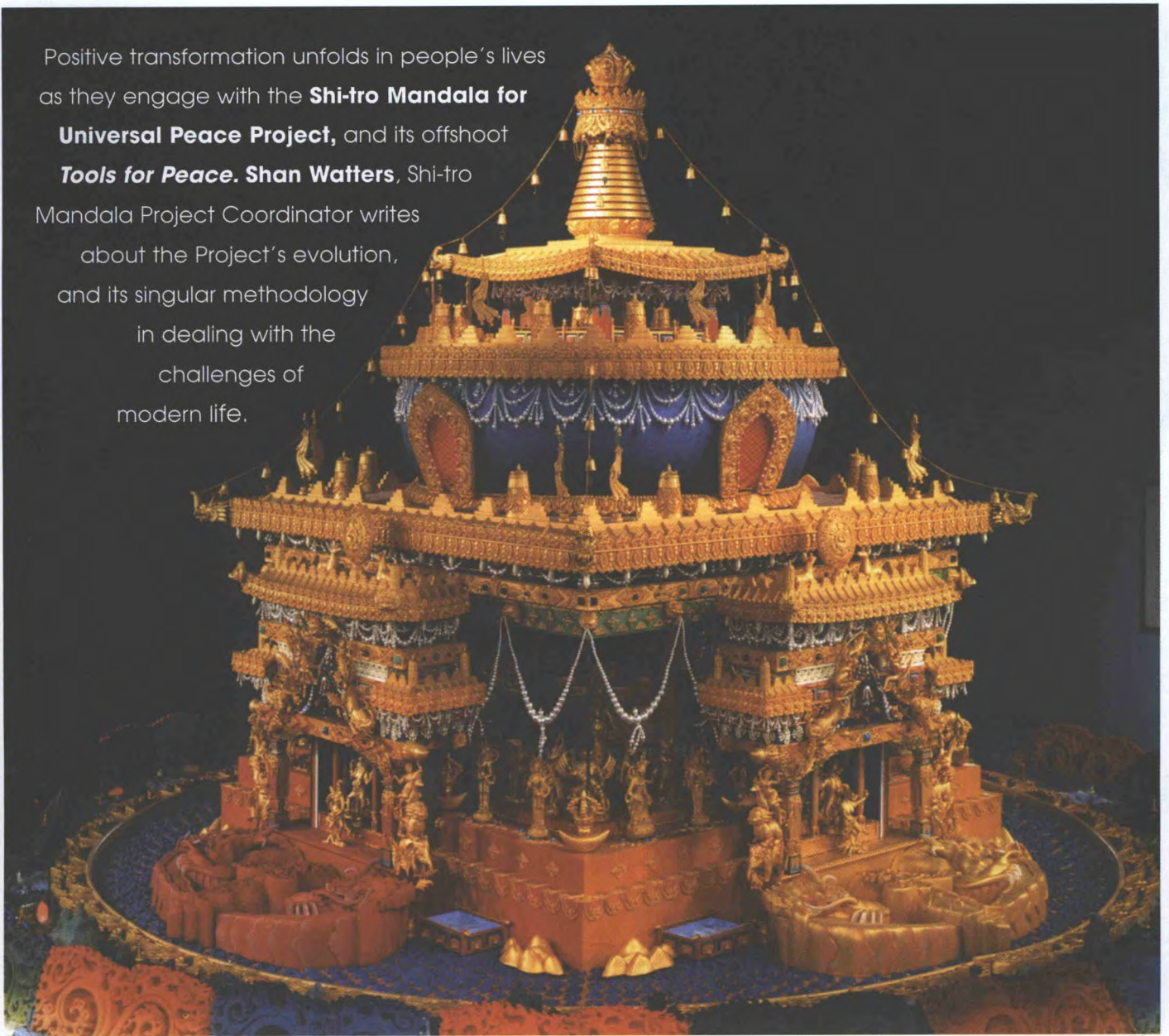


Positive transformation unfolds in people's lives as they engage with the **Shi-tro Mandala for Universal Peace Project**, and its offshoot **Tools for Peace**. **Shan Watters**, Shi-tro Mandala Project Coordinator writes about the Project's evolution, and its singular methodology in dealing with the challenges of modern life.



The Shi-Tro Mandala

"I wanted to see what it felt like to kill someone," says a fifteen-year old boy, when asked at a recent *Tools for Peace* workshop why he was incarcerated at juvenile detention facility, Camp Scudder.

We hear things, working with youth in these environments, which we would never have dreamed existed in the minds of children. Our hearts break and our minds reach to teachings on patience and non-judgment. When they begin to recognize their own inherent goodness, it is a joy to witness!

The young man mentioned above is now writing a book about his life. He is taking responsibility for his actions. The regret he now feels is painful. This change of heart he attributes to methods garnered from the workshop.

mandala for universal peace

What are the methods used to reach disaffected, cynical, and often-violent youth in this detention facility's run-down gym?

In 1995 Lama Chodak Gyatso of Chagdud Gonpa Thondup Ling in L.A., California, revealed his intention to create a three-dimensional Shi-tro Mandala. This



Pema Thaye and Lama Gyatso show His Holiness the Dalai Lama the drawings of the mandala



Youth engage in Tools for Peace

particular mandala depicts the peaceful and wrathful deities of the 100 Buddha Families (“Shi-tro” in Tibetan), which are expressions of enlightened qualities with the power to transform negativity and promote wellbeing and spiritual attainment.

It took Tibetan artist Pema Namdol Thaye, two assistants and many volunteers, eleven months and 7,000 hours of artistic labor to complete. The elaborate sculpture measures 10 feet across by 12 feet high, and was carved from

How does this mandala work? According to Lama Gyatso, “To see, hear of, or otherwise come in contact with such a mandala, has a transformative effect on even very ordinary people, awakening in them attitudes of altruism and compassion and causing these qualities to grow.”

During the mandala’s construction, a simple dialogue with the community began on what the

mandala represented – the beginning of *Tools for Peace*, a community outreach program which offers an art-based curriculum centered on the basic symbolism of the mandala. Symbols representing principles such as compassion and tolerance are translated into a non-Buddhist framework, and presented to the community as methods to deal with the causes of conflict, such as anger, prejudice and ignorance.

Pilot workshops were offered in a variety of public environments throughout 2001. At UCLA’s Hammer Museum, for example, an arts and nonviolence education workshop with artists Christie Fields and Mark Bradford was created. Youth from five Los Angeles high schools created a community-building mandala out of art and non-art materials. “This was a new experience,” one youth wrote. “It made me think in different ways. I came in feeling insecure and scared and left feeling accomplished, like for once youth were taken seriously and could make a difference.”

The Four Thoughts are used as a foundation in the workshops. We start by asking participants how many of them have had someone close to them die. Then we ask if life is precious



Camp Scudder: Community mandala dissolution by inmates

wood, clay, and modern resins, and painted, gold-leafed and adorned with gems and hanging pearls. His Holiness the Dalai Lama blessed it and His Excellency Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche consecrated it.

– sometimes the answer is a resounding no. If people do not have a sense of life's value, they devalue life, with the ultimate devaluation being murder or harm against oneself, others or both. We discuss their death, cause and effect and the fact that all beings have suffering in an extended interchange.

We ask youth to draw. Beginning in the center of a line drawing of a mandala, we ask each person to examine their most precious quality and depict it with a symbol. Resistance often comes up, as many have never contemplated their intrinsic goodness before. As they complete their mandalas, they build a symbolic picture of themselves embodying their highest qualities. The group then creates a community mandala concentrating on symbols of peace.

A dialogue of sharing is established in which people feel understood, cared for and listened to. When their experiences are validated, they are able to learn methods to heal, refocus, and shift toward nonviolent attitudes and behaviors that draw on their own basic goodness. They express and share these qualities in artwork, finding a deep personal satisfaction and confidence that inside their own hearts are the tools for peace.

Tools for Peace can be implemented in a wide variety of circumstances and venues, with or without proximity to the Shi-tro Mandala. Other collaborative workshops are in the planning stages, as are curriculum development materials.

Working with the Mandala is challenging. When we speak of the four thoughts or the four immeasurable qualities of compassion, love, joy, and equanimity, how well are we implementing these attitudes? The more we commit ourselves to the practice of peace, the more we see evidence of change in ourselves and those we share the methods with. Our anger lessens toward the parent that kills, or the child that kills. Embracing compassion we also embrace their suffering, knowing full well that they want happiness as much as we do.

Teaching nonviolence in a prison environment addresses violent behavior in obvious ways. In other environments we work with more subtle forms of violence, having discovered that any negative emotion can lead to violent behavior. Taming these emotions is a reliable path to peace. The gift the Mandala offers is the means for this transformation to occur.

We look behind to see how far we have come instead of looking at how much further we must travel. But having been with the Shi-tro Mandala from the first lines being drawn, we know a level of excellence worthy of our exertion and commitment. ☸

A three-year traveling exhibition for the Shi-tro Mandala is currently being developed. If you are interested in exhibiting the Shi-tro Mandala or in *Tools for Peace* please contact Thondup Ling at (1) (323) 953-9477 or visit www.shi-tromandala.com

**An Appeal to Buddhist Practitioners to
SUPPORT MONKS AND NUNS
Contribute to the Lama Yeshe Sangha Fund**

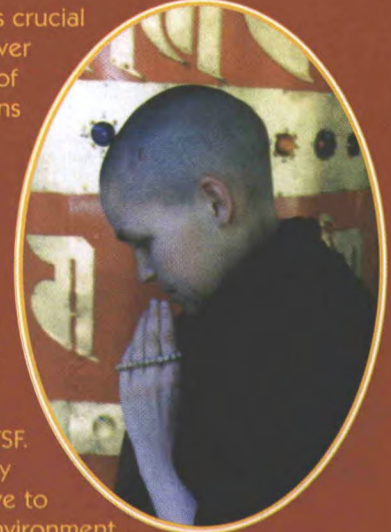
A donation to this crucial fund will help to cover the living expenses of FPMT monks and nuns who lack the resources allowing them to engage in serious study or meditation retreat or to offer service.

Due to inadequate funding, only 10 out of 240 FPMT Sangha members are supported by the LYSF. This means that many monks and nuns have to work in a worldly environment and find it difficult to practice and study the Dharma. Unfortunately, many Sangha eventually disrobe under the pressure.

It is very important for the future of Buddhism in the West that we have qualified spiritual teachers and guides in our communities. Many of us have received teachings and spiritual guidance from our kind Sangha; please help support these precious monks and nuns.

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