

Maitreya Project Relics Visit Kalmykia

When Telo Tulku Rinpoche invited the Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour to come to Elista, the capital city of the Republic of Kalmykia, the answer from Lama Zopa Rinpoche was a resounding yes.

Kalmykia in southwestern Russia was traditionally a Buddhist society that suffered greatly after the Russian Revolution in 1917 and subsequent period of Stalin's repressions when the entire Kalmyk nation was sent into Siberia. They were able to come back from exile after thirteen years, with much of their Buddhist legacy lost. Since the 1980s, a revival of Buddhism has taken hold in Kalmykia.

The biggest Buddhist temple in Russia and in Europe was opened in Elista soon after His Holiness the Dalai Lama paid his long-awaited visit in 2004. Named the Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni, the temple was constructed just nine months after the Dalai Lama had briefly consecrated the site on his way back to India. [Julia Jironkina](#), Save Tibet Foundation, Moscow, and [Linda Gatter](#), Maitreya Project International, report:

That visit by the Dalai Lama was the realization of many dreams and hopes of Kalmyk people of all ages, as was the new temple with its divine and imposing look. It is as important and as easily recognizable for the Kalmyks as the Potala Palace is for the Tibetans all over the world. The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni is a symbol of the nation united in its desire to preserve their national identity and Buddhist legacy, even though they live so far away from Mongolia and Tibet.

It was in this magnificent building that more than 70,000 visitors from twenty cities came to see the Maitreya Project Relics in August 2008 – a very impressive turnout considering that the population of Elista is 130,000 and the entire population of Kalmykia is only 300,000. The President of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, and Head Lama, Telo Tulku Rinpoche, were delighted with the response.



Telo Tulku Rinpoche views the relics

Telo Tulku Rinpoche was born in a Kalmyk family in the United States. As a four-year-old boy, he expressed his wish to be a Buddhist monk. And at the age of six, in 1979, he got a chance to meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New York. His Holiness recommended sending him

to Drepung Gomang Monastery in India to get proper training as a Buddhist monk. He spent thirteen years in Drepung Gomang studying Buddhist philosophy under the guidance of illustrious Tibetan masters. In the late 1980s, while studying in the monastery, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the great Indian saint Tilopa.

In 1991 Telo Tulku Rinpoche paid his first visit to Kalmykia with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Shortly afterwards, in 1992, he was elected as Shadjin Lama (Head Lama) of Kalmykia by the Kalmyk people and was entrusted to lead the process of spiritual restoration of this Buddhist region in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then, he has supervised and managed to rebuild twenty-seven Buddhist temples that had been destroyed during the Communist Era, as well as building the main temple, The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni.

Over the years, Telo Tulku Rinpoche has made special efforts to strengthen religious and cultural ties between traditional Buddhists in Russia and the Tibetan community led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In 2007 he initiated the first-ever Mongolian and Russian Buddhist Festival in Dharamsala, India. In 2007 Naropa-Tilopa Buddhist Center in Mongolia requested Telo Tulku Rinpoche to supervise the revival of Naropanchen Monastery that he had led in his previous incarnation.



The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni in Kalmykia at sunset

Telo Tulku Rinpoche spoke at the opening of the Relic Tour:

“I first heard of the Maitreya Project maybe six or seven years ago. When I was told the decision had been made to build a Maitreya Buddha statue which would be higher than the Statue of Liberty in America, I thought it was unrealistic. It was hard to believe it somehow.

“As the time went by, it occurred to me that, if we apply due efforts, the dream may come true. We should be optimistic and I definitely support this gigantic project. Not only the statue as it is, but as an overall humanitarian project that will help to overcome poverty in that part of India. We as a Buddhist republic can make our contribution as well.

“I heard many good things about Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I read many of his books and articles. When I was a young monk, I had no chance to meet him personally, but I watched him from afar. Last year we finally had a chance to meet and talk. We immediately got very close. We have a lot in common, and the main thing is our desire to help people. I am sure Lama Zopa is one of the best rinpoches in the Gelug tradition, a great teacher. He dedicates his works to the benefit of humanity, and this is very inspiring for all of us.

“We had made many attempts over the years to invite the relics to Kalmykia. But the organizers didn’t know much

about Kalmykia and Buddhists who are living there. Last October I had a chance to introduce Kalmyk President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov to Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Washington. I also informed him about the sacred relics that should be brought to Kalmykia. Since Lama Zopa Rinpoche already heard about Kalmykia, he decided to include it to the Heart Shrine Relic Tour itinerary.

“The relics are very precious, and there are many reasons why people should contemplate them. They are our keys to the rich Buddhist heritage and culture. One can contemplate the relics to get blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as share this beautiful experience and blessings with our families and friends. Whether we are Buddhists or not, when we see the relics, we feel happy as we are getting in touch with the history of Buddhism.

“I would like to thank Lama Zopa Rinpoche for giving us a chance to bring the relics to Kalmykia. And I would like to express my hope that he would be able visit us here, to give us his guidance, teachings and advice in the future.

“I would like to thank Maitreya Project and three wonderful relic custodians who have been traveling with the relics for several years and working tirelessly to give people across the world a chance to see the relics.”
[Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour Custodians Ven. Siliana Bosa and Andy Melnic were assisted by Ven. Marco Calvetti.]

The relics altar



Geshe Tenzin Dugda, eldest Tibetan monk for many years serving in Kalmykia:

“Great Buddhist teachers have power to leave us their blessings. We can go to India and other sacred lands and we can get blessings there only because buddhas and teachers of the past blessed that land. The blessing can also come to us in the form of relics. When you circumambulate the relics, you should have strong faith in your heart and mind. If you are able to generate such a faith, then you will create positive imprints in your mind which will allow you to be reborn in the entourage of Maitreya Buddha. Right now we are living in the time of the fourth Buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni. In the future, the fifth Buddha will come, Maitreya Buddha. And today we can create proper reasons to be able meet him.”

Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, President of Kalmykia:

“Just a few years ago we couldn’t even hope to have Buddhist temples and monks – all this was strictly prohibited. But now Kalmykia is turning into a real center of Buddhism. It’s hard to believe that holy relics of Buddha Shakyamuni are present here illuminating our path. On behalf of the Government of Kalmykia I would like to express our gratitude to our friends from FPMT. They made a long journey, visited many countries, but when they came here they said they have never seen such a beautiful temple. Thank you very much! We are so happy to be the first Buddhist republic in Russia to host the relics. These relics will be enshrined into the heart of the Maitreya Buddha statue that will be built in India, and today I would like to announce that we also made a decision to erect a 16-meter-high statue of Maitreya Buddha that will make our city even more beautiful.”

The Maitreya Project Heart Shrine Relic Tour ...

... features a unique and precious collection of more than 1,000 sacred Buddhist relics which were found among the cremation ashes of Buddhist masters. Buddhists believe the relics are produced as a result of the master’s spiritual qualities of compassion and wisdom. They resemble beautiful pearl-like crystals.

In the future, the relics will be permanently displayed in the Heart Shrine of the completed Maitreya Buddha statue in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, in northern India. Meanwhile, the collection will travel throughout the world to bring the blessings of the relics and the message of loving-kindness to people everywhere.

Since the Tour began in 2001, more than two million people on five continents have been blessed by the relics. During 2008 the Maitreya Project Relics toured North and South America, Europe, Taiwan and South Korea. In 2009 the Tour will visit Mexico, Asia, Canada and Europe.

To invite the Maitreya Project Relics to your city, please contact relictour@maitreyaproject.org.

For more information about Maitreya Project and the Heart Shrine Relic Tour please visit www.maitreyaproject.org.

A bride and groom visit the relics.

