

Voice of Clear Light

Volume 14, Number 6 / December 2014



Mexico's Resident Lamas Share Their Art View Photos of Paintings in Two Mexico Stupas



Stupa Chamma Ling Torreón

The work of the two resident lamas for Ligmincha Mexico—Lama Kalsang Nyima and Lama Yungdrung Lodoe—speaks for itself.

Visit either of the two Bon Buddhist stupas in Mexico and you will find them filled with the mandalas, murals and other work of these two master artists.

Lama Kalsang painted and decorated the interior of the first bon stupa ever built in the West, Chamma Ling Torreón, Coahuila, with beautiful images of Tapihritsa, the Eight Auspicious Symbols and the mandala of Shenlha Okar. That stupa was consecrated in February 2006.

Under the supervision of Lama Kalsang and Lama Yungdrung, art and decoration is still ongoing for the second Bon stupa, Chamma Ling Valle de Bravo (Great Stupa for World Peace), consecrated in 2010. Lama Yungdrung began working in 2011 to develop the beautiful Ma Gyu (Bon Mother Tantra) mandala for the great stupa. Lama Kalsang has painted the art for the entrance to the stupa and will be developing other work.



Stupa Valle de Bravo Stupas are symbolic representations of the mind and the stages to the path of enlightenment. They are built according to universal principles and represent the power of wisdom from ancient lineages. Like the stupas themselves, the mandalas within them are not just paintings—they are powerful images that embody multiple dimensions.

Participants at Serenity Ridge's annual Summer Retreat in Virginia were able to experience some of the power of the Mexico lamas' work and learn more about their lives during a talk and slide presentation given one evening.

In addition to their beautiful art, both lamas travel throughout Mexico visiting the country's 17 centers and giving spiritual teachings. They also have conducted classes for those who are interested in learning the art of thangka painting.

[View Lama Kalsang Nyima's work](#)

[View Lama Yungdrung Lodoe's work](#)

Lama Kalsang Nyima



Lama Kalsang Nyima is a master of sacred geometry—universal patterns that mirror the fundamental laws of the universe. More than that, when he paints a mandala, he does not only put brush to canvas or walls, based on the ancient Bon texts of Tibet; his work incorporates three dimensions, including the dimensions of mental consciousness and pure awareness.

This level of knowledge and awareness made Lama Kalsang the perfect person to create the art for the first Bon stupa in the Western world, Chamma Ling Torreón, Coahuila. It also may be why many students know him as Lhari-la, sometimes referred to as "painter of God" or, as Lama Kalsang more modestly says, "like professor."

Lama Kalsang is happy to be part of his family lineage, which connect together Bon, through his father's Dong lineage, and Buddhism, through his mother's Nyel lineage. He was born in 1970 in the village of Tad, in the province of Dolpo, Nepal. Dolpo is culturally Tibetan and home to 14 Bonpo monasteries and many great Bonpo masters.

At age 9, Lama Kalsang became a monk at Samling Monastery, the oldest and most important monastery in Dolpo, where his grandfather, Lama Lhagyep Rinpoche, was head teacher. For 12 years Lama Kalsang trained intensively at Samling in the many methods of sutra and tantra and completed many long personal retreats. These included a traditional three-year closed retreat.



At age 21, Lama Kalsang decided to move from Dolpo to Kathmandu to study with H.E. Yongdzin Lopon Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, the most senior teacher in the Bon tradition. Because of the remoteness of Dolpo and the lack of transportation, it took him a month to walk from Dolpo to Kathmandu. There, he began four years of studies at Triten Norbutse Monastery under the close guidance of Yongdzin Rinpoche. In addition to studying traditional Bon teachings and dzogchen teachings, he also learned techniques of traditional thangka painting.

Lama Kalsang deepened these skills during five years of training at Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche's monastery in nearby Boudhanath under the master Chokyong Gonpo. After completing this course he returned to Triten Norbutse where Yongdzin Rinpoche asked him to help paint the entire cycle of Bonpo tantric mandalas; these images were later published in the book *Mandalas of the Bon Religion*.

In 2000, Yungdrung Lama, abbot of the Bonpo monastery in Sikkim, invited Lama Kalsang to teach in a school for Bonpo children at his monastery. For six years, he taught education and also music, chanting, rituals, painting and torma making. His experience as a thangka painter led him to an invitation to teach an advanced course for painters sponsored by a large museum in central India. The next year the museum invited him back to paint three entire rooms with Bonpo images.

Over the years Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche paid many visits to Lama Kalsang's monastery in Sikkim and they came to know each other well. When Rinpoche invited him to come to the West, Lama Kalsang accepted.

His first task was to paint the series of images for the interior of the first Bon stupa in the West, in Torreon, Mexico. This included a huge 40-foot mandala of Shenlha Okar. All of the work was painted freehand. Lama Kalsang worked tirelessly, day after day without any breaks, for seven months to complete the work. Following this, he took four months to finish the mandala of Tapihritsa.

"Painting helps the mind become calm," he says. "There is a very deep, deep connection. You are fully present in the painting, the movement of the brush, the beauty of the colors, the drawing, measurement and proportion. Your mind is completely here, no more past and no more future."

Before beginning to paint Lama Kalsang would begin by connecting with inner refuge, then do mantra repetition. Each of Bon Buddhism's 360 different mandalas has a deity associated with it, a quality and meaning connected with it, and a mantra. The mandala of Shenlha Okar embodies compassion and clarity. Its mantra is AH OM HUNG A A KAR SA LÉ Ö A YANG OM DU.

Lama Kalsang explains that preparing a mandala includes more than the actual painting itself. It includes working in three dimensions. The first dimension is the work itself—the sacred geometry, based on specific design, proportions and colors set forth in ancient Bon texts and taking into account the five elements, directions and qualities. It includes the gathering of materials and the actual painting of the mandala itself. Then comes the second dimension—the conceptual mandala, where one meditates, visualizing the mandala in space using mental consciousness. The third dimension is the nonconceptual mandala, in which there is no visualization and no thinking—"like ultimate reality, pure awareness," he says.

Following his work in Torreon, Lama Kalsang went, at Tenzin Rinpoche's request, to Chihuahua, Mexico to tutor young Tulku Jorge Rene. Beginning in 2007, visited Serenity Ridge Retreat Center, headquarters of Ligmincha International, a number of times, and served as resident lama at Serenity Ridge and at Chamma Ling in Colorado. Lama Kalsang returned to Mexico in 2010 to help prepare for the consecration of the Great Stupa for World Peace in Chamma Ling, Valle de Bravo—a project that Yongdzin Rinpoche asked his disciple, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, to undertake. Although Tenzin Rinpoche asked him to stay at Serenity Ridge, Lama Kalsang felt a connection with the Mexican people, and after discussion, Rinpoche asked him to become resident lama for Mexico.

Lama Kalsang has done some work on the stupa in Valle de Bravo, including intricate painting of the exterior doorway, and work will continue on the interior of the stupa. Over the past several years, the Mexico sangha has grown and flourished, so he spends much time traveling to different sanghas to give teachings on meditation. He also has given sacred geometry workshops, last summer teaching one class in drawing and proportion and a second class on color.

"I am very happy to be a family member of all the sangha members," he says—not only sangha in Mexico but of all of Ligmincha. "To everyone, my greetings and my love and my prayers."

[View Lama Kalsang Nyima's work](#)

* * *

Lama Yungdrung Lodoe



In January 2011, Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche asked Lama Yungdrung Lodoe to come to Mexico to paint mandalas for the Great Bon Stupa for World Peace at Chamma Ling Valle de Bravo. Since that time, he has lived in Valle de Bravo, working on projects for the stupa and giving teachings to sangha members both in Valle de Bravo and in other locations in Mexico.

Lama Yungdrung's journey began in Tenchen, Tibet, where he was born in 1978. His father comes from the Lang lineage, which included the king of Tibet from 1349. His mother is part of the Black Garuda lineage, said to come down from Kuntu Zangpo, the primordial Buddha.

At age 8, Lama Yungdrung went to a sacred mountain with Master Tsukpu Rinpoche to practice ngondro, chod and zhine. Starting at age 9, he entered Tondol Ritod Monastery in Chumpo, Tibet. There, he received training and teachings on rituals, practices and ceremonies for three years. Lama Yungdrung also studied Tibetan art for three years at the home village of Yongdzin Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche.

How did he become interested in art? "Yongdzin Rinpoche's cousin was my classmate at Tummo teaching, and I found out his father was a great master painter," Lama Yungdrung recalls. "I wanted to learn more. We requested permission so I could take classes, and it was granted."



So Yongdzin Rinpoche's uncle, Master Sireng Yelmpel—painter for the king—taught the young monk the art of Bon thangka painting, which includes a complete study of Bon teachings. Lama Yungdrung was his most outstanding student, taking top place in an art competition above the other students in his class. He also studied calligraphy and mandala painting with master Arre Tenzin for six months in Retod Gompa Monastery in Tibet. He learned the art of sculpting in metal and bronze from the great master sculptor Nganzu Sunam, and how to make gowns and clothing with master Tashi Gagatha.

In the monastery, Lama Yungdrung studied with his root lama, Namla Rinpoche, who previously lived in Yir Gompa Monastery, which was destroyed by the Chinese. Lama Yungdrung traveled to Tibet for three years to help rebuild the monastery. "But later on the Chinese did not allow it anymore," he says. Afterwards, he journeyed to the sacred mountain Puyear Kangri (Ice Mountain), which is 5,000 meters above sea level. For more than three years, he did chod practice and ate only potatoes and Tibetan medicine.

All of this happened before the young monk had turned 18! At age 18, Lama Yungdrung left Tibet for India, where he studied the history of Tibet at the Dalai Lama's school in Dharamsala for five years—two years of regular study and five years of studying Tibetan and modern art. There, he also won top awards in yearly competitions.

When it was time to work on the art and decoration for the Great Bon Stupa in Valle de Bravo, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche called on Lama Yungdrung to develop the mandala of the great stupa. So in January 2011 Lama Yungdrung traveled to Mexico and started his work there.

First, he began the great Ma Gyu (Bon Mother Tantra) mandala, which is more than eight feet high. Working along with his friend, Geshe Nyima, the mandala took six months to complete. After that, it took another year for Lama Yungdrung to complete the painting of Sherap Chamma (the Wisdom Loving Mother deity) for the stupa.

During his time in Mexico, he has created other Tibetan art, including the Shakyamuni Buddha, a wrathful lama protector and, at the request of Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, a nonsectarian logo of the six Buddhist schools. He also has created Indian art and other kinds of non-Buddhist art, primarily portraits.

Lama Yungdrung also actively travels throughout Mexico, visiting different sanghas to give teachings and offering workshops in areas including the art of painting.

[View Lama Yungdrung Lodoe's work](#)