

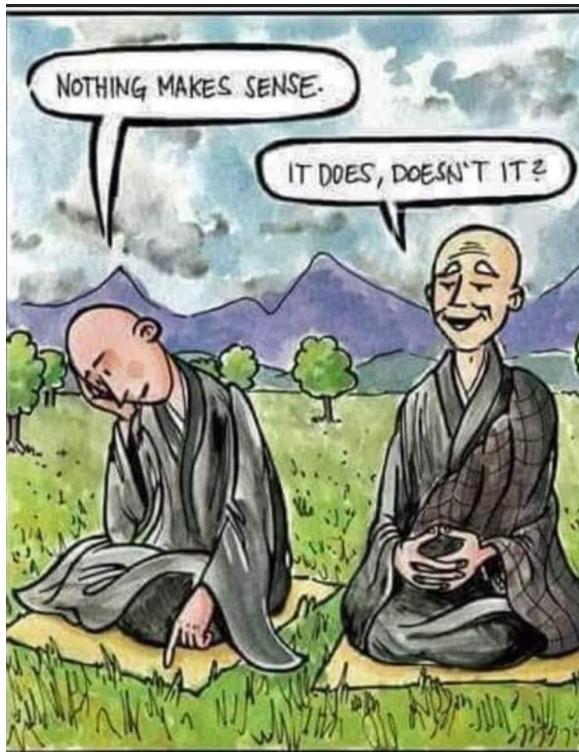
Four years ago, Brad began growing hemp on his land, selling its biomass to an extractor at harvest time. "We have poor soil and arid conditions and it flourishes here. It's a perfect crop." He still holds the Heaven and Earth vision as one that may unfold in time. "It's a long game. With a few capable, well-motivated people, it could happen. Now there is more stability, and buildings I've

designed in a certain way to support that kind of community." Brad recently designed models for both 100- and 200-sq.ft. retreat cabins, and he hopes that the time will come when practitioners are supported in doing retreat in these simple structures in the Colestin Valley.

Covid-19 has affected life for people in many ways. It has had a positive effect on Brad's family, bringing them even closer together. Three of Brad's grown children have returned to live at home, finding it a safe haven for weathering the pandemic. His fourth child, Zach, also appears for long visits. "I love having the kids home," Brad said. "It's fulfilling. I don't yearn to travel or do other things. It has brought me a great lifestyle."

Contemplative Cartoon Corner

Because Humor is Good for Our Health



And then ????



About Sangha News

Sangha News is published bi-monthly. The next issue will be in February. If you have any news, poetry, cartoons, etc. please contact Gaea Yudron at gaea.laughing@gmail.com.

Be Well and Happy!