

## Rejoice for the Wonderful Food Fund! A Devotional Tear Dropped in the Rice Bowl

*By Geshe Thubten Jinpa*

**Received May 2012:** The sun is at its brightest at 9 a.m., but a soft breeze blows making the morning chilly. Hundreds of monks in their maroon robes begin to flow in, clutching a square cushion in their right hands, like someone going to the office would carry a briefcase, and a plate in their left hands. Soon the debate courtyard is full with thousands of them and before long the courtyard turns into a huge garden of red roses.

After an hour-and-a-half long prayer session, everyone scatters all over the courtyard, each looking for a debate partner. In less than a minute the whole yard is covered with monks debating in pairs.

Thousands of hands clapping together with loud voices of Dharma discussion makes it sound like the middle of India's busiest train station. Everyone seems so enthusiastic and absorbed in debate. Amazed and transfixed by the atmosphere around me, I hardly notice that time is running. It is 11:30 a.m. when the disciplinary master signals the conclusion of the morning session.

The senior monks gradually move towards the dining hall but so many other junior ones are still fully engaged in the high fever of debate, looking so determined to prove their side of the argument.

By the time I find my seat in the dining room, many senior monks have taken theirs in the front rows as more monks make their way into the dining room. Soon the hall is filled with thousands of monks and a deep voice far in front begins to roar. I realize it is the prayer from Lama Tsongkhapa's "Songs of Experience," with its repeated verse: "I, the practitioner has practiced in this way. You the seeker of liberation, practice in the same way."

As I listen to this prayer, my eyes roll over the many monks sitting around me. All of them look like they are in their thirties and forties, mostly quite skinny, the maroon of their robes a little faded, heads fully shaved, yet looking glorious sitting so calmly in concentration, perhaps contemplating the words of the prayer. Then hundreds of junior monks rush in with basins, buckets and kettles of food. It is an international marathon with Indians, Europeans, Americans, Chinese and Koreans among the procession serving the meal.

I am totally thrilled by this spectacular atmosphere, but as the serving of food begins my heart suddenly fills with a strange mixture of joy and sentiment. I am thrown back down memory lane to when Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche was emphasizing so much about the Sera Je Food Fund project, when he explained to every benefactor about its importance, and the time he put his palms together to appeal for support for the project. I recall Rinpoche working so hard to start this project and all the time and effort he took to make it run smoothly.

A part of my mind is rejoicing, “How wonderful the job Rinpoche has done! How kind he is. What an abundance of merit he let so many people create!” I cannot recall every thought that arose at that moment but it is all so emotional, hearing the voice reciting Lama Tsongkhapa’s inspirational prayer above these thoughts as my heart is moved more than ever with rejoicing and admiration. Then my heart explodes with extraordinary faith and tears begin to roll down my cheeks, silently slipping under my spectacles. I come to realize only when a drop falls into my rice bowl. By then my voice has turned soft and I find myself crying uncontrollably. Perhaps people around me start to notice.

By now, rice, dhal and a piece of fruit is served to each monk in the hall and food offering prayers begin. I sense unconditional appreciation and profound dedication in every monk throughout the offering prayer. Everyone begins to eat. For me, it is the most delicious dhal and rice I ever tasted. Silence is unbroken while thousands of monks empty their bowls, but I cannot finish my share as the feeling of admiration for my guru’s extraordinary deed makes me constantly emotional.

Soon with dedication prayers completed, all the monks leave their seats making way for the juniors to clean the place. I have no choice but to leave with the remaining food left in my bowl. As I walk out I notice a group of old monks, mostly in their seventies and eighties, some crippled with stick in right hand and a bowl in the left.

I go up to one of them whom I know and ask why he needs to come all the way when he can send one of his young disciples to fetch food for him.

He gives me a toothless smile and answers: Eating in the Sangha assembly means not only sharing the food but sharing our merit by making it greater, making our merit stronger, and dedicating for the happiness of all sentient beings. It is also to rejoice in the great deeds of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and all the benefactors of the Food Fund. He puts his palms together every time the name of my guru was mentioned. He keeps saying that coming to the Sangha assembly is never troublesome to him when he thinks of what wonderful karma has been created by those who have made this food offering possible.

I feel so much joy to see for myself the immense benefits that Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and his disciples worldwide have brought to the entire Sangha assembly of Sera Je Monastery through the Food Fund Project!

*Written by Geshe Thubten Jinpa, November 28, 2011. Edited by Ven. Tenzin Tsultrim April 4, 2012. Gently edited for inclusion here on the [Sera Je Food Fund Latest News blog](#).*