

The Death of Geshe Jampa Gyatso

When students at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy heard on November 24, 2007 that their beloved Geshe Jampa Gyatso had been taken to hospital, they were already in the midst of a 24-hour recital of the Long Life Sutra for him. "The news made us stronger," said Ven. Joan Nicell. "Many people came, and at the end of the recitation we were told that Geshe-la had improved greatly. In fact, the people who saw him on Sunday afternoon were very relieved and said he looked much better and was breathing easier and had slept better than he had for some days." But he didn't sleep well on Sunday night and "by the small hours of Tuesday morning he was sitting in meditation posture and was unmoving (even while the Tibetans dressed him). At about 3:40AM, he stopped breathing."

Ven. Birgit, a former anesthesiologist and graduate of the Masters Program 1998, who has been closely involved with Geshe Jampa Gyatso's medical tests and treatments for the past ten years, takes up the story:

Illness and death

During a summer vacation in India in 2000, Geshe Jampa Gyatso manifested pneumonia with high fever, much coughing and physical weakness. The cause of this pneumonia was a cancerous tumor in his right lung, and although surgery could have been attempted, Geshe-la strictly refused that. Knowing that the tumor had already spread to other parts of the lung, it was not a promising therapy. His expected survival time was about eight months.

Subsequently Geshe-la accepted various therapies, among which the only one he liked was the blessed water of the "water-lady" Maria, which Raffaello regularly provided for him.

Despite the prognosis Geshe-la recovered well, and continued to show good health for the next six years. In early spring 2007 one could see some lymph nodes protruding at the left side of his neck. This being a possible location for metastases from lung cancer a biopsy of the lymph nodes was done, but did not reveal cancer cells.

In the following months Geshe-la slowly started to lose some weight, and often said he was tired. Then, in November 2007, he developed a swelling under his chin, some of which could be treated with anti-inflammatory medication and antibiotics, and the symptoms improved slightly. However, swallowing remained a problem and Geshe-la could only eat soups and liquids.

For that reason we asked him to accept a CAT scan, which showed that the old tumor of the lung, which had been there for seven years, had remained almost unchanged. However, there were some pockets of enlarged lymph. We asked that a biopsy of the lymph nodes be done – if they were of different origin than the lung cancer, they could have been treated with medical therapy.

The day following the examination Geshe-la vomited a lot. During the CAT scan he had received a contrast substance in order to make the structures in the throat visible. But his kidneys were impaired from long-term diabetes and could not eliminate the substance very well. So while he was supposed to drink a lot in order to eliminate the substance, he was sick each time he tried to drink, which led to significant dehydration over the next two days.

On Saturday evening, November 24, he lay in bed, dehydrated, with serious difficulty breathing. Dr. Giari was very concerned that Geshe-la might not survive the night and

decided to bring him to the hospital in Cecina in order to give him fluids and electrolytes.

Geshe-la accepted and was treated adequately there, whereupon he visibly regained strength and vitality. The next day, Sunday the 25th, Geshe-la was once again sitting up in bed, quite happy and relaxed. He was breathing much better, and was happy to have visitors. We had hope that his state would remain stable until we received the results of the biopsy, and that it would be possible to make an attempt at medical treatment (which had come good in a Mo done by Dagri Rinpoche).

However, on the 26th he had not slept again and looked extremely tired. Then, in the early hours of the 27th, his breath suddenly became much more difficult. The doctors in the hospital tried to counteract the swelling in the throat with cortisone, but without success. Geshe-la stopped breathing at 3.40 A.M., in meditation posture, in the presence of Ngawang and Jinpa, who were with him at that time.

According to ordinary appearances, Geshe-la was a 76-year-old human being who had been diagnosed with cancer six years previously. I personally think that it was a great miracle and only due to his unbelievable kindness that Geshe-la could remain with us all that time, completing the Masters Program and teaching another Basic Program despite his physical condition. During all the time of what appeared to be severe physical distress, Geshe-la never showed any signs of worries or suffering. He remained peaceful, humorous, and lucid throughout.

Now the master we so love has entered into Tuk-Dam, one with the Dharmakaya of all buddhas. He has shown his great attainment in a life full of virtue, wisdom, love, and compassion. We have lost the physical presence of one emanation body, but it would be sad to think that we are lost, after Geshe-la has taught us the holy Dharma for so many years. If now we cannot live according to the Dharma he has taught us, what has been the purpose of his being with us here, and what would be the purpose for him to return?

The cremation

By Ven. Joan Nicell

At 8.00 A.M., Monday, December 3, 2007, Tenzin Tashi Tulku, the incarnation of Geshe-la's teacher, Geshe Tashi Bum, was permitted to visit Geshe-la for the first time since his arrival at the Institute on 1 December. It seems that it is

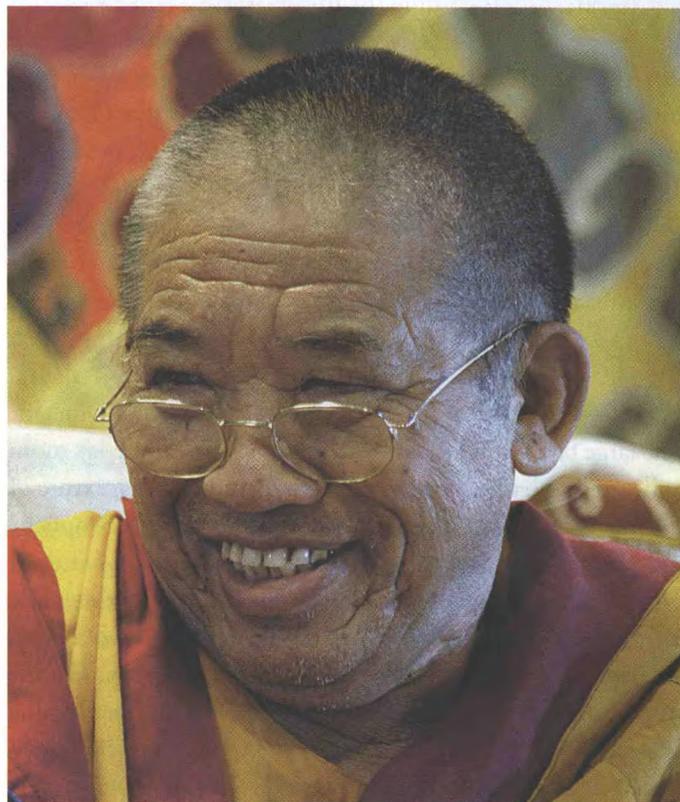


PHOTO: Ven. Joan Nicell

quite common that a lama in Tuk-dam waits for the arrival of his own lama before leaving his body, and so Tulku Gyatso had given very strong instructions that the young Tenzin Tashi Tulku was not to even enter the villetta until the morning of the 3rd (this was the anniversary of the passing away of the founder of Sera, Jamchen Choje, and so was considered a very auspicious day for Geshe-la to leave his body).

Upon arriving at the villetta that morning, I found all the lamas and Tibetan monks sitting on the floor in Geshe-la's room reciting the prayer "Chanting the Names of Manjushri" in Tibetan. I was told that Geshe-la was still in meditation. Outside there was a very strong, swirling wind (I remember having difficulty opening the door of the villetta from the inside as I was leaving). At 11.00 A.M., as on the previous days, we offered Tsog together with Dayab Rinpoche, Gomo Tulku, Tulku Gyatso, Tulku Tenzin Tashi, Minyak Rinpoche, and Geshe Tenzin Tenphel.

Afterward, Dayab Rinpoche was taken down to the cremation site by Jinpa, where he examined the cremation stupa and the palanquin that had been constructed to transport Geshe-la to the site. Then, together with Rinchen, Rin-

poche looked over the Tibetan text, which Lama Zopa Rinpoche had suggested be used, that explains what is to be done before and after the mind leaves the body.

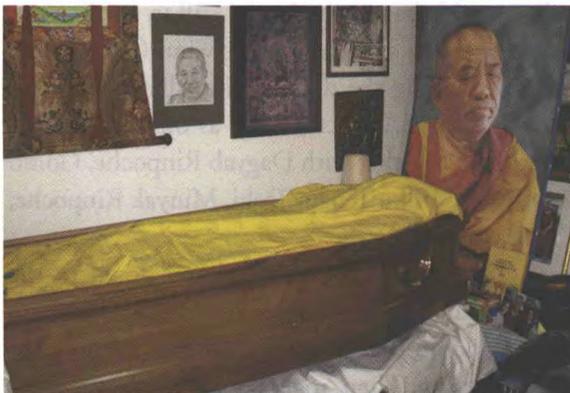
By late afternoon only the throne of the cremation stupa had been completed, and work was just beginning on the vase. Dagyab Rinpoche returned to the villetta in the late afternoon and about 5:00 P.M. we were informed that Geshe-la's mind had left his body (the news hit us as if Geshe-la had died for a second time). Rocks with special signs (as advised by Geshe Ngawang Dragpa) were placed on the cho-go that covered Geshe-la's body. A small group of us Western monks and nuns, who were present in the villetta at the time, recited the prayer for the Swift Return several times aloud in English and Tibetan, standing and then kneeling in front of Geshe-la. The Tibetan lamas and monks then did the same in Tibetan. The large basin and a chair were brought into Geshe-la's room to be used to bathe his body in water containing a mixture of ground cloves, cardamom, and other spices. Dagyab Rinpoche and the other lamas recited prayers behind the closed door while Geshe-la's body was bathed and wrapped in the white cotton and red and orange silk that had been prepared for this occasion. Over this was put the bodhisattva robes. On his head was placed the ushnisha and crown of the five buddha lineages, usually used during empowerments. His body was placed in a wooden structure that had been built to keep it sitting upright, and katas were hung from the posts in the four corners. Geshe-la was placed sitting on his usual seat in his room and his disciples were permitted to visit him, to offer him a kata, and to prostrate to him. A long but silent line of people quickly formed inside and outside the villetta as word quickly spread, even among the local people, that it was now possible for people to come to say their good-byes.

While all this was happening, we were told by Dagyab Rinpoche that it would be extremely auspicious if the cremation could take place the next day on December 4, as this was

Lama Tsongkhapa Day. Geshe-la would be taken from the house to the cremation stupa in the palanquin, in the presence of only a small number of disciples, at 6:00 A.M. the next morning. This meant that we had less than twelve hours to finish all the preparations, which included not only finishing constructing the cremation stupa, but also making the surrounding area beautiful and filled with offerings.

As a team of men carried on the construction with great haste under floodlights, orange cloth was wrapped around the poles that had been planted in the hard ground earlier that afternoon (forming a fenced-in area, 10 meters square). Tables were set up on the right and left sides of the cremation stupa and covered in white tablecloths bordered with orange (also specially made for the occasion). One table was set aside for the fire puja ingredients that had been prepared in just two days by the many people who had come to pay their respects to Geshe-la. The other tables were covered in colorful bowls of saffron water with flower floating in them. At the same time, beautiful garlands were constructed with greenery and colorful flowers and hung between the poles. There were people everywhere around the site, working under the floodlights, busily setting up offering bowls, making garlands, bringing things down from the gompa.

Since there was no time to actually draw the eight auspicious signs and seven royal emblems on the not-yet-completed cremation stupa, enlargements were made with the photocopier and assembled together, cut, and traced in red. The palanquin was decorated with colorful katas and small victory banners. Three sides of the vase of the cremation stupa were gradually constructed, plastered, and dried with a fire usually used for soldering metal. The seven royal emblems and a Dharma wheel were pasted on the lower part (the throne) and the eight auspicious signs on the upper part (the vase). Above the eight auspicious signs were pasted drawings of hanging strands of jewels. At 6:15 A.M. everything was



PHOTOS: Ven. Joan Nicell except where indicated.

ready, and I raced to my room to change my dirty and dusty robes, just in time to pay a short and last visit to Geshe-la. About eight men, mostly monks, were chosen by the Tibetans to carry Geshe-la's body to the cremation site (according to the astrological calculations, it was important that they had not been born in the year of certain animals). In a somber procession we left the villetta and proceeded to the cremation stupa. As the lamas recited prayers, Geshe-la's body was placed in the stupa on top of a white piece of cotton on which had been drawn a Dharma wheel. Geshe-la was set facing west toward the sea, with his face at the level of a hole in the vase of the stupa had been left for the introduction of the fire puja substances. A tripod of iron was quickly constructed around his body to support the firewood that was then placed in the shape of a tee-pee around his body. Then the fourth side of the vase was closed with bricks and plaster, and the remaining auspicious signs were pasted on it.

The cremation began about 2.30 P.M. when center director Laura Pellati returned from the town hall of Santa Luce with the official document authorizing us to perform the cremation on the Institute's property. The puja itself consisted of a Yamantaka fire puja and so we Westerners were able to recite the puja either in English or Italian, as it was led by Minyak Rinpoche in Tibetan. As the fire was about to be lit, and as it was lit by Geshe Tenkyong (the resident geshe from Padova who was chosen to do this because he did not have any Dharma connection with Geshe-la), a shot of pain ran through all of us disciples – it was as if Geshe-la had died for a third time. Puffs of white smoke swirled up into the sky as the logs began to crackle, followed by orange flames that swirled straight up into the sky. Dagyab Rinpoche was symbolically connected by a white piece of cloth (on which was written the syllable BAM in Tibetan) tied around his body to the end of the funnel (a piece of copper gutter) that fed into the main opening in the cremation stupa. Doctor

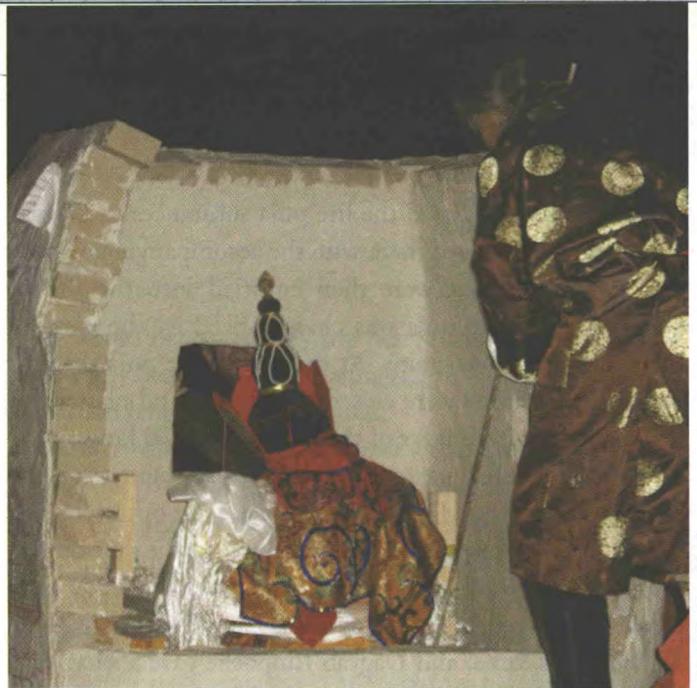


PHOTO: Ven. Joan Nicoll

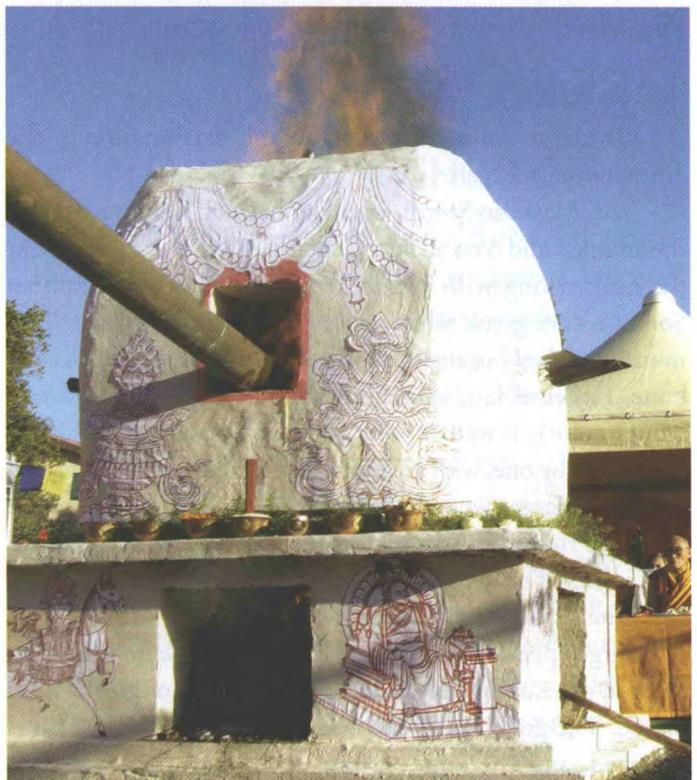


PHOTO: Thomas Schwellberer

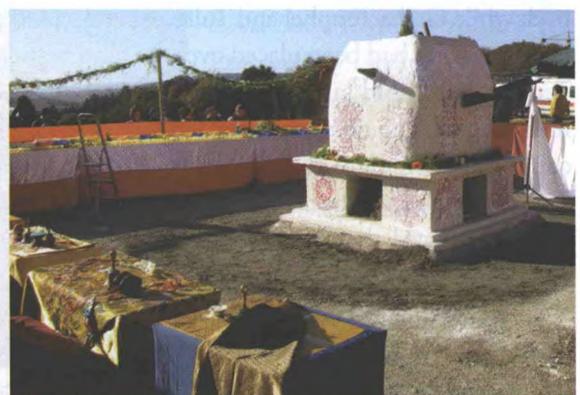
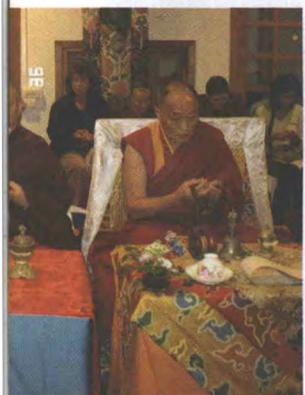


PHOTO: Thomas Schwellberer

Samten and Sixte passed the fire puja substances to Dagyab Rinpoche, who offered them with the accompanying mantras into containers that were then emptied into the fire by Sonam. The entire puja was characterized by the pleasant fragrance of roasted grains. At the end of the puja the four doors in the throne were closed with bricks and plaster and then covered with images of the four directional kings.

The puja lasted just over two hours. As it came to an end the sun began to set. The island of Corsica, far out to sea, was sharply outlined against a sky that seemed as if it were on fire. We circumambulated the stupa and then went to the gomba to prepare for Tsog at 6:00 P.M., as it was Lama Tsongkhapa Day. All the lamas came, and Dagyab Rinpoche gave a short talk, after which Gomo Tulku, on behalf of the Institute, thanked Rinpoche for coming to help us with the cremation ritual.

The relics

On the morning of December 14, examination of the ashes for relics began.

Ven. Massimo Stordi, who had been chosen to represent the monks, and Ven. Laura Coccitto, who was to represent the nuns, along with Geshe Tenzin Tenphel and Thubten Sonam, were given white gloves and a kata to cover their mouths as they began sifting through the ashes for pieces of bone. Pieces of Geshe-la's skull (which were all an unusual orange color), as well as other larger and smaller pieces, were placed one by one, with great care and tenderness, into a crystal vase and a larger wooden bowl. Smaller pieces of bone were separated from the ashes with a sieve. The rest of the ashes, as well as bits of charred wood, were carefully placed into white sacks that Rinchen had made for this purpose.

Larger pieces of blackened singed bone were found on the iron grate upon which Geshe-la's body had originally been placed. The grate (which had been warped by the heat) was removed, and the bones found in the upturned pot were added to the crystal vase. Then everyone was asked to step back while Geshe Tenphel and Tulku Gyatso raised the upside down pot that had been placed over the sand mandala (Geshe Tenphel had told us that it was important that at that moment there be no one nearby with a negative mind as this could cause any signs that were present to disappear). Geshe Tenphel explained that there were signs of mountains in the sand. He traced them out in flour and allowed everyone to have a look at the sand mandala.

The vases containing Geshe-la's bones were carefully set on the high throne that had been set up to receive them in the gomba. As the ritual ablution ceremony began, tea and rice

were offered to the bones, as when a lama is first welcomed to the Institute (this being auspicious for the quick return of Geshe-la's incarnation).

From then on either Tulku Gyatso or Geshe Tenphel performed a daily ablution of the bones. The Tibetans explained to us that it is more common for relic pills to be found in the bones after a period of ablution, than for them to be found in the ashes of the cremation. In any case, Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said that more important than the ablution is that Geshe-la's disciples continue doing pujas and practices, especially every seven days – we have been offering Tsog at the Institute every Tuesday since Geshe-la passed away, up to the 49th day [January 14, 2008], as well as one year later on November 27, 2008.

Since then, although I cannot say that life has returned to "normal," we have gone back to our usual activities and work for the Institute, while continuing to meet each evening to recite the Vajra Cutter Sutra and "Chanting the Names of Manjushri," followed by the prayer for Geshe-la's quick return. It is a sad time for all of us. The Institute is a different place without Geshe-la. However, it is amazing how many people have had dreams of Geshe-la or even visions of him or sensations of his presence since the day he passed away, all of which were characterized by a feeling of peace and joy.

Now we are busy making preparations for the Masters Program. Geshe Tenzin Tenphel says that he has a heavy weight in his chest when he thinks about his new responsibilities, but all of us are convinced he has the strength of mind to carry them well. There are 80-plus students in the residential program, more than 100 in the on-line program. I think that Geshe-la would be pleased with all of us. ☸

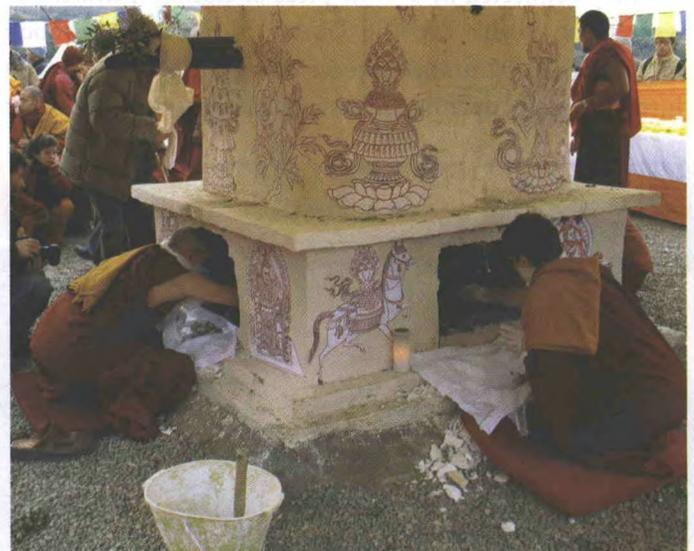


PHOTO: Ven. Joan Nicell

The Life of Geshe Jampa Gyatso

Geshe Jampa Gyatso was born in Dham in north-central Tibet in early 1932, although his passport has his birth date as December 15, 1931. The first of seven children of a Tibetan nomad family, he was named Pelgye by his parents. As an infant he suffered from frequent illnesses that at times even risked his life, but his health dramatically improved when he reached the age of four. During that same year, a visiting Nyingma lama predicted that the boy would leave home at thirteen to become a monk, and would never want for physical nourishment. At the age of seven he received the intermediate renunciate vows from the famed Purchog Jamgon Rinpoche of Sera Je Monastery. Rinpoche, recognized as the manifestation of the future Buddha Maitreya, gave the boy the name 'Jampa Gyatso,' which means 'Ocean of Love.'

Although it wouldn't be until the age of twenty-two that Jampa Gyatso would become a fully ordained monk, at the age of thirteen he did indeed leave home to live and study at the famous Sera Je Monastery outside Lhasa as predicted nine years earlier. His routine for the next three years was strict: rising at four A.M., he would clean the room and make offerings on the altar before making a fire for tea. At first his time was spent mainly in memorizing texts and helping with chores, though he would sometimes 'escape' for a walk to Lhasa or a nearby lake.

At sixteen, Jampa Gyatso began his formal study of Buddhist philosophy with the text called *Collected Topics*, memorizing pages while he did his chores. He attended the various daily assemblies of monks in the main hall and began to learn and practice the art of debate. It was at Sera that Jampa Gyatso met Lama Thubten Yeshe, who would become one of his dearest friends. Jampa Gyatso and Lama Yeshe were ardent debaters, and formed debating groups amongst their friends to practice together. When they weren't in class or debating, Jampa Gyatso and Lama Yeshe, along with another friend, would sneak off to Lama Yeshe's room. There, behind the locked door, they would read the songs and biographies of great meditators.

During this time Jampa Gyatso took ordination as a novice monk with the great master, Tag Rig Dorje Chang, studied the vows, and received lam-rim teachings from the tutor of the Dalai Lama, Trijang Rinpoche. For the next six years he studied the Perfection of Wisdom sutras and continued to receive teachings on the lam-rim. Encouraged by his guru, Geshe Tashi Bum, at the age of twenty-two Jampa Gyatso received full ordination.

Jampa Gyatso's life took a dramatic turn in 1959 when the Chinese occupation of Tibet forced him, like thousands

of other Tibetans, to leave his native land. Leaving his precious texts, sadhanas, and possessions behind, on March 27, 1959, on the advice of his guru, together with Lama Yeshe he joined a party of thirty-five to escape toward Bhutan and eventually on to India. The route was rigorous, and when Jampa Gyatso arrived in Buxa, India, he was very ill. He was immediately admitted to a regional hospital where he remained for five months, then to a larger hospital in Rajasthan where he stayed for almost a year and a half.

After nearly two years of hospitalization, in 1961 Jampa Gyatso returned to his studies, this time at the monastic settlement in Buxa. There he continued with six years of study and debate. Then, in 1967, along with fifty other older monks, Jampa Gyatso entered the newly instituted Buddhist studies program at the Sanskrit University in Varanasi to study toward the degree of Acharya, which he received in 1970. At the request of the Religious Affairs Department of the Tibetan Government, Jampa Gyatso continued his studies at the Lower Tantric College. One year later, after completing extensive examinations at the three monasteries of Sera, Ganden, and Drepung and having debated in Dharamsala at the annual prayer festival in 1972, he became a lharampa geshe, the highest level awarded.

Geshe Jampa Gyatso spent the next several years helping in the preparation of the land that was donated by the Indian government to the Lower Tantric College. He worked in the fields until a request from the Religious Affairs Department petitioned him to leave to take part in a new research program at the Higher Tibetan Institute in Varanasi. With the help of other scholars, Geshe Jampa Gyatso chose to investigate and compare the various interpretations of the aspects of the three knowers (a topic from the Perfection of Wisdom sutras) from the viewpoint of the different philosophical schools. His research at Varanasi culminated in 1976 with a final thesis of 480 pages.

He returned immediately to the Lower Tantric College, where shortly thereafter he received a letter from his old friend, Lama Thubten Yeshe, who asked him to travel to the West to teach. Geshe Jampa Gyatso consented and in 1980, after four years of delays and changes in itinerary, he left for Italy where he has been the principal resident teacher and spiritual guide at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa ever since. ❁

(From Everlasting Rain of Nectar: Purification Practice in Tibetan Buddhism by Geshe Jampa Gyatso. Paperback, published by Wisdom Publications www.wisdompubs.org)



PHOTO: Bruno Vannucchi

The Works of Geshe Jampa Gyatso at Pomaia

By Ven. Joan Nicell

Geshe-la, as he was affectionately known to all, arrived at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Pomaia (Italy), on November 30, 1980, and unexpectedly left us almost exactly twenty-seven years later on November 27, 2007. While the facts about what Geshe-la taught and did in those twenty-seven years are easy to recount, it is not so easy to describe what he did for so many people during that time. However, to begin with, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that he, in all likelihood, gave more hours of teaching in the West than any other Tibetan lama.

In 1983, at the request of Lama Yeshe, he set up a seven-year teacher training program in Sutra and Tantra as well as a twelve-year Geshe Studies Program that, between them, were to include not only commentaries on three of the five great texts studied in Tibetan monastic universities, but also commentaries on the four classes of tantra and the Guhyasamaja

Tantra, as well as on six of the supplementary subjects.

When I first came to the Institute in 1990, Geshe-la had completed his commentary on the *Ornament for Clear Realization* and was teaching the last chapter of the second of the great treatises, Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, to an extremely small group of disciples. In fact often the staff – Geshe-la, George Churinoff (the textual translator), plus the Tibetan-English and English-Italian interpreters – outnumbered the students in the gompas. Upon asking about this sad situation, I was told that it had not always been like this, and that in 1983, there had been many students who had engaged with great enthusiasm in the study of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*. But the years passed and, with many interruptions to the program for a variety of reasons including a lack of translators, the number of students slowly



PHOTO: Sally Ong

Memoir

When Geshe Jampa Gyatso arrived in Italy in 1980 he was already suffering from a severe stomach ulcer. He said that when he was in India he often found himself spitting blood. We had him checked right away, and in fact he was told by one of the most famous surgeons in the country, Professor Staudacher, that he had to be operated on. The doctor, who said that such an ulcer would most probably transform into stomach cancer, really liked Geshe-la, and he scheduled the operation almost immediately. Geshe-la was admitted to a very modern hospital in Milan, but when I arrived the day of the operation I found him still in bed. He said that he had changed his mind and didn't want to be operated on. He had received a sign from his protector, Palden Lhamo, that he shouldn't do it. Early that morning they had brought him a glass with hot tea. Geshe-la drank it and put the glass back on the bed stand. Seconds later, the glass exploded in a million pieces. He also dreamed of Lhamo and made a mo: everything was indicating not to do the operation. The famous doctor was very kind and understanding, so we left for Pomaia.

The amazing part of this story is that his ulcer was perfectly cured, and of course he did not develop any consequence from it. *By Massimo Corona*

dwindled as they experienced difficulties in supporting themselves economically, and either left the Institute or began to work full-time in various positions in the Institute. In spite of this, Geshe-la himself never seemed to become discouraged and continued on to finish commenting on the *Supplement to the Middle Way* in 1991, as well as the *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* in 1997. He once told me that he had been determined to finish teaching these three great treatises because he had promised Lama Yeshe that he would do so.

In the meantime Geshe-la also taught regular weekend courses, not only at the Institute but at many other centers all over Italy, as well as occasionally in Spain and England. On average he would teach three out of four weekends a month, in addition to the regular teachings on Buddhist philosophy from Monday to Friday. Often he would leave on Friday afternoon and return either late Sunday or Monday morning, yet still he would be in the gumpa on Monday evening, teaching us the intricacies of Buddhist philosophy with great patience and thoroughness. When his translator came down with tuberculosis in 1992, Geshe-la began to teach both weekend courses and the *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* in what he himself always called his "broken English." For those of us who had deciphered his "broken English," it was a joy to directly receive the unmistakable Dharma from such a great master.

In 1996, Thubten Pende, the recently appointed director of the new FPMT Education Department, suggested that a revised edition of the Geshe Studies Program be taught by Geshe Jampa Gyatso at the Institute. The following year was spent in organizing and advertising the newly created seven-year Masters Program, complete with the study of the three great treatises as well as one year devoted to an overview of tantra in general and another to the in-depth study of the Guhyasamaja Tantra. In January 1998 Geshe-la began to teach the *Ornament* to the thirty-five students who had come from all over the world to study Buddhist philosophy (in the small Italian village of Pomaia) with a living master who had earned a reputation for his scholarly knowledge as well as his down-to-earth practical approach to Dharma in daily life.

In the fall of 2001, half way through the Masters Program, Geshe-la was diagnosed with lung cancer [see "The Death of Geshe Jampa Gyatso" page 18]. Geshe-la continued to teach the Masters Program, lessening only his schedule of weekend teachings outside the Institute.

Although the Masters Program must have been easier than the early years of the Geshe Studies Program, it was still a pioneer program and fraught with many difficulties for the students and staff alike. However, in spite of this, twenty students completed the entire seven-year program while

another thirty completed one or more subjects. The Masters Program was followed by a two-and-a-half year Basic Program, offered both as a full-time residential program as well as a correspondence course. Geshe-la shared the teaching of the nine core subjects with the Institute's second resident lama, Geshe Tenzin Tenphel, who taught the philosophical subjects, while Geshe-la himself taught the more practice-oriented texts. This time, sixteen people completed the entire residential program while another twenty-nine completed one or more subjects, nineteen completed all nine subjects by correspondence, and another forty-six completed one or more subjects by correspondence. Requested by both His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe-la had accepted to teach another Masters Program beginning in January 2008. Eighty students have been accepted into the program.

Geshe-la was the motivating force behind many Dharma activities. He was directly and indirectly involved in the founding of many Dharma centers in Italy, as well as a monastery and nunnery at the Institute, and more recently the acquisition of twenty acres of land near the Institute for the future construction of a joint monastery and nunnery. In 1986 he was appointed abbot by Lama Zopa Rinpoche of the newly founded Takden Shedrup Dhargye Ling Monastery, and in 1990 was appointed abbot of the newly founded Shenphen Samten Ling Nunnery. In 1994 he was asked by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to be the abbot of Nalanda Monastery in France, where he was invited to teach annually. In addition, he benefited his many disciples in India by paying regular visits over the years to his house in Sera Je Monastery where he was asked by the Tibetan monks to teach various subjects.

In addition to his 480-page thesis on the three exalted knowers, over the years Geshe-la also composed several texts in Tibetan, and a commentary by him on the practice of Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, called *Everlasting Rain of Nectar*, has been published in both English and Italian. Also a commentary on "Minds and Mental Factors" and a collection of short teachings have been published in Italian. Numerous transcripts of his teachings (including his Masters Program and Basic Program teachings) are available as unpublished manuscripts in both English and Italian. The list of teachings given at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa alone number 380 courses – and that does not include the numerous empowerments that he gave, nor the annual tantric retreats that he led.

Geshe-la was involved in all four visits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Institute, as well as the visits of many other important lamas. He oversaw the building of three stupas at the Institute, the filling of a prayer wheel containing 21 billion

Love Talks to Anger

Composed by Geshe Lharam Lobsang Sherab, known as Jampa Gyatso (Ocean of Love), at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Pomaia, Italy in 1987.

Destroyer of the happiness and contentment of all migrating beings, Anger,
 You infiltrate the minds of beings,
 Dividing the harmonious and distancing the disharmonious;
 If you do not behave yourself,
 I, Love, will throw you to the mouth of patience!

I, Anger, am a powerful warrior,
 Destroying in a single instant even the virtues accumulated over many eons
 And agitating body and mind.
 I will definitely destroy you called "Love,"
 Powerless in the minds of all living beings!

You who are called "Anger" are shameless and crazy.
 In whoever's mind you abide, blazing like fire,
 You burn the roots of virtue and create unhappiness.
 Pacifying you with the moisture of love,
 I, Love, am the bestower of happiness and contentment.

I, Anger, am an intrepid hero!
 Abiding in all beings' minds,
 I destroy enemies and protect friends.
 You, Love, are but a sneaky thief!

You and I must compete in strength.
 All the wise will back me, Love.
 Possibly a single brainless one will back you!
 When we two compete, you are certain to be defeated.

So, realizing the faults of hatred, abandon it!
 Recognizing the authenticity of love, practice it.
 The mental factor of hatred acts to harm.
 Love, wishing happiness, acts to benefit.
 Therefore, strive always to cultivate love.
 Understand that hatred is like poison, my friends.

Forgive me for saying whatever advice came to my mind.
 Composed by a vagabond with the name "Love."

mantras, and the transformation of an old and ruined chapel into a beautiful temple dedicated to Chenrezig. He regularly filled and consecrated the many statues brought to him by his disciples. He was involved in everything to do with the Dharma at the Institute, from choosing the color of paint for the interior of altar, to the redecorating of the protector gumpa, to the construction of a celestial mansion for empowerments, to the organizing of elaborate rituals (the blessing of wealth vases, long life pujas, the annual Losar puja, the conferral of empowerments both by him and other lamas, fire pujas...).

In addition, Geshe-la was involved in every major, and many minor, administrative decisions at the Institute and in other Dharma centers (from what to do with mentally-ill guests and volunteers up to the construction of new buildings to provide accommodation for an ever-growing number of students). He attended public conferences, inter-religious dialogues, political encounters, and did whatever he could to support Tibet in its struggle for autonomy. He accepted interviews with reporters and occasionally appeared on television. In spite of his dislike for long meals, he always accepted our invitations to his birthday celebrations, Losar lunches, and Christmas dinners. He learned and respected our Western customs and traditions.

He gave advice and did divinations regarding anything and everything, from which doctors and treatments were the best for a particular illness, to how to find (or keep!) a partner, what to do with troublesome children, a sick parent, a difficult employer, competition from colleagues, whether it was the right moment to change jobs, to buy a new house, to set up one's own business, to take ordination, to have a child... His door was always open to everyone. To everyone he would say "I will pray," but he also actually helped people find a partner, a job, an apartment to rent, a house to buy... He made peace between partners, as well as between parents and children, even telephoning one of the parties involved to talk to them personally.

Geshe-la taught us not to misuse our own or others' belongings, to not waste or throw out what could still be used, to not go running after the latest gadget, whether a cell phone or a car. He showed us how to laugh at ourselves, our silly habits, our shortcomings, our weaknesses. He taught us to accept ourselves for what we are, while striving to become the buddha that is everyone's potential. He taught us with endless patience, repeating time and again how to develop equanimity, love, compassion, patience, concentration, and wisdom. He told us his favorite stories over and over again, checking our memory by always adding a slight variation from the time before. He delighted us with his acting out of the sufferings

of aging (often pointing out the fact that we would have a heart attack if we were suddenly to wake up old with a wrinkled face, gray hair, no teeth, loose skin), as well as the torment of attachment and the way we say "I love you," while meaning "I am attached to you." He shocked us with his outspoken opinions about politics and politicians (both Western and Tibetan). He surprised us with his lack of etiquette, tranquilly cleaning the wax out of his ears, taking out his false teeth to clean them, or scratching his legs or back while we talked to him. He charmed us with his imitations of people, his knowledge of our world, his insight into our lives and problems. He forced us to work on ourselves, on our minds, on our mistaken way of viewing ourselves and our world. He made us be truthful and honest with him and with ourselves. In short, he never put up with any of our usual garbage.

Geshe-la always found a way to communicate with people, whether they were Buddhists or not. He could talk with great expertise on politics, especially Italian politics (he watched the news everyday when he was not in retreat), as well as on world events and sports (especially his favorite Italian sport, soccer). He was curious about everything and everyone, he missed nothing. Often he would interrogate us on some subject, only for us to then find out that he knew far more about the subject than the person he was questioning! He was known for his computer-like memory, not only of the names of the many people he met, but also where they were from and where they lived, what kind of job they had, how many children they had, what their difficulties and problems were...

Geshe-la, on the outside, was always a simple and humble human being. He never showed off his knowledge, and was the first to say that he did not know something or had forgotten something. He had no recipes in his dealings with people: He could be whatever they wanted him to be – a kind parent, a shoulder to cry on, a friend to share problems with, a priest to confess to, a therapist and counselor, a learned scholar, a tantric yogi. In fact he was all these and much more. He left an imprint on everyone who met him, with his joy, his huge smile, and his contagious laughter. He had a forthright way of telling us how things are without any of the usual political correctness. He could be wrathful and tough. He could be as soft and loving as a mother with a newborn child. He was at his ease with everyone and in every situation.

The Institute is a lonely place without Geshe-la, it is as if the very heart of this place has come to a stop. However, all of us here are determined to carry on the many projects he initiated, of which the upcoming Masters Program and the construction of the new monastery are the priorities. May he swiftly return to teach and guide us once again. ☸

A Quickly Written Prayer for the Reincarnation of the
Supreme Virtuous Friend,
Geshe Jampa Gyatso,
Who Was Enriched with the Qualities of Learning,
Purity and Good-heartedness, Sorrowfully Calling Melodious
Sound of the Deva's Great Drum

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Even though numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas exist,
The only guru with whom we have a karmic connection is you, none other.
Like a loving mother, you nourished us with compassion;
Led along the path to enlightenment, we became extremely fortunate ones.

But suddenly you have gone into the sphere of dharmakaya.
Your children disciples, left without a refuge, have fallen into darkness.
Please, do not give up on us but hook us with your compassion –
We request the quick return of your incarnation
Who, like the Dharma King of the three realms, Lama Tsongkhapa,
Benefits the teachings of the Buddha and transmigrating beings.

With your holy Dharma nectar,
Give breath to us tormented transmigratory beings
And quickly take us to the state of great enlightenment.

Due to the blessings of the eminent victorious ones and bodhisattvas,
The truth of infallible dependent arising,
And the power of my pure special attitude taking responsibility,
May the vital points of this pure prayer be accomplished.

Colophon:

The great virtuous friend, the sublime Geshe Jampa Gyatso, benefited the world in general and, for almost half his holy life, the FPMT in particular, as a Dharma teacher at Kopan Monastery (Ogmin Jangchub Choeling) and especially Istituto Lama Tsong Khapa and its branch centers in Italy. As a result, many fortunate people were extremely kindly nourished with the profound and extensive holy Dharma and brought onto the path to enlightenment.

Even more special than all that is what Geshe-la was able to put into practice and complete with respect to the FPMT's seven-year Masters Program, which was arranged by Geshe-la and the great virtuous friend whose name is difficult to mention, Lama Thubten Yeshe. Geshe-la's strong wish was to train students in the extensive teachings of sutra and tantra and this great kindness has been extremely beneficial not only to the students who attended but, since many Masters Program graduates are already teaching at centers, also to many other people who have been able to enjoy the happiness of studying Dharma with them.

Through remembering Geshe-la's kindnesses to his students and especially the wish to give them the opportunity of reciting this prayer for his quick return; the disciples' strong devotion, pure samaya and desire to quickly meet the smiling new face of the new incarnation; and the wish for not only the devoted disciples but also numberless other beings, already born and migrating into this world, to enjoy the fortune of being led along the path to enlightenment by the new incarnation, I thought there may be some benefit in writing this very short, convenient prayer. Therefore I, the ignorant being bearing the name of Thubten Zopa, wrote it in haste, with requests from the heart that this wish may be accomplished.

Written at Kachoe Dechen Ling, Aptos CA, 28 November 2007. Edited by Nick Ribush