

FROM 10 TO 10,000: The Slow but Steady Rise of Kalachakra Centre



France is a site of incredible FPMT activity: two long-standing centers, a monastery, two retreat centers and a publishing house. *Mandala* acknowledges all of the French FPMT service in this section and recognizes **Kalachakra Centre** as this issue's featured center. For over twenty years, KC has established itself as a Parisian treasure.

Kalachakra's Basic Program students with Geshe Lobsang Jamphel

Kalachakra Centre

Taking respite from a rainy afternoon in Paris on a tour of Kalachakra Centre (KC), one might choose to sit in the serene meditation room, browse the Dharma bookshop (the only one in Paris supplemented by an online retail service and boasting 500 French Buddhist titles), or survey an impressive list of course offerings available for students and an interested general public.

Currently supported by over 300 members, the center has secured an excellent reputation for quality Buddhist programming. In 2003, the center joined with five other local Buddhist centers and invited His Holiness the Dalai Lama to come teach. Ten thousand people attended the teachings and Kalachakra earned a reputation as a dynamic, accessible Buddhist center in bustling Paris.

"I feel the key to our success is to be very close to the people's Dharma needs," explains director Ven. Elisabeth Dukier. "Some people like to study, others prefer meditation. Some want to formally become Buddhists, while others prefer to simply pursue a way of life which offers more internal comfort and ease. And it is our job to respond, we have to provide."

The center now stands in a solid position relative to many struggling centers and study groups, but it wasn't always this way. Kalachakra Centre was founded in 1987 by Lama Zopa Rinpoche after a public talk in Paris. Lise Medine, who met Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 1976 at Kopan, was instructed by Rinpoche to start a center and he gave it the name "Kalachakra." Lise took on the job as director and began by leading meditations in her home. To supplement this program she invited nearby teachers to teach on lam-rim and lo-jong once a month, such as Geshe Lobsang Tengye and Khensur Tegchok Rinpoche from Institut Vajra Yogini and Nalanda Monastery.

After eight years of gatherings in Lise's home, Marie Adeline took the reins. From 1993-1997 Marie, who met Lama Zopa Rinpoche in 1991, served as director, first continuing with meetings in her own apartment and then moving the center's operations to a larger apartment in the 20th arrondissement. Sponsored by a kind benefactor, the larger space enabled Marie to establish a bigger program. She invited Ven. François Fontaine, now director of the study

group Gyaltsab Jé (La Réunion) to give teachings and lead meditations in the new space. Lama Zopa Rinpoche visited the center in 1994 to offer the Kalachakra *jenang*, and returned in 1996 to give a White Tara initiation.

François Lecointre, current director of Institut Vajra Yogini, next served as director from 1997-1999. He continued to organize meditation classes and hosted geshe from Institut Vajra Yogini who came once a month to teach lam-rim. And then in 1999, Lama Zopa Rinpoche appointed French nun, Ven. Elisabeth Drukier, as center director:

“I’ve always had a love-hate relationship with Paris: busy, noisy and so beautiful. I was quite happy I had managed *not* to be involved for fourteen years,” Ven. Elisabeth remembers. “When Rinpoche asked me to take over as director, find a site, and develop the center, I couldn’t hide anymore.”

With the support of a large donation, Ven. Elisabeth purchased an old printing press in the north of Paris close to the canals. The building was in a very attractive area located near many metro stations and would serve ably as a site for the new center. The beginning was difficult, however. Ven. Elisabeth explains, “Paris is a city where you find very high masters such as Ganden Tripa and Dagpo Rinpoche. All of the traditions are already represented and the Buddhists tend to go from one center to another, mixing the traditions.” With the help of new Spiritual Program Coordinator, Ven. Thubten Kunsang (Ven. Kunsang now travels with Lama Zopa Rinpoche), Ven. Elisabeth began to carve out KC’s place in the already warm Buddhist climate of Paris.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave teachings at KC in 2001 which were a big success. Rinpoche advised, “The center is like an ambulance having the mission to save all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to enlightenment.” As is often the case after a visit from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the staff was energized and the managing team experienced a new level of cohesion.

In 2002, seventeen years after the center began, the first FPMT Education program was taught at the center. This first cycle of *Discovering Buddhism* sealed a group of Kalachakra practitioners as regular guests to the center. Denis Fouché, former Nalanda monk, and Ven. Kunsang led meditations and group discussions and the member base began to grow.

Since then, Kalachakra Centre has finished two cycles of *Discovering Buddhism*. They are halfway through their first cycle of the five-year *Basic Program*, taught by Nalanda’s Abbot Geshe Lobsang Jamphel, who teaches at the center one full weekend a month. Kalachakra’s own *Ultimate Healing Program*, held bi-monthly, features guided animal

Institut Vajra Yogini

Institut Vajra Yogini will celebrate its 30th anniversary from May 5-June 6, 2009 by hosting a **100 Million Mani Retreat** with Lama Zopa Rinpoche (more information on page 12).

In 1979, a small community of twelve students moved into an old abandoned chateau in the southwest of France to start a Buddhist center under the guidance of Lama Yeshe. The first years were difficult, remembers Ven. Elisabeth Drukier, the Institut’s first director. “There were no showers or toilets, no heating, and we had to repair roofs, install a waste water system, tidy up the overgrown gardens ...”

In 1980, the west wing of the chateau caught fire during the night. The course that had been planned with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche had to be cancelled, but Lama Yeshe, in a telephone conversation with Ven. Elisabeth, burst into laughter. “Very good, very good ... good purification!” he responded. Perhaps he already knew that the money from the insurance would allow them to purchase another chateau ten kilometres (six miles) away, which became Nalanda Monastery.

Since those rough beginnings the Institut has continuously offered a rich program of courses and retreats and has been blessed by visits from many of the greatest Tibetan masters of our time. As resident geshe, Geshe Tengye took care of the community and gave teachings from 1980-2003. In 2003, Geshe Tengye retired and handed responsibility over to Geshe Tenzin Dorje (although he accepted the request of his many students to keep living in the Institut), and in 2008 Geshe Tenzin Loden took over as resident geshe. In addition to the FPMT standard teaching programs, feng-shui courses and tsa-tsa making classes, annual highlights at the Institut include the traditional January Vajra Yogini retreat, a one month lam-rim retreat, a vipassana retreat with Ven. Antonio Satta, and the much anticipated Summer University with Yangsi Rinpoche.



For more information on upcoming courses and retreats please visit:
www.institutvajrayogini.fr/IVY_A/IVY_A.html

liberations and Medicine Buddha meditations. The center also hosts free weekly open meditation sessions in the evenings; conferences on Buddhism and society – which include discussions on the relationship between Buddhist practice and work, Eastern and Western psychology, ethics in management and business, etc.; and monthly talks, *les causeries*, on lam-rim subjects. Twice per year KC holds successful weekend-long workshops on *Buddhism in a Nutshell*,

an introductory FPMT Education course; and *101 Meditations*, an adaptation of Ven. Sangye Khadro's book, *How to Meditate*. Along with standard FPMT programming, Kalachakra Centre also pledges to teach the three principles of the path through the "back door" by offering classes on Tibetan medicine and thangka painting which attract Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

Every year Kalachakra Centre also organizes a trip to India geared around His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings. In 2005 they brought 30 people to Amravati for His Holiness' Kalachakra initiation. On the journey, Swiss monk, Ven. Thierry, led meditations, practices, and offered explanations concerning the teachings. All involved felt the tremendous benefits. "It has been the most interesting trip of my life," said Patricia, an attendee. "Just seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama with this faithful crowd of Tibetans around moved me so much! Since this initiation, Kalachakra became my practice. I do it also with the Kalachakra group at the center."

As the need for services expanded, so did Ven. Elisabeth's vision. "With students completing the FPMT programs [which include retreat modules], we had to think of a retreat option to accommodate their needs. So, two years ago we

Editions Vajra Yogini

Editions Vajra Yogini (EVY), an FPMT-affiliated **publishing house**, can trace its beginnings back to the early nineties when Ven. Robina Courtin, then editor of *Mandala*, pushed Institut Vajra Yogini to produce a French translation of Wisdom



Publication's *Wisdom Energy* by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. From this request, Editions Vajra Yogini was born and has since translated and published 37 books and 21 transcripts including works from Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, plus a variety of titles and translations from Tibetan masters and Western Buddhist

scholars. Additionally, a sutra collection including the *Sanghata Sutra* and the *Sutra of Golden Light* is available. Plans for the future involve translating fundamental Buddhist root texts from Tibetan and Sanskrit into French.

In 2000, EVY became an independent entity but is still closely linked with Institut Vajra Yogini and remains located on the same land as its mother center.

"From our side, we are trying to build a bridge between the past and the future centuries and between East and West by contributing to the transmission of wisdom and compassion to French speaking readers for the benefit of all sentient beings," said director Michel Henry. And for nearly twenty years, they have been doing just that.

For a catalog of EVY titles, please contact: contacts@vajra-yogini.com

started to rent places outside of Paris. It soon became obvious that we should purchase a Kalachakra retreat center as a new development for the center. Rinpoche was quite supportive about this decision, and with a bank loan we recently bought an old farm in the western part of France, one hour and forty-five minutes from Paris," Ven. Elisabeth said.

Nalanda Monastery

In order to create a supportive environment for the expanding community of Western monks and nuns of the International Mahayana Institute, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche founded Nalanda Monastery as the first Western monastery of the FPMT in 1981.

Currently, around 25 monks and a number of lay men form the core of the Nalanda community.

In 2008, Geshe Jamphel, the abbot of Nalanda, began teaching the FPMT *Basic Program* which will run for five years. Western teacher, Ven. Fedor Stracke, also teaches one week per month; the program will finish in 2012 and students can choose to continue on to the *Masters Program* or begin the *Basic Program* again. New students are welcome to enter either program at that time.

For twenty-seven years Nalanda has established itself as a unique center for Western monks in the Tibetan Gelug tradition. Located on the river Agout with its own gardens, the monastery maintains a tranquil and lush environment.

Center director, Ven. Tendar, coordinates the daily operations of the monastery while other senior monks occupy roles such as Study Program Coordinator and Building Manager.

For more information about Nalanda, please visit: www.nalanda-monastery.eu



At the new retreat center, KC started a retreat program which has been very well received. No individual retreats are yet offered, but the retreat center is offering organized retreats related to their Parisian program. This way, members of the center can experience teachings in a retreat environment and local people not already tied to the Paris center can gain access to the teachings. “We are now meeting some obstacles regarding fire hazard safety but this should be resolved soon and we are preparing a full summer program of retreats,” Ven. Elisabeth explains. “The building has quite a lot of potential and can accommodate fifteen to twenty people. Fundraising is currently underway to enable us to renovate more buildings and increase our capacity.”

Thanks to past and present center staff, teachers, volunteers and donors, Kalachakra Centre now confidently serves the people of Paris with a variety of quality programs for students at differing levels of practice. They are an example of the fruits of slow and steady growth, and the patient dedication that such growth requires. ☸

To learn more about Kalachakra Centre or to view the program calendar visit: www.centre-kalachakra.com

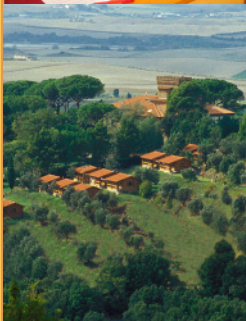
Thakpo Kachoe

In 2004, Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave his blessing for an FPMT retreat center to be built by Daniel Mestre and Sylvaine Litaud on 22 acres of beautiful pasture and forest land on



the high plateaus of Provence, France. Thakpa Kachoe, Vajra Yogini’s Pure Land, is intended to serve primarily as a sacred space conducive for long, individual retreats. In addition to constructing an administrative building and isolated, stilted meditation huts, pasture land will be used to cultivate lavender as well as other medicinal and aromatic herbs, as advised by Rinpoche, or landscaped into a botanical garden dedicated to the preservation of medium altitude flora.

Funds for building and equipping the first meditation hut, which will feature ecologically sourced materials and solar panels to provide hot water and electricity, are still being raised. For more information on these efforts, please contact Daniel Mestre at: daniel@thakpakachoe.com



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