

Architecture of the Mind



Sangha and students in front of the framework for the Great Stupa.

By Ian Green

Our view of reality is formed by what we see around us – which is why in every culture and every tradition mankind has used architecture to express what is important to us. In Western culture, our external and internal reality used to be very different. Traditionally, the most imposing architectural statement in any city was the cathedral or church perched on a hill. Today, by contrast, our landscape is dominated by symbols of power and competition. We are impacted by the importance of commerce in the form of towering skyscrapers and vast shopping malls. The glory of sport, our secular religion, is trumpeted by our massive sports stadiums. And the individualism of our lifestyles is demonstrated by suburban sprawl.

No doubt this is why Lama Zopa Rinpoche stresses that the West needs more holy objects. As Rinpoche says, “The special advantage of these holy objects is that, just by existing, they make it easy for us ordinary beings to create merit. These holy objects, such as statues, stupas, and scriptures of the Buddha, become the support for

peace and happiness for oneself and others and within the world. It is explained by the Buddha in the Sutra of the Mudra of Developing the Power of Devotion that the minute you see a holy object you create numberless merit, so there is no question that if you actually make prostrations, offerings, and so forth, you create far greater merit.”

Stupas are a particular inspiration because they are symbolic representations of the Buddha’s mind of enlightenment, which is the perfection of wisdom and compassion. But a stupa is no passive symbol, as His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche has said: “A stupa creates a lightning rod for the blessings of your guru, and for the blessings of the buddhas of the ten directions and the three times to descend.”

It was in India that the popular tradition of relics and pilgrimage centers with circumambulatory sites arose, and the circumambulation of Buddhist stupas, always in a clockwise direction¹, has continued ever since. The third century

¹ An exception to this rule is performed by practitioners of the Bön religion, the indigenous tradition of Tibet, who circumambulate counter-clockwise.

B.C. saw the birth of the greatest stupa builder to date – the Buddhist emperor Ashoka. Ashoka restored and built many of the great stupas, and is said to have constructed 84,000 other stupas from their original relics within his lifetime.

Fundamentally, a stupa is made up of five constituents: a square base, hemispherical dome, conical spire, crescent moon, and a circular disc. Each of these elements is rich in metaphoric content and is identified with one of the five cosmic elements said to make up the entirety of manifested existence. These are earth, water, fire, air, and space. As mentioned before, there is a further interpretation of the stupa as a symbol of enlightenment, and when you see the design from overhead, it is a perfect mandala – the mystic symbol of the universe. This mandala is seen to be complete in the form of a stupa.

A Great Stupa down under

Currently, a Great Stupa of landmark proportions is being constructed near Bendigo, in the state of Victoria in southern Australia. The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will be the same shape and size as the Great Stupa of Gyantse, which was built in the fifteenth century in Southern Tibet. The Great Stupa, or Kumbum, of Gyantse has been described as a wonder of the Buddhist world.

Designed to be 50-meters-wide (164 feet) at its base and rising to a height of just under fifty meters, the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will be the largest stupa in the Western world. It will be an unmistakable symbol of the establishment of the Buddhadharma in the West and the resilience of the Tibetan spirit.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has expressed his support for the building of the Great Stupa in the West. He said, “This stupa will be very significant for Buddhist spirituality and for Tibetan culture. Support for this stupa is a good way of creating merit.”

The Great Stupa was the concept of FPMT founder Lama Thubten Yeshe, who visited Atisha Centre in Bendigo in 1981. Lama Yeshe’s vision was for a *big* stupa with a large temple and a library inside. Lama Yeshe’s plan also called for a monastery, a Buddhist retreat center, a lay community, and a hospice to be established nearby. Today much of this plan has become a reality and the comprehensive development plan for the 120-acre (48-hectare) site has been approved by the planning authorities.

Since Lama Yeshe passed away in 1984, the Great Stupa has been under the spiritual direction of Lama Zopa

Rinpoche. In Rinpoche’s words, “The Great Stupa will illuminate the world. It will give so much peace, so much peace of mind to people around the world.”

Many great spiritual leaders have blessed the site by their presence, including His Holiness Sakya Trizin, Ribur Rinpoche, Geshe Lama Konchog, Lama Lhundrup, and Master Thich Phuoc Hue. On June 8, 2007 the Great Stupa will be blessed by a visit and a special ceremony by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In November 1994, Khensur Kangyur Rinpoche consecrated the site to subdue all hostile energies and create an atmosphere of peace and goodwill. And in the year 2000, work began on construction of the massive earthworks for the Great Stupa and the circumambulation paths.

In August 2003, Khensur Rinpoche conducted a ceremony to bury four treasure vases on the site of the Great Stupa, a gift from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And on the most auspicious date of June 4, 2004, Geshe Konchok Tsering conducted a puja on the site before taking the controls of the machine to commence construction of the foundations of the Great Stupa. Some months later the massive foundation footings were completed.

Construction begins

The most recent developments have led to the erection of the first two floors of the steel framework of the Great Stupa. This first stage framework, which includes construction of the concrete walls, creates an impressive idea of the magnitude of this project.

The Great Stupa is designed to last for 1,000 years and this has called for innovative solutions from Architect Peter Weiss of Lines, MacFarlane and Marshall, structural engineers Connell Mott MacDonald, and services engineers BRT. These companies have all offered considerable cost reductions, as have steel companies Industrial Galvanisers and GFC Industries. And world-famous feng shui authority, Lillian Too, has provided free advice on the direction of the Great Stupa and its internal layout.

The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will be a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists of all traditions as well as a place of worship for our fast-growing Australian Buddhist community. Located next to the Stupa are Atisha Buddhist Centre, Thubten Shedrup Ling monastery, a nunnery, and a lay community with plans for a healing center, a hospice, and even a primary school.

STUPAS

The Great Stupa of Universal Compassion will house many Buddhist artworks including large statues, thangkas, frescoes, and images. In time it is expected that artists from the Himalayan region will be brought to Australia to decorate the Great Stupa.

Repository for relics

Stupas are often a repository for the relics of great saints and teachers, and indeed the real power of a stupa comes from the holy relics which are housed in the stupa. For many Buddhists, such relics can lend immense power to a stupa because it is believed that the essence of the teacher's wisdom is distilled into their relics.

Visitors to the site of the Great Stupa can view the amazing and inspiring collection of sacred Buddhist relics that have been offered to the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion. These relics are on display every weekend and public holiday at the Great Stupa Exhibition Centre, and twice a year the Great Stupa Holy Relics Tour goes to temples around Australia and Asia. Visitors can also see the holy objects that have been gathered for the Great Stupa including the four-meter (13-foot) high Guru Rinpoche statue.

Expected to cost \$15 million dollars, the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion is funded entirely by donation. Details can be found at www.stupa.org.au

Ian Green is director of the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion project.

THE JADE BUDDHA PROJECT



Ian Green with Kirk Makepeace, the CEO of the Jade Mine, shown here in Bangkok posing next to two halves of a giant piece of gemstone-quality jade known as "Polar Pride." The jade will be transformed into a 3.5

meter/11.4 ft Great Jade Buddha statue including lotus and throne. Polar Pride has since been delivered to the Jade Factory in Northern Thailand. The statue is being modeled on the Buddha inside the Mahabodhi Stupa in Bodhgaya, India, chosen because all Buddhists generally recognize it. When the statue is finished, it will tour major cities in Asia and Australia before being installed next to the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion.

The Dzambala Wishfulfilling Jewel Project

Preserving the Dharma in the Remote Valley of Tsum in Nepal

Himalayan Sangha Fund



Many Thanks to All of You

who have contributed to the great success of the first phase of the project. The building at Raehen Nunnery of accommodation, dining room, kitchen and school rooms was completed in December 06.



Renovation of Mu Gompa

started in April this year with the building of rooms, dining room and kitchen for the resident monks, fulfilling the second part of the pledge to the Sangha of Tsum Valley.

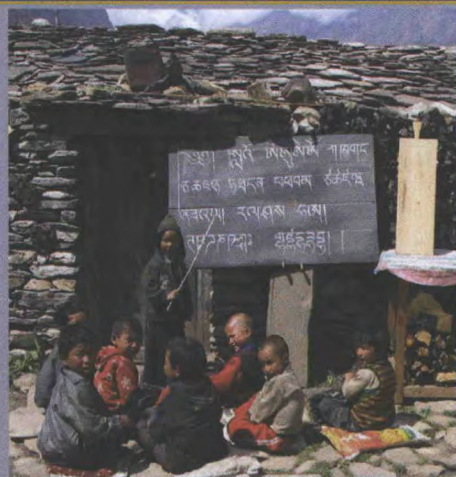
Read more or donate at www.fpmt.org/tsum

Himalayan Community Fund

The second phase of the Tsum Project is focused on the needs of the community in the valley. The locals are very poor, living from the crops they can grow in the short summer season. Essential services are mostly missing. The Himalayan Community Fund, following advice of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, has now been set up.

Our Goal

- Primary School with Hostel
- Medical Care Center
- Old People's Home
- Hydropower electrification scheme
- Clean Water Supply



Read more or donate at www.fpmt.org/tsum