

The Retreat of a Lifetime:

Guru Devotion in Australia with Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Story contributors: Helen Patrin, Owen Cole and Adele Hulse. Photos by George Manos.

I don't think that anyone had ever anticipated that our precious guru would show the aspect of a stroke in the middle of the retreat. This became an intense teaching on so many levels for all of us, whether we were physically present at the retreat or back in our daily lives. The importance of making your life meaningful is resonating in my mind and how we really need to put effort into transforming our minds.

— HELEN PATRIN, FPMT AUSTRALIA NATIONAL COORDINATOR

From April 2-30, 2011, nearly 200 mostly-Australian students participated in the retreat of a lifetime with Lama Zopa Rinpoche, co-hosted by FPMT's Atisha Centre, Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery and the Great

a long life puja for Lama Zopa Rinpoche on behalf of all FPMT students. However, as Rinpoche has repeatedly demonstrated, things around the guru do not always unfold according to our plans; the teaching we *need* might not be the teachings we anticipate.

The 2011 Australia retreat will be remembered in many ways. It goes without saying that it will be thought of by many students as the retreat at which Lama Zopa Rinpoche manifested the symptoms of a stroke. But the story of the April retreat reaches much more broadly and deeply than the pivotal event that shook the minds and hearts of students and friends worldwide. It is a moving story of guru devotion, told through the incredible organizational efforts of the retreat sponsors and the intense practice of retreat participants.

For many years, FPMT Australia (FPMTA) has jointly requested Lama Zopa Rinpoche to visit Australia to lead a long retreat. In early May 2010, a message arrived from Rinpoche accepting their latest joint invitation and stating that Atisha Centre was where he would like the one-month retreat to take place in 2011.

The request came as a big surprise to Atisha Centre, who shares land with the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion and Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery [see page 64] on the outskirts of Bendigo, a town of 100,000 residents about 150 kilometers (93 miles) northwest of Melbourne. There was little infrastructure available on the land to host what would no doubt be a large retreat. In fact,



Atisha Centre's resident teacher Geshe Konchok Tsering, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Atisha Centre's director Cherry Rattue, Ven. Kunsang in background

Stupa of Universal Compassion in Bendigo, Australia. The preliminary schedule was straightforward: two weeks of commentary on Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*), the transmission of the rare Rinjung Gyatsa initiations during weeks three and four, and ending with the usual heartfelt offering of auspiciousness:



Guru Rinpoche statue at Great Stupa of Universal Compassion near Bendigo, Australia



the plan had been to request Rinpoche to visit in 2015, when their building projects would be further along and they would be better able to host a gathering of great magnitude. But the three centers – familiar with meeting challenges – agreed to host the teachings and quickly began the massive task of speeding up building projects and organizing a month-long retreat with less than a year to prepare.

Miraculously, and thanks to the blessings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the tireless work of staff and key volunteers, Atisha Centre managed to finish and obtain council approval for their new accommodation block just as students were arriving on April 1. Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery completed their new accommodation block as well, although the electrician was unable to get the power in until the second week of the retreat. Organizers had hoped to complete the lower level of the Great Stupa for the retreat but weren't able to. At the last minute, a large white marquee was erected inside the stupa's massive steel framing for the first two weeks of teachings, providing the participants with protection from the elements.

"Their steady calm gives no indication of the enormous courage they have shown in having this retreat here in the first place," long-time student and Lama Yeshe biographer Adele Hulse said of the Bendigo complex staff and their dedicated band of retreat volunteers. In addition to creating a welcoming retreat environment, the organizers also were able to cover the retreat expenses for the 50 Sangha members who attended.

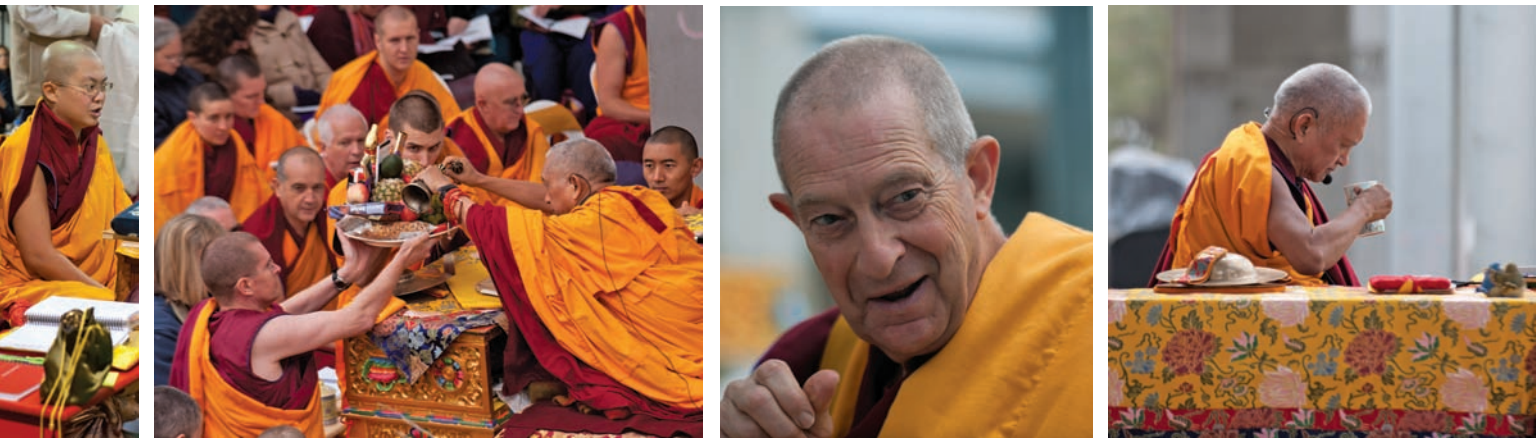
The FPMT organization is no stranger to putting on life-changing retreats. In April 1971, Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave his first ten-day course at Kopan Monastery, then called the Nepal Mahayana Gumpa Centre, attended by about a dozen people. "She pestered me like a mosquito," Rinpoche said, referring to Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche's first Western student Zina Rachevsky, who had the original idea to offer a meditation course to Westerners in Nepal. "She kept on

asking until I began to feel encouraged in my heart and developed a strong wish to do it. I asked Lama Yeshe what he thought. He said, 'Well if you think it will be beneficial, then you do it.' So with Lama's blessing I agreed." Exactly 40 years later, Lama Zopa Rinpoche led the month-long retreat in Bendigo, where he continued to fulfill the heartfelt requests of students for teachings.

As part of a new FPMT tradition initiated three years ago, Rinpoche has established three annual ongoing teachings covering key lineage practices, and it is possible that the commentary on Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* and the 305 Rinjung Gyatsa initiations might become a fourth. Rinpoche has been giving commentary on Lama Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* at the Light of the Path retreat, hosted by the Kadampa Center in North Carolina, USA; *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* commentary, held in Singapore at Amitabha Buddhist Centre; and *Lama Chöpa* commentary at Potowa Center, Indonesia. (Please note: Rinpoche's teaching schedule for the remainder of 2011 has been canceled.)

"With these series of teachings, Rinpoche has set in motion the establishment of the absolute complete and perfect package with which we can spend the rest of our lives engaging," said Merry Colony, FPMT Education Services' director. "FPMT's Media Center and Online Learning Center are preserving them in such a way that one can dive into these most amazing teachings again and again, going deeper and deeper as time allows."

"The teaching for the first two weeks was scheduled to be Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*," reported Owen Cole. "Shantideva's life was explained but we didn't start the actual text. Rather, Rinpoche gave us his pressure-cooker, practical style of teaching to motivate and inspire us to get a move on with our Dharma practice."



From left opp. page: Lama Zopa Rinpoche at the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion construction site; Rinpoche and retreat participants visit the construction site; Ven. Sarah Thresher and Ven. Dechen; Ceremony in front of Guru Rinpoche statue at the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion; Ven. Thubten Gyatso, founder of Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery; Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching in the unfinished Great Stupa of Universal Compassion

During the teachings, Rinpoche repeatedly emphasized the necessity of seeing the guru as Buddha, purification of negativities in the mind (bad karma), and the accumulation of merit (good karma). He reminded students – many baby boomers and long-time practitioners – of this age of degeneration, where many people die of cancer and sickness, many others are threatened by wars, tsunamis and earthquakes, and we cannot tell who will be affected next. He said that even if we have been studying Dharma for 20 years, when problems arise, we often don't remember karma or the teachings of the Buddha.

“Rinpoche offered the most precious, rare, profound heart instructions on guru devotion! These came from Rinpoche's heart to our hearts,” said one long-time student. Rinpoche stressed guru devotion as the path to realizations, success and spontaneous happiness. He also focused on the *Seven Limb Prayer* with large parts of some sessions spent meticulously meditating through it with special emphasis on prostrations and rejoicing.¹ Retreat participants quickly developed a rhythm of doing the Eight Mahayana Precepts and *Lama Chöpa Jorcho*² in the mornings and going to teachings with Rinpoche in the late afternoon and evening.

Canadian nun Ven. Joan Nicell again did the impossible; she transcribed Lama Zopa Rinpoche's words as he taught and had them simultaneously displayed on a screen above his head. “The feedback I've had has always been good,” said Ven. Joan, who also serves as the study program coordinator at Italy's Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa. “New students can have difficulty understanding Rinpoche while older students can become sleepy or distracted.” She also has done simultaneous transcribing at Rinpoche's annual

teachings in Indonesia, Singapore and North Carolina in recent years.

Rinpoche commented early on that the first two weeks of the retreat could be a good time for meetings to be scheduled between sessions. In addition to the FPMTA four-day national meeting [see story on page 55], center directors, spiritual program coordinators, registered teachers, and FPMTA board members all took advantage of this time together and arranged meetings to catch up, share ideas, and strategize plans for the future. Claire Isitt, FPMT Center Services' director, attended the first two weeks in order to connect and work with people during this time. According to FPMTA coordinator Helen Patrin, the most important discussions were those on Sangha welfare, which Rinpoche had strongly advised to take place with so many Sangha members present and with the vital need to take care of aging Sangha.

At the end of the first half of the retreat, the Great Stupa's Guru Rinpoche statue, which had been shrouded in tarpaulins, was uncovered for a ceremony around the statue. Retreatants made many offerings and prayers.

The third and fourth weeks of the Australia retreat were scheduled for the rare Rinjung Gyatso transmission. Ven. Thubten Gyatso had requested this series of tantric empowerments from Rinpoche for the Bendigo centers. “My thought was that these three centers are uniquely suited to helping preserve the Vajrayana tradition,” he said. Rinpoche

¹ The seven limbs are prostrating, making offerings, confession, rejoicing, requesting to turn the Dharma wheel, requesting the teachers to remain in the world and dedicating. This standard structure is common throughout Tibetan Buddhist liturgy.

² Available through The Foundation Store: www.fpmt.org/shop/

had given the initiations before at the Enlightened Experience Celebration of 1982 in India.

The second half of the retreat sessions moved into the gompa at Atisha Centre, which held the smaller group (many students left the retreat following the first half) perfectly. According to Adele Hulse, despite many participants developing heavy colds, which created “liquid and incessant” noise, most attended every session, including early morning prostrations. “Rinpoche’s detailed dedications made it clear that a cold was nothing compared with the opportunity to practice in this lifetime,” she said.

On the morning of April 22, Rinpoche arrived in the gompa at 4:30 A.M. to continue giving Yamantaka initiation. “When he returned that afternoon, he mentioned that he had ‘felt something’ when leaving the gompa that morning, and that now his speech felt different. By the following morning we all knew Rinpoche had suffered a stroke,” Adele recalled. [See page 20 for a complete story on Rinpoche’s health during this period.]

“From then on we just stayed together doing all the practices we were asked to do. It was a wonderful feeling being together and practicing so hard, with the solid ranks of Sangha in front of us, Ven. Dechen’s exquisite chanting, Ven. Steve Carlier’s thundering voice leading the protector practices and Ven. Sarah Thresher’s utterly moving motivations. Ven. Gyatso led detailed lam-rim meditations,” Adele said. “It was

almost as though Rinpoche had planned that we all just sit and practice together.” Two days after Rinpoche went to the hospital, Ven. Robina Courtin, a student of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche since 1976, wrote, “Last night we recited sutras all night. Lights and flowers fill the gompa. In spite of everything, and even though we’re all a bit shell-shocked, I am very glad to be here, practicing with everyone.”

The retreat ended with *Lama Chöpa* and a big tsog held in front of the Guru Rinpoche statue in the now tent-less and spacious Great Stupa. About 250 people attended the puja, which had been recommended by Khadro-la in Dharamsala. Geshe from FPMT centers in Sydney and Melbourne were there. At the end of the puja, Rinpoche asked that a list of all prayers being done worldwide be read, which inspired and consoled retreatants. Atisha’s resident teacher, Geshe Konchok Tsering, spoke to the group. According to Ven. Robina, “He told us that the most important thing is to keep our commitments purely, in particular to be harmonious with each other, remembering that one of our main vows is to not criticize each other – or, as Rinpoche sometimes puts it, not ‘speak the faults’ of others. He also said that holy beings come into this world to benefit others, and he implied that if people don’t practice, they won’t stay. There’s the teaching for us.”

What If It Is All True:

A Retreatant Reflects on the Lessons of a Lifetime

By Renate Ogilvie. Photos by George Manos.

Benidigo was Gold Rush territory. One hundred fifty years ago, a huge throng was driven by greed and excitement to this harsh and dry part of Australia. A sign at the entrance of Atisha Centre acknowledges that we are on aboriginal land.

Most of the retreatants stay in “Tent City” like the early prospectors. There are kangaroos in the twilight hours, poisonous snakes lurk in the bush, and strange little creepy crawlies live in the showers. It’s a very Aussie retreat, and many students have come from far away – Perth, New Zealand, London and the United States. Atisha Centre itself is a triumph of devotion and effort over the harshness of the terrain.

On the gompa wall are old photographs of bearded young men with ’70s hairstyles, and young women in nostalgic clothes building the early version of the center. Smiles. Some robes. A few children. It looks bucolic, but must have been backbreaking work.

And here they are: a selection of these early Buddhist pioneers among the more recent students – grey-haired and cool, Dharma savvy. Over lunch we hear tales of living in a tree stump at Chenrezig Institute, evading the Nepalese border control, the early days in Kathmandu and Dharamsala.

Towering above everything is the steel construction of the Great Stupa. It is huge, amazing. Even unfinished

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Comments by Retreat Participants

Photos by George Manos



Bob Sharples, a Buddhist since 1977, student at Tara Institute, Melbourne, Australia

The power of Rinpoche is extraordinary. He hits you between the eyes. I got a renewed commitment and clarity to my practice and a clearer understanding of what I'm going to do over the next 10-15 years, if I live that long.



Len Warren, a Buddhist for 10 years and student at Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, Perth, Australia

I had watched Rinpoche on video and had trouble understanding what he said and didn't know if I was up to the long hours of teaching. However, I could understand him on the retreat and there is a power to his teachings which has strengthened a lot of my beliefs and gives me the energy to keep going and to go deeper. I'm soooo happy that I attended the retreat.



Ven. Youdan, ordained seven years and lives at Chandrakirti Centre, New Zealand

I got so much out of the course, it's incredible. Rinpoche is so dynamic and so alive in conveying the teachings. It makes me totally want to be just like him.



Vicki Taylor, a Buddhist for 35 years from Sydney, Australia

I can't put into words the improvement in my mind under the influence of Rinpoche. He put immense time and energy at the beginning of sessions into the preparation where I normally rush the practice. Rinpoche slowed things down so it became a powerful practice. The way he does the *Seven Limb Prayer* is profoundly moving and completely transforms your mind.

Three Weeks of Fluff Stuffing



Robyn, Ronda and Brian stuffing cushions at Atisha Centre. Photo by Marilyn Chambers.

In addition to renting 40 accommodation tents plus toilets and showers for retreat participants' comfort, retreat organizers (led by Sally Dudgeon) made sure students had something soft to sit on and an appropriate place

to set their Dharma materials. Atisha Centre secretary Marilyn Chambers headed a team of volunteers who spent three weeks filling 153 mats and 200 cushions with 33 bales of polyester insulation bats made from recycled plastic bottles and two 100-kilogram (220-pound) bales of synthetic yarn tops. The beautifully made blue covers came from Mongolia.

"The sewing team was Hannelore and Marilyn as the mainstays over three weeks, with Julie, Alison, Cilla and Ruby all giving us a couple of days each," Atisha Centre director Cherry Rattue



Liam and the jig. Photo by Marilyn Chambers.

wrote. "Liam [Chambers, Atisha Centre's spiritual program coordinator] invented a 'jig' to help us cut the bats into the right shape to fit the mats. It took two days to cut the bats to size with a power saw. Each cut created a flurry of loose fluff, hence our working title of 'Liam and the fluff stuffers.' Luckily we had an uncarpeted room in the new accommodation building to make the mess in. When the cushions arrived, Annette, Brian, Birgitta, Robyn and Ronda joined in to help the stuffing team. Some of us took bags of stuffing and cushions home too and filled our houses with fluff as we spent evenings stuffing."

Cherry also offered "heartfelt thanks" to FPMT Australia's smallest study group, Shen Phen Ling, who, with just eight members, donated 108 red puja tables for the retreat and helped deliver bales of stuffing to Atisha Centre.



From left: Tent City at Atisha Centre; Lama Zopa Rinpoche with Guru Rinpoche statue at Great Stupa of Universal Compassion

it is awe inspiring. This is history in the making, akin to one of the great cathedrals of Europe being built. What an explosion of merit and good karma, an inspiration for generations to come.

In one corner of the Great Stupa is the stupendous statue of Padmasambhava [Guru Rinpoche], now completely gilded by Rinpoche's Chinese translator and long-time student, Huang Chen Roo. Guru Rinpoche sits in the posture of royal ease, his eyes wide open, looking at suchness. The impact is immense.

What if it is all true? My steadily eroding Western skepticism – feeling the Dharma, and more specifically, the Guru grinding me down, exposing the root of all misery: self cherishing. I am longing for his teachings, welcoming the long night sessions that are to come, with my legs, six decades old, aching. Time is passing. Water bottle empty at night, clean socks diminishing, the strong mints almost gone, ten days to my birthday, then nine, then eight. Stars on the way to the evening session, all constellations seemingly the same but always moving, the world never ever at rest.

The Guru is Buddha, and he is soaking me with his presence. His teachings leave me unhinged, drunk, babbling the first night, speechless the next. I understand once more that there is no security except in his mandala.

In his limitless kindness the Guru-Buddha manifests in his earthly body so I can actually see and hear him teach

the infinitely soft, indestructible method of bodhichitta mindfulness. He shouts: Empty! Merely labeled! Facts fall away and are revealed to be nothing but intense hallucinations. I'm riding high. I love it. There seems to be a definite shift. I'm ready for many more years of Rinpoche's teachings.

But then: the Guru's most powerful, most shocking manifestation.... His illness is a sign of what is to come. Impermanence is no longer just an aesthetic experience.

I flee to my tent and dissolve into self-cherishing. I plead with my Guru not to abandon me, let water flow uphill and defeat illness and Yama, just for me. It is a dark hour.

But this too passes. The Guru is Buddha. The Guru is perfect. We witness the laughing and joking Guru in the Stroke Unit, praying for his fellow patients, taking their suffering on himself, a buddha in his most compassionate manifestation.

Yes, it is all true. ♦

Please see page 20 for an extensive article covering the unfolding of Rinpoche's health during and following the Australia retreat.

Streaming video teachings and a transcript from the Australia retreat are now available for free on the FPMT Online Learning Center at <http://onlinelearning.fpmt.org> under "Bodhicaryavatara commentary." Please see the Site User Guide for instructions on how to create an account to access the Online Learning Center and enroll in this course.

When the Guru Manifests a Stroke

Ordinary Appearances and Extraordinary Teachings from Lama Zopa Rinpoche

On Friday, April 22, Ven. Roger Kunsang, attendant to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and FPMT CEO, sent an unexpected request to the FPMT community. The brief but urgent sounding message asked students to recite the mantras of long life deities such as White Tara and Amitayus for Rinpoche's health and long life and for centers to "organize extensive Medicine Buddha puja or Medicine Buddha practice with many offerings and strong prayers for Rinpoche's health and long life." The requests came on the "important advice" of Khadro-la, (an extraordinary Tibetan woman who is widely regarded as a dakini, an oracle, and certainly someone special by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dargi Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche). Ven. Roger ended his message thanking everyone for their understanding, help and support, concluding that this was "very important at this time."

While not uncommon for Ven. Roger to send out periodic requests for prayers and practices for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's health, this message was unusual. After all, Rinpoche was in the middle of teaching a one-month retreat in Bendigo, Australia, and by all accounts, the retreat was surging along with not a moment to spare for general updates from Ven. Roger. Students around the world took a collective breath of concern, got out their Medicine Buddha puja texts, recited mantras, organized group pujas, and waited with bated breath for more news.

Ven. Roger's next update came the following day: "Lama Zopa Rinpoche has been admitted to hospital, the medical staff have confirmed that Rinpoche has had a stroke and temporally lost some of the movement of his right side and his speech is impaired." With these words arrived the unwelcomed reality that the FPMT community's precious guru, object of refuge for countless beings



Lama Zopa Rinpoche in California, USA, February 2011. Photo by Dionne Wilson.

suffering in innumerable ways, kinder than all the buddhas of the three times, was manifesting a serious obstacle to his health and long life.

Ven. Roger reiterated the recommended prayers and practices from the day before, and remarked that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been informed of Rinpoche's condition and that numerous high lamas close to Lama Zopa Rinpoche as well as Kopan Monastery had already begun doing pujas. Within hours of the startling news concerning the severity of Rinpoche's condition, messages via center listservs, websites, as well as individual student's Facebook pages confirmed that the collective effort would not be small. Pujas

were organized, group prayers initiated, mantras undertaken, animal liberations planned, vows to practice harmony and keep personal commitments were revitalized, service of all variety was offered to Rinpoche and his entourage; and, with fervor, dedication, and heavy but open hearts the FPMT community did what it does best ... it went to work.

Over the following day, a picture emerged of what happened. According to Ven. Roger, in the middle of the Yamantaka initiation, Rinpoche felt, "some sensation on the left side of his head as he left the gompa, then something more on the walk back to his room. Rinpoche said it was 'like something was trying to enter him.'"

Ven. Joan Nicell, who transcribes Rinpoche's teachings in real time during his retreats, reported, "At the beginning of the afternoon session at 3:30 P.M., as Rinpoche started to talk, I thought the audio wasn't adjusted right, as I was having difficulty understanding him. Then, Rinpoche, himself, paused in mid-sentence, with a big smile on his face, to say, 'Do you see the difference in my speech? You can hear it? Do you notice my speech changed? My speaking, do you see a change? That happened when I went out. This morning,

Top: Students greeting Lama Zopa Rinpoche as he arrives to teach the one-month retreat in Bendigo, Australia. Photo by George Manos.

Below: Ven. Roger Kunsang with Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the grounds of Atisha Centre, Australia, April 2011, prior to Rinpoche's manifesting a stroke. Photo by George Manos.



when I went out, I felt that outside. Maybe I shouldn't have gone outside. That's good for the self-cherishing thought, for the selfish mind. It is the opponent to harm, to destroy the self-cherishing thought.' However, after a couple of minutes, Rinpoche started to speak [somewhat] more normally, and continued with the preparation for the Yamantaka initiation for the next three hours."

Ven. Roger later explained, "When Rinpoche arrived back in his room from the session of Yamantaka, it was clear that something wasn't right but Rinpoche was determined to continue the initiation. It was about 8:00 P.M. and Rinpoche was determined to continue. I was quite concerned so there were several calls to Dharamsala discussing with Khadro-la what would be best. When Rinpoche saw that it was difficult to continue the initiation he wanted to have appointments with students. After some back and forth Rinpoche gave up on that which was a relief as it seemed very obvious that Rinpoche really wasn't well."

By the next morning, Rinpoche had lost some use of the right side of his body and his speech was slurred. Ven. Roger arranged to take Rinpoche to the hospital. After nine hours of waiting, tests and medication, Rinpoche was assigned a bed in the men's ward. No private rooms were available and the hospital was short of staff due to it being Easter weekend.

It quickly became apparent that Rinpoche would not physically be able to continue teaching for quite some time when on April 24 Rinpoche's scheduled upcoming teachings in Indonesia and his return to Lawudo in Nepal were canceled.

On April 25, the day after Easter, a CAT scan showed no bleeding or clot in the brain – a huge relief for thousands of increasingly anxious students. Two days later, the doctors at Rinpoche's hospital discouraged visitors for some time, citing Rinpoche's obvious fatigue and warning that future physiotherapy would be very tiring.

As the days unfolded, updates and amended practice advice came through to the FPMT community from Ven.



From left: The first photo of Lama Zopa Rinpoche to appear to the community, after Rinpoche's admittance to the hospital; Ven. Holly Ansett helps Rinpoche put his hands in the mudra of prostration from his hospital bed while an exhausted Ven. Roger grabs a few minutes of sleep.

Roger, Khadro-la and Choden Rinpoche advised a new, specific set of practices for student to engage in: Medicine Buddha puja with extensive offerings, as many sessions of *Four-Mandala Ritual to Chittamani Tara* as possible, as many recitations of Most Secret Hayagriva mantra with supplication as possible, and continual recitation of White Tara mantra with Lama Zopa Rinpoche's name included. Students attending the still-in-progress retreat in Australia began to send reports, keeping their fellow students updated on what it was like to carry on the retreat without their precious guide.

Ven. Roger reflected in his blog, *Life on the Road with Lama Zopa Rinpoche*, "I think Rinpoche is quite exhausted. It is like after 40 years nonstop on the road ... it is all catching up! Now Rinpoche is sleeping through the night! BUT! Give him a chance.... At one stage (in the middle of this) Rinpoche wanted to go back to the course (150 people are still doing the retreat) and sit on the throne and finish the Yamantaka initiation. He typed on the iPad: 'I can sit on the throne, Geshe-la can read the initiation text, then people think they are getting the initiation from me!' I really don't know physically how that could have worked, but Rinpoche wanted to try and obviously had been thinking of how he could manage it. It never happened because when the doctor heard this she said, 'NO. WAY.'"

At the end of April, Rinpoche had what the doctors termed, "a continuation of the stroke," which can be a common occurrence with stroke patients. Ven. Roger explained that this is one of the main reasons why Rinpoche needed to

remain in the hospital, to "gain control over the blood sugar levels and blood pressure, what are seen to be the conditions for [another] stroke if they are not strictly controlled."

Students wondered what Rinpoche looked like and how his holy speech had been affected. The first photo and videos of Rinpoche were released on April 30. In the powerful photo Rinpoche blesses his lunch. The caption read: "Lama Zopa Rinpoche in hospital, with great difficulty putting hands in mudra of prostration during extensive offering practice."

In the videos, although Rinpoche appears clearly exhausted and his speech severely slurred, he maintains his characteristic concern for practicing and remains remarkably joyful. [Videos of Rinpoche in the hospital can be found on FPMT's YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/user/fpmtinc.]

Rinpoche's first written message to the public was released on May 3. The note said: "I am enjoying the hotel, 5 or 10 star hotel." Rinpoche's signature was large and recognizable with a shakily drawn smiling face in the "o." He used his left hand to write it because his right arm remained paralyzed.

Rinpoche continued with physiotherapy. On May 13, Ven. Roger happily reported, "Rinpoche's sugar levels are improving. He is now on insulin. Blood pressure is now close to normal. Rinpoche still gets fatigued quickly which doctors say is normal in this kind of situation, so a lot of rest is required."

On May 14, Ven. Roger confided to his blog, "We have been here now six weeks (Bendigo, Australia). Maybe this is the longest [stay] in one place for many years. Each day



From left: Ven. Roger at Rinpoche's side in the hospital; Rinpoche writes messages from his hospital bed. Below: Rinpoche's first message: "I am enjoying the hotel, 5 or 10 star hotel." Photos by Ven. Holly Ansett.

over the last week Rinpoche seems to be getting noticeably better. Now three weeks in the hospital, life each day here is busy. You wouldn't think it, but it is! We take on a lot of the work the staff normally do so that Rinpoche is more comfortable. A small Dharma team (Ven. Kunsang, Ven. Ailsa and Gail) cook outside the hospital (at the monastery) and bring the food in three times a day; I stay 24 hours and have a comfortable niche on the floor beside Rinpoche; Ven. Sangpo and Ven. Holly are here 18 hours a day."

Ven. Roger wrote that through this entire experience, "Rinpoche's attitude hasn't changed at all." Rinpoche continued to send messages to friends and students from his hospital bed despite the fatigue and heavy schedule of therapies.

In one message, Rinpoche said:

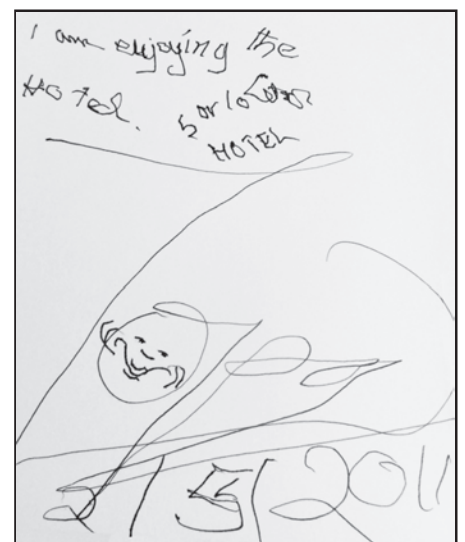
"This is a rare opportunity to be in the hospital. I am very lazy but pray to take on the suffering of all sentient beings, especially the people who have diabetes, blood pressure and paralysis, so it is an incredible opportunity...."

"I realize that being in hospital I can't lift at the moment [referring to his arm to make prostration], [can't maintain] altar [gestures to altar], can't use candles [in the] hospital, [can't make] water bowls. I realized that worms don't have any legs or hands, and their body is long [so they cannot practice], so I realized that so much unbelievable suffering [comes] for people who have two arms and no opportunity to make prostrations [which is] unbelievable, most unbelievable easy [way] to create the cause of enlightenment, highest success of life, wow, wow, wow."

According to Ven. Roger, "Rinpoche sent a message to one high lama: 'This is my past negative karma ripening now, may it be the cause of the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.' That high lama replied, 'Rinpoche is not experiencing negative karma but has taken on a big obstacle for the world of Tibetan Buddhism.'"

Students were delighted to receive a short note from Ven. Roger on May 18: "Lama Zopa Rinpoche has been discharged from the hospital and is now resting comfortably in a private home nearby the hospital." Rinpoche's recovery continues with physiotherapy, Western as well as Chinese treatments and Khadro-la's advice and assistance. Ven. Roger ended his message thanking everyone again for "the support and prayers by so many."

The number of prayers and practices reported by students and supporters around the world continues to grow as do the sincere and heartfelt requests for Rinpoche to please remain in order to continue teaching and to get well and live long for the benefit of all.



Nalanda's Amazing Offering

By Ven. Tenzin Yonten, spiritual program coordinator of Nalanda Monastery

It began with a very quick email from Ven. Holly. The first lines were, "... extremely important and urgent, Rinpoche requests all Nalanda monks to make 7,000 offerings to Namgyälma, and recite 1,000 long Namgyälma mantras.... Rinpoche is hardly able to speak or move ... please give this the highest priority." Ven.

Holly explained that Rinpoche advised, "Doing this practice you receive long life free from sickness. It purifies all obscurations, liberation from hell and so forth, all lower realms. If an animal hears this mantra, then it is its last rebirth as an animal, this mantra stops rebirth in lower realms, and after death you get reborn in Amitabha pure land. It will be last rebirth in the womb. You will get reborn in the heart of a lotus."

From that moment on was a blur of activity, and through the kindness of Geshe Sonam Ngodup, we received the transmission of the long Namgyälma mantra that evening.

As monks searched for 5,000 plastic cups from Lavour's two supermarkets and another car was dispatched to IKEA to fill a shopping cart with tea lights, there were monks on their knees in the monastery grounds picking daisies for the 1,000 flower offerings, and others dreaming up ingenious methods for assembling make-do trellis tables from scaffolding planks and white sheets.

There were creative thinkers working on ways of beautifully arranging kilo upon kilo of every kind of brightly colored candy, the most perfect and delicious fruits, and strings and nets of fairy lights of every color to hang from anything hang-able, as a small army of people assembled the water offerings by dancing a



5,000 plastic cups were filled with offerings.
Photo courtesy of Nalanda Monastery.

sort of ballet around each other to prevent knocks and spills.

But, where to sit? A gompa filled to the brim with beautiful offerings of every sort now had to accommodate 28 monks, as well as monastery volunteers and other devoted students that came to lend a hand. Somehow, and with some careful mind-

fulness, we managed to squeeze everyone in the spaces between all the tables for the practice and mantra recitation to begin.

In addition to the three daily sessions of Namgyälma, there have been pujas such as *Lama Chöpa*, *Ganden Lha Gyäma* [*Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga*], Medicine Buddha, Chittamani Tara and Sixteen Arhats as well as animal liberation practices to save many fish and countless worms.

Many of the monks have completed the 1,000 long Namgyälma mantras as requested. We plan to reset some large tables of offerings once all the monks have returned to Nalanda (by the first week of June), and we will continue with three sessions a day until Rinpoche's instructions are fulfilled.

Rinpoche, from the bottom our hearts, thank you so very much for giving us so much joy in making these offerings for your healthy, long and prosperous life. All of Nalanda's monks are continuing the recitation and make the most heartfelt dedications so we may create the causes for you to always remain as the perfect and pure example for numberless sentient beings.

Ven. Holly reports that, "Rinpoche is extremely happy with what Nalanda has done. He commented a number of times that possibly they are the only Westerners who have recited the long Namgyälma mantra 1,000 times."

On May 4, the FPMT Board of Directors wrote a heartfelt letter and request to Rinpoche, on behalf of all students around the world. The entire letter can be found at www.mandalamagazine.org, as part of this issue's featured online content. We conclude here with the final moving paragraphs and join in a collective and sincere request to our most kind, incomparable, Lama Zopa Rinpoche.



Most Holy Guru, whose nature is inseparable from the victorious all-pervading Vajradhara. You who are master possessor of the complete teaching lineage of the Buddha, Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche:

... **Your deed of manifesting** the aspect of having a stroke has made tens of thousands of your followers and well-wishers around the globe apply themselves so assiduously in doing so many kinds of practices: recitations, pujas, lights offering and liberating animals, and so on.

These activities have been, and continue to be, dedicated toward your speedy recovery and long and healthy life. Your showing the aspect of illness has in turn benefited sentient beings even more as this compassionate deed of yours has actually spurred us lazy beings of this degenerate time to practice even more. But truly this

manifestation is the very last thing in the world we, the worthless disciples, wish to encounter. We have no wish to encounter this manifestation for even a split second! So now, please, please, for the sake of us all, withdraw from showing this aspect and we as FPMT Board Members will follow all your advice, instructions, and practice and we will strive even more diligently to protect, guide and uphold the FPMT organization the best we can.

By the power of the prayers of all your gurus, all the Sangha in the great monasteries, your disciples around the globe, the Three Jewels, and infallible dependent-arising, our minds filled with devotion and aspiration, we sincerely request and pray: Please withdraw the aspect of showing illness and resume your true aspect of vajra body for the sake of all your disciples. Without you, our minds are so weak and feeble like newly-born babies without parents, the day without sun, the night without the moon and stars, and fish without water.

Please, please, please most Holy Guru, the source of our temporal and ultimate happiness, live long until all beings' sufferings end. ♦

Please see page 10 for advice from Ven. Choden Rinpoche and Ven. Roger Kunsang as well as compiled resources from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive regarding how to view the guru manifesting illness.

To keep up to date on all official reports, announcements and requests concerning Lama Zopa Rinpoche's health, please subscribe to "Rinpoche's Health – Official Updates and Practices" at www.fpmt.org.

Ven. Roger Kunsang's blog, "Life on the Road with Lama Zopa Rinpoche" can be found at www.mandalamagazine.org.