

Be careful what you wish for...

your guru may have something else in mind

Kopan Monastery, end of November 2006. Everybody has gathered at the entrance to welcome our holy guru, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. In the middle of the trumpets blowing and with incense burning, Rinpoche advances amongst the ecstatic crowd, protected by a parasol and blessing whoever presents khatas to him. Suddenly Rinpoche sees me, stops, and says, "Oh, you are here! Since a long time I haven't seen you! Are you still working with the Red Cross? You know, I was speaking of you with somebody a short time ago. Your practice of the tsa-tsas helped a lot of people to do it as well."

Then Rinpoche continued his distribution of smiles and nice words to everybody before disappearing into the main Gompa.

By Jean-Pascal Moret

Of course I felt overjoyed with Rinpoche's words, but I didn't understand why Rinpoche had said what he said to me. Suddenly I remembered how all this started. At the end of the 1991 Kopan November course, I went to see Rinpoche with a very solid state of mind: I wanted to have Rinpoche's blessing to do 100,000 prostrations in Bodhgaya right after the course. As usual, Rinpoche found his *mo* box, threw the famous dice, and the answer came:

"Yes, good idea, but before you should do 200,000 *Migme Tsewai* Guru Yoga."

"Thank you, Rinpoche, but what about the prostrations?"

The dice answered, "Good, but first recite 400,000 Samayavajra mantras!"

"Thank you, Rinpoche, but what about the prostrations?"

Again the dice. "Good, but first do 400,000 Vajrayogini tsa-tsas!"

Suddenly, I had a problem to digest, but I continued reciting the same mantra: "What about the prostrations?"

Rinpoche looked at me strangely, and threw the dice again. "Good, but first do 200,000 water bowls!"

I was stunned, but not enough to prevent me from murmuring, "Rinpoche, what about the prostrations?"

Rinpoche answered, "Anyway, you do what you want!"

Finally I got Rinpoche's blessing to do the prostrations. What a relief! I then went down to Bodhgaya, bought a prostration board and proudly started to do prostrations in front of the holy stupa. On the second day, I broke my back. I could hardly walk, so I stopped the prostrations, rented a meditation hut at Root Institute, and did the Migme Tsewai for two months. I began to understand that the best practice is to listen to my holy guru and not stick stubbornly to my own ideas! With this realization, I decided to make the tsa-tsas as soon as possible. After exploring all the possibilities, it came out that the best place would be to do them at Nalanda Monastery in France.

Thanks to my job, I would have enough time and money to complete that practice. I was working (and still am) for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a body of the International Red Cross movement which works mainly in conflict-affected places of the world. This organization has been mandated by the international community to work to alleviate the sufferings of the conflict

victims, especially by offering protection for war and political prisoners, restoring broken family links, and bringing assistance to those in need. I was lucky enough to have been recruited a few years earlier by the ICRC, and I would be able to manage to have my working contract end in time to do the tsa tsas.

At that time, I was in between a mission in Cambodia and the next one in Burundi. This job is particularly stimulating for practicing Lam-Rim, since we are confronted with the three kinds of sufferings in a very apparent way. My role in the organization is to communicate with as many people as possible – but essentially to the combatants – the bases of the International Humanitarian Law, embodied mainly in the Geneva Conventions: how to behave properly in a conflict.

I believe that the founder of the Red Cross Movement and the Geneva Convention, Henry Dunant, was a real bodhisattva. It is impossible to get an idea of how many people have been saved or helped by the various components of the Red Cross since it came into being in 1864! This is why I feel so fortunate to work for this ideal and to be able to make a living doing such a job, especially with the possibility to have so much time for Dharma practice.

After my time at Root Institute, I went to Nalanda where I was warmly welcomed by the monastic community despite the fact that I'm a lay person. One of the monks, Ven. Bertrand, created the silicone moulds that I needed for the tsa-tsas quickly and skillfully; thanks to everybody's support, I was ready very soon to start. I was given a very nice room that had once served as a pigeon house, and I set up a working place outside so that I could get tanned while doing the practice! This was much better than going to the beach, but much more tiring as well! The main problem was finding a way to get rid of the bubbles that inevitably spoiled Vajrayogini's holy body. After many tries, I found the solution by adding liquid dish soap to the water that I used to wash the moulds. It left a very thin layer that prevented the creation of bubbles.

Then came the question of storage. Since I made around 1,000 pieces a day, we decided to quickly build a big tsa-tsa house to store not only my tsa tsas, but other practitioners' productions as well. Thanks to the help of many volunteers and some of the monks, the house was ready in a few months. My contribution was only financial, as I was too busy with the practice. I started every morning at 7:00 A.M. and finished at 6 P.M., without a lunch break. It took



me fifteen months over three years to complete the job. I used around twelve tons of very fine plaster and thus made the local material seller very happy!

I remember one day when Rinpoche was visiting Nalanda, he showed a great interest in my practice. He visited the place where the tsa-tsas were stored before being placed in the tsa-tsa house. I packed the tsa-tsas in crates, filling them up horizontally to make best use of the space. When Rinpoche saw this, he immediately said, "Vajrayogini should stand up. She must not sleep!"

I had to reset the sleeping Vajrayoginis in new crates that I brought from the nearby supermarket. During that practice, which lasted quite some time, I had to fight against many obstacles, mainly physical ones. It was quite difficult by the end of each day, as well as getting up in the mornings – the body being the main object of purification. Regarding the mind, it was a funny dialogue between the rationalist who questioned the rationale behind the practice, and the devoted disciple trusting the holy guru's instructions.

Some years after, when I offered the completed practice to Rinpoche, he showed great joy, clapping his holy hands and reciting a new mantra, "Amazing, amazing!" This was probably the most intense feeling of joy I ever had in my life – making the holy guru happy is really great fun!

A huge asset in my being able to complete the tsa tsas was the continuous support of the Nalanda community that always showed great support and admiration. They deserve the merits of the practice as well! ☸