

# the freelance lama



Photo: Ven. Roger Kunsang

**THUBTEN DORJE LAKHA LAMA**, who escaped from Tibet in 1959, has been living in Denmark – and devoting his life to others – since 1976. For years he has been organizing ‘helping hand’ agencies, such as the Buddhist Forum, the Committee for World Peace, and Tibet Charity. He explains:

In Denmark I function as a course leader, giving lectures, and leading meditations and retreats. I call myself a freelance lama. As there are many small Buddhist groups in Denmark, I

thought it important to have a common ground and common activities. The Buddhist Forum arranges events, where all the Buddhist groups can come together and share information. This is our tenth anniversary year. I am going to set up a Buddhist Forum in Sweden this year.

The Committee for World Peace is our small contribution to peace in the world. Twice we’ve helped organize His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s visits to Denmark. Board member Else Hammerich went on to create the popular Center for Conflict Resolution in Denmark and a similar center in Dharamsala, India for Tibetan refugees. This project came about after Else had asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama how to help. Maria Damsholt, another board member, also established the Center for Conscious Living and Dying to help dying people – a project under FPMT’s Danish center Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling.

In 1997 I set up Tibet Charity in Denmark, since, as a Tibetan refugee myself, I realized the importance of helping poor Tibetans and supporting His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s efforts in helping refugees. Since then Tibet Charity has also been set up in Sweden and Norway.

We have sponsored more than 400 elderly Tibetans, as well as monks, nuns and children, and have also set up an educational project for young people with problems who drop out of school. With representatives in Nepal and South India, who look for and report new cases to us, we are able to find many needy people.

As the Dalai Lama shows concern for dogs suffering

from parasites and rabies, Tibet Charity has made contact with Danish veterinarians and suitable medicine for dogs has been bought. In January this year, we went to Mundgod, south India, with Dr. Gunvor Juul and 120 dogs were treated. This December four highly qualified Danish doctors will accompany us, with transportable surgical equipment, to treat the dogs in the Mundgod settlements and sterilize them. They will also treat sick cows.

## Monasteries to make new traditions in the new world

I was fortunate to meet Lama Zopa Rinpoche this year, and after spending some time exchanging ideas, Rinpoche wanted me to express my views about monasteries in MANDALA.

There is no reason to change the valuable old traditions, but in the new world I believe monasteries have to add some new traditions in education and social work.

It is essential that some kind of social relationship between the monastic and lay communities exists. If it doesn’t, then strong devotion in the minds of the next generation of Tibetans will not exist.

Monasteries are important in preserving Buddhist philosophy and tradition. However these should not be the sole repositories for that. There should also be space for lay people to get a philosophical education, and thus take a hand in preserving Buddhist philosophy and tradition.



Monks should also go out to Tibetan camps, villages and families to give basic Buddhist teachings, otherwise Buddhist practice will be limited to the monasteries, which could become increasingly empty with no more devoted new monks.

In Western countries many lay people study Buddhist philosophy, write books and do their practice, so why not Tibetan lay people as well? I noticed this year in Dharamsala, India, many young Tibetans are very keen to learn Buddhist philosophy, but have difficulty following

very traditional teachings. They need teachings suitable to a new generation's mentality. I gave them a four-day course on Tibetan Buddhism with space for a lot of questions, so they were very happy.

"Pureness" for a monk or nun has more to do with vows rather than tradition. If a monk cannot stay in pureness, he should then have the space to serve in monastic social work, where he would still have the opportunity to practice bodhicitta and get the benefit of the monastic atmosphere.

Monastic social work could take the form of clinics or hospitals. Monasteries should have monastic doctors and monk helpers to help the sick lay people. These doctors could treat the sick at the monastery, or visit them in their homes. They can also help the poor, who cannot afford to make offerings for prayers. Even if they pray for five minutes, that would give much comfort to the poor, the sick and the dying.

Older people without family are in a hard situation,



*Lakha Lama in Batang, Tibet 1989, concentrates on healing a sick man. Many thousands of people came to get Rinpoche's blessing everyday. Rinpoche did not spare himself — he touched people with leprosy and big wounds all over.*

as are people with sicknesses like tuberculosis, asthma and diabetes, which take a lot of time and money to treat. In Mundgod, some people are just allowed to die because they cannot afford treatment.

I am seeing that I can't help everyone, but I wish I could. I think small children are taken care of by worldwide organizations and there are a lot of Tibetan schools, so I don't really go so much into that field. But as we are Tibetan

refugees, we have a big responsibility to care for our people who absolutely need economic help, so I would like to suggest that all Gelug monasteries agree to establish a fund to help needy Tibetans. ☸

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*We* Buddhists must find the courage to leave our temples and enter the temples of human experience; temples that are filled with suffering. If we listen to the Buddha, Christ, Gandhi we can do nothing else. The refugee camps, the prisons, the ghettos and the battle-field will then become our temples. We must remove the landmines in our hearts, which prevent us from making peace ... We can oppose greed with the weapon of generosity. We can oppose hatred with the weapon of loving kindness; we can oppose delusion with the weapon of wisdom."

— VENERABLE SAMDECH PREAH MAHA GOSANANDA,  
FIVE TIMES NOMINATED FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE, AND WIDELY  
RECOGNIZED FOR HIS EFFORTS TO SAFELY REMOVE THE LAND MINES  
WHICH PLAGUE SOUTHEAST ASIA.



Photo: Happy Lotus