



Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation Inc. Newsletter Autumn 2006

ZASEP TULKU RINPOCHE

Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation has a long-standing relationship with the Venerable Zasep Tulku Rinpoche, a meditation master of the Gelugpa Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Rinpoche received his training under some of the most competent Buddhist masters in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion of that country. Later on in India he graduated from Varanasi Sanskrit University with an Acharya degree and spent 18 months in Thailand at the request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He first came to Australia in 1977 and taught for three years before leaving for Canada. He has established Buddhist centres and taught throughout North America. Rinpoche has also been the Spiritual Director of Dorje Ling Retreat Centre (formerly Illusion Farm) in Tasmania for many years. He is recognised as the 13th incarnation of the great Kagyu teacher Lama Chabdak who lived in the Kham region of Eastern Tibet and founded Zuru Gompa 600 years ago. Rinpoche is known for his gentle compassion and good humoured wisdom.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT.

Dear Friends

'A bubble in the stream, a leaf in the wind, insubstantial as a dream...' These are the images used to describe the stuff of our lives...not very practical or promising you might say. So why do we go to such efforts to support retreat centers, organize teacher visits, working bees and retreats if our imagined life is as real as a magician's illusion? Your answer is as good as mine, and it could have something to do with joining in the dance. When the guru sings our hearts naturally respond with joy...we want to learn the chorus...maybe a verse or two... why not get up and move...perhaps swing our partner round and round...and pretty soon the square dance of the mandala has us in flow and we lose our frozen feelings as we heed the call and 'listen up lively' to the fiddler's tune...and the stream and the wind and the dream are us passing through us, dancing in and out of each other's lives in a state of freedom and harmony. Perhaps that is why we do it...to be part of the beautiful dance in the field of practice.

The Easter retreat with the most wonderful Zasep Tulku Rinpoche has inspired the above and my deepest heartfelt thanks to all who inspired, assisted and participated in the dance. It is still *phat phat phatting* and *om ah humming* in my heart.

This is supposed to be a President's Report but is sounding more like a poet's report. The President is out of reports, (but what follows will have to do!) Two major areas of focus have been determined for our collective consideration. The first is the wish, expressed at the retreat by Rinpoche, for a new gompa, and by others at regular intervals for a new kitchen/dining facility and amenities building. This wish is in recognition that the current facilities, though wonderfully rustic and full of charm, are getting closer to the end of their use-by date. The second is the proposal to establish an 'umbrella' organization linking all of Zasep Rinpoche's students. We are still very much at the beginning of our efforts to purchase the Dorje Ling property and the funds to undertake the above-mentioned developments are not yet available. This is where the second focus area becomes important. This is an idea that some of Zasep Rinpoche's students around Australia have started to consider as an important step towards a cohesive and financially viable sangha. If we are to be successful in, for example, applying for tax deductability in building donations, we would be more likely to do so if we can demonstrate an Australia-wide and active sangha. Our local Incorporated Association would be linked to other similar groups around the country. Under Rinpoche's direction projects like the Dorje Ling developments could be energized and undertaken by a larger group. Many of our mortgage contributors are already part of these other groups. Both the above are ideas worthy of consideration and I would ask that you do so and perhaps give us on the committee some feedback. It would be appreciated. Thanks again to all our wonderful sangha.

Big love Guy Turnbull

2006 COMMITTEE

TASHI CHOLING DHARMA FOUNDATION COMMITTEE consists of:

President: Guy Turnbull

Secretary: Maria Grist

Treasurer: Keith O'Hara

Public Officer: Margaret Steadman

Committee: Roslyn Alexander, Tony Dix, Anna Crotty, Annie Willock, Kate MacNicol.

We have had some offers of help with the Committee as a result of the recent Retreat. We will keep you posted.

MEMBERSHIP - HAVE YOU RENEWED?

Please note that all memberships for 2006 fell due at the AGM in December last year. Even if you are a member due to your donation to Dorje Ling, we would still appreciate it if you would subscribe, as this helps us to defray costs such as printing and postage.

REGULAR MEDITATION MEETINGS

Our regular meditation meetings are held at 7.30 - 9.00 pm every Tuesday above Gould's Naturopathica in Liverpool St Hobart. All welcome. Sadhana practice is held every first Tuesday in the month. On other Tuesdays, meditation and discussion will be led by members of the local Sangha.

LIBRARY.

We are in need of some bookshelves for the TCDF library. If you have bookshelves you don't need, or materials and/or expertise to build one, please let the Committee know.

Ahh but then as time passed I realized more and more that Sangha is no different from the rest of the path; it will not come and seek you, but when you are ready and hungry to seek it, small opportunities of opening and unfolding appear before us.

Gradually over time after doing a few retreats at Dorje Ling and being a regular at Tashi Choling, I realized that this group of people was very supportive to all who come to them and as much or as little energy I have will be embraced and very appreciated. So we went to Dorje Ling to do the working Bee.



CHAINSAW WIELDING SANGHA

On one sunny weekend a few weeks before Zasep Rinpoche's visit my partner Beth and I headed up to Dorje Ling for a working Bee.

I have been going to Tuesday Nights at Tashi Choling for some time, and in the last year or so giving more time to my meditation practice. Often we start the evening with taking refuge, 'I take refuge in the Buddha the Dharma and the excellent Sangha'. The first two, Buddha and Dharma, made sense to me but the third, although not struggling with it, I found I had little connection with.

What is this Sangha thing really. I had read about it in various books but found it the most difficult out of the three to connect with. Where and who is my Sangha? Sure I love to go to Tashi on Tuesdays but is that the Sangha? Is this my spiritual community? How do we support each other and ourselves? Do I have to denounce my life and become a bhikkhu or become the lay equivalent and move to Tibet or Thailand? What is Sangha in Hobart, Tasmania, next stop Antarctica?

Then I started to think about animals; penguins, for instance, are one big Sangha all working for the greater good of their penguin community. So where does this leave ME and us of the buddhist path and our collective path and support. Then it began to dawn on me that sangha was such an important aspect to a fulfilling dharma practice, the support to fulfilling selfless practice and so much of it was around me. Before really understanding and interacting with the Hobart Sangha I have to admit to being quite judgmental at first. A group of older dudes who all were very nice and friendly but were supporting each other and not really interested in us slightly younger seekers of the path, what has this group got to offer ME?. (Sorry)

I told a few friends what I was up to for the week end and they wondered why I was to go to the other side of the state to chop fire wood for 3 days, but I have to say it was the most enjoyable and fulfilling long chainsaw wielding session I have had! There was a sense of really giving support to a greater group rather than just those immediately around me, a sangha! So we chopped and carried wood, had great communal feasts, swam in the lake when it all got too hot, listened to black cockies doing their crazy thing, and stayed up late talking excitedly about possible futures for Dorje Ling.

What a place this is! As Prashant said "This is the billionaires club!" We are so lucky to have this sangha and this beautiful retreat centre, so enjoy and hope to see you at the next working bee.

What an 'excellent sangha'

By Andy McIntosh

Zasep Rinpoche's 2006 Tasmanian visit.

A brief summary.

Arriving in Hobart we met in Holyman Avenue, Hobart airport and exchanged greetings and gifts of fresh apples and dancing daka and dakini mudras!

Resting in nature, with long-time dharma friends and families, Rinpoche took time acclimatising and recovering from a full program of retreats and public talks in Darwin, Sydney, and Katoomba.

Why Meditate? The first talk in Hobart was inspiring, deep, challenging and warmly sprinkled with stories and laughter. This led us into the weekend of *The Three Principal Path: teachings of Lama Je-Tsongkhapa: Renunciation, Bodhicitta and Shunyata*. Rinpoche continued to ground the teachings in discussion and personal experience. Always teaching in a way to feel the fresh zap of the transmission, like being "plugged into the extension cord of dhama wisdom."

"Meditation for Healing the Mind". This second public talk packed the yoga studio to the walls! Zasep Rinpoche continued to lead us through a wise and compassionate mind stream, addressing topical issues as parenting, supporting sick relatives, our own fluctuating practice.

Mahamudra Easter Residential.

An extraordinary event as they always are! Around 45 retreatants arrived from interstate and overseas, recognizing the golden opportunity to sit so intimately with a great and experienced teacher as Zasep Rinpoche.



Qi Gong on the lawns.

Representing 6+ decades of human life from the 10-year-old children to the elders of 60's...we gathered to liberate

our minds and explore compassionate wisdom together. For some it was the first visit, others reminisced over where 20 years had gone and reunited, growing and processing together. The 3 days of silence made more potent the personal experience and amplified the night sounds of our fellow sentient beings who shelter in this sanctuary when the humans are not about: such fat possums and friendly black cockatoos!

TCDF are so grateful for the support and help generously given to enable such an event:

Guy Turnbull our trusty President works tirelessly to support Zasep Rinpoche and his needs while here...We were all gladdened by the completion of Rinpoche's Retreat House knowing there had been a big effort to install a gas cook top, hot water, shower, flushing toilet, and new wood heater. Pleased by the results, Rinpoche extended an invitation for individuals or small groups to use the facility and suggested he may be back in January 2007 to do a personal retreat!!



Installing heater.

Special thanks to Bunji and Rupert for the gourmet vegetarian cuisine and morning steaming chai tea. The Lorinna Valley folk supported us with freshly baked bread, access to Howard's shop for supplies and a relic slide projector and use of the community hall to show the DVD that the Canadian Broadcasting commission made featuring our wonderful teacher. Last minute extra wood supply was cut by Billy Jean...which we needed due to the weather. Thanks to John Beck (Caretaker) for the beautiful mown grounds and care of the trees.

Thanks to Maria for recording all the teachings and we look forward to being able to access these through Tashi Choling evenings, our library or or purchase our own set (see Page 4 of this issue).

Thanks to Kate Mac the travel dakini who coordinated visitors and car pooling...a very demanding and important detail. Particular thanks to Jan, Bess, and Maurice- some of the NSW sangha who came days early to help prepare the site.

Especially thanks to those who took up routine responsibilities throughout the retreat: eg Chani for First Aid officer, Anna for nurturing the whole retreat with her kindness and clear guidance. There are many who supported by being there, so present and responsible unfolding together.



Maurice, Roslyn, Bess, Rinpoche and Jan at Dove Lake enjoying Tasmanian weather.

The last 3 days of *Chod and commentary*

The initiation transporting us into the ancient rituals of Tibetan Buddhism! Listening to the tale of Machig Labdron I felt like a child at bedtime....imaging a life like hers!

Trying to blow the bone trumpet and play the large Damaroo humbled us as we attempted to cut the 'truly existing I'. Chanting ancient mantras and singing in Tibetan will always transport me beyond beyond.

The opportunity to be together in this way is priceless and plumbs depths. I treasure it all and cannot express enough gratitude to Zasep Rinpoche, holy teacher and lineage holder of the dhama, please travel safely and fly like an eagle back to visit us soon.

A complimentary copy of this newsletter is sent to all participants. Please pass it on to other interested readers or coffee table, or notice board. We welcome feedback and contributions.

In Peace, Roslyn Alexander

DORJE LING NEWS

Building Projects

New kitchen/dining/facilities complex. COMING SOON!!!!
New Gumpa. Also COMING SOON.

Keep your eyes on the web site and please help where you can.

Wish List

Curtains & Rugs for Rinpoche's Teacher's House.

Sponsor a retreatant!!

TCDF wish to establish a fund to assist people to retreat who may have the motivation and time but not the funds to pay for the facility or food. In this way, we hope to continue the energy of meditation and focus on dharma practice at Dorje Ling.

Please consider continuing to use this wonderful facility that you/we are all part of!!

Next working bee/winter retreat:

Possibly June long weekend, 10-12 June. Contact Guy 0409 713813.

Did You Know?

You can do your own personal retreat at Dorje Ling.

Just organise it with our caretakers, Anna or John, on 6363 5178

DVDs of recent retreats

We are currently transcribing the videos from the recent retreats by Zasep Tulku Rinpoche onto DVD. By next issue you should be able to order copies of these to buy. If you can help with copying the finished DVDs and printing covers, please contact Maria on 62349404.



What is Mind?

Rinpoche asked students this question during the Mahamudra retreat. Over the next few issues, we will be publishing some of the students' answers:

Every Where
and
Every Thing
No Where
and
No Thing!
- Pamela

What is mind?
It is the rattle
inside an empty box.
- Jaspa

Mind is longing
Mind is exquisite longing
Mind is longing for Dharma
- Nicole Harstead



Mind is excitable
and when excited
becomes "fizzy"
Bubbles of thought rise
seemingly from nowhere.

At first there can
be a lot of bubbles,
but usually they subside
sometimes into dullness
for some emptiness
but the bubbles will
be back.

FIZZY.

-C.D. Compact Disk

Mind is a television set
relax.....
or watch your favourite dream
on DVD.

I experience mind like a
dark storm
gusty wind
baby breath joy
dive into clear blue sea
belly laugh
warm bath
bush fire
-Teresa

Big sky Clear Mind:

Artists inspire a Dorje Ling Fund-raiser



T-shirt orders close on June 1st. Orders must be accompanied by \$25 per shirt. E: maria@tashicholing.net
Thanks to Jaspa and Suze for the art work and enthusiasm.

Haiku
High wind, heart racing
Is the room empty or full?
Both – so stay sitting.
-Ursula

Intellect and spirit
The tool for the freedom of all beings
At once a weapon of mass destruction.
-Zoe

mind is not
emptiness and fullness in
this moment
silence is here ever present
always now
always love.
-Mukula Grace

Mind is view
Mind is vision
-Rinpoche

What is Mind?
One
clay raining river flowing
-anon

Power of delusion
-anon

Thoughts blow through mind,
Like wind in leaves.
Mind observes wind
like thoughts in leaves.
The storm passes.
-Jenni Mc

ME
-anon

just this,
so they say.
with the LOT.
-Andreas

You are the ultimate magician
Creating all from nothing
And when you stop
Nothing's lost and you get bliss in knowing.
-Maurice

More next issue or you can read them all, plus see some retreat pictures, at www.tashicholing.net

Touring Tibet in 2005 - Part One

By Kirsten Mayer

From 2nd July until 8th August in 2005 I traveled from Lhasa, Tibet, to the border crossing with Nepal, by bus and bicycle. Here are some of the things I experienced in Lhasa.

The first few days at altitude I had a bad headache, lots of lethargy, and poor sleep – all the symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness, AKA Altitude Sickness. Nevertheless, I was struck by the beauty of the utterly joyful smile given to me by some of the Tibetan women. Also striking were the numbers of people, mostly old, but also some young mothers, constantly spinning prayer wheels as they walked the streets. I imagined the air totally saturated with prayer. Many of the Tibetans seemed happy, true Buddhists I guess.

The Jokhang

The Jokhang is the holiest monastery in Tibet. There are at least three koras (circumambulations) around the Jokhang. One inside the large prayer hall. Another inside the monastery around the outer walls of the main prayer hall. And a third through the narrow cobbled streets around the monastery itself. (By the way Gompa means monastery which includes the entire monastery campus, eg. including the living quarters of the monks. I don't know what they call the main meeting/chanting space so I have called it the "main prayer hall".)

Each dawn and sunset, hundreds of Tibetans do one of these koras the requisite three times. Some are chanting, some are chatting, some are silent, some have rosary beads, some are constantly spinning prayer wheels, and some wear wooden hand paddles and a thick apron and do full prostrations with each step. I regularly saw two men doing full prostrations.

The feeling while doing the kora is awesome. I felt so privileged to be able to experience the koras, and to be able to spend some time in this holy city breathing in prayer! I felt so happy for the Tibetans who could do this every day of their lives.

On 7th July I did the internal two koras, starting at 6pm while the monks conducted their chanting. The Jokhang main prayer hall, like all others that I saw, was lined with paintings and statues. However, the feeling of reverence and gratitude in this hall was indeed the greatest in the land. I felt a strong desire (!) to give thanks to the wonderful Buddhist masters depicted in the statues, and

to prostrate myself as the Tibetans do. Mostly I felt so grateful that such a place and a people of such great devotion and insight exists, and has existed for so long.

The Potala

Second only to the Jokhang was my visit to the Potala Palace. The Potala marks one's arrival in Lhasa. It is like the centre of the wheel about which the city rotates.

From the suggestions in my guide book, I imagine that the Potala is a symbol for the Dalai Llama, the Buddha of Compassion, to the Tibetans. This may be partly why Tibetans come from all over the land and are so devoted to making the kora around the outer-most walls of the palace grounds. One day a week Tibetans can enter the Palace for free. Despite the crowds of foreign and Chinese tourists, the day Tibetans can enter is the busiest day of the week. Interestingly, a Chinese woman tried to enter for free along with two Tibetan women and myself. The Tibetan women were obviously trying to help the Chinese woman enter for free.

The Chinese have recently developed a great fascination for the "magical, holy, snowland" of Tibet, and flock here for holidays. I am told the Chinese government grants few of its citizens passports so they are forced to travel within the borders of the land they are so proud of. They call the Tibetans their 'brothers' and are very happy and proud that Tibet is now part of China. They go to the Potala but don't seem to show up at the Barkhor, nor the Jokhang, nor in the Tibetan quarter.

The many rooms and roofs and statues, paintings and artifacts of the Potala are very interesting and impressive. However, the greatest place of all, was the meditation room of the Dalai Llama. I lingered as long as I could there. It felt so peaceful and so fresh. A very special place.



Sera Gompa

It was my great fortune to visit Sera monastery in the company of a Tibetan woman and her two young sons. Her sons were initially afraid or shy, but once they got over this, they wanted to hold my hand all the time, and didn't want to say goodbye :)

Visiting the prayer hall in the way your average Tibetan does, reminds me of a visit to a fun park! There are so many amazing images and statues to gaze at, circumambulate, touch and give offerings to!

This is how a prayer hall visit is done at Sera: First, of course you remove your shoes and hat at the entrance to the main hall. All the main halls I saw in Tibet had an external semi-enclosed 'portico' where you may remove your shoes beneath frescoes of wrathful deities and the wheel of life.

You circumambulate the interior of the chapel in a clockwise direction and the first task is to give thanks to the protector deity of the monastery. So you start by walking (to the left) past all the delightful and frightening frescoes of all the benign and fierce deities in the main hall to reach the first 'chapel'.

This chapel is shaped more like a passageway and indeed leads to the protector-deity chapel. It contains three huge 3 metre high, statues of the past, present and future Buddha. These three Buddhas face statues half their size above your head of the 8 Boddhisatvas

You step through to the next room which contains the statue of the protector of the monastery. This room has old weapons hanging from the high ceiling as a symbol of the renunciation of war. You wait in line here with the jostling Tibetans to stick your head in a hole at the base of the statue and touch the feet of the protector of the monastery statue, as a sign of respect. You also offer some money by stuffing small notes anywhere you can in or around the base of the large statue. You can get a blessing/prayer from the monks at that point if you are Tibetan or do the correct thing (which I didn't).

You exit this room back to the main hall, stepping down some worn stone stairs that are slippery with candle wax. Then you circumambulate the deity

2 more times, via the main hall and the passageways with the three huge Buddha statues.

Next, you move onto the series of linked chapels that stand behind the main hall, opposite the wall of entry. In the first chapel you climb some stairs and touch your forehead to the knee of a future Buddha statue, and offer some more money. You walk around the statue's back and do the same on the other side.

Onto the next linked room you can pray before more statues of deities - this is where the picture of the Dalai Lama used to hang, but does not now due to the Chinese regulations.

Then in the last chapel, you crawl under the bookshelves that line the walls and reach to the ceiling, fully stuffed with manuscripts. You then offer some more money to some more statues of deities.

On your way out of this chapel you rub your hands on the chains that are drawn to the one side of the door back to the main hall - they would form a curtain if they were not drawn aside.

But you are not over yet because in the main hall there is another statue on your left to pray to and give offerings. Then as you finally walk out of the main hall, you turn and say a prayer before backing out, so as not to turn your back on the Buddha.

Unfortunately, most of the tourist go to Sera mainly to stand around in the courtyard at 2pm to watch, photograph and video the monks debating their lessons, using their characteristic slapping of hands gestures. This daily event is mentioned in the Lonely Planet, which is what makes it such a tourist attraction. It has to be a bit off-putting to be a monk, trying to tease out the meaning of their teachings with all these foreigners hanging out just to watch you do it! It's like watching someone doing a university tutorial! And seemed quite disrespectful. The monks continued on, despite being so keenly observed.

Drepung Gompa

Also while staying in Lhasa, I visited Drepung monastery which has beautiful and extensive frescoes and statues. Drepung is quite large and has many schools, however like Sera monastery, it felt quite under-populated and deserted. It was cleaned out by the Chinese.

But at least most of the buildings were still standing. Later in my journey, as

I rode my bicycle through the countryside outside Lhasa and Shigatse I saw many, many ruins. The Lonely Planet claims that the Chinese destroyed 7000 monasteries. I can't imagine they could have been that many, however I spoke to local people who now had to travel half a day to a monastery when earlier there would be one much closer, or in each town.

At Drepung I visited the communal kitchen, where the tsampa is prepared in a giant cauldron some 2 metres wide and deep. The whole kitchen was very medieval-looking with enormous, blackened vats, a large wood fire on which the food was cooked, piles of firewood and a ladle the size of a bucket! The tsampa seemed to have something in it - apart from flour and water and yak butter - perhaps dates. But it sure ain't gourmet to look at! The tsampa was ladled into buckets with the monks retrieved after their late morning chanting, (almost as if it were their compensation/remuneration); and I assume, carried to their schools to eat.

Lesser Lhasa

I do not know what life was like for Tibetans in Lhasa before the Chinese occupation but I imagine these were not common:

- ~ Hoards of western tourists ticking off the sights from their 4 wheel drives and enjoying pizza, icecream and alcohol at the hotels and backpackers places catering to their tastes.
- ~ An ever increasing distance between the Potala and home of the Tibetans
- ~ block filled with ugly 2-4 storey Chinese shops and offices
- ~ No visible celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday (which passed while I was in Lhasa).
- ~ Ghost-town-like monasteries and many, many ruins.

A traveler I later met in India also remarked on the great difference in attitude, ease and warmth of Tibetans in Dharamsala and Tibet. It seems those in Tibet are less at ease - unsurprisingly.

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Review of a Forum with the Tabo monks: Feb 17th Hobart.

A wonderful evening at the Friends' Meeting House was shared by many diverse representatives of the Tasmanian community. The emphasis was on the success of the development of a sustainable approach to living. The Tabo monks' slide show supported the examples told of Tibetan culture, its traditional medicine practices and the environmental responsibility taken by these people for the impact they have on the world environment.

I felt this to be an inspiring example of taking healthy aspects of Western culture and development to enhance and ease some of the difficulties of climate, isolation and economy, in the remote Spiti Valley. The visiting monk/architect spoke of how they have skilfully ducted heat from modern adaptations such as an atrium on the side of the monastery through bamboo pipes to hot houses in order to diversify the vegetable production for the health of the community. The international community benefit from the preservation of ancient artefacts and fresco paintings (see picture).



From Tabo:
The Bodhisattva
Suramgama ca.
1040 A.D.

The visiting abbot and his entourage expressed deep appreciation for the people who sponsored the monks and spoke of some of the orphan children also in need of sponsorship. Please contact Chai on 0401381949 if this inspires your support.

While visiting the East coast the monks blessed all the living beings of the threatened Wielangta Forest (right) saying prayers to protect and encourage harmony and life there.



Thank you Chaitana for the opportunity for the Tashi Choling Dharma Foundation to support this wonderful sharing of culture. An enriching and inspiring cultural link has been developed.

We heard stories of how the passion and dedication of a few strong hearts and minds can have such transforming ongoing effects!

-Roslyn

