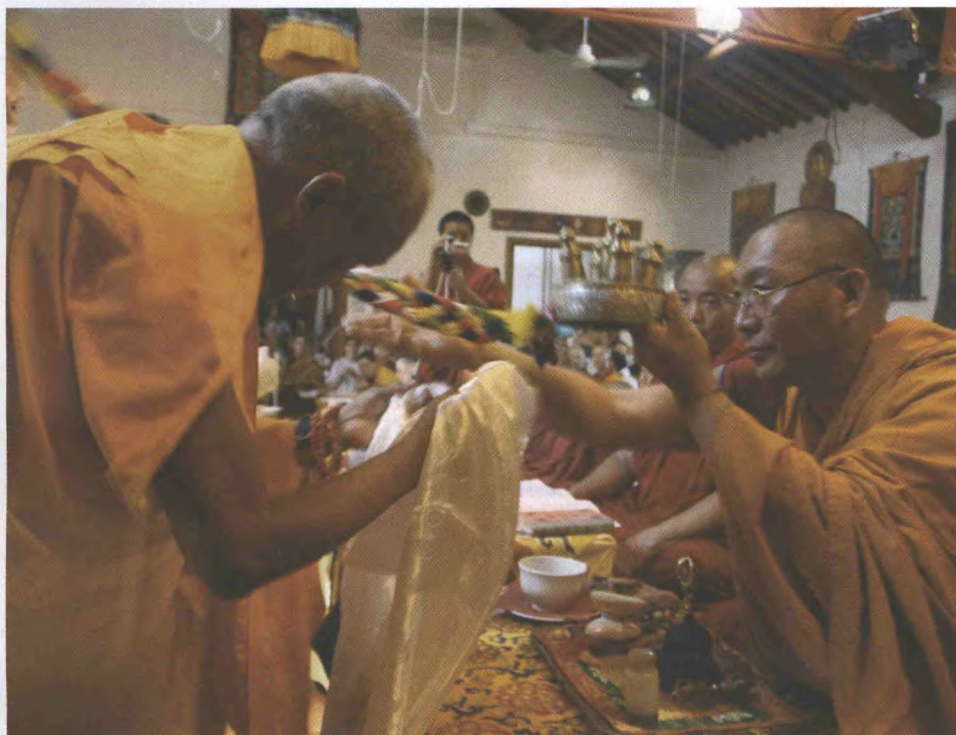


Glorious Italian days and nights

Lama Zopa Rinpoche had promised Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa in Italy that he would visit his students to console them in their grief at losing their beloved Geshe Jampa Gyatso in November 2007. He finally made it in June 2008 with a promise to confer the empowerment of Lama Tsongkhapa, and as a stroke of good fortune, his visit coincided with the Maitreya Project Relics Tour. **Ven. Joan Nicell** reports:



This Page:
Long Life Puja for
Dagri Rinpoche.

Firstly we welcomed the relics with the traditional ceremony due a high lama – clouds of incense, Tibetan horns, and an altar filled with bowls of saffron water on which floated little bunches of lavender flowers. The relic exposition was inaugurated in the tent set up for the teachings with a ceremony presided over by Dagri Rinpoche, who had come to see Rinpoche, and our resident teacher, Geshe Tenzin Tenphel.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche arrived the next day. He slowly made his way along the line of several hundred disciples who had come from all over Europe, pausing to perform full-length prostrations to the relics before ascending the throne where

he began his talk. Our disappointment when he descended only 45 minutes later was quickly dispelled when he stopped to ask whether the extensive offerings of saffron water and flowers had been blessed and offered yet. No, they had not. He suddenly did an about-turn and returned to his place on the throne. All around there were ripples of delighted laughter! Rinpoche told us that to have made such wonderful offerings and to not have offered them was a worse loss than that of losing billions and zillions of dollars! He then guided us through the preliminary prayers, stopping often to meditate, especially on rejoicing. That evening he attended the bimonthly Lama Chöpa Tsog.

His teaching the following day on how life is very short, like a flash of lightning in the night, fit perfectly with the sudden death of our Dharma friend Alessandro Falaschi, who just the week before had collapsed and died in front of us while serving in our Coffee Shop [Obituary page 67]. That same evening Rinpoche talked about Lama Tsongkhapa's life and qualities, leading into an entertaining

PHOTO: Henri Lopez Kunsang.

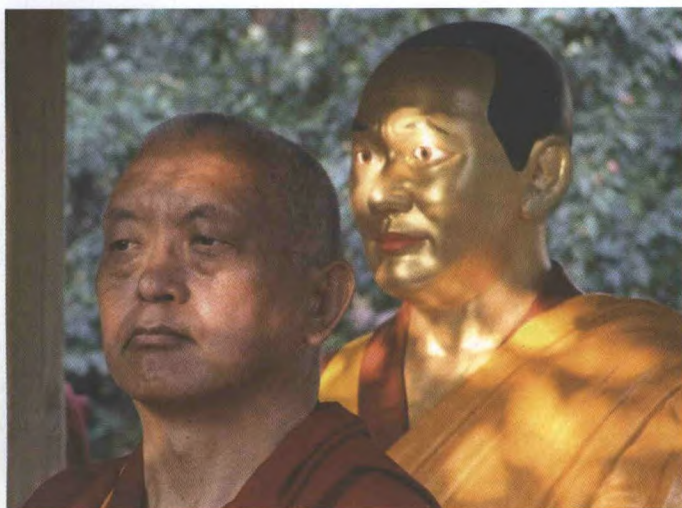


PHOTO: Wojtch T. eslik

Lama Zopa with the statue of Lama Thubten Yeshe.



PHOTO: Ven. Joan Nicell

Lama Zopa meets with the directors of the Italian centers.

teaching on how we first go to kindergarten, then to high school, then we get married, then we have children, all for this “I” ... *which is not there!* With great mirth he showed us how we are like moths, which fly into the bright flame of a candle, and like fish, which swallow a wiggling worm on a hook, in following our attachments – all for the sake of this non-existent “I”!

After Rinpoche met with the directors of the Italian FPMT centers, he paused in the garden to look at the statue of Lama Yeshe. He called for a duster, filled the empty offering bowls, and ended up giving a talk to an ever-growing crowd on the benefits of offering even a single grain of rice, or even the tiniest flower, to a buddha statue. Later he talked at length on the emptiness of the letter Z, drawing the letter over and over again in the air while emphasizing that each part of the letter Z was merely labeled and did not have the slightest existence from its own side.

Rinpoche had convinced Dagri Rinpoche to remain a few extra hours in order to perform some pujas for the Istituto. Within minutes the lamas were in the garden, ready to do an Incense Puja, while tables, chairs, a bowl of flour with incense, a tea offering, umbrellas to shield the lamas from the summer sun, a microphone and speaker, all seemed to miraculously appear from nowhere. This puja was to have been followed by a Hayagriva Puja but Rinpoche decided to take a break in order to meet with the monks from Nalanda. In the meantime, news came that the Hayagriva Puja was to be preceded by Lama Chöpa (but without tsog). Then we were told that Rinpoche would make a mandala offering to request Dagri Rinpoche to live long. Then we were told that

there *would* be tsog – imagine the rushing around! Then in the middle of the puja, it was suddenly announced that we would be doing the Brief Offering to the Sixteen Arhats! In the end, Rinpoche succeeded in offering an actual Long Life Puja to Dagri Rinpoche, without giving anyone any stress, just a bit of exercise as we literally ran around getting one thing after another into place. This improvised long life puja was one of the most enjoyable pujas ever!

Rinpoche told us that what would make Geshe Jampa Gyatso really happy is for us to practice. Taking this as a starting point, Rinpoche went on to explain the entire gradual path to enlightenment, identifying one after the other the various realizations that are to be attained by practicing it! This was followed by another piece of the oral transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light*.

And just as the sun was beginning to set, Rinpoche, together with Geshe Tenzin Tenphel and Geshe Tenkyong, resident teacher at the center in Padua, was taken by car to the site of the proposed monastery, two kilometers down the road, where the monks and nuns had been patiently waiting for several hours. Rinpoche had asked the Sangha to prepare a makeshift door to represent the door to the future monastery and now he told us to run through it, pushing and shoving as if we were a huge crowd of monks and nuns all trying to get into the new monastery! This was done with such enthusiasm that we actually fell over each other! Rinpoche then spoke about the benefits of the monastery, and a puja was performed, including a tsog offering, as darkness fell and a lone light illuminated the lamas. The atmosphere was entirely magical.



PHOTO: Ven. Joan Nicell.

Long Life Puja under the hot Italian sun.

Assembly of Sangha.

The site of the proposed monastery.

It took a five-hour tour of the grounds the next morning for Rinpoche to decide where to construct a stupa dedicated to Geshe Jampa Gyatso. Rinpoche first paused at the three stupas to offer khatas and give a talk on how to visualize making extensive offerings – like those in all the FPMT centers, those at the Istituto, those in his house in Aptos, and those in the retreat center in Washington – to all the stupas and all the holy objects in the entire world for the benefit of each and every hell being, each and every hungry ghost, each and every animal, human being, demigod, and god. Then in our small temple dedicated to Chenrezig, Rinpoche performed a consecration ceremony together with Geshe Tenzin Tenphel, reciting praises and requests to Chenrezig and offering a khata to the statue of Thousand-Arm Chenrezig. After touring all the possible places for the stupa, and paying a surprise visit to Shiné Jewelry and the shop run by Chiara Luce Edizioni, Rinpoche went to the spot where Geshe Jampa Gyatso had been cremated and suddenly sat down on the grass nearby to do his observations about where to put the stupa. Perhaps not surprisingly, the place that came out best was the very first place Rinpoche had been brought to five hours earlier, right at the beginning of the tour!

That evening, Rinpoche, showing the aspect of tiredness but with never-ending kindness, returned to continue the oral transmission of the *Sutra of Golden Light*. The next morning, as he was leaving, he gave all those who were present a handful of rose petals to keep on their altars.

Those six days with Rinpoche once again showed us that our guru's kindness and energy for teaching the Dharma know no bounds. He gave and gave and gave, from the moment he arrived to the moment he left. May this holy being among holy beings remain until the end of samsara, constantly turning the wheel of Dharma for us wandering and lost sentient beings! ☸

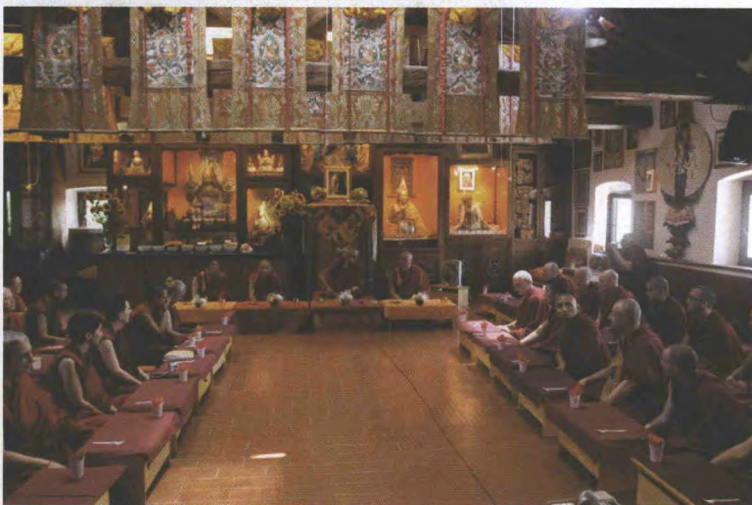


PHOTO: Henri Lopez Kunsang.



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