

TIBETAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE HOLDS EIGHT-DAY SEMINAR LOS ANGELES 1998



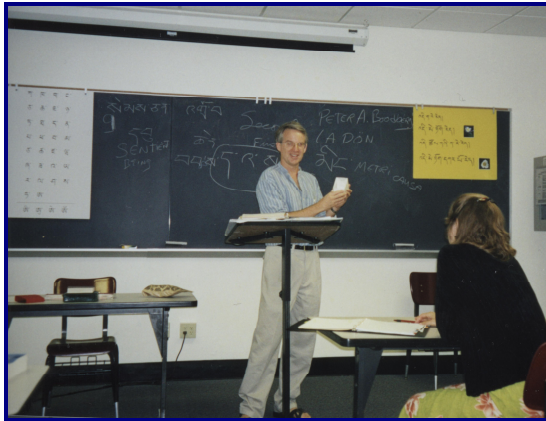
Instructors Lama Yeshe Wangmo, David Curtis, and John Pettit, during the awards ceremony

The *Tibetan Language Institute (TLI)*, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan culture and language, held its first week-long language seminar in Los Angeles this August [1998]. Classes were held at the beautiful Loyola Marymount University in West L.A. Intensive classes in beginning, intermediate, and advanced Tibetan were attended by 35 enthusiastic students. Classes began at 9 a.m. and, with the exception of a lunch break, ran until 5 p.m. The public joined students for the evening film and lecture series featuring the films *Windhorse*, *Message of the Tibetans*, and *The Lion's Roar*, as well as lectures on "Introduction to Sanskrit" by Dr. Y.S. Shastri, PhD., "Meditating with Sadhanas" by Lama Yeshe Wangmo, and "Tibetan Terminology: Surfing the Semantic Bottleneck" by John Pettit, PhD.

Although the schedule was exhausting, and students' eyes were often glazed after the first few days of comprehensive and compelling classes, students' overall zeal, diligence and devotion to the task at hand was unmistakable.

At the end of the third day, one student commented, "My head feels so full it might explode, but it's wonderful. I'm learning so much."

One student from Oklahoma asked why she goes to such lengths to study Tibetan, said, "I study Tibetan in the hope that with increased understanding of the language, when I listen to the teaching, I'll understand at a deeper level."



David leading the beginners' class



David receiving a thank you gift at the end of the seminar party. *TLI* offered delicious *momos* for all to enjoy, to end the eight days together

Another student chimed in "What I'm going after is a more direct experience of the teaching through a knowledge of the language in which the teaching was preserved."

Comments such as these are just what TLI founder and executive director, David Curtis, was hoping for when he set out to organize this program. David, who has been teaching Tibetan language in classes and to individuals in Los Angeles [since 1993], taught the beginning level classes at the seminar. His intention is to make this summer's seminar an annual event. David believes that through teaching the Tibetan language, not only will strides be made to preserve the threatened Tibetan culture, but students of Tibetan Buddhism will gain a deeper level of understanding directly applicable in their practice. An intensive seminar such as was held this August allows beginning students of Tibetan the opportunity to progress through the fundamentals such as learning the alphabet and basic grammatical structure, and by the end of eight days, to actually be able to read and understand simple texts. David says that his beginning students learned, in eight days, what would normally be covered in several months of weekly classes.

When queried about David Curtis, students were overwhelmingly effusive in their praise.

"David is my foundation. Forever will I hear 'the five prefixes are...etc.' All I want to know is, when is the next class?"

Another student wrote to David, "You've opened a door to a deeper understanding of the Dharma for me. I can't thank you enough."

Another said, "The week was excellent! David is a superb teacher. I'm so grateful he created this opportunity."

Teachers for the intermediate and advanced classes were John Pettit, who recently finished his PhD. at Columbia University under the direction of Robert Thurman, and Lama Yeshe Wangmo, co-founder of Vajrayana Foundation Hawaii and spiritual director of Lotus Gate Sanctuary.

Asked about the value of what the *Tibetan Language Institute* is doing, John Pettit responded, "I think the *Tibetan Language Institute* provides an alternative which makes the language itself and also the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism much more accessible to people. People wouldn't have to become graduate students. They might not have to go to India and live there in order to learn Tibetan....to read the texts and understand the language in order to be able to study very profoundly with their teachers, *TLI* can provide tools to do that."

Lama Yeshe said that learning Tibetan is "...a growing process. You grow in the language, rather than learn it."

And, according to the students this writer spoke with, that's exactly what happened....They "grew" in Tibetan.

--Crystal Zevon

1998

The *Tibetan Language Institute* now holds annual summer seminars in Montana. Contact TLI for information at 406/961-5131 or by email info@tibetanlanguage.org. Go to the photo album of the 2005 seminar (in Photo Gallery of this website) for further images of past seminars. For information about the current year's seminars, go to the Calendar section of this website at www.tibetanlanguage.org.