

## **Happy Healthy Retreat Houses by Paula Chichester**

Building a house is a personal and a community activity. There are very few houses that the builder was the only person who ever lived in that house. Therefore, when you build a house or renovate a house, you are doing it for many more people than just yourself. It is good to remember this when you plan a design and a budget for a house. You have to think of the social benefits a house will give as well as the personal benefits you can immediately see. For this reason, building a healthy house can be a priority for everyone, even if you are sure that petrochemically derived products don't compromise your health at all. The next person that uses your house will benefit from its healthy attributes and you may in the future as well. Your pets will, too. Veterinarians report that the dogs and cats are experiencing the same catastrophic rise in chronic illness that plague humans, which is resulting from the rise of toxic substances in our environment and foods.

Why is it advantageous for personal and community health to invest in non-toxic building materials? Healthy people are happier people and being happy in our homes is probably the most important attribute we are looking for in a home. Many of the conventional building materials, plywood, varathane, house-paint, glues and sealers contain volatile organic compounds, VOC's. VOC's enter organic systems, animals (including humans) and the food and water we ingest. When these compounds enter our blood stream they endocrine inhibitors. On our cells, the building blocks of every tissue in our body, are receptor molecules that catch messenger chemicals that are tell our cells what to make and what to do. These messenger chemical compounds or transmitters are the way our endocrine system organizes and orchestrates everything that happens in our bodies. For example, they are the messengers the pituitary gland sends to the brain cells that tells them what to do... The circumferential boundary of the cell has receptor sites where these messengers connect to the cell and "tell the cell" what to do. These VOC's that we inhale and the pesticides that we eat have a similar chemical architecture to these messengers.

When our bodies fill up with these manmade chemicals, they go to the receptor sites and occupy the place where the messenger would have taken its message. The message is not received and the cell does not function according to what the body needs. As one can imagine, this causes great havoc in organic systems, all of them, from the tiniest bacteria, to the frogs, the trees, your dog and you. This is the ecological nightmare that we live in today. This is a major reason why we see such an increase in the rates of disease in modern industrial society, particularly those diseases related to the endocrine function such as diabetes, depression, cancer, headaches, obesity, chemical sensitivities, Alzheimer's, and so many of women's health problems, PMS, infertility and uncomfortable menopause. The endocrine system is completely confused by these compounds. This phenomena is not well known in the general society mostly because the information is not popular among the corporations who happen to own the media as well as the companies that profit from the sale of these chemicals. It is up to us, the consumer, to seek out this information from the big-hearted scientists who are figuring it out! We

won't find it on the label of the products or in the popular mainstream media such as TV, radio or magazines or newspapers. But if you want to be happy and healthy, you would do well to invest a little more money in the alternative building products. In the long run, the benefit far outweighs the added initial capital output.

There is also a more far-reaching positive influence you make when you build a healthy house. In this country especially, our democracy is based more on where we spend our money than how we vote. If we buy healthy products and don't buy the toxic chemical products, we are sending a message to the industries that make and promote the use of those toxic chemicals. Therefore, when we build a non-toxic house and use non-toxic household products, we are helping the fishes and the frogs and lizards and the snakes and the birds and the butterflies and everybody in our ecosystem!

Because the healthy house products are new, less well-known and less-advertized, there is a smaller market for them. They do cost a bit more. If we take on that cost now, in the future, as more people do like us, the prices will come down. And it isn't that much more, maybe 10 %, depending on the size of the house and if you are using your own labor. If we look at prices as the only criterium in our economic analysis, we lose the big picture and the greater benefit for everyone. Our health, the health of future inhabitants and the health of our larger ecosystem is much more valuable than a few dollars.

Building healthy buildings is especially crucial in Dharma Centers. People who go to retreat are often already beset with mental and physical chronic illness. These symptoms are definitely exacerbated in toxic buildings.

There are two main topics to learn to make a health-giving house: how to use feng shui and how to avoid using toxic chemicals in the building itself and inside the home. Until you educate yourself to be aware of these two topics, you may not notice them; but, I guarantee you are influenced by them.

If you put the average person in the meditation hall at Land of Medicine Buddha, they may feel slightly unsettled in there, but they won't pay much attention to it. If you put Lillian Too, feng shui master, in that Gompa, she is so agitated by the negative chi flow from the exposed beams overhead, she can't bear to be in there. During a normal retreat at Vajrapani Institute, most people experience back aches and fatigue and sleepy minds. They blame it on themselves and reckon meditation isn't something that is fun or that they are good at. If you put Sumden or me in that gompa, we have the same symptoms. We are even more aware of it, much like Lillian and the beams, and we know it is coming from the fumes out-gassing from the floor, the woodwork and travelling up from the gas ranges below. The average person just drinks more tea and eats more cookies and feels fine. But I dare to ask, what is their mind and body experience in their meditations? And what is the long term result of medicating yourself with caffeine and sugar? Not so good....when you reach 50 years or so, you will be feeling arthritis or diabetes or any number of ailments...not so good for meditation practice, either.

As we begin to develop subtle states of mind, these two factors have much stronger influence on how we feel. If we want to develop subtle states of mind, we must pay attention to these two hidden factors if we want to reach our goal of a clarity and awareness. This is why feng shui and toxic chemical awareness must be taken into consideration when building a retreat house. Most retreat house builders are not meditators so they have not yet developed this keener sense of awareness. People who go into the retreat houses Sumden has built immediately feel good, but it is not obvious to them why. To the untrained mind, feng shui and toxic chemical awareness are hidden phenomena. It doesn't take much time to learn to be aware of both of them and your retreat or your life will be far improved on all fronts. Abolishing the toxic chemicals help to give you the freedom to be feel good without stimulants, to have a clear, calm and stable mind and thereby able to penetrate subtle states of mind. Feng shui not only improves health, it improves ALL the aspects of your life...from your lovelife to your career, to your children, to your golf game, to your bank account.

#### HOW TOXIC HOUSES AFFECT US

To be able to make the connection between the air you are breathing to the way you are behaving and the way you feel is a very difficult connection to make. We are changing environments constantly and, therefore, breathing different cocktails of toxic chemicals throughout the day. Each building is built with different substances that have different toxic chemicals in them, although there are some major standard products in use such as plywood and varathane. My husband, Sumden, and I were told all this information as early as 1984 when we met Peter Richardson, who had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Peter had all the CAT-scans and everything else done to verify his M.S. and was about to undergo some very expensive treatment when he met a holistic doctor. Peter changed his diet, took the gas range and heater out of his house, had all his amalgam fillings replaced in his mouth and he was totally cured of M.S.! We were happy for him but were sure that wasn't our problem. We were living in a plywood, moldy, retreat house that had gas for cooking and lighting. We, like everyone else we have tried to communicate this to, just sloughed off Peter's advice that our house made us sick and angry.. We thought we had "lung". We did, but what we didn't know is that those toxic chemicals CAUSE lung!

One of the big obstacles to acknowledging this source of poison is that it can be a major job to overhaul a toxic house, so people would rather deny it. Change, openness to new ideas, is difficult for anybody. You need a very strong reason, and this one is difficult for people to see even when you are really sick from a chemical in your house. Who wants to accept that their cooking gas makes them sick? What a hassle!

It took us 5 years of preliminary practices, suffering all the way through, before we finally had the karma to see that toxic air was a major source of our emotional and physical suffering. People with already compromised immune systems from other causes are much more intensely affected than people who are fairly healthy; but I am convinced it affects everyone. In fact, a major way to acquire an exhausted immune system is by a

constant exposure to toxic chemicals for an extended period of time. Examples of this are living in a house with a gas leak, or working in the automotive industry, or the building industry or the dental industry or moving into a brand new house. I am also convinced that the more you meditate, the more sensitive you become.

We aren't the only ones who thought the effects of gas and plywood poisoning was just lung and there wasn't much to be done about it from the outside. Recently, a very good monk left Shinne Land because he said he had a bad case of lung. He told one of the other Sangha members there that his lung went away when he was fasting. This means when he wasn't cooking, which means when he wasn't breathing gas fumes. Those little houses don't vent very well in the winter time with the house closed up. The lights and the refrigerators are also gas. He left in the spring, after winter....

Another Sangha member died at Shinne Land recently. According to what she expressed to a friend of hers, she also had a very bad case of lung. The autopsy could not reveal the cause of her death, but she died at the time there was a very very large earth shattering sonic boom. Sumden, who is extremely sensitive, was nearby during that boom. He knew immediately that something terrible had happened. He thought I had died. This type of shock can cause the mind to leave the body if there is a lot of lung. From what she told her friend, who told me, her "lung" sounded exactly the way both mine and Sumden's mind's get when we live in a small house with unvented gas. We used to think it was lung, too. Her lights and refrigerator were also gas. When they found her body, the gas stove was still on, fumigating her house.

There is also the story of a monk who was doing three year retreat at Vajrapani Institute. I gather he already had some psychological obstacles and they got much worse in the retreat and he had to leave. When Jetsun Lama Zopa Rinpoche advised me to do my next Great Retreat at Vajrapani Land, I was shown his retreat house. I instantly knew that I would have the same experience he had...The hut is made of plywood, the paint and wood sealer is toxic, it is moldy and the heater is propane. I would go mad in there. Rinpoche told me the house should be torn down, they still let people use it....

This is serious business, especially for meditators who spend all day long inside. What is really frustrating for me is to know what is going on but I don't have the karma to have people take heed to what I have to say. I was the same, so I can't expect them to be any different. I can't prove 100% that the plywood and gas are the cause of these sad stories, but even if it MIGHT be true, the situation is grave enough that this information warrants some consideration. At least we could TRY building healthy buildings on FPMT lands and see if people have better experiences. I am sure they will. We could build houses that offer the cooperative condition to ripen the seeds of calm abiding rather than the seeds of anger and hostility in peoples' minds. (We have not had a very good success rate at Shinne Land. Even the first nun was full of hostility when she left, I heard. It is so sad to me because I know the gas makes many people very disturbed.) If we are really about preserving the Mahayana Tradition, then, if these toxic chemicals impede people's ability to meditate, then this information is part of preserving the Mahayana Tradition. Lama wanted us to investigate how to make Tibetan Buddhism work in the west and I am

convinced this building information has to be an integral part of the plan. These houses built with toxic chemicals were not in Tibet! This information was not part of Tibetan Culture, but it is part of modern culture. We are foolish to ignore it, in my opinion, of course.

Sumden informed me recently that two or three of the retreatants at Shinne Land decided to test our advice and removed the gas refrigerators and stoves from their small cabins. They report that they are feeling stronger as a result of this renovation. Maybe we are making some progress after all!

Just recently I attended a week-long retreat at Vajrapani Institute, the place I have suffered some of the worst cases of toxic air poisoning. I began to pay attention to the evenings when I felt the worse at the end of the night. It was the evenings that the windows were shut. After those very same evenings, our greatest living yogi of old Tibet, whose very mentioning of his name brings tears to my eyes, the Jetsun Ribur Rinpoche, would not come to teach the next morning because he had some sort of indigestion. I would also ask other students, the healthy ones, who have no chemical allergies, how they felt during that evening session. "OH," they would say, "it was the worst night ever, I couldn't pay attention at all, my back hurt and I was so sleepy." When I mentioned this to the Lama's translator and attendant, "Oh no, Rinpoche doesn't have those allergies." They are not allergies, they are simply air poisonings. Those of us who have broken down livers and immune systems just notice it much more intensely. (It is also interesting to note that on those evenings, the cooks were baking below and propane gas is known to cause gastro-intestinal upset.) If I mention my observations to anyone, they look at me like I'm crazy. Or they think this is just Roger and Paula's problem. I can see it hurts them all.

In 1995, we were fortunate to spend some hours with Geshe Yeshe Tobden, a famous yogi from Dharamsala. He definitely agreed with us and said that for him, the newer a building is, the harder it is to meditate in one. Maybe that is why he preferred to live in his shack that he built for 90 rupees in the early '70's, even after he had many wealthy Italian students.

The reason why "healthy" people, i.e. people with fairly good immune systems, don't notice the effect the air is having on them is because these are the same people who drink caffeine and alcohol and eat sugar and wear perfume. These stimulants keep you operating at a higher frequency so you don't notice most of the effects of these chemicals. If they tried to do a retreat without these stimulants, I'll bet they would notice them immediately. Most of these same "healthy" people suffer from at least one of the following: depression, chronic back pain, arthritis, frequent headaches, insomnia, anxiety, PMS, hypo-thyroidism, sinus allergies, hair trigger anger, forgetfulness....on and on.... which they treat with aspirin and prescription drugs and alcohol. People who have chronic cases of *Candida albicans* are much more susceptible to experiencing the effects of toxic air. Most people don't know about *Candida*, either.

For years, Sumden and I felt rotten and went through periods of mental instability like I had never experienced before. We thought this was due to our purification practices and to the lingering after-effects of hepatitis A and Candida. This is true;--but, when we began to take the toxic chemicals out of our air and food and clothing and bedding, we felt drastic, immediate changes in our body and mind. We had the energy to do what we wanted to do and we never had any more arguments...only if we had been poisoned in someone else's home. And even then, we knew what the cause was and could stop ourselves. It may be of interest to the reader that we finally were able to understand that toxic air was a major cause of our distress when we completed the preliminary practice of reproducing 100,000 images of Lama Tsong Khapa, the great Tibetan Yogi and Scholar whose teachings became the foundation for the Gelugpa Lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. We were, like magic, thrown out of the Dharma Center where we lived in New South Wales, Australia and blown to Adelaide (at least 2,000 miles away) where within three or four days we were taken to Dr. David Mitchell, M.D. - homeopath who had a waiting list three months long! Dr. Mitchell diagnosed all the poison for us.

When we landed at Milarepa Center, in the northeast of Vermont, USA, to begin construction of a small retreat center for the two of us, we knew we had to build non-toxic houses. We didn't know a lot about it at the time and there was no literature about it in the popular media. We did know that propane gas made us both very angry and tired. Lucky for us, Martha Tack had just become the director and she still commuted to her job at the Harvard School of Design Library. If there was any literature to be found on non-toxic housing, it would be there. Sure enough, every weekend for about two months, Martha would bring us three or four books from the library. It was enough to give us a working knowledge with which to begin construction.

That was in the winter of 1991. By the time we finished our retreat, almost five years later, a critical mass of alarmed citizens had developed to the point where there was a new industry of non-toxic building supplies, catalog companies and stores that sell non-toxic indoor products and paints and glues, etc. The internet now has many sites that sell products and information on how to build non-toxic buildings and renovate old ones.

It is difficult for me to be patient on this matter. I have spent 20 years in toxic gompas in FPMT and other Dharma centers watching the people's nose drip with allergies, watching everyone writhe in back and knee pain, watching people fall asleep, or even pass-out during teachings, watching myself (and others) lose control of my emotions after a few hours in those gompas. The ex-India campaigners can't make it to the morning teachings, they have such hangovers from the night before. (They are the most susceptible because they, poor dears, have the worst immune systems.) I don't blame anyone. Nobody knew about these dangers when they built with those materials or installed gas ranges with no vents (which is illegal, by the way) in kitchens beneath or next to gompas. I just wish someone besides Sumden and me would see the pink elephant in the middle of the gompa and at least develop the wish to make a healthy one! And stop building toxic houses!!!!!!

Some construction workers report of nagging pains, fatigue and forgetful mind but do not equate them with the materials they use. It is not easy to make that connection and if your work depends on it, that makes it even harder. Next to dentistry, the building industry is the slowest to change. And with good reason, there is so much money invested in a house, people are very wary to try something new, in case it fails.

And I am just reporting what I see in my little world. I know that this is the secret cause of so much of the violence and hostility and mental illness and physical disease in America today. Just look at all the children with asthma and attention deficit disorder--and cancer! Not to mention the rising incidence of homicide in children.... These chemicals cause uncontrollable anger and violence; I have seen it in myself! The statistics are skyrocketing, but nobody knows it's the soap they use and the sheets they sleep on and the rugs they play on and the gas in the kitchen. And the worst part is the chemicals induce the stress, that weakens the immune system, that makes the body have stronger negative reactions to the chemicals, which makes more stress...weaker immune system...more violence... It is an ever increasing downward spiral into total hell. It takes so much time for science to prove these things. The EPA can't begin to keep up with the amount of new chemical products on the market today. The people who produce them don't have to test their products' effects on mice. They don't really think that far, and they don't really care, either. (Their minds are too debilitated by the toxic fumes they breathe all day long!--just joking, dear.) For anything to change, it will take a grass roots movement. It is slowly happening, but if I can judge by the reaction I get from my own community, it's a slow boat to China, this one.

Well, I've let out my steam. I'll put away my curved knife and skull cup and return to a more peaceful aspect.... Now, for some sound information on how to live without toxic chemicals. I will discuss a healthy house in the context of a retreat house, but this information applies to any building--office, shop or home.

### CREATING YOUR HEALTHY RETREAT SPACE

Ideally, the best retreat house is one that you can build for yourself that is catered to your specific feng sui and health requirements. Second best is a space you can renovate to suit your personal situation. Third best is a hut that is given to you to use for retreat and you just do the best you can to remedy the already existing feng shui and building materials. You can apply the ideas here to all three situations. Of course, if your retreat is a few weeks or a few months long, then it doesn't make a lot of sense to build a new house just for that....unless you are wealthy and want to build and donate a very nice retreat space for a Dharma Retreat Center. That would be marvellous.

There are basically four parts to designing a realization-facilitating retreat space. Tibetans call it a House of Attainment.

1. Feng-shui
2. Building materials best suited for retreat
3. Energy conservation considerations
4. Features to keep out the local animals and insects

Before I begin, I would like to mention again that this topic is by itself the subject of a whole book that Lama Zopa Rinpoche requested Sumden Lhundrup to write for his students. He is very talented in any aspect of design and is a master of space and form. He has built at least a dozen retreat houses all over the world, of stone, of mud and of wood. He is in a very long retreat and has no space in his life to write that book just now. Maybe he will write that book one day; in the meantime, poisonous houses are erected every year, so I thought to give a little introduction to the subject with references to good books. I have researched information and assisted physically with most of Sumden's building projects, so I have a fairly good knowledge of the subject. I will do the best I can with a rudimentary review of the basic ideas. There are many websites these days that offer information and materials on healthy ecosystem-conscious housing. Builders and designers can be contacted on the internet. If you need more assistance than what I offer here, please look there.

## FENG SHUI

For those of you who are new to feng shui (pronounced fung-shway), it is the Chinese science of geomancy. Feng sui teaches how to optimize your living space by understanding how the compass directions and the earth's magnetism interact with astrology and the elements of fire, water, earth, metal and air. Understanding these influences and their interrelationships shows how to improve the health, life-span, prosperity, wealth, relationships, family, success and personal growth of an individual. Particularly when applied in the design of a building, feng shui teaches how the influences of the elements, directions and astrology produce specific results for individuals. When working with an already existing building, feng shui gives remedial measures that can be done without any major renovations. It definitely is real and it definitely works and can produce amazing results when used properly. It is good to note that a person's karma has a more powerful influence on what happens to them than does feng shui. But that doesn't mean we can ignore feng shui. It is really important. You can feel it quite easily when you begin to work with it.

Feng Shui is like Chinese Medicine for the environment. Chinese and Tibetan Medicine teach how the elements and the flow of chi inside our body affect our inner experience such as the mental and physical status of our mind and body. Feng Shui teaches how the elements and the flow of chi outside our body affect our outer experience and inner experience such as the status of our relationships, careers, personal growth, health, etc. If you add to this the Vajrayana Buddhist Teachings on how the five elements and their corresponding wisdom qualities affect our secret experience, we have a very exciting system to transform the mundane into the supra-mundane in all aspects of life. All yogis of the past utilized these three realms of knowledge on their path to Enlightenment. When you incorporate these outer, inner and secret element and energy-balancing systems into

your life, you discover a very enlightening, stress reducing, virtue and health-encouraging and endlessly interesting lifestyle---and a very interesting and totally pleasing retreat house, too! Feng Shui is a lot of fun because you use color, imagery, materials and space to enhance and enliven the energetic ambiance in a house. You can energize the elements that are weak in your body by energizing those elements' locations in your house. You energize the parts of your life that need help, like career, health, relationship, by energizing those attributes' locations in your house. With feng shui, even the smallest retreat hut can feel like a celestial mansion...which means you feel satisfied and happy.

It is very important to remember when you are designing your retreat house that you are going to be in this house every day for months or years without going anywhere else. AND, You spend about 22-23 hours a day inside that house. That is why the air quality is important. This is also why feng shui is so important for a retreat house. It has to be a house that gives comfort, pleasure and some diversity in color, elements and style. With feng shui, even the smallest house can be balanced in earth, fire, air, water and metal elements. This balance promotes contentment which is the basic necessity for a successful retreat. You don't need to give yourself cabin fever! It's hard enough to keep lung away without having to contend with a toxic, psychologically stuffy house.

My good friend Judy Weitzner first introduced me to feng shui in 1987 when she asked me to ask my friend, Ron Rhoades, to look for a feng shui book at his job with Book People, a large distributor of "alternative" books in Berkeley, CA. There weren't many books on feng shui then in English, the one that turned up at Book People opened up a whole new way of looking at the natural world for me. When we left India in 1990 to figure out where to do our Great Retreats, we stopped in Singapore and I was able to find more books there. It was all very complicated to me, calculating astrology and all these diagrams of room layouts, compass calculations, etc. I couldn't make heads or tails of it. The only part I could understand was about the auspicious land forms to look for when placing a house. I found a perfect site in the 400 acres of forest at Milarepa Center. That may have saved our lives! It was a south facing slope on the side of Barnet Mountain, where the land leveled out for a couple of acres; the land mass to the east was slightly higher than the land mass to the west (the green dragon and the white tiger). There was a lake in front and a stream running north-south to the east.

When we began our next retreat center project at Land of Medicine Buddha. Again, I bought what seemed like the best book on Feng Shui and, again, I couldn't put the effort into deciphering all the compass calculations; it just seemed so complicated. Six months later, after we had framed and half-finished the buildings, our Jetsun Lama Zopa Rinpoche arrived with his new-found interest in Feng Shui AND he brought his new feng-shui teacher, Lillian Too, to Land of Medicine Buddha. What an incredible blessing Lillian has brought to all of Rinpoche's students. Lillian writes very easy to understand books on Feng Sui!!! They are simply stunning! Too bad they weren't in the book stores where I went looking.....not yet published.

Lillian's book, *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Feng Shui*, is excellent and totally user-friendly. I recommend it to everyone. I recommend all her books. It only takes a few hours to learn the basics. You figure out your birth element (wind, water, etc) and find out what your best directions are, make a grid of your house or office and assess your situation. Lillian gives excellent cures or remedies if you find harmful feng shui in your house, like the house faces an inauspicious direction for you, things like that. If you are about to design a house, then you draw the nine part layout of the bagua that is specific to you and design your house around that. This makes it easy to figure out where to put the altar, the kitchen, the bed, etc.; which direction to face while you practice and sleep and eat and cook, all these things are part of feng shui.

There are three main schools of feng shui, as far as I know: (1) the form school, which describes auspicious land forms, where to put a building on the site you have; (2) the compass school which tells you how to orient the building and all the inside rooms for maximum benefit, colors to use, how to use the elements to your advantage; and (3) the flying star school, which is based on the astrology of the building and of the inhabitant. Flying star basically tells you where the chi is flowing in the building, so you know where to site the activities you will be doing inside. This is not covered in Lillian's *Complete Illustrated Guide*, but she does have a book on it or you can get help from Bill Kane. If I were to build another house, I would base it more on the form and compass school because the flying star changes every seven years. You may have to change the roof or change a door every seven years. I don't know if I will have resources to do that, but if you do... go right ahead! The feng shui masters say the flying star is the most important. My experience tells me that a lot of power comes from learning and working with the compass school, which Lillian describes very well and with lots of illustrations.

Here is what Lama Zopa Rinpoche has to say about Feng Shui. The following is a letter Rinpoche wrote to all the FPMT center directors in October of 1997:

*"The main causes of success and difficulties are good karma and negative karma. However, there are also external conditions that contribute both to success and prosperity and also to problems. These outer conditions can be created by setting up the correct fengshui inside one's house, and in the external surroundings. So these are conditions to bring success to stop problems.*

*When good karma is very strong, external and internal conditions will change naturally due to the power of good karma, even without any application of feng shui. However, having an understanding of feng shui can help. Correct application of feng shui can help to solve these problems depending on how extensively one applies the correct feng shui. This can be true even in the case of the FPMT centers that have been developed for many years and are doing quite well due to much purification, merits, and correct Dharma understanding.*

*Within the organization, we are building retreat centers and setting up city centers, so we need many things to benefit the Dharma successfully. When there is much harmony and finances and when things go well, people have more space in the mind to develop compassion and a good heart. In this way, they are able to continue their practice without*

*so pressure, worry , and fear in running the center. Also, people tend to be more mentally clear and physically healthy. Of course, for bodhisattvas the harder it is the happier they are because of the opportunity to sacrifice their life and bear hardships for others.*

*I feel that the first, best, and biggest benefit and the main solution is the Dharma. I think feng shui is the next most important solution to help others and stop the normal problems that people always talk about--relationships, job, health, education, wealth and long life. I would also like to request all the centers to put a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the southwest or northwest part of the director's office at the center also the gompa (the meditation hall), in order to create the causes for His Holiness to guide us."*

There is one factor in feng shui that I'm not sure you will find in Lillian Too's books and that is the value of putting holy objects in your retreat house. Lama Zopa Rinpoche shows us the value of the presence of holy objects in our environment all the time, but we aren't so quick to catch on to it. I think it is because of our Christian upbringing. I can hear the words resounding in my head, "Thou shalt not bow down to graven images!" I don't think this is a conscious thought, we just don't quite get it when it comes to statues. Rinpoche once told me that there are two great obstacles for western people: (1) not believing in the infallibility of the law of cause and effect and (2) having no faith in the power of holy objects. Sumden is totally in tune with the power of holy objects and his influence has given me the opportunity to see the effect with my own experience. ..Which is what it takes for most of us. I include a teaching Rinpoche gave on this subject when Rinpoche blessed my meditation room. The walls are totally covered in pictures of Gurus and Buddhas and Deities...almost all of them were given to me by Sumden.

**A TEACHING FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE ON THE VALUE OF HOLY OBJECTS IN HOUSES ( from a video of Lhundup Nyingje's retreat house taken by Ven. Brian Halterman)**

Sumden Lhundrup describes features of the retreat house:  
This room is particularly built with sound-proofing features to keep out noise and the summer heat. It has double windows so there are four panes of glass, the walls are about 12 inches thick, lots of insulation in them. I put in a false ceiling with r-50 insulation so the room is much quieter than the rest of the building and it's much cooler in the summer and warmer and drier in the winter . This whole house is built with non-toxic materials, so you can keep the windows closed if you want to. You can keep the house closed up in winter and not get cabin fever. This building is also built to Paula's auspicious feng sui. She sits in her success corner, facing her most powerful feng sui direction. The elements are enhanced in their corners. We used feng sui to pick the colors for the house and where to put the kitchen, bathing, sleeping areas, etc. We were careful to remedy all the sha chi (negative chi) by rounding all the corners and using crystals at the doors and windows. Bill Kane offered the flying star prescription, which, among other things, included building a metal mountain in the front of the house, a large water feature at the back and a large wind chime over the front door. For the metal mountain we built up a foundation of stones and on top of that we put a 50 gallon drum filled with 1500 Mitukpa

tsa-tsas. We painted the drum gold and put on top a brass 10 inch stupa and a 18 inch garden-style Buddha statue painted gold. Inside the meditation room, you notice there are lots and lots of pictures of Gurus, Deities and Buddhas on the walls and this is through the inspiration of Rinpoche. The reason for that is so that are more objects to create virtue-merit, all the offerings become more meaningful and all the practice becomes more meaningful. So, this is a new tradition, a lot of photo-copied Buddhas everywhere.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's response to the room filled with holy objects:

*It is mentioned in the King of Concentration Sutra, even if you see a drawing of Buddha on a stone wall, even out of anger, it causes gradually to see ten millions of Buddhas. Ten millions of Buddhas, like the hundreds of deities of Tushita doesn't just mean a hundred, it means MANY. Even if the motivation is total non-virtue, black, due to the power of the holy object, the power of the Buddha, it creates so much power and inconceivable qualities because Buddha has achieved inconceivable qualities, which Buddha has accomplished by being free from all the defilements which is derived from the great compassion that is generated towards all sentient beings, including us. Due to the power of holy objects, the mind is purified. Just by seeing a holy object, it purifies the mind, the defilements and obscurations. It purifies the mind and plants the seed of enlightenment plus liberation from samsara and all these things. Then in the future the seed is planted for the mind to become more developed on the path to enlightenment, more and more to be able to see more and more numbers of Buddhas. Then, of course, ultimately you are able to become one with the numberless Buddhas. That also means that you become able to achieve the Guru, which means the absolute Guru, the dharmakaya of the Buddha's holy mind. Your mind becomes oneness with the Dharmakaya, the Guru's Holy Mind; this is the definition of achieving the Guru.*

*So, with all these, every single painting of Buddha, pictures, statues; each time you open the eye, each time you wake, you see Buddhas. Each time you open your eye, you see holy objects. Each time you open your eye, each time you wake up from sleep, you plant the seed of Enlightenment, not just one, but so many hundreds of seeds of Enlightenment. So that's a simple way to make life so meaningful. In my house in Aptos, the offering room and my room are filled with holy pictures: the Guru Puja merit field, Medicine Buddha, Thirty-five Buddhas and others. When other people come, if they put their palms together, during that short visit-- one minute two minutes, whatever-- if there are one thousand pictures of Buddha, they create one hundred thousand causes of Enlightenment during that minute. That's the highest achievement, liberation from samsara, that many causes. Then, they also create one hundred thousand causes for good rebirth next life. It's not just creating one good karma to receive a good rebirth next life. It's not just one time, not just one hundred thousand times, because karma is expandable.*

*So therefore, now, if there are one hundred thousand pictures of Buddha, when people put palms together, they create the cause for inconceivable numbers of lifetimes of good*

*rebirth. So just by putting your palms together and prostrating to the pictures and holy objects each time when you enter into the room, you create that inconceivable merit. Generally it is mentioned in the Sutra you achieve eight benefits if you put your palms together to one statue, to one Buddha. In the future lives you achieve a perfect body, that means with all the perfect senses with the beautiful shape and color, like that. You receive perfect surrounding people who support you so that all the holy wishes will be fulfilled, to benefit other sentient beings, to practice Dharma, able to live in morality. Without morality, you have no basis for realizations, such as shamatha, great insight and all these things.*

*The cause to achieve realization of the whole path to liberation and enlightenment is devotion. Without devotion, you cannot receive the blessings of the Guru; without blessings, you cannot achieve realizations. So, these benefits you get from putting the palms together (and prostrating to holy objects) are very important. The next benefit you receive (from putting palms together to holy objects) is the brave heart to do things in public for others, to serve the teachings of the Buddha; then one gets born in deva or human realm next life. Then next one is very important: the cause to achieve the aryan path. There are five paths to achieve enlightenment, merit, preparation, right seeing path, path of meditation, no more learning. If you achieve the Mahayana Aryan Path, the path of right seeing, the third one, from there you will overcome death, cycle of death and rebirth, old age, sicknesses, sufferings of samsara. So good bye sufferings of samsara. That's what happens, like an apple a day, good-bye doctor. So here, by achieving this right seeing path, good-bye oceans of samsaric suffering which continuation has no beginning. Good-bye. When you achieve Mahayana aryan path, arhat, also you overcome all those sufferings, the cycle of death and rebirth. In tantra, when you have achieved the graduated path of generation and completion stage, when you come to the isolation of body, isolation of speech and mind, that which is clear light, illusory body, unification those two, the unification of no-more learning. So when you achieve clear light, at that time, you overcome the cycle of death and rebirth, so it is the Aryan path. In Tantra the Aryan path is the clear light of meaning, there is clear light of example and clear light of meaning which is the extremely subtle wisdom directly seeing emptiness. So in tantra, when you have clear light, you are free from the cycle of death and rebirth. So therefore it's very important to put palms together to pictures of Buddhas and statues, you get that benefit to achieve the aryan path and the last one is enlightenment.*

*Then there are also ten benefits mentioned in the sutras; therefore, whether it is a family house or an individual house, if you have space, put many many pictures, outside inside, but not disrespectfully. Sometimes people use holy objects as decoration and put them in a disrespectful place. You shouldn't do like that, you should place them respectfully; then, it is very good. I started this tradition after reading about its benefits, and in Taiwan I have seen thousands of Lama Tsong Khapa merit fields in the students' houses-- whole bundles stacked on the altar and also they offer the Christmas light offerings. The Taiwanese students started two things: the extensive offerings and the many pictures.*

## PLANNING

If you are building a structure on a virgin piece of earth, you may want to perform a ritual called The Great Slithering One to ask permission of the local earth spirits to build a house there before you break ground. I have put this in an appendix. It is a good idea to do this because it can prevent future disasters and minor obstacles to the building and those who dwell in it.

When you design a retreat house, the first thing to do is to decide how big your house or hut will be. This is mostly dependent on your budget but also on the site. Next, look at the site. Spend some time there and get the “feel” of the place. I heard a famous architect say that you should pick out where you want the garden first and design the house around that, i.e., design the landscape in which the house will sit. A house should feel connected to the garden. A good house design will invite the inhabitant to walk outside to be in the garden. Find out where your water source is and how you will get it to your house. Figure out the best way to set the house so that there is good water drainage all around the site. Read the feng shui books on house placement, find the site that maximizes your potential for the white tiger, the green dragon, the black turtle and the red phoenix (all names for land forms on the four sides of a house). Match the land to your personal good directions and overall feng shui lay out. Look at the compass directions. Make sure the land is stable. Don't put a house on a hill or near a cliff if it is going to slide down, obviously. A steep site is not good feng shui because the chi is always falling away from the house. If the house is not on a flat spot, but isn't on a steep place, you can take some time to level the land where the house is going to be. Sumden always takes the time to do this before he builds a house. He makes sure there is good drainage all around that level spot he prepares and then he builds a solid foundation on level ground. This is not only good feng sui, it also provides a level circumnambulation path around the house, which is a very, very nice attribute for a house. It is so relaxing to just amble around your house, doing walking meditation or recite prayers. Circumnambulation is a practice like prostrations, and when done with Bodhicitta motivation, brings great blessings to your mind and body. It is also just easier to build a house on level ground. If the hut is small enough, you can level the land with a shovel. Place the house so it will maximize solar gain. This means there are many windows on the south side and not so many on the north. (Of course, this is just the opposite in the Southern Hemisphere.) If you don't have good feng shui directions in the south and east (in N. Hemisphere), you don't have to put the front door in those directions, but you can still have many windows on that side.

Draw the feng shui bagua that will promote your good health and good qualities. Design the inside lay out of your house around that bagua. This will tell you where to put the kitchen, the meditation area, sleeping area, which way to face when sleeping, meditating, the bath, the fire, etc. Find ways to eliminate the sha chi, like making rounded corners on the walls. (Incidentally, I learned from the small apartments in New York City that you can have a bathtub any where in your house. It doesn't have to be near the toilet. You can have a bath tub in your house and a toilet outside your house. For retreat, this is best.)

About sleeping and meditating in retreat: Years ago, Sumden and I met an abbot from one of the Gelukpa monasteries. I am sorry, I have forgotten his name. This kind Kyenpo had completed a great retreat and he gave us some advice on how to do one. He put a lot of emphasis on separating the meditation seat and the bed. He said not to sleep where you meditate because this will tend to make your meditations drowsy. When you sleep, sleep well, with your legs outstretched so you can rest properly with good chi circulation. When you meditate, meditate properly, with your legs in vajra position so your mind is alert with good chi circulation. Don't have the bed or the meditation seat on the floor. Elevate them so chi will flow under you and so you won't lose kidney chi or be unnecessarily cold.

Because of this advice, even when our meditation huts were only 7 ft.x 7 ft. (2.3 m x 2.3 m), the bed was along one wall and the meditation box was along the opposite wall, facing the bed. The altar was above the bed. That was all that was in the hut. The beds had to be only two feet wide to accommodate this configuration. Poor Sumden, he is an extra-large tall man, he could barely fit in his bed! I was okay. The meditation seats were as high as the bed and were 3 ft.x 2.5 ft. We had storage under the meditation seat. Still, we are really glad we set the huts up like this. The kind Khyenpo was right.

Another important factor to consider when planning your house is ventilation. Make sure there are windows on all four sides of the house, so that air can flow through all parts of the house when the windows are open. Two sides is okay if you have a small retreat hut. You must be able to air the house out with fresh air. In the corner of the house where my kitchen and library are, the window stayed shut all the time because I took the screen out because this was the window where my stove sits just outside of it. (See the section on gas). The whole house would fill up with the glue and print fumes from the books, which, unless the printer uses soy-based inks, are very toxic. I made a screen to fit the stove window, I leave the window open now and I notice a huge improvement in house air-quality. My energy level took another leap up.

Obviously, if you plan and design with great detail, you will have a much more satisfactory result. I have to thank my friend Melissa Washburn, an architect who uses feng sui, because she made me sit down and draw my own bagua and come up with my own design, and then, she began to talk to me. This way the house grows out of the owner's creative process, enhanced by an architect. This makes for a very successful house-building adventure. Houses always seem to take twice as long as you think they will to build and twice as much money, too. If you have a limited budget, think you have only half or two-thirds of what you actually have when you plan. A house is only half finished when you get the outside done. The finish work takes a long time. That's where that money goes. If you are hiring a builder, be sure you know what you want and stick to it. Take the time to look into alternatives before doing what your builder is used to. If you have a builder who will not do what you want and acts like he knows more about your house than you do, get another builder. If you have the time to build your own house, this is best ...at least be able to supervise the builders. You will be happier that way.

## BUILDING MATERIALS

When Sumden was preparing to build his house at Shinne Land, he was fortunate to be living with our Jetsun Zopa Rinpoche. (All of Rinpoche's feng shui books just happened to arrive from Nepal at this time.) Rinpoche did mo's (divinations) on what type of material would be best for a retreat hut. Adobe or rammed earth came out best; then straw bale, last was the conventional wood stud framed house that is standard in USA--even the non-toxic version. I hear that the rammed earth monastery, Thubten Shedrup Ling, in Bendigo, Victoria, Australia is perfectly wonderful. Straw bale also appeals to me because it is so fast and so cheap. People unfamiliar with this method don't understand that they are covered in stucco and are quite waterproof. You have no influence from the straw, it is airtight sealed inside the wall. In Nebraska, USA, they have been building with straw bales for over a hundred years. It is labor intensive but only for the placing of the bales on a concrete slab. The videos I have seen show 10 people working for a weekend and all the walls are up in two days.

Straw bale, rammed earth and adobe bricks appeal to me because of their quiet quality and their thermal conservation. I lived in a 200 year old adobe house in New Mexico and it was marvellously cool in the summer and toasty warm in the winter. Straw would be the same. There is such a nice earthy grounded feeling to them. The reason we never used these materials is because our retreat sites have always been in remote areas and you need a good concrete poured foundation for these house types. That was just too much work for us to do by hand. When you build with straw bales, all you do is lay the concrete slab with rebar as long as the proposed walls sticking up all around the edges, make the window, door and roof frames; haul in the bales and impale them on the rebar like you stack bricks. Stucco the outside and inside, put up the roof and you are done! If I built another 10x10' hut, or 10x 20' hut, I'd do that...only make it 12x12 on outside so it'd be 10x10 on the inside. Two foot thick walls would be like a cave!

A really good feature you can include in a cement base for the floor is to put pipes for hot water into the cement. The water can be solar heated or wood-heated and all winter long is heated from the floor. There's no smoke fumes to contend with and the warm floor is simply luxurious--and really good for your kidney chi! There are books that tell how to do this.

Yurts are quick and cheap but unless you can get them imported from Mongolia made of homemade wool flannel, they are generally made of plywood, which is toxic. Yurts are not very thermal efficient and are hot in summer and cold in winter. It's a personal choice. We lived in a canvas and wood yurt for a few months and it was miserable in the winter in northern California...damp and moldy. Mold makes you really sick. They are probably

okay in a high altitude desert where the winters are dry and aren't too cold and the summer's aren't too hot--or if you insulate them.

Most major cities have recycled building material businesses. You can get windows, doors, sinks, bathtubs, all kinds of good junk, even good unused lumber sometimes. It's good for your budget and good for the planet. I have learned from the carpenters that doors are best to buy with their frames. Making a door frame can be very time-consuming. It depends on what you have more of time, or skill or money.

If you are going to use the standard stud constructed wooden house, there are several things you can do to make them more user-friendly. First, use 2x6's instead of 2x4's for the stud frame. I would even use 2x 8's if the house is small and you can afford it. The thick walls comes closer to the quieting and thermal conserving effect of the thick walls of adobe or straw bale. I'll just list the rest of the non-toxic adjustments:

--Take the paper off of the fiberglass insulation before you put it in the walls and ceiling. Fiberglass is just glass, but the paper and glue is toxic.

--Put a layer of visquene plastic between the fiberglass and the sheetrock. This is a vapor barrier.

--On the outside of the studs, wrap the house with housewrap like tyvek. This lets the moisture out but keeps the wind out.

--Instead of plywood for the shear factor for stability, you can order a product called Hardi-Panel, which comes from Australia originally. It comes in 3x8 or 3x10 and probably 3x12, or 4x8, 4x12, etc. You put it up over the studs where builders usually put plywood and then attach a siding to the plywood. The Hardi-panel does both of this at once. It looks like stucco when it is finished. It is fireproof which is another good feature. It is made of cement and wood fiber, no toxic chemicals. It doesn't smell at all.

--For the roof, instead of plywood, you can do it the old-fashioned way by laying 1x8's on top of the roof frame and attach a fire-proof roof to that--. They make large shingles, like 2x4 ft.out of material similar to Hardi-panel or you can get a metal roof. That rolled roofing stuff is flammable, toxic and only lasts twenty years or so, it is cheap in the short-run, but not so in the long term, and if the house is in the forest, it's not fire-proof at all!

---If you are building a small super low budget small hut, you could just use corrugated sheet metal for the siding and roofing if you sealed it well with caulk and those wood strips that fit the corrugations. You see houses like that in Australia and some of the original buildings at Shinne land are built this way and they are holding up well, must have been built 50-70 years ago...

--For the sealing caulk, use the 100% silicone caulk. It is toxic for a couple of weeks until it cures, then it is fine. So while you are building it's okay to use. The other caulks can outgas toxic chemicals for months and months, so READ LABELS. Make sure you seal

the house well before you move in to keep out the drafts and the insects. By this I mean, put caulk all around where the subfloor meets the sheet rock and all around the window frame.

--To avoid plywood on the subfloor, you can either lay down a layer on the diagonal, above the floor joists of 1x8 pine or fir or cedar; or you can dispense with the subfloor and use a good tongue and groove 1x6. Remember to put plastic under the floor and to insulate the floor well. We turned our floor frames on their sides and stapled hardware wire all along the bottom on top of the plastic and then laid the insulation inside of that. NO mice problems.

--We put in a hardwood floor once and made our own goop to go between the cracks by mixing hardwood sawdust with casein glue (made from milk), which you can order from a company called The Natural Choice in New Mexico. It worked fine. It must be what they used before petrochemicals hit the building industry. There are cork floorings now and also real linoleum is also non-toxic. There are softwood tongue and groove wood floorings also. Ceramic or stone tile floors are totally safe. Just be careful what you use to seal the tiles. Look for a tile sealer in the alternative catalogs, they are there.

--Some of my greatest discomfort in buildings comes from the varathane and urethane wood sealers people put on floors and furniture and built-in cabinets and bookcases.

There are many chemically-safe alternatives on the market now. I feel so sad when I go inside new gompas and smell that stuff and feel my headache and fatigue coming on when I know there are perfectly good alternatives available.

--There are also wall -paints, water sealers for decks (Stay away from Thompson's Water Seal) stains, etc.available that have zero VOC(volatile organic compounds). Many of them can be found in regular hardware stores. There are catalogs listed in the reference section and I'm sure the internet has even more. You can learn a lot just from reading the catalogs.

--Sumden built in most of the furniture in the houses he has built, like the bed, the altar, the meditation seat, kitchen cabinets, etc. This saves space in small huts and it looks cool, too! If you bring in second hand wood furniture or cloth chairs, they are likely to be covered in a toxic substance. In a small retreat hut, you can build your own. We found that redwood, which is still cheaper than buying hardwood, has no offensive substances. Pine can cause allergic reactions for many people, and even if you don't start out with one, a house full of it could make one. Redwood is a lot prettier than douglas fir. Cedar is smiliar to pine in its smell quality. He also used leftover hardi-panel for shelves, etc.

--For the indoor soft things like meditation cushion, mattress, pillows...you can make your own or have them made by futon people or buy them ready made out of organic cotton and untreated raw wool for stuffing. It works great. I made our futons for our retreat houses at Milarepa Center. It wasn't hard to find a source for the wool. There are organic type businesses most everywhere now. I purchased it from a futon-making

business. First we made a huge splurge and had futons made for us, but the law required them to spray fire retardant on them and we couldn't stand that. I tried unsuccessfully to wash it out. Then I made some. If you can't make them, you can buy non-toxic futons in catalogs now but it's really cheap and easy to make your own. And there are also local futon companies that will make large thick organic wool and cotton meditation cushions... like 2.5x 2.5 feet to go in a meditation box..whatever size you wish.

--Be careful of the fabrics you choose for curtains, too. I bought ready made cotton curtains this time and they were fine after three washings. Make sure you wash fabrics at least three times in non-toxic soap (we use Dr.Bronner's) before bringing them into your retreat space. If you sprinkle water on cotton fabric and the water immediately absorbs into the cloth, the cloth is okay. If it beads up and sits there, you need to wash it more. Your clothing can be a major source of indoor air pollution so check it out.

Plywood, particle board, all the wood products that are not solid wood are glued together with toxic glues. Outdoor plywood is less toxic than indoor plywood so if you insist on plywood, you can use the outdoor stuff indoors. It does outgas and an older house is less likely to cause a problem. I live in five year old plywood house now. I still have dark circles under my eyes from my allergy to the formaldehyde in the plywood, but because I have eliminated most other forms of toxicity, although I look ugly, I don't feel ugly anymore...I feel great! New plywood can be a really killer and can set off chemical sensitivities you never before experienced. That happened to me. I'd stay away from it if you can. If you live in a plywood house, there is a company called Pace Chemical that makes a wood sealer and wall-paint, called Crystal Aire, that seals out most of the formaldehyde that is out-gassing from the plywood. If you use plywood in a new building, then cover it with Crystal Aire afterwards or put Crystal Shield paint. or some similar product...better to avoid the plywood or particle board.

## OTHER SOURCES OF INDOOR TOXICITY

1. MOLD. Mold is an organism that thrives on moist environments and emits toxic fumes. Unless you live in the desert, you must be very careful to keep the house dry in the wet season. If you live where there is a hot humid summer and you have electricity, a de-humidifier is a very good investment. People who have had Candida for years, even if they get rid of it, are highly sensitive to mold. It will cause all the symptoms the Candida caused. Candida is also a mold. If you can't use a de-humidifier, or even if you can, keep your walls and floors especially clean in summer and watch out for signs of mold--check out the places regularly that aren't in the path of regular air flow.

Mold is a major obstacle at the two Santa Cruz area Dharma Centers. The housing for the transient workers is made of plywood, often have leaky gas appliances, leaky wood stoves and are moldy. Because they are vacant for periods of time, the mold accumulates. I think it is fair to say that people who are attracted to work at Dharma Centers, are more often than not people who have experienced a higher than average amount of psychological trauma in their lives. These people are the ones who are more likely to be sensitive to molds, gas, formaldehyde, etc. (Trauma and stress deplete the adrenal gland

function which causes chemical sensitivity.) It is no wonder that their mental and physical well-being degenerates while they are there and they don't stay long. They go seeking refuge and just get worse and we, in all our Buddhist wisdom say, "Oh, too bad, it's purification." I think we can help people more than just giving them conditions for their bad karma to ripen! This has happened to me and to other people I know. A very bright, but very sensitive person, just recently had to leave Vajrapani Institute with a serious case of depression. If I lived in the house he was living in, I'd be exactly, well, not exactly, but similarly, the same way. If we want to build healthy communities, we need healthy buildings. Simple isn't it? Why is it so hard for people to see this?

2. DUST MITES. Dust mites are microscopic insects that live on the skin that falls off our bodies in our beds and clothes. Many people are allergic to their dander, like people who are allergic to cats and dogs. A lot of people don't realize it. You can alleviate that by purchasing special covers for your mattress and pillowcases. They are found in the same catalogs that provide products that don't use toxic chemicals.

3. WOOD SMOKE. If you have a wood stove for heat (and even if you don't) you must air out your house everyday--open up all the windows for a few minutes, even when it is cold. I once met a woman in her eighties who lived out on a farm in rural Vermont and she was still active in her garden and chopped all her own wood. She said it was because she aired out her house really well, every day. And in Vermont it gets unbelievably cold in the winter! We lived in Colorado for three winters and every winter we would hear the story of the hunting party that went to a cabin in the woods, loaded up the wood stove, went to sleep and never woke up. They died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Commercial wood stoves tend to leak gasses like carbon monoxide as well as smoke. In a small retreat hut, this can be quite a source of chronic fatigue, even if you still air out the house everyday. Sumden has designed and had a welder build two different sized wood stoves that are completely sealed on the inside of the house. They are basically a sheet iron box that fits into the wall from the outside of the house. The door and the smoke stack are on the outside of the house. All that is inside is the heating box of burning wood. They work really, really well. I've often thought he should patent them and give them to someone to market. They would be so great in small retreat houses. For Lamas like Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche who have lung diseases, they would be so perfect. They probably developed those lung diseases from the wood smoke in their mountain huts. For the general public who live in larger houses they could really help people who are so chemically sensitive they can't use gas heat and wood stoves are the only unsatisfactory alternative.

Even if you aren't sensitive to woodsmoke and gasses now, if you spend a few winters in retreat inside a small house with a leaky wood stove, I guarantee you will be. You have to remember, on retreat, you are inside about 23 hours a day, in the same house. This is very different to most other lifestyles. The retreat house I live in now had a large wood stove in it already. My woodsmoke sensitivity is not all that great, I thought, so I left it and we didn't install one of Sumden's stoves. I noticed the second winter that it does bother me (the smoke and gasses leak out the door), so I only burn one fire a day. It rarely

freezes here in northern California and I spent most of my time wrapped up in a red wool blanket in my meditation box. I light the fire at the lunch break. If it is really cold, I may refuel it a second time, but I always notice its effects on me. It's usually about 50 degrees in the morning and evening...not too cold. If I move to another retreat hut one day, I will definitely use one of Sumden's design stove. If you put the Sumden's stove in a wall near a door with a large roof overhang, it isn't much trouble to go outside to start the fire. The results are far greater than that little effort.

**FOAM INSULATION.** In the mid-1970's, when the first energy crises hit North America, someone developed a foam insulation that could be sprayed in between the outer and inner walls of all the old houses that had no insulation. A few years later, Canada banned its use after its effects on health were discovered. Unfortunately, as usual, the industrial lobbies were too influential to pass such legislation in the U.S.A. Go Granny Dee!!! (Granny Dee is the 90+ year old woman who recently walked across the U.S. to publicize the need for campaign finance reform to return democracy to America.) This stuff is really killer. The main toxic ingredient is formaldehyde, I recall, the same that is in plywood.

With all good intentions, they did this to the house at Milarepa Center. They took an 200 year old farm house, blew poison into the walls, took all the old paint off the interior wood work (floors, bannisters, window and door frames, doors) and replaced it with poisonous varathane. They quit using the wood fired basement furnace that supplied clean heat to all the rooms and installed wood stoves on the first floor. Now the basement is so moldy, you have to hold your breath to go down there, and of course, the mold permeates the entire building. There is no septic tank ; the toilet goes into the creek, so they installed two indoor outhouses that smell really great, let me tell you! This was all done with good intentions as house improvement but that house is so sick it is no wonder at all in my mind that nobody stays there except for the devoted and good-hearted founder whose heart and soul is inseparable from the place.--(and who developed cancer after he rennovated the house with all those great new---highly toxic---materials.)

**CLEANING PRODUCTS AND PERFUMES.** The two main sources of pollution here are petro-chemical products and formaldehyde. Formaldehyde is a main ingredient in most perfumes, skin cream fragrances, after-shaves, etc. Make-up. Laundry detergent, dish detergent, floor cleaners and waxes...all that stuff. There are alternatives available at all major health food stores and in the catalogs. We use Dr. Bronner's soap for clothes, body and dishes. You can use washing soda or borax if your clothes need extra cleaning. Don't use chlorine bleach. Beware of sponges, too. You can use steel wool and an organic cotton dish-cleaning cloth for your dishes. Be careful what you put in your car, too. And make sure you know what they are putting in your car at the car wash. Armour-all is another killer product! In Dr. Theron Randolph's revolutionary book on allergies that was published in the '70's, I think, he talks about one of his child patients who was extremely angry and uncontrollable by his parents. He got worse everyday after dinner. Dr. Randolph figured out that it was the dish-washing detergent the mother used! The smell would permeate the house and the boy would throw a tantrum. They got rid of the soap and the problem was gone. Even if you don't have allergies, I strongly urge you to

throw out the Tide, Cheer, the Joy or whatever commercial detergent you use and go to the health food store for your washing needs. Even a lot of those are no good. Why? Because they are full of phosphates that pollute the water and it all goes to the ocean you know! Little froggies all over the planet are going extinct!

**PHENOLS.** Phenols are gasses that come out of plastics. They are what you smell in your new car, the TV, the stereo, the computer. Right now I am sitting at this at least seven year old Macintosh powerbook in between the screen door and a window. I get a headache from the lap top otherwise. I used to think it was just eyestrain. Some of it is just the electromagnetism coming out of the screen.

**FABRICS AND FABRIC TREATMENTS.** Scotch guard and the water repelling agents put on couches and chairs can make you sick. A dentist we had in Vermont told us he washes his new clothes three times before he wears them to get out the formaldehyde they put on to make them look fresh and new. Ever notice how light-headed you feel or how absent-minded you get in a fabric store or a department store or a K-mart? Just stand in the detergent section in Super market for five minutes and check out your mind. Be careful of second-hand clothes, too. They may have a nasty chemical in them that you can't wash out. Generally, they are okay, but if it is wool, really watch out, you cannot wash out the PERC. I would not advise buying second hand wool items.

**DRY CLEANING.** PERC (perchloroethylene), a chemical they use in dry-cleaning is a known carcinogen. People in the dry-cleaning industry have cancer rates six times higher than average. There are safe alternatives to PERC and some dry cleaners use them. Check out your local market.

**CARPETS,** especially synthetic carpets, are one of the greatest sources of indoor air pollution. And it doesn't go away with years of wear. Wool and cotton are generally okay, but you are much safer if you buy from a store that can guarantee it is pure wool and has not preservatives or water-repellents put on it. Many carpet stores are aware of this now and sell non-toxic carpets for the well-informed customer. Again, the internet is a good source for locating one in your area. In New York State they passed a law where the carpets have to have a health warning sign on them like cigarettes do. The healthy house books discourage any use of wall-to-wall carpeting. They are often laid right over the plywood, they trap dust and dirt, which go moldy and they are generally toxic. You can't pick them up, clean them and air them out like you can with throw rugs. It's better to buy wool or cotton throw rugs. You can support the Tibetan refugees that way, too!

**CANDLES.** When I lived in a tiny retreat house, I discovered that the candle on my altar was the source of my insomnia...which I had never experienced before. I notice all candles bother me, even the beeswax ones, although they are much better. Butter lamps are fine. When the Jetsun Lama Zopa Rinpoche was staying in a small room at Deer Park in Madison, he filled his room up every night with candles. The air was really bad. Sumden and Brandon Beznoska replaced them all with those Christmas electric "candles". The dark circles under Rinpoche's eyes disappeared immediately.

Tim Moran recently gave me a coil of copper wire that holds a cotton wick he made out of cotton string braided together. He gave me a gallon of lowest food grade olive oil. It works quite well in a 6" butter lamp from Tibet or Nepal that Sumdem gave to me. Electric light offerings are the cleanest, and karmically very clean if you generate your own electricity with the sun.

**BOOKS:** Keep your books in a part of the house that has extra good ventilation. The glues and inks on most books are really toxic. Printers don't have to use those inks anymore, soy-based inks work great and are totally safe. Sumden bakes his new books by putting them in a plastic storage container, standing up and opened, with a piece of plastic sheeting or glass on top in the sun for a few days. Second hand books are much better-- unless they are moldy!

**STORAGE OF TOXIC MATERIALS:** If you have gasoline, chain saws, weed-wackers, kerosene, house paint, caulk, etc...**DO NOT STORE THEM IN THE SAME BUILDING THAT YOU LIVE IN.** Even in a basement, they will leak into your living space. I keep mine in my privy and I bought one of those tiny outdoor plastic storage boxes for Elaine, the other resident here. They are basically an enclosed set of shelves. Even cardboard boxes can be a problem for some people.

#### **COOKING GAS AND GAS HEATERS**

Would you run your car inside the house and let the exhaust fumes fill up your airspace? This is similar to what happens every time you cook a meal on a gas range without the vent going. The gas has no smell, so people don't notice its effect on them. What you smell in raw propane gas is a garlic smell they add to it so people will know when gas is leaking. The burning gas is also full of toxic chemicals. Of course, not everyone has the same degree of reaction to the gas. But it is very difficult to tell if you do or not. Notice how you feel after cooking a meal. Are you tired because you ate a big meal or is it the gas? People who cook a lot on gas, like professional cooks, often have chronic neck stiffness and pain. This is from gas. Unions warn chef apprentices about the frequency of developing alcoholism in their profession. One of the main reasons chefs drink is to calm their nerves, the gas makes them nervous, uptight and irritable. Alcohol allows them to maintain some clarity and composure in their minds while they breathe gas all day long. I began to develop my sensitivity to gas after I spent two summers cooking on the unvented gas ranges at Vajrapani Institute. After I left there, I spent a year in a house with a leaking gas range. Since then, gas makes me feel intoxicated, tired and my brain stops activating its ability to inhibit quick emotional responses.

**GOMPAS AND KITCHENS MUST BE IN SEPARATE BUILDINGS!--**If the cooking fuel is gas.

As for the gas heaters, I'd use wood before gas, even if it is vented--especially if your retreat hut is in a forest. Some people object to the idea of using wood because they say you kill insects. I have never seen an insect on a piece of wood I put in my fire place. I check it. Some woods are more prone to insect infestation, like here in California, the

insects tend to be in the oak, but not in madrone or fir. The thick-barked woods tend to harbor more insects.

One thing you need to know about this list of indoor air pollution, which is not complete, I am sure is this. Each one of these things by itself may not make you ill, but when you have them altogether in one house, and if you spend 22-23 hours a day in that house, you are bound to feel more exhausted than you would without these things in your house. So even if you are totally healthy, with no chemical sensitivities at all and you want to have an energetic, pain-free, enthusiastic retreat, you must minimize these factors of pollutions as much as you can. When your energy can come from your own healthy chi, instead of from caffeine and sugar, it is a much more calm and stable base on which to relax your mind into tranquility. I don't know how anyone can meditate when they drink tea and coffee and eat sugar....such a cacophony of thinking goes on!

It isn't that hard to do in a small retreat house.

For cooking, we have been satisfied with a two-burner gas range that we put on a shelf, outside the house, right at a window level. Sumden built a weather-wind-mouse proof box around it. You open the window to put the pots on the stove and close it up while it is cooking. It must be able to draw the air away from the house when you open the window. On a recent visit, Sumden noticed the gas came in the house when I opened the window. He put a peice of tin over the half of the window opening, the top half, and now the airs goes out the window and up the stack when I open the window. I am no longer exhausted after a meal. I thought it was my poor digestion. It was, but the poor digestion was caused by the gas! My next project is to order a book on solar cookers and begin to use the sun to cook most of my meals during the sunny season. They use them all over Africa. It's free and doesn't harm the environment at all!!!

You really have to be "on the ball" all the time in this game of keeping your air quality pure. If you can't do anything else, at least get yourself a good air filter to put in your meditation and sleeping room! Sumden is very keen on detecting toxic air. He is like the canary in the coal mine. His sensitivites are keener. He must be a Bodhisattva who took rebirth in the west so he could manifest these sicknesses to show us grosser beings modern obstacles to enlightenment. I have noticed since I have been able to recoup my sleep deficit, I can identify toxic effects more clearly. This is an example of why you have to work on all fronts (diet, rest, detox, etc.)to have a stong body and mind.

Here's an example of what I am talking about. My friend, Victoria, does my shopping for me and, until a few weeks ago, my laundry for me. Last fall, my laundry began to have a perfume smell to it and I didn't pay much attention. I just aired it out on the line before I brought it in the house. This spring I was far more fatigued than I should have been considering I have been doing everything I talk about in this book. I started doing more chi gong and felt somewhat better. I ordered some new bedding for Sumden and Victoria agreed to wash it three times before we sent it on to him so he wouldn't have to do it by hand. He let me know right away there was something really poisonous in that washing. Victoria only used the soaps I asked her to. There was some chemical in the washing

machine that wasn't in my soap or maybe the soap I thought was okay for me wasn't! I got all the clothes and bedding out of my house and felt better immediately. So you have stay on top of what comes in to your retreat house!!! Now I wash only with Dr. Bronner's.

Another example is this laptop headaches that I already mentioned. Sumden reminded me of the phenols they outgas. I didn't consciously sit by the door, but when there was no headache, I took note of the airflow in the room.

**POWER LINES AND ELECTRICITY:** Although there is some debate over the deleterious effects of power lines. I wouldn't build a house near them. They may not cause cancer but I'm sure anyone who is sensitive to energy would feel the effect of those power lines. I know some people who notice a big difference in their meditation practice when they are in a house with no electricity at all. I think that if you do have electricity, DC current, which comes from a simple solar system is preferable to AC current because it moves in one direction. The AC current is alternating so tends to have a very subtle agitating effect. Some people are extremely sensitive to electricity and must keep their exposure to electric appliances and other electrical gadgets to a minimum. Everyone is sensitive to it to some degree so it is best to keep appliances and stereos out of the meditation room and bedroom. There are little instruments you can buy to measure the gauss input of your appliances. I think they also tell you what is a healthy exposure. Don't sleep with any electric things plugged in near to you. and **BEWARE OF CELL PHONES.** They are very dangerous, don't put them up to your ear, use an earphone jack that is connected to the cell phone. They are especially toxic inside an automobile, so get out of the car to make that phone call. There are people in Europe who have been over exposed to cell phone who have to wear metal suits, like space suits, just to be healthy now... If you live near a cell phone broadcast tower, move away! Cell phones and cell phone waves are carcinogenic and cause brain cancer.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Since the days of the Whole Earth Catalog, there have been many wonderful books written on alternative to petrochemical energy based homes. Today, you can look to catalogs like Jade Mountain of Colorado and Real Goods and Alternative Engineering in California. Or go to any good book store and just browse the solar energy/alternative building section. Harnessing solar energy is not very difficult. If you can budget a couple of thousand dollars into your retreat house plan, you can have all the electricity you need. Solar collectors are now made that work through cloud cover, so winter is not a hindrance. For heating there are a number of passive and active solar plans.

One of the greatest contributions you can make to world peace and economic justice is to convert to solar power or to build a new house with solar power. The petrochemical industry is responsible for so much war and famine and hardship. I wish I had a book to reference this to you but I think anyone who has access to information about what goes on in the world in relation to oil can see our foreign policy is centered around supplying our nation with oil--at any cost! And the cost is often very great to poor people in oil rich

developing nations whose governments are lead by military juntas who are supported by oil companies and the CIA. If you want to help all the people and creatures of the world, you can help by lessening the American demand for oil. Most of our power plants are petroleum based---and nuclear power is even worse!!! I heard on a news documentary once that Harry Truman wanted to implement solar power back in the 1950's with the forecast that by 1975, our nation would be primarily powered by the sun. But guess what? The oil lobbies killed it. The oil lobbies may run our government, but WE HAVE GRASS ROOTS POWER. The only way our country is ever going to change is by individuals taking the responsibility upon ourselves to change. Uncle Sam ain't gonna do it, folks; He's been bought out. If you added on the social cost (like the opportunity cost of our military budget) of maintaining the economic hegemony of the petrochemical industry, our petroleum powered electricity would be far more expensive than the investment in a solar system for your house! It's worth it just for your karma alone!

Since the days of the Whole Earth Catalog, there have been many wonderful books written on alternative to petrochemical energy based homes. Today, you can look to catalogs like Jade Mountain of Colorado and Real Goods and Alternative Engineering in California. Or go to any good book store and just browse the solar energy/alternative building section. Harnessing solar energy is not very difficult. If you can budget a couple of thousand dollars into your retreat house plan, you can have all the electricity you need. Solar collectors are now made that work through cloud cover, so winter is not a hindrance. For heating there are a number of passive and active solar plans. I'll mention one I like as an example.

My brother, Lew, built the nicest family size house I have ever been in. He built it in 1979 for less than \$5,000. He used recycled materials for most of it--a lot of that was free from the dump! It is two stories and sits on the side of a hill. The first floor I would guess to be about 20 feet by 30 feet. The floor has a concrete slab base that is covered in simple terra cotta tile. This acts as a heat sink to collect the heat in the day from the sun or wood stove and radiate the heat back throughout the night. The first half of the northwest wall is set into the hill at the back of the house. (The second floor rises above the ground) This wall is made of river rock and cement. He collected the rocks and put them in the hillside and built the house around that. (You have to make the drainage so the water coming down the hill doesn't go behind the rock wall, but to the side and away from the house.) The wood stove is set against this rock wall so that the wall, too, heats up in the day and keeps the house warm at night. Also, having a house connected to the earth stabilizes the temperature of the house. There is a bay window on the south side where the dining area is and there are windows all along the southern exposures. The glass french doors on the south side open on to a little patio that looks down onto Round Valley. The second floor windows are oriented the same way. The first floor is all one room for kitchen, dining, playing and relaxing. I don't know how high is the ceiling but I bet it is nine feet. The place is so spacious and, at the same time, cozy and warm. The upstairs is bedrooms and the bathroom and storeroom are off the main room downstairs. It is very simple, very elegant and it even has that wonderful quality that invites you out into the garden to view the panorama of Round Valley stretching out before you. This is created

by building on a concrete slab at ground level and placing a bay window next to French doors that open out onto a south-facing patio.

You could take a theme like that and put the water pipes in the concrete floor and do away with the fireplace in the house. Steve Pearl told me you could attach 50 gallon drums to the south side of the house, laying on their side, that heat up the water in the day that circulates through the floor. You could probably figure out a cooling system with cool water too. In the winter the water is heated with an outside firebox.

Sumden built a retreat hut under a rock overhang at Osel Ling in Spain. Windows were all along the front. Totally cool. He always puts a big window on the south side of his retreat houses. In the winter the sun warms up the floor. In the summer the sun is overhead, so it doesn't come inside. It is so nice to come out of a long session in the cool morning and lay down in the sun...especially when there is snow on the ground outside!

Our retreat huts at Milarepa Center had to be so small that we put the wood stove under the house. There was no room for it in the house. We went outside to tend the fire. This turned out to be a good idea when we experienced the gas and smoke leaking out of the stoves. I think this is how Sumden got the idea to design that great stove he uses now. The area under the house was three feet high which meant the house itself was above snow level, there was a storage space, and the floor was warm all winter. We read about this technique in a book on Korean Architecture. In Korea, it is a common building practice to have the house elevated off the ground and have the heating under the house. The warm floor in the winter is so nice.

One thing we took from one of the books from Harvard was a plan to make a small viewer that would let you see where the sun would be in the winter months from the site of your future house. Sumden built it out of graph paper, plastic and a wooden dowel I think. I can't remember exactly, but he calculated the angle of the sun for the latitude where we lived and drew that in an arc on graph paper. It stood up on a small platform that you held up to your eye and sighted through it, like you would hold up a pair of binoculars. I remember going around and marking the trees that would block our sun in the winter as he looked past the arc on the paper in front of him while he stood at the house site and looked south. Then he harvested those trees for our firewood. This is a really helpful tool if you live in a wooded area. It can probably be found in one of the solar house books.

There are many good ideas. It's good to use one that is tried and true. The main thing is to assess your site and your climate and figure out a plan that works well for both. At least you must put large windows or a glass-slide door on the south side, make the walls thick and insulate well. I wouldn't recommend using glass slider doors in cold climates like in the northeast of USA. They are not so thermal efficient and freeze shut in winter. A flat ceiling with thick layers of insulation (like R50) on top is an excellent way to keep cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This style of vaulted ceilings with visible rafters is not only bad feng shui, but it is not very thermal efficient. If you want space, you can

make a high ceiling. The main thing is to assess your site and your climate and figure out a plan that works well for both.

To conserve gas, you can have a solar hot water heater. Even those camping solar showers are good for the summer. You can cook with a pressure cooker and get a solar oven!

### KEEPING OUT THE CRITTERS

The basic idea is to seal up the holes where the animals and insects can come in as you build. Sumden caulks around the windows on the inside and where the subfloor meets the sheet rock. This keeps the dampness out, too. To keep out insects, you can also put boric acid, a powder found at drug stores, around the perimeter of the subfloor before you put the insulation and sheet rock up or whatever type of walls you are using. I already mentioned how we lined the bottom of the floor frame with hardware wire to keep out the mice. Sumden also makes sure there are no holes where the roof rafters come out of the siding. He just makes little patches with hardware wire and staples them over the holes by the rafter. Innovate and figure what to do with the materials and house style you use. Think ahead. It's so much better to keep them out than to have to take the time to catch them. I often end up killing a few by accident when I try to catch them. Catching them is so stressful for them, too. Keep your sink, tub and shower drains closed in summer, too. Put in drains that can close. There are biological drain cleaners now, so you don't have to use chemicals anymore.

If ants do come inside, I learned from Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche that a small amount of honey laced somewhere just outside the house will keep them out. I have used fructose and water mixture, you could use sugar and water. I put it on a ceramic tile and the ants are happily munching away all day with no care at all for what is inside the house. It is nice to feed them, too.---and you have to do it every day until they go away.

If you have a pest problem, you can go to Steve Tdebits website. Steve says that termites can be prevented if you paint a borax solution on the wood until it is soaked, three times.

GEKS: GEK is a Tibetan word for interfering spirits. When there is a new baby in the house, Tibetans incense bathe any person or thing before allowing them into the house. When Ganden Tri Rinpoche arrived at Maggie Kress's retreat house Silas and Sumden had just built for him, his attendant Tashi, went through the whole house and incensed it very well, particularly all around and under the mattress where Ganden Tri Rinpoche was to sleep. In a four year retreat, Sumden and I began to notice that we experienced hindrances every fortnight when our groceries were delivered. He suggested we recite the Heart Sutra and incense the bags before we brought them into our boundary. We noticed no more hindrances after that. One time when I was cooking for Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, He and his attendants had spent hours preparing to do a Lu puja. They were ready to start but they couldn't find the text anywhere. It seemed to have just disappeared from the house. I arrived to cook dinner just after Rinpoche had completed a Gek Tor, an offering to appease the Geks, and within minutes they found the text. I

remember Roger Kunsang saying if he had ever doubted the existence of Geks, it was gone now. So you may want to take care of Geks in your retreat place, too.

**NAGAS:** Nagas are water spirits. Even if you don't believe in them, it's good to take precautions not to harm them because they will harm you if you believe in them or not. The main way to offend nagas is to desecrate land around water. This means don't throw garbage in streams, keep areas around water lines and water tanks and springs neat and clean. If your house is near a creek, keep the grounds around your house clean. If you want, you can make friends with nagas by making incense offerings to them. You can even learn to do a Naga Puja. Traditional peoples who make ceremonial offerings to water spirits to ask for rain or to ask rain to go away are not stupid. Here are a few examples:

When Sumden lived at Chenrezig Institute, a couple also lived there. They were healers, yet, they both had tropical ulcers on their feet. One ulcer was so infected, pus was coming out the top and bottom of the foot. They tried everything. Finally, they went to Geshe Legden, the abbot of Sera Je Monastery who spent a year at Chenrezig Institute. Geshe-Legden asked them if they lived by water. They didn't think so. They went back to their camp and, sure enough, a water line, went right by their camp. So, they went back to Geshe-la with this news and Geshe-la asked them if they were neat and tidy? He told them to go back and clean up their camp area really well and make it beautiful. They did and their ulcers went away.

In the winter of 1997-98, in California we experienced a phenomenon that weather people call El Nino, which means it rains and rains and rains until Big Sur starts falling into the ocean and the Santa Cruz mountains slide all over the roads. Houses fall down, roads are destroyed. It's a mess! We were already way into this state, Highway 1 had slid into the sea all over Big Sur and another huge storm was brewing out in the Pacific. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was in retreat in Big Sur at the time. His trusted attendant, Ven. Roger Kunsang, contacted Sumden and me and asked us to do a large grain and smoke offering with Geshe Wangdu. We did the naga puja for many hours. My friends with TV's said that while we did the puja, they could see the storm on the satellite picture move away from the Central Coast of California.

When Sumden and I spent 18 months building a retreat center at Land of Medicine Buddha, we did not know about The Great Slithering One, the puja to request permission from the local Naga King to dig in the earth and build a house in his domain. After the project was completed, we had to tear it all down. It says in the text that if you dig the earth in the wrong place, without the Naga King permission, the house will be destroyed. After this, Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche translated the text into English for us. This puja is included in the appendix and I highly recommend its implementation!

**BARDO BEINGS AND OTHER SPIRITS:** In most cases, these beings cause no harm, but they are around and if you want to make them happy and make your environment more harmonious you can make offerings of burnt grain to them called the SUR in Tibetan. I include this ritual in the appendix also. You can make a charcoal barbeque just

like you are ready to barbeque but instead you smother the coals with flour, wheat or corn, whatever you like. You can add juniper or other types of incense. These beings gain nourishment from the smoke. Their bodies are too subtle to ingest food but they are still hungry. It is good to do this if a person close to you has died because their spirit may be hanging around for a few days or weeks. You can use coals from a fire, too, of course. Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche does this every night. It is a great way to practice loving kindness and generosity.

So...about those healthy houses...plan well, talk it over with builders, don't think you have to do it just like they say, but listen well and go away and think about it. Don't rush, think of all the possibilities and make sound choices based on your budget and your needs...and make offerings to the local spirits. Remember, houses, even tiny retreat houses, always cost much more than you think they will, even with the best of planning, because nothing happens according to plan.

written by Paula Chichester in 2001

## THE GREAT SLITHERING ONE

This is the puja that must be done before a house (or stupa) is built. It is an offering to the local spirits, the Naga King, to request permission to dig up the earth and build a structure in their territory. I don't know the author of the text. Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche translated it in August of 1998 for Ven. Roger Munro before building his house at Shinne Land, scribed by Paula Chichester.

### Introduction

(by Paula Chichester)

When you read the explanation of how to draw the grid to find where to draw the center line of the Naga King, it seems quite complicated. What follows in this intro is how Sumden Lhundrup (Roger Munro) summarized the procedure. We have done it three times so far and it appears to work. You draw a square on leveled earth which has 45 inches on each side in the USA and 90 cm on each side in the rest of the world. (see note 2.) Each side must have 90 units (or parts is the word Rinpoche uses); so in the USA, each unit or part is one half inch. Each side of the square represents 90 days of the season. 360 altogether for the entire year. (I guess you could make it 91 units on each side to make 364 days of the year, but this is not how the text is written.) The main point of the drawing exercise is to find the area under the arm of the Naga King because this is where you dig up a piece of the earth called "the earth attainment". You find this by placing the Naga King on the square with 90 units on each side. The units correspond to days of the year, you find where the day of the puja is on the circumference of the square and this is point from which you draw the midline which goes down the center of the Naga King. The first day of spring begins on the bottom left side, when you are sitting at the bottom. Beginning from here, you go around the square until you come to the present

day, following the Tibetan Calendar. This is the top point, you draw a straight line connecting that point to the point on the opposite side of the square. Then you draw in the Naga King using the rest of the grid to get the correct size. To find the area under the arm you do this: make a grid on your square of 10 parts, 9 units each. The area you want is in the fourth square down from the top on the right side of the center line of the naga king, (i.e., the line you drew from your date point). If you go down to the fourth square from the top of the naga head and then go horizontal from the left side over six squares, the area under the arm is in that horizontal plane inside the 6 and 7 horizontal squares. You can further divide these squares into 9 units to get the most exact location. It is easy if you look at the diagram. You need the grid so you can get the Naga King body in the correct proportions. After you dig up the earth, you can bury an earth treasure vase in that place.

Kyabje Thubten Zopa's Translation of the Text

## PREPARATION

At south and north, get the four intermediate corners. At each quadrant periphery, you divide into five, depending on the place, how tight extended, according to that, you make the sign, even the center line. On the east-west line, divide into 10 equidistant pieces (five on each side of the center line) by dividing each quadrant into five. On the center line, mark the east west line. Hold a string from the center line and measure up to corners but not quite as long and hold it there to make diagonal lines. (see note 2 for instructions on making the square).

The naga king's body is 10 cubits. Ten cubits means the number of large parts (the squares), not actually a cubit. ( A cubit is the distance from tip of mid-finger to elbow, but in Sumden's system for drawing it is 4.5 inches or 9 cm.) Make five marks, four center lines are divided into five, then you put the line, including the edge.

Each side has ten great parts, each great part is divided into nine. Altogether there are 8,100 parts. Outside is 90, you can count each piece one side 90 at outside. ( $90 \times 90 = 8,100$ ) At each corner mark comes 90, so the total becomes 360 days (4 sides  $\times$   $90 = 360$ ) The gross reality for three winters, the head faces to the east, face is towards the south. (This means the top of the head is directed east, but face is facing to the south.) Don't draw profile view lying on one side. Check on the Tibetan calendar when are the three months of winter, higher winter, middle winter, lower winter. Three springs head is to south, face is to west. Three summers, head points west, face is to north. Three autumns, head to north, face is to the east.

In some texts, the tradition is three winters the head faces to the south; three springs, head west; three summers, head north; three autumns, head west. Other than that, in Kilacha, in old printed texts, there are many different explanations but all these are causes of exhaustion. In vajra mantra of old secret tantra (Nyingma), the twelfth month (hor) examine from the twelve and the spring. Vajra mantra from the new secret mantra looks at the spring time moon. One has to know from the calendar and astrological things to

check. Nay Khyim, there are about 12 Khyims to be checked from Tibetan astrological calendars. Other systems are like water with the turtles, takes out (essenceless).

One's own pure system, the way to look at is in the three springs, the head points to the west, face is north (first). The three summers, the head points north, face to east (second). Three autumns the head points east, face to south (third). The three winters the head points south, face to west (fourth). Also one should sit head is west, tail is east, etc. Each corner is called du ching nam kang (30th) and should be the 30th of the month. (Three springs starts at the first day of the Tibetan year.) The fourth month is beginning of summer first day. The first day of the four seasons, the head of the landlord (naga king) is in the small part of the corner of the grid (center line of body coming out of head) of the first day of season. In the middle of season, head is coming between the 15th or the 16th of middle north (along center line pointing west). It circles towards the right clockwise and each day the head moves one degree (small part) without knowing.

The proportion of the body abiding that way and from where to get the earth attainment, if one takes from anywhere, this is extremely dangerous. It has five poisons by seeing, touching, breathing and so forth. This naga landlord is the king of all. This is a deva king of all and a dangerous one, if one is not careful. Completely surrounded by the worldly deva (tsa) and dekye, the eight groups of worldly gods. The tea offering to the dedye is very good to stop storm travel, earthquakes, etc. They are very much connected to the weather and som many things where there is danger with elements.

If one does war (digs up the earth attainment) on the head or back side, tail, hand, or face, middle tail and so forth, another part of the arms, the general will be killed. If you draw the mandala on these parts, the vajra master will die. If one does marriage, the wife dies. If one does the wrathful tantra, the practitioner dies. If you make a grave there, the astrologer who chooses the grave site dies. If part, they die. Any show is bad to all. If the patient's pillow in on that side, the life will be taken away. A house built there will become a graveyard. Whatever is done, people will get sick. (If you build) a throne, the guru will die or heavy sickness. If operation, healing with iron fire, this turns out wrong. It becomes the cause for death, so therefore, this method should be cherished.

Now, to understand the body and how it circles, the five limbs, the importance to recognize the direction of the north, then check the date of the month, then from that day down to the tail, wherever the day today falls, the day of the puja, examine the landlord who goes by slithering tails, from that small square down to the tail, wherever it is abiding, that is the center line of the body. Then, in front of that and behind, measure nine small parts on either side of center line. Morning, part is from backside; afternoon part is from front; two great parts wide. Draw these lines of front and back of center line side.

Wherever the day of puja falls, the center snake point of tail is always at the opposite end. Snake crown is one great part, high face is one great part; heart, one great part. Heart to navel, one great part. Navel to secret place, one great part. That is the upper part of the body. From secret place to end of tail is five great parts. Therefore, where it is on the diagonal, etc., the cross line (center of square) is always at the secret place. The end of

the tail comes down to the limit. (Five great parts down.) The left side of the body is always down, right side up, left hand at left ear, right hand on right hip, holding the wish-granting jewel. The color is like the root of the lotus (white).

The ornaments are as in the following prayer, draw well with sand (draw first in ground with a stick, then fill outline with color--you can buy colored sand for Navajo-type sand paintings at large hobby stores.) To find the earth attainment you can just do outside of the body if you know well. Or just do where head is facing to establish the location of the elbow. You don't need to divide the whole square into the nine parts, just be clear where the parts of the naga are.

From the head of the snake go down 27 small parts to the heart, again from the heart come down 9 small parts (on the drawing this is the bottom of the hand.) From center line go to the landlord's left (right in drawing) half 14, which means 13 and a half small parts and then come back to the right (left in drawing) half 5, which means 4 and a half small parts. This creates a rectangle where the right side is the 13 and a half line and the left side is the 4 and a half small part line. The top is the large part line under the breasts (heart) and the bottom is the line, 9 small parts down from the heart. The upper left corner is the bottom tip of the elbow and this is the area to dig. On the area just to the left of the rectangle, not in the rectangle.

These are two systems to discover the earth attainment. I think the latter one is correct. Understanding the season is to get the correct earth attainment correctly under the arm.

Second type of explanation:

27 small parts, from head of snake to the heart, again from heart come down 9 small parts (bottom of hand) from there go 9 small parts from center line go left (right side on drawing) half fourteen (an expression that means 13 and a half small parts). From left go back along small line to right, go one half 5 (which mean 4 and a half). According to the Geshe in Taipei, this goes to top of the elbow and you dig there. The 13 and a half is right side of a triangle that goes from line at bottom of hand up to heart, one big square and the inside line is the one half 5, so right at the corner, top corner and below that is the area that you dig.

## PUJA

After this is well done, in front of the landlord put torma of the three whites and three sweets. (Butter, curd, milk; brown sugar, honey, molasses) Then adorned with various scarves, perform two water and five sense enjoyments.(argham, etc). Then the vajra master faces towards the landlord and does this ceremony. Sit in the south.

Do the preliminaries, refuge, bodhicitta, the four immeasurables. Dispell, purify the drawing, (the two mantras to dispell hindrances and dissolve into emptiness. OM SVAHAVA...etc.) While it is empty, in front is the great slithering one, colored like the root of lotus, extremely white radiating one. The upper part of the body is in divine aspect and is beautified with many ornaments, crown of various jewels, ear ornaments, necklace,

belt armbands, bracelets, garland, turquoise and amber and so forth, decorating the body. On the head are nine various colored snakes moving like on a canopy making sounds like “phui”, right side above, left side down. The left hand supports left side of face, right hand holding wish granting jewel with thousands of beams granting all wishes at right waist. The lower part of body is in the aspect of a very glorified green snake.

At the crown is cheite naga named Thaye; at neck, red naga: Jogpo; at ear, white naga: Pema Karpo; at heart, blue naga: Norg Gyes; on shoulder, yellow naga: Pema Chenpo; at navel, yellow-white naga, Dung Dyong; at secret place, green naga: Tobgu; on tail, black naga: Rigden. All this upper part is in divine aspect. The lower part of the snake is coiled, having one snake moving, carrying various jewels blazing with light. From one’s own heart, the beams of seed syllable invoke in one second the great slithering one with 8 nagas, similar to what one has visualized. DZA HUM BAM HOH. They become non-dual. Put palms together showing the five-pronged vajra:

BHUMEEPATI NAGARANZA SAPARIWARA SAMAYA RAMENTU HUM HO  
HUM  
(3X)

Put the landlord under the pledge.

OM AH BHUMEEPATA NAGARANZA SAPARA WARA ARGHAM, PADYAM,  
ETC... PRATITSA HUM SOHA....all the way to SHABTA.

Then sprinkle milk over the torma, bless with six mantra and six mudra concentration.  
(see note 1)

Then, by opening the vajra palms: OM BHUMEEPATI NAGA RANZA SAPARA WARA  
IMAM BALIMTA CRIHANA KHA KHA KHAHI BUZA TA PI PA TA PI SHA WA SU  
KAMA GUNA PUNZA PRATITSA YA SO HA (21x)

Then long prayer from Chakrasamvara torma to worldly protectors: (You the entire gathering of gods, nagas, yakshas, etc...) down to complete all the wishes. Then the vajra master, holding the bell and dorje, offers praise and request:

EH MA HO! Who has dress of the ocean possesses a jewel holder, possessor always holding.....bliss, you the owner of the land, slithering holding various jeweled ornaments. The eight great naga kings who depend on the parts of your body, you are the da chen of the earth, whose upper parts of the body, the controller deva, having the poisonous snakes, crown ornament moving like a cloud. Lower part of the body is curved like a vase spout. Powerful one, to you I pay homage. All those who get born and transmigrate extremely depends on the holding base (earth). In order to ripen the vajra master, please grant the joy of the attainments of the art.

King of Nagas replies:

You, the holder of wisdom, you can enjoy as whatever you like.

Then, the vajra master with divine prides takes the earth attainment from under the arm (not part of the body). Use a pick with a vajra handle in the left hand underneath and right hand hold from the torso. The vajra master faces head of slithering landlord. Then turn your back towards the tail, visualize that way. Then you dig four times (can be any implement and any size hole), then scatter around the foundation border outside (of the building to be built). The fifth scoop is the earth attainment, therefore, keep it in a container.

This (fifth scoop) one is called the earth having the five elements, (the earth attainment). If there is earth charcoal, nails, hairs, dry life, sand, husks in that five elements, then, various harms will come to the human beings. These cause anger, epidemic disease, pains in joints. Without those mistakes, the earth is very soft, rich and dark. If it is white, yellow, red and black. If it is a mixture of colors, it means pacifying, increasing, controlling and wrath. The various actions will be actualized. (Merry, this is how my notes are, but it seems it should be: if it is white yellow, etc, it means pacifying, etc.) Without those knowing this important spot, if you dig any other place, other than the nine parts of earth (on any part of the body) parent, father, mother, brothers, wife, daughters, friends, etc. will die. If you dig backside, you will die or you will be kicked out of the place. On tail, you will lose your animals and you will lose your power. In the place where you dug the five elements, you put a treasure vase, according to the practice, then cover the earth. Then you make offerings and praise to the landlord as before.

Request for patience. The landlord and entourage are extremely please at that place. Then erase the whole thing. The offerings are thrown in the southeast. After that, it is said that this is the place to build temple, stupa, house, mandala and so forth. You mix the five, (the earth attainment) with other auspicious earth and wherever you sprinkle it, all the shortcomings get pacified and auspicious goodness will happen.

Colophon: Translated by Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche in August, 1998 at Deer Park, Madison, WI. Dictated to Sumden Lhundrup and Lhundup Nyingje. lightly edited by Lhundup Nyingje (Paula Chichester). This needs to be checked.)

Notes:

1.

#### SIX MANTRA AND SIX MUDRA CONCENTRATION

1. OM SVABAWA BISHUDE DHARMADE VAJRA SIDDHI HUM

three middle fingers face out right hand; meditate on emptiness

2. NAMA SARVA TATHAGATE BAYO BUSHE MUKHE BE SARVA DEKAM  
UGATE PARANAM IMAM GA GA NAM KAM SOHA

sky treasure mudra: generate the offerings

3. OM AMITE HUM PHAT

fingers curled in facing and touching each other, middle finger out (used in fire puja also): everything becomes nectar.

4. OM AHKARO MUKAM SARVA DHARMANAM ATTAYA NUT PEN TVOTA (OR TOTA) pronounced like soha.  
left hand, vajra fist at heart; right hand, granting realizations: the offering is actualized
5. NAMA SARVA TATHAGATA AVALOKITE OM SUMBARA SUMBARA HUM  
wrathful finger snap: the offering is received
6. OM RURU PURU ZOLA DITA (TISHTA?) SIDDHI ROTSANI SARVA ATTA  
SODHANI  
SOHA.  
fearlessness mudra: binds yours and theirs, due to samaya, all wishes and needs fulfilled.

Due to the power of virtuous wishes, special bodhicitta, blessings of Tathagatas gone beyond and the sphere of emptiness, may all virtuous works be achieved without resistance or obstacle.

Note 2: This is as you do in fire puja mandala: To get the perpendicular line to the center line you hold the string with a pencil tied on the end on the center line at the 3/4 mark and make an arc in the area where there will be the perpendicular line on both sides of the line.

Then you go to the 1/4 mark on that center line and with the string the exact same length as before make another arc on top of the first one. Do this on both sides of the center line and you will get the perpendicular line.

Then to find the diagonal lines, you hold the string at a length that will make an arc in the area that will be the 45 degree mark (inbetween the cross of the perpendicular lines). You hold the string in the 3/4 mark on the center line, make the arc where the diagonal will be. Then you hold the string at the same distance on the 3/4 mark on the perpendicular line and go to where you just made an arc and make another, where the arcs cross is the diagonal line. Do the same on the other side.

In all cases, you must keep the string at the same length on each side of the center line each time if you want accurate lines.)

Note 3. Additional Tibetan feng sui comments on building from Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche: Outside, the east and south, generally is good. Even that you divide each direction into eight. As for an east, 1,2,3,7,8 are bad. Starting from left divide into eight pieces doors, 4,5 is good like that. South 1,3,4,6,8 is bad, 2,5 is good. 7 is middle. West 1,4,6 is good; 2,3,5 is middle; 7,8 is bad. North 1,2,4,8,7 is middle; 4,5,6 good. Four corners are bad, goes clockwise 1-8.

About the two story house, north side is shrine room, down below is wealth, west side place to keep food, grains, south side is for animals outside house; east and south, your rooms; kitchen, the stove should be southwest

cheers!

nyingje  
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Bill Kane for feng shui advice:dorje1@mindstream.com

CATALOG RESOURCES: just telephone 1-800-555-1212 and ask for the listing or look up on internet.

Alternative Engineering

Jade Mountain

Real Goods

Maggie's Organic Clothes ([www.organicclothes.com](http://www.organicclothes.com))

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Grain and Salt Society topsalt@aol.com; (800) 867-7258--sea salt and health books

Non-Toxic Environments, Box 384, Newmarket, NH 03857

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