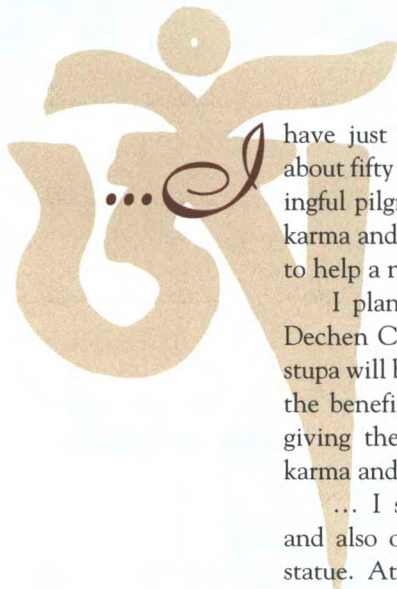




from  
LAMA ZOPA'S  
letter to His Holiness the  
DALAI LAMA



... I have just returned from Tibet, with a group of about fifty Westerners. I think it was quite a meaningful pilgrimage; we were able to purify negative karma and create a lot of merit. We were also able to help a number of monasteries and nunneries.

I plan to build a large stupa in the area of Dechen Chu, the birthplace of Lama Yeshe. The stupa will be in memory of Lama Yeshe and also for the benefit of the local villagers, young and old, giving them the opportunity to purify negative karma and plant the seed of enlightenment ...

... I sponsored a two-story Maitreya statue and also offered enough gold leaf for the entire statue. At Reting Monastery we also made the arrangement to offer gold on all the special days of the year to the ancient statue that they have there called Sangdu Jampal Dorje. This statue, according to the text they have, was made and exists for the benefit of Tibet ...

... We are sponsoring sixty nuns at the site of Kadampa Geshe Potawa's monastery to do eight Nyung Nays, and we hope we can do this on an ongoing basis. My hope is to create a fund for many of the nunneries at these holy places of the Kadampa geshes. The fund would then sponsor the nuns to collectively do annual retreats of 100 million *manis*, and also sponsor a geshe/lama who can teach lam-rim to them, the heart of Buddhism; only in this way can they know how to practice Dharma. The geshe would teach them in a class situation to make sure that they understood properly. In this way, they can have a better life living in the nunnery with a good understanding of Dharma.

I found in this visit to Tibet that things are much stricter than when I visited in 1986 and 1987 (that was just before the riots). Everywhere we went, we needed a permit and at least one official guide had to come with us. Wherever we arrived, we had to report to the police station, and we needed permission for almost anything we wanted to do. At one time in Reting, there were as many as eight police camped with us, watching everything we did. Mostly they were watching me to make sure that I had as little contact as possible with local Tibetans: in fact, the police would tell the local villagers that nobody was allowed to visit our camp site or to approach me in particular for blessing, etc. In some places, they refused to allow us to go. Even to go to Reting, we had to negotiate hard, and once we finally arrived there, they said we couldn't stay. They wanted us to leave immediately but I think because of the number of Westerners we were able to negotiate to stay, although we were quite restricted in what we did. They were very nervous about attracting the attention of the public. In some ways, it looked like they did whatever they could to stop us doing anything that would cause the local Tibetans to be happy, which is mainly to do with Dharma activity.

When I went to Tibet in 1986 and 1987, the Western sangha had no problem wearing robes; but this time throughout the whole trip, from the time we crossed the border, the Western monks and nuns could not wear their robes. On one occasion we thought to try, and the Western monks and nuns circumambulated the Jokhang. The





Photo Ven. Roger Kunsang

*"I tried to explain to the police that I didn't come to Tibet to see mountains etc., that I was not a tourist, that I came for pilgrimage to see all the very special holy places" – Lama Zopa with fellow pilgrims in Tibet*

Tibetans were very happy to see it, you could see them rejoicing. But you could see the police were not pleased. Ven. Sarah Thresher went into one of the shops in her robes to buy something. Immediately, the police came in and had the shopkeeper close the shop up.

We also did a large *tsog* offering at the Jokhang with the sangha in robes, but we could only do it at nighttime when the public had left. I thought to myself, "This is too much – too much trying to control." I wanted to do the puja in the daytime in full view of the public, but they refused permission.

So only once did the monks and nuns wear their robes, because we were very concerned that the Tibetans who made contact with us, or the hotel where we stayed, could get into trouble if we did things that were not allowed, especially after we left.

All the monasteries and nunneries that we visited were very happy. The Tibetans there did their very best to show the holy objects, especially in the Potala, where two monks took us into areas not normally shown to the public and explained many things. One of the monks was a senior Namgyal monk who gave a lot of detailed explanations ...

One Tibetan monk who guided us to the various Kadampa holy places said he was deeply moved seeing a large group of Westerners, and Taiwanese, Singaporeans, etc. He said seeing them practicing and meditating and expressing devotion really touched his heart and deeply benefited his mind. He was very, very helpful to us, showing us the various places and explaining the stories and also presenting us with relics for the Maitreya statue.

At Lama Yeshe's birthplace, the police at first would not allow me to visit Lama Yeshe's family. After some discussion they allowed me to, but I couldn't stay overnight. Many of the villagers came over to the house to meet me. There wasn't much I could do but recite prayers and mantras for them, hoping to clear some obstacles they have, and giving them Medicine Buddha mantra to recite. Many Tibetans have eye problems, so I was praying at least for them – praying that they may not be born in the lower realms, sometimes doing the prayer to meet Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings, and sometimes reciting the *Lam-Rim* prayer. I gave advice to Lama Yeshe's family and friends on the proper way to do prayers and make offerings and *Lama Chöpa* *tsog*.





Stupas at a nunnery in the Penpo Valley Photo Bob Cayton

At Dechen Chu, the place where Lama Tsongkhapa had a vision of Guhyasamaja and four-faced Mahakala, I did *Lama Chöpa* tsog around dusk with the nuns, and many villagers came. The police said earlier that day that they didn't want this to happen. They said, "You can come here for pleasure, but you can't do any Dharma activity," so I waited until just before nightfall. It went very well, with many people attending from the surrounding villages. If it had been done during the daytime, there would have been a lot more Tibetans coming.

I tried to explain to the police that I didn't come to Tibet to see mountains, etc., that I was not a tourist, that I came for pilgrimage to see all the very special holy places. I explained that in the West it is very difficult to find holy places, but in Tibet there are many where in the past so many Tibetans actualized the path.

The monks from Reting Monastery had to be very careful about talking to us. We did visit the monastery and made offerings, etc., and one monk showed us around. We also went to the retreat place high above the monastery where Lama Tsongkhapa composed the *Lam-Rim Chenmo* and did prayers there and also recited the *Lam-Rim Nyamgyu*. I saw a picture of Reting Rinpoche recognized by the Chinese – it felt similar to the Panchen Lama, who was also recognized by the Chinese. He lives below in the monastery, well guarded. I did not visit him. It was explained to me how this Reting Rinpoche was recognized. The Chinese sent some of the key monks of this area to Lhamo Lhatso to

confirm this was the Reting Rinpoche. I asked the monk who was guiding us (he is the appointed Chinese representative at the monastery) if this reincarnation was recognized also by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but he seemed to get angry, in my view, and gave no response.

In Gomo Rinpoche's monastery in Penpo, the leader of that area came and said to me that I can meet the Tibetan people, but I cannot give blessings – put my hand on their heads, etc. My Tibetan driver gave them all *malas* and blessed strings.

They were happy, and said before they left, "Please don't make the blessings or the talk too obvious." Many villagers came; I think maybe 200 to 300. Outside the monastery, in the open, we did the oral transmission of a few mantras and brief explanation of the different levels of Dharma motivation and I told them, "This is the mantra cherished by all the buddhas, their heart mantra, extremely precious. We Tibetans are most fortunate because since childhood

we have the opportunity to recite this mantra (*Om Mani Padme Hum*) and practice the good heart." I explained that this would help to fulfill your wishes, and that of other sentient beings.

Whatever merit we created during the pilgrimage to Tibet we would like to dedicate for all your wishes to be successful and for all the political leaders of China to change their minds so that they support your wishes for freedom; that they may invite you not only in Tibet but also in mainland China. ❀

-Lama Zopa

