

*This section will provide you with stories, articles and reports which highlight the intersections between practicing and preserving Dharma and issues facing the modern world.*

### The Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition: Looking to Mongolia



Lama Zopa Rinpoche outside the Parliament after being awarded the Order of the Polar Star. From left: Khulan Dembereldorj, Director of Enlightening Mind; Dr. Dulmaa Power, COO of FPMT Mongolia; Lama Zopa Rinpoche; Ven. Sangpo, second attendant to Lama Zopa Rinpoche; Ven. Roger Kunsang, CEO of FPMT and main attendant to Rinpoche; Haatanbaatar, Director of UB.

*In the Fall of 2010 Lama Zopa Rinpoche spent one month in Mongolia, engaging with characteristic vigor in a host of inspiring, beneficial and groundbreaking activities. Mandala is pleased to offer you an overview of Rinpoche's recent visit to this fascinating country, details of an historic conference on the future of Mongolian Buddhism, news of Rinpoche receiving an award from the President of Mongolia in recognition of his work to spread and preserve Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia, and information on the many initiatives which Rinpoche has started or plans to begin in this country which is now emerging from sixty years of communism as a potential stronghold for the preservation of the Mahayana tradition.*

#### MONGOLIA AT A CROSSROADS By Ven. Sarah Thresher

Mongolia – the country of Chinggis Khaan – is at a crossroads, an extraordinary time when old and new stand face to face. In the countryside one still sees *gers*<sup>1</sup> dotted over the vast rolling steppes and nomads on horses herding their animals with lassos, but now solar panels and satellite dishes are a common sight outside these timeless dwellings and motorbikes and small blue Korean trucks are parked beside tethered horses. In the over-populated and over-polluted city of Ulaanbaatar – home to half the population – Lexus, Hummers and Toyota Land Cruisers help jam the karaoke-lined streets, and shopping malls with brand name goods are springing up along Peace Avenue in the heart of the city. Seventeen years after the fall of communism, Mongolians are savoring their new wealth and freedom. The money, however, is only in the hands of a few, and there are still people living in holes in the ground, scouring through the rubbish for plastic bottles to sell at half-a-cent, or begging for food with fingers and legs lost to frostbite.

Rinpoche has an obvious and very special connection with Mongolia. Indeed, Jhado Rinpoche, ex-abbot of

Namgyal Monastery, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche are widely recognized in Mongolia as two of the Tibetan lamas most active in helping to fulfill His Holiness the Dalai Lama's wishes of nurturing the revival of Buddhism.

Rinpoche's concern for Mongolia extends beyond teaching Dharma and translating and publishing Dharma texts, he also has a range of social service projects which include feeding the hungry, healing the sick and providing shelter for the homeless [An entire list of Rinpoche's activities in Mongolia can be found on page 41]. But for me, perhaps the most inspiring thing is simply to watch Rinpoche move around the cities and countryside. He is the consummate lama: standing out from the crowd, people are naturally drawn to him with devotion and he endlessly bestows blessings, teachings and advice, giving whatever is needed to whoever asks in an unbroken flow of compassion.

Rinpoche's recent visit began when he was invited as a keynote speaker at a major conference part-sponsored by the government on the future of Mongolia as a country to preserve the Nalanda tradition of Buddhism – sutra and tantra as it is practiced in Tibetan Buddhism [See page 40 for a full report on the conference].

<sup>1</sup> A *ger* is a Mongolian yurt – felt dwellings that can be moved to any place and adapted for summer and winter.

## RINPOCHE IN ERDENET AND DARKHAN

I arrived in Mongolia a week after Rinpoche, so I missed the conference and the dinner with Richard Gere (Mongolians were delighted to see a Hollywood actor on television talking about Buddhism). My first weekend was a trip with Rinpoche to the second and third largest cities in Mongolia – Erdenet and Darkhan– located in northern Mongolia. Rinpoche has activities in both cities and it's a good start, but his wish is to open centers and teach the Dharma *everywhere* in Mongolia – the potential is limitless.

Erdenet is a city based on copper mining. The Mongolian economy is booming right now due to its large mineral resources and the local copper mine decided to build a huge statue of Buddha dominating the townscape, so our first stop was to meet the people in charge who sought Rinpoche's feedback and blessing. It was a timely meeting because Rinpoche wants to build large statues all over Mongolia and part of his trip to Mongolia was taken up locating sites for a 13-story Maitreya Buddha in the heart of Ulaanbaatar, a 12-story Padmasambhava in Erdenzuu, and a 7-story Lama Tsongkhapa in Darkhan. Rinpoche and M.K. Sen, the CEO of FPMT Mongolia who is based in Malaysia, inspected the \$2.5 million copper statue before lunch and a well-attended talk at the Sports Complex in the center of town. This was Rinpoche's first visit to Erdenet and he encouraged everyone to study.

The next day Rinpoche taught in Darkhan where he has a group of very devoted students at the Golden Light Sutra Center. At the main theater complex he taught on emptiness. He encouraged the students to develop and expand their activities and proposed that the largest prayer wheel in Mongolia be constructed in Darkhan, the venue for the next 100 Million Mani Retreat led by Rinpoche in 2012.

## TEACHING AT IDGAA CHODZIN IN ULAANBAATAR

Back in Ulaanbaatar, Rinpoche began a series of teachings at Idгаа Chodzín in the main monastic complex called Ganden in the heart of the city. Idгаа is the monastery Rinpoche has been supporting for many years now. When Rinpoche first visited Mongolia, the few token monks who manned the dilapidated Idгаа temple during the latter communist period offered a mandala and requested Rinpoche's help to build a new temple. With the aid of generous sponsors, Rinpoche was able to do this and the temple was opened for the EEC4 in 2004 with teachings by Rinpoche, Choden Rinpoche and Denma Lochö Rinpoche to Mongolians and students from around the world.



From top: On the road to Erdenet a nomad on horseback herds his animals with a lasso – a timeless and common sight in rural Mongolia. Photo by Ven. Sarah Thresher.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche's image dominates the main intersection at Darkhan City.

For this visit, the temple was again packed and Rinpoche taught and gave transmission of the 21-chapter version of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. This sutra is virtually the bible of Mongolia. In the old days every family had a treasured copy in their *ger* and it was and still is the tradition to invite monks to read it at least once a year. Rinpoche became acquainted with the sutra through a Mongolian doctor and upon first reading it, put it to the crown of his head and made a vow to Chenrezig to spread it throughout the world. During this visit, Rinpoche told us that he wanted to give transmission and teach the sutra in every part of Mongolia.

## FEASTING WITH THE NOMADS

After a week of teachings, Rinpoche left for another trip to the countryside. This time it was not the countryside of the semi-industrialized north, but the nomad provinces of central Mongolia to visit proposed statue sites at Erdenzuu. Erdenzuu is regarded by many as the original monastery or “Samye Ling” of Mongolia. It was built within sight of Chinggis Khaan's old capital Kharkhorum, which was once the center of the largest empire the world has ever seen and is now totally non-existent. Ringed by a wall topped by 108 stupas, Erdenzuu is an iconic image of Mongolian

## ■ Dharma in the MODERN WORLD



Buddhism and was once a thriving center of Buddhist culture. Now, much of it lies in ruins and the few old temples that survive are a museum and tourist attraction.

There is one old Buddhist temple still active within the grounds of Erdenzuu, however, and the abbot came to greet Rinpoche and show him around. After we had visited two temples, monks wearing ceremonial robes, playing instruments and carrying a large yellow parasol arrived to escort Rinpoche in procession to the monastery. He was seated on the main throne, offered a ceremonial mandala, *airag*<sup>2</sup> and feast offerings, and requested to give teachings, a scene that was repeated at every subsequent monastery we visited throughout Mongolia, a country where Rinpoche is recognized throughout as a great lama. Rinpoche talked briefly about the importance of keeping pure vinaya vows and explained that he planned to build a huge Padmasambhava statue at Erdenzuu to ensure the spread of Dharma throughout Mongolia and to protect the country. That night we stayed at a *ger* camp near to Kharkhorum and Rinpoche visited the local governor to discuss his plans. A spectacular site, perfectly located and with outstanding views, was chosen and a day later Rinpoche performed incense puja and prayers to clear obstacles on the top of a lofty hill with views that seemed to reach forever.

While at Erdenzuu, Rinpoche made a side-trip to Tsaigansum, the summer retreat place of the Idгаа monks which is located close to the former summer palace of Kublai Khan immortalized by Coleridge in his poem “Xanadu.” It lies in a valley of hot-springs and we drove two hours on dirt tracks (Mongolian “roads”) to get there. The scenery was spectacular and when we stopped for a break, Rinpoche himself pulled out a camera to take photos! The local head monk, now approaching 80 years old, took ordination

during communist times when it was illegal and was hidden from the authorities by the nomads for 10 years. He drove out 20 kilometers [12.5 miles] to greet Rinpoche, exchange khatas, offer *airag*, and then escort Rinpoche back to the temple. A huge feast had been prepared for Rinpoche in a special *ger*. The table literally overflowed with piled-high plates of nomad dairy delicacies that must have taken days and weeks to prepare alongside expensive fruits and vegetables imported from Ulaanbaatar. I felt like I was back in the Middle Ages at the court of Kublai Khan.

It was amazing to see how news of Rinpoche’s arrival spread in a valley with no cell phones or landlines. There were maybe 100 people when Rinpoche began teaching, but by the end of the talk, another 100-200 had arrived, all dressed in their finest dells and bearing khatas and offerings. One person brought two horses to offer the monastery and Rinpoche blessed them. A similar scene took place the following day when we visited another monastery some 100 kilometers [62 miles] away. Rinpoche was clearly happy to reach out to the many people who had most likely never met a high lama before.

### RETURNING THE LINEAGE OF MOST SECRET HAYAGRIVA

Back in Ulaanbaatar, Rinpoche returned to Idгаа to give the initiation of Most Secret Hayagriva, a special practice of Idгаа and Sera Je. Rinpoche received the lineage of this practice from the Mongolian Geshe Senge Rinpoche. Geshe Senge lived through the years of Chinese occupation in Tibet and became the first abbot of both Sera Je and Sera Me when some religious freedom was once again granted after the death of Mao Tse Tung. He preserved this lineage of Most Secret Hayagriva which came from the Mongolian lama Kalka Damtsig Dorje and then passed it on to a few tulkus from Sera Je in Dharamsala in 1986. For me, it was

<sup>2</sup> Fermented mare’s milk – for Mongolians, their highest offering.



a moving event to witness Rinpoche returning this lineage to the people of Mongolia. Some people in Mongolia, it seems, regard Most Secret Hayagriva as their main deity although commonly it is said that Chenrezig is the patron deity of Tibet, Manjushri of China and Vajrapani of Mongolia. As an interesting coincidence, on the day of the initiation, the “Dalai Lama” of Mongolia, His Eminence the Bogd Gegeen Jetsün Dampa, who has spent his entire life in exile, returned to take up residence in Mongolia having finally been granted Mongolian citizenship. Although old, paralyzed and unable to speak, he has vowed that his next incarnation will be born in Mongolia.

## RECEIVING THE HIGHEST AWARD FROM THE PRESIDENT

For the final week of teachings, Rinpoche completed the transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light* up to chapter 18. A most amazing thing happened on the last day of the transmission. The night before, Rinpoche had given commentary on chapter seven, The Four Guardian Kings, which explains how important and beneficial it is for the rulers of a country to honor the monk who teaches the *Sutra of Golden Light*. The next afternoon, Rinpoche was called to see the President of Mongolia and awarded the Order of the Polar Star, the highest honor that can be awarded to civilians and is rarely given to foreigners, in recognition of his work in spreading and preserving the Mahayana tradition in Mongolia. Only one other Tibetan lama had been awarded the honor in the past and that was Bakula Rinpoche, the lama who first invited Rinpoche to Mongolia and one of the gurus from whom Rinpoche received transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. When Rinpoche arrived at Idгаа that night to complete the transmission, the Polar Star was pinned to the lapel of his *dongka* and he joked that he felt like one of those Mongolians who proudly display the medals they received during

From left page across: Part of the feast offered by nomads to honor Rinpoche at Tstagansuum. Photo by Ven. Sarah Thresher.

On the way to Tstagansuum, Rinpoche himself took photos. Photo by Ven. Sarah Thresher.

Rinpoche and 80-year-old monk arrive at Tstagansuum Monastery. Photo by Ven. Sarah Thresher.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche blesses horses offered to the monastery at Tstagansuum. Photo by Ven. Sarah Thresher.

Rinpoche meeting with the President of Mongolia to receive the Order of the Polar Star. Photo by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

communist times! “I don’t deserve the award I have been given. It is due to the efforts of all the people here,” Rinpoche told us, “Receiving it means that I must work harder and do more to help.” That day, Rinpoche offered the President of Mongolia a copy of the *Sutra of Golden Light*, newly translated into Mongolian and published by FPMT. That night, Rinpoche offered a copy of the sutra to all the people at Idгаа who had taken the transmission, urging them to recite it as much as they could.

As Rinpoche slipped through the airport’s VIP entrance the next day to board the plane, leaving behind a long list of projects and instructions to be followed through, he promised to return to Mongolia again soon. “We are just beginning in Mongolia, so of course it’s not so easy,” Rinpoche told Roy Fraser, director of the social services projects and coordinator of all the countryside centers and activities, “But every single effort made now is so important because it is the foundation for the present and future development of Mongolia – all the good things that will happen in the future. What we are doing now is creating the basis for that. So this is the best offering to Lama Yeshe as well as to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. You are fulfilling His Holinesses’ holy wishes.”

Ven. Sarah is an FPMT Touring Teacher based in the USA and currently traveling and teaching in the countryside of Mongolia.

### THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM By Vesna Wallace



Lama Zopa Rinpoche (middle) was a keynote speaker at the 1st International Conference on Mongolian Buddhism. Photo by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

The First International Conference on Mongolian Buddhism was held on September 26-27, 2010 in Zanabazar Buddhist University, which is housed in Gandan Tegchenling Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. It was co-organized by Gandan Tegchenling Monastery, the center of Mongolian Buddhism, and by The Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture. Conference participants were internationally recognized Buddhist leaders, scholars and activists from traditionally Tibetan Buddhist regions and the United States. The conference received great public attention and media coverage.

The conference was opened with Mongolian and Tibetan ceremonial chanting. In his welcoming speech, the abbot of Gandan Tegchenling Monastery, Khamba Lama Choijamts, pointed out that the purpose of the conference was to identify the challenges to and opportunities for preserving and propagating the Buddhist heritage in contemporary Mongolia. In his concluding remarks, he also expressed Mongolian Buddhists' pride and sense of responsibility in upholding and ensuring the survival of the Nalanda tradition of India. Dr. Gregory Kruglak, the president of The Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture, expressed his belief that Mongolia's traditional Buddhist

culture will prove to be uniquely valuable as Mongolia continues its successful transition to a modern democratic nation in which respect for life and the environment permeates all aspects of society.

The panels held on the first day of the conference covered topics related to the Mongols' contribution to the spread of Buddhism in Asia since the 13th century; the issues relevant to the present and future state of Buddhism in Mongolia such as challenges posed by modernity and aggressive proselytizing activities of foreign missionaries who often ridicule and disparage the Mongolian Buddhist tradition; Buddhism's encounter with modern science; and Buddhist solutions to the current environmental crisis in Mongolia caused by the unregulated mining and the other environmentally hazardous activities of foreign and domestic companies driven by greed.

The second day of the conference began with prayers by H. H. Rizong Rinpoche, Ganden Tripa and ended with recommendations, outcomes, and encouragement expressed by conference participants, with further concluding remarks from Thamtong Rinpoche.

Themes covered during the second day of the conference were encounters between modernity, social action and

traditional Buddhist culture; Buddhism and the role of women in contemporary Mongolian society; Buddhist ethics in business and leadership; and Mongolia's unique Buddhist art and culture.

At the conclusion of the conference, participants

expressed their thoughts on the benefits of holding a conference of this kind and their enthusiasm to continue with such conferences on a regular basis held in different regions in which the Nalanda tradition has been preserved.

Vesna Wallace, who was a speaker at the conference, is a professor of Religious Studies at U.C. Santa Barbara, specializing in the study of Buddhist traditions of South Asia, Tibet and Mongolia. Her most recent translations include *The Kalacakra Tantra: The Chapter on the Individual Together with the Vimalaprabha* and *The Inner Kalacakra Tantra: A Buddhist Tantric View of the Individual*.

## LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN MONGOLIA

### **GANDEN DO NGAG SHEDRUP LING, ULAANBAATAR:**

FPMT's city center located opposite the famous Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in the heart of Ulaanbaatar offers Buddhist classes at different levels and plans to begin teaching the Basic program. The center also has an active children's program, English classes, a popular vegetarian cafe and visits to prisoners. *Director: CH Khatanbaatar. Resident teacher: Ven. Thubten Gyälmo (Glenda Lee)*

**ENLIGHTENING MIND:** The translating and publishing arm of FPMT Mongolia, which has produced a number of high-quality books and recently published a translation of the Sutra of Golden Light in Mongolian. Authentic Dharma texts are crucial to spread information in this vast country. *Director: Khulan Dembereldorj*

### **IDGAA CHOINZINLING MONASTERY MONK'S FOOD**

**FUND:** Rinpoche himself, with the support of Mongolian benefactors, is the main benefactor offering lunch, breakfast, dinner to all the monks at Idgaa.. This allows the monks to be able to live in the monastery rather than having to return home to their families on a daily basis so it helps them protect their vows.

**DOLMA LING NUNNERY:** An FPMT nunnery located in a picturesque old temple in the suburbs of Ulaabaatar. Currently there are nine nuns and plans to extend the rudimentary facilities and build a new nunnery. *Director: Ven. Thubten Gyälmo (Glenda Lee)*

**LAMP OF THE PATH:** The umbrella name for FPMT social service projects serving the homeless, poor and vulnerable members of Mongolian society. It comprises a soup kitchen feeding up to 80 people a day with a shower complex, free health care, medications and health education talks, training and employment in

tailoring for unemployed women and an educational program for children in the *16 Guidelines* for which purposes a kindergarten will soon be constructed. *Gers* are also distributed to the homeless. *Director: Roy Fraser*

**CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM:** Teaches *16 Guidelines* in kindergartens and schools in Darkhan city, and an adult education program based on the *16 Guidelines* for work places and local government departments. It provides summer holiday programs for all ages and camps for at risk teenagers. The program is also developing projects to provide water through well construction and employment based on forestry nurseries and wool manufacturing in various parts of Mongolia.

### **GOLDEN LIGHT SUTRA CENTRE, DARKHAN AND ARYADEVA STUDY GROUP, ERDENET:**

Teaching in the second and third largest cities of Mongolia. *Director: Roy Fraser; Assistant Director and Translator: Badmaa; Teacher: Ven. Sarah Thresher; and Manager: Odgeral*

**LARGE STATUE CONSTRUCTION:** To date: three large statues are planned, a 13-story Maitreya Buddha in the heart of Ulaanbaatar, a 12-story Padmasambhava in Erdenzuu, and a 7-story Lama Tsongkhapa in Darkhan. *CEO: M.K.Sen*

### **MONGOLIA 2012 PILGRIMAGE AND 100 MILLION MANI RETREAT:**

A major event for FPMT Mongolia. The pilgrimage will give participants a chance to tour this fascinating country and also see first-hand the extent of Rinpoche's vision. The Mani Retreat will be led by Rinpoche and will be an opportunity for international students and Mongolians to practice side by side in retreat with Rinpoche's teachings against the backdrop of the stunning Mongolian countryside. *Director: Roy Fraser, Assistant: Ven Sarah*

## A Significant Symbol of Unity

By Khamba Lama Chojjams

*Khamba Lama Chojjams is the abbot of Gandan Tegchenling Monastery, which housed and co-organized the First International Conference on Mongolian Buddhism. The following statements are excerpted from a report on the Mongolia conference which Khamba Lama gave to the 2010 International Conference on Tibetan Buddhism, held October 18-20 in Atlanta, Georgia, at Emory University. Please see page 44 for a report on the Atlanta conference.*



To my mind, this event served as a very significant symbol of the unity of the countries following this sublime tradition, and a sign that we can work together in the future. I am immensely grateful to all the lamas, scholars and social activists who came to take part in this momentous meeting. In particular, let me say how pleased I was that my good friend Richard Gere was able to join us; his presence created tremendous interest among the younger generation in the Buddhadharma...

We Mongolian Buddhists are fortunate today to live in a free and sovereign nation. Therefore we are keenly aware of the special responsibility that we must shoulder. Working with you all, we are prepared, and determined, to remain active in pursuing some of the key ideas that were discussed in Ulaanbaatar. This includes the establishment of a common platform or international organization that represents our shared tradition, and that will allow us to work together to make the Buddhadharma an important instrument in creating a more compassionate world, while at the same time preserving our own distinctive institutions....

Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Khamba Lama Chojjams. Photo by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

## Reflections on Mongolia's Historic Conference

By Lodi Gyari Rinpoche

*Lodi Gyari Rinpoche has served as His Holiness the Dalai Lama's special envoy to Washington, D.C. since 1990 and is also one of the founding members of the Tibetan Youth Congress, the executive chairman of the board of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and chairman of The Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture, among other duties.*

Lama Zopa Rinpoche and other lamas entering the conference hall. Photo © Tenzing Paljor.



**M**y role in the conference was assisting Khamba Lama Choijamts in my capacity as the chairman of The Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture. I have had more than 25 years of relationship with Mongolia. I am honored to have a close personal friendship with many Mongolians including national leaders and especially Khamba Lama Choijamts. As a devout Buddhist, I have always tried to do whatever I can to assist fellow Buddhists whether they are from Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, or for that matter, from any part of the world. One of the reasons which motivate me in this endeavor is the plight of Buddhism in my own country, Tibet.

The main purpose of the conference was to share with a broader Buddhist world the state of Buddhism in Mongolia today. It was felt that reemergence of the Dharma in Mongolia as a vibrant force is something that can inspire fellow Buddhists throughout the world. At the same time, having a gathering of eminent Buddhist teachers and leaders can also further strengthen the Dharma in Mongolia which obviously faces new challenges.

This gathering in Ulaanbaatar has become historically relevant. In addition to discussing the state of Buddhism in Mongolia, the gathering also dealt with broader issues which have long-term bearings on the future of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition which upholds the core of the Nalanda school of thought.

As Buddhists, we always teach about interdependence. It was evident how interdependent we are even within the Buddhist world. For the Buddhadharmas to grow and to benefit sentient beings, it is important that as a first step we support each other within the Buddhist family so that our tradition remains strong and vibrant. With the tragic situation of Buddhism in Tibet, it is even more important that we all make extra effort to make sure that the Dharma remains strong in countries like Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal and in the Himalayan regions where our common tradition flourishes.

Non-Mongolian Buddhists can support the efforts by following the example set by Bakula Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. In my view, the contribution of Bakula Rinpoche to the revival of the Dharma in Mongolia was immense. Similarly, the work by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and FPMT is remarkable. I also hope that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be able to continue to visit Mongolia to confer his blessings. His Holiness' leadership and presence remains the single most important factor in the maintenance of the Mongolian people's strong and unique Buddhist identity.

I'd like to convey my warmest congratulations to Lama Zopa Rinpoche on being conferred upon the highest Mongolian national award to a non-Mongolian for Rinpoche's pioneering work in Mongolia. This decision by the Mongolian government is also reflective of their national character. To acknowledge and appreciate someone's contribution reflects the character of the people. These days, whenever I have an opportunity to speak to the Tibetans, especially the younger generations, I try to encourage and inculcate in them this kind of character. ♦

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

*Help make Lama Zopa Rinpoche's vision for Mongolia a reality by participating in the **Mongolian Pilgrimage and 100 Million Mani Retreat** in Darkhan, Mongolia in 2012. Please stay tuned to [www.mongolia2012.com](http://www.mongolia2012.com) for details as they become available.*

## A MESSAGE TO MANDALA READERS FROM RICHARD GERE:



Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Richard Gere in Mongolia.  
Photo by Ven. Roger Kunsang.

**T**his is a unique time for our Mongolian brothers and sisters. They have begun the very difficult process of shaking off seventy years of often brutal Soviet influence and they are happily rediscovering and re-embracing their extraordinary Buddhist history and culture. It is a very exciting moment. With the discovery of large and valuable deposits of gold, copper, uranium and rare earth elements, they are in the position of being able to control their own destiny and write their own future. I was able to meet with great leaders there recently – leaders of incredible vision, courage and skill, who are committed to Buddhism as a vital part of that future. As one of the two remaining independent countries which embraced the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and made it their own, Mongolia is surely tied to Tibet's destiny as well. It is most important for friends of Mongolia to encourage and support their long-term vision of wisdom and compassion.