

# Venerable Dolma:

## Walking the 'Tightrope of Consciousness'



>> *The Venerable Yana Dolma took time out of her busy schedule to prepare her thoughts for this year's Health & Harmony Festival. She is an ordained Tibetan Buddhist Teaching Nun and received her initiations, transmissions and teachings from fourteen eminent Rinpoches and Gesbes including Lama Yeshe. She teaches with wisdom and humour at the Arya Tara Gold Coast Buddhist Centre focusing on how to attain happiness in our modern world.* by Maggie Wilde

For many years The Venerable Dolma was an ordinary woman waiting patiently to blossom into fullness. Like most women today she happily took on the various roles and identities required of her. She was a wife, a mother,

a daughter, a sister and a friend. She made the school lunches, nurtured and supported her growing family, kept house and earned a living as a health practitioner as she held onto a dream.

*MW: Not many people and especially western women could imagine a path quite like yours. Marriage – Motherhood – Ordained as a Buddhist Nun? That's a quantum leap in western thinking isn't it?*

Venerable Dolma: Yes for many people in the West I imagine it is. I was married and had two children but I had been studying Buddhism for nearly 27 years. I fulfilled the responsibilities of motherhood first – raising children is one of the biggest learning tools we can ever be given. It is such a blessing.

*MW: So how did you go from that to being ordained?*

Dolma: (laughing) I didn't rush into it! I had over 25 years of practice. One of the first things we learn with Buddhism is 'question everything'. 25 years was enough time to question. It was time. The children had always known that when they were established as adults then mum would don the robes and become a nun.

*MW: Was that a bizarre concept for children to comprehend? Your average mum*

*simply joins a gym or gets a hobby when the kids leave home!*

Dolma: I think it was my son that questioned the most... He said at one point 'Please don't turn up at my wedding in robes!' But I think he's got over that now. As teenagers they were just grateful that mum didn't go around with her head shaved wearing red robes in front of all their friends (laughing). I just fitted in for them at the time. Before I was ordained I had reached the stage where I had absolutely no doubt that the Buddhist techniques worked. As you start listening and studying the philosophy you start to realise 'Yes, this is what I do believe and these techniques are actually helping me.'

**"We are simply here to polish our minds & open to a wider perspective. By bringing together love, compassion and wisdom we eventually open to the Buddha mind of enlightenment"**

I remember sitting with some of the really advanced Buddhist study lessons on death and dying and I thought 'Ooh these guys really know what they are talking about!' The Buddhist methods are not the only methods and nowhere in Buddhism does it say that they are but they do work.

*MW: So was it a big step for you eventually?*

Dolma: After so many years of practice I didn't have a lot to renounce. I was already not doing the things that we vow not to do. I suppose the only thing I hadn't renounced was chocolate and I don't need to do that.

*MW: In the robes of a nun I imagine you stand out from the crowd. But it's more than that... you are a western woman wearing the robes of a nun. You have been ordained*

*into a very traditional male role in a very traditional male philosophy. Has that added a dimension of difficulty for your transition?*

Dolma: Yes. Obtaining sponsorship in the west is harder for an ordained nun and especially a western one. Male Lamas find sponsorship easier. In a monastery you are provided with food and accommodation but I am one of the few who lives outside the monastery. A couple of High Lamas see me as a teacher so it is more useful for me to be making the philosophy and meditation more readily available by teaching outside the monastery. I don't mind really as I am sure something will happen soon about finding a sponsor for the teachings and it would also be wonderful for us to get help with establishing a small meditation centre.

*MW: What then are the basic concepts of Buddhism?*

Dolma: Buddhism is often mistakenly perceived as a religion but it is actually the philosophy of love and wisdom. It combines love, compassion and wisdom. The next level is represented by the fact that everyone has the potential to reach a total clarity and total consciousness that we call enlightenment. Everyone has this 'enlightened Buddha' mind within and we connect to it by using love, compassion and wisdom.

*MW: So what stops us from connecting with that 'Buddha' mind?*

Dolma: We can't easily see it because the mind has been muddied with old beliefs, negative emotions and patterns. This leads to a narrower perception of reality. We are simply here to polish our minds and open to a wider perspective. By bringing together love, compassion and wisdom we eventually open to the Buddha mind of enlightenment.

To find out more about the program of events at the Arya Tara Centre, phone 07 5522 7827, email [arya-tara@dodo.com.au](mailto:arya-tara@dodo.com.au) or log on to [www.freewebs.com/arya-tara](http://www.freewebs.com/arya-tara)

*MW: How does the average person get in touch with this wisdom?*

Dolma: Buddhism is called the middle path, but it's really like a tightrope. By practicing methods like meditation (there are many techniques) and working towards enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings we learn to maintain our balance on the tightrope. Sometimes we move a little towards Samsara which is that narrower perception and sometimes we stagger the other way but the aim is balance through love, compassion and wisdom. You don't have to be a Buddhist to hold Buddhist philosophy. There are a lot of natural Buddhists - people who are thinkers and observers, people who are compassionate and truly wise who work for the good of other sentient beings. Environmentalists, healers, teachers, the Health & Harmony magazine, they are all sentient beings working for the good of other sentient beings.

*MW: So how do we stay balanced on that tightrope?*

Dolma: If you get caught up in 'Samsara' or old patterning it's simply a matter of catching yourself through self-observation. I suggest you have a good laugh at it and let it go. We are in charge of our own reactions to events around us aren't we? We can react negatively or we can giggle and say to our self 'Ego you are taking this personally aren't you? Okay let it go and we'll take you to the beach later if you're a good girl.' (laughs) The more you learn about Buddhism the more you realise it is very joyful.

*MW: How can we possibly show compassion to someone who hurts us?*

Dolma: By realising that that person is suffering as well. People throw negativity at us because they are suffering aren't they? How can you really be annoyed with someone who is suffering?

*MW: When you compare the philosophy of Buddhism with large organised religions is the major difference internal concepts versus external concepts?*

*Other religions hold a blind faith in an external being or 'God' whereas Buddhism teaches internal trust and faith using the tools provided in the structure.*

Dolma: Yes and it's understanding that the internal ability/potential is within all beings. When you build that in yourself you are able to see it more clearly in others. When you see it in others you automatically build this compassion and tolerance. This is probably why the Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace prize because of his natural tolerance and compassion.

*MW: So what is your focus at the Health & Harmony Festival?*

Dolma: Re-empowerment. Lama Yeshe was one of the first Lama's to come to the West who really understood Westerners. He said that the biggest blockage for people in the West was lack of confidence. People seem overly confident but they are not. Lack of confidence stems from dis-empowerment. My focus at the festival and the Arya Tara centre is to re-empower people with internal faith - faith in themselves and in the interconnectedness of everything.

*MW: How do you get that message across to women in particular when many women still see that old system in the workplace, at home and in society?*

Dolma: It's a matter of teaching them how to become aware and observe themselves. Learning how to check their perceptions. Learning methods like meditation - this can give them a chance to watch the mind. Encouraging them to have periods in their life where they can sit and observe themselves and their reactions so they can get a sense of being more than their thoughts. It starts with the awareness - you have to know you're in prison before you want to get out of it.

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Building awareness of the perceptions and conditioning that have disempowered us in the past and overcoming them. Learning how to notice the old patterns and get a sense of the person behind the conditioning - our true potential - what we call the Buddha nature or mind.

*MW: Tell me about the Arya Tara centre.*

Dolma: We have many Buddha's that symbolise all aspects of who we are. Tara is the female Buddha of wisdom and Arya Tara is the sum total of ultimate wisdom. Arya Tara encourages us to find our female wisdom mind. The Buddha Tara is definitely smiling. She's got one foot out like all women who are ready to jump into action... you know 'Mum... can I...?' (laughing) then you're off and running.

*MW: You say that so well. It makes me realise you are a mother.*

Dolma: Yes, a normal everyday woman, I still am. It's just now my work is a nun's - which means now I have an exceptionally large family (laughs)!

*MW: If people are interested in meditation or your teachings can they visit the centre?*

Dolma: Definitely. The centre is for everyone. We teach the Buddhist philosophy on Sunday nights. Monday is meditation and there is always a workshop at the end of every month. I do a more advanced meditation on Wednesdays. We are very privileged to have the well-known Lama Choedak Rinpoche visit and teach us on a regular basis. He is a meditation master and his teachings are also in fluent English. His Eminence Karma Lhundup Rinpoche and a few other very High Lamas come over from India every year and give special teachings and ceremonies. I have been asked to do blessings in hospitals and talk to nursing staff. I do a lot of teachings on the processes of death and dying. In India I am also involved in setting up a nunnery for displaced nuns. Many old, uneducated nuns have to wander the street as beggars, homeless because other monasteries won't take them in. Many are still escaping from Tibet and they don't have anywhere to stay. These nuns have so much wisdom to offer.

*MW: How do you manage this financially?*

Dolma: I will get to India in November somehow. I would like to do a little pilgrimage and take others that wish to come and just see what we can do about getting sponsorship for the nunnery. I exist on the Gold Coast on small donations given to the Arya Tara Centre. We have about a hundred students now. I simply go where I am sent and I am here now and we will see what happens.