

# Celebration in Mongolia

*By Roy Fraser*

There was an explosion of joy when, after many years of prayers, waiting and cancelled visits, the news was received that Lama Zopa Rinpoche would be visiting Mongolia for two weeks.



Rinpoche with the  
Abbot of Gandan  
Monastery

As this was classed as a private visit rather than a teaching tour, we were asked to keep it low key and with no publicity, which made it difficult for the FPMT Mongolia management committee to organise, as in Mongolia a whisper of a visit by any high lama travels like the wind.

When we were finally given permission to announce the tour, people were literally crying in the streets. This country is so hungry for Dharma that a visit by a revered master such as Lama Zopa Rinpoche is a cause for national celebration from the highest government officials to the poor and homeless who use our social services.

But due to our lack of merit and the kindness of the Guru, the day before Rinpoche's arrival we received the news it was to be postponed for a week and reduced to seven days. So it was with bated breath that we waited for the next week to crawl by as all the plans were rearranged. Our lesson was that nothing is certain until it happens, and

we hoped the lesson had been learnt and we didn't need a second teaching!

But with no further lessons needed, the energy changed in Ulaanbaatar as Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Ven. Roger Kunsang and attendant monks entered the Skyway lounge on the evening of September 15. Unfortunately, it was with one bag less than when they left USA. But once this had been confirmed beyond doubt, and immigration cleared, we proceeded to Shedrup Ling, FPMT Mongolia's center in Ulaanbaatar. There we were presented with the spectacle that was to greet us every time Rinpoche came and went – a large crowd of devotees, who had waited patiently while the luggage debacle was sorted, just for the opportunity to offer a *khata* and receive blessings from a living buddha. On some occasions these people would wait from eight o'clock in the morning to four or five in the afternoon for that moment of contact with Rinpoche. And of course Rinpoche greeted each one personally like an old friend – again, many were reduced to tears.

With no heavy organised teaching schedule, Rinpoche was able to devote much of his time to receiving individual students, board members and sponsors. Upon entering Rinpoche's room, everyone circumambulated the table of holy objects, and inevitably what began as an opportunity for a blessing turned into a transmission of a holy text or mantra and a teaching. It was not possible to keep to any schedule and often the translators, who did an excellent job, were kept working late into the night.

On day three, following successful treatment at a dentist (she was so happy to treat a buddha!) Rinpoche visited Dolma Ling Nunnery and Community Center. After the official greeting in the 360-year-old gomp, which FPMT Mongolia has restored following its destruction by the communists, Rinpoche visited the Community Center. As with all normal time-related activities, this happened about an hour later than was expected, but still the sixty guests at the soup kitchen waited patiently for the opportunity for a blessing. Rinpoche's first words were: "I am so happy to meet you. We have a very close karmic connection and I am very happy for that. Thank you all so much for giving me this precious opportunity." The air was electric as Rinpoche then launched into one of those teachings where it seems every aspect of the entire Lam Rim is touched on, and so much advice given, that the poor (and yes, it's true, somewhat smelly!) homeless were enraptured, and hardly dared to breath for the next hour. In fact, it was too much for one old man, and he had to receive treatment from the doctor when he collapsed.

Rinpoche then visited the Health Clinic which offers free medical care to the vulnerable, and after viewing some photos showing the horrific situations the staff often have to deal with, Rinpoche led a brief but very moving meditation that everyone who was in the photo album, everyone who entered the Health Clinic, the sponsors, and even those who thought of the Health Clinic, would be immediately freed from all their suffering.

Then a visit to the Children's Development Program where Rinpoche advised the children how unbelievably lucky they were to be receiving education, not just on the ABCs and maths, but also on moral values and how to lead a better life, which is the focus of the program.

After a brief visit to the Adult Vocational Training *ger*, the nuns offered a meal, and Rinpoche gave much valuable advice to those assembled as well as to the four nuns who were doing a two-month retreat.

The next day the main activity was lunch with the Abbot of Gandan Monastery, Mongolia's main center for the revival of Buddhism, parts of which escaped the



Rinpoche at the TV interview  
Rinpoche greets MK and his wife Ming.  
Teaching at Golden Light Sutra Center

purges. Much of the discussion was about the effects of the communist purges in the late 1930s, which saw an estimated 30,000 monks and nuns killed and most monasteries completely destroyed; also about the revival of Buddhism



since the fall of communism in 1990, and how to best move forward from here.

At Gandan, Rinpoche gave a live interview at the first and only Buddhist FM radio station in Mongolia and later moved to the Educational Channel of Mongolian National TV to give another interview – actually it was a long, profound teaching of truly epic Rinpoche proportions. Although the director of the TV station made several attempts to stop the flow, he didn't get the chance to ask any questions! Again this was followed by a deeply moving welcome by the many requesting blessings when Rinpoche returned to Shedrup Ling, and more personal meetings late into the night.

Saturday was the day for Rinpoche to visit Darkhan, where FPMT Mongolia has another teaching center, Golden Light Sutra Center. Of course this included a full schedule of teachings and meetings, and it was essential to depart from Shedrup Ling by 9:00 P.M. to make this possible. At 11:00 P.M. Rinpoche was still in meditation. Then when departure finally came at about 11:30 P.M., Rinpoche decided it was the perfect time to visit one young woman at her home. When Rinpoche first came to Mongolia at the request of Bakula Rinpoche in 2000, a nine-year-old girl had offered a *khata* to Rinpoche, spontaneously declaring that she would pray for Rinpoche's long life every day, and inviting Rinpoche to visit her house. Rinpoche recounted this story at the Dolma Ling Community Center and the young girl, now grown into a fine young woman, commented it would be like a dream if Rinpoche did actually visit her home this time. So this was the moment for her dream to come true. It is always so inspiring to see how people's karma ripens when around our Guru.

Seeing that the trip to Darkhan was delayed even further, everyone set out with the plan that if the visit to a local monastery was cancelled Rinpoche would arrive in time for the public lecture. *But* Rinpoche decided to stop halfway for an extended rest and lunch. In trying to make arrangements to change the schedule, Ueli Minder discovered that no one was at the venue because there had been some misunderstanding with advertising! So why would Rinpoche be in a hurry to arrive in Darkhan when he already "knew" that nobody would be at the teaching? Relax, follow your Guru. Thank you for the lesson.

Upon finally arriving in Darkhan at exactly the right time, the very warm welcome was followed by a teaching to the Center students. Rinpoche made it very clear he was committed to developing a strong FPMT presence in that city, bringing much joy to the local students.

Rinpoche had a meeting and dinner with several high government officials who confirmed their support for the activities of FPMT Mongolia in Darkhan. Rinpoche was able to offer advice on how the government could handle the challenge of managing the mining of Mongolia's mineral wealth in an ecologically and financially healthy way which would benefit all Mongolians, rather than just the few who are already wealthy.

On the way back to Ulaanbaatar for the public teachings at Idgaa Choinzinling (the largest building at Gandan Monastery which was restored by FPMT Mongolia), we received an invitation to have lunch with the President of Mongolia at his private residence. Plans had changed again! Jhado Rinpoche had also been invited to lunch where a vivid discussion developed about the reestablishment of Buddhism in Mongolia and the challenges which lay ahead. It was the President himself who opened this discussion by asking his guests how much they thought the situation had changed since 2000 and the establishment of FPMT Mongolia by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. The discussion ranged over how to teach the basic ideas of Buddhism to lay Mongolians, who have so much faith but little knowledge; how to train monks to teach the lay people, especially the young; how to integrate basic information about traditional Mongolian culture and religion into the education system; and what kind of books to publish to reach the greatest number of people. Lama Zopa Rinpoche introduced his idea to build a nine-storey high Padmasambhava statue and a fourteen-storey high Maitreya statue in Mongolia. It was clear to everybody that Mongolia has a crucial role to play in preserving the Nalanda tradition of Buddhism and in the future development of Buddhism in the world. It was also clear that Rinpoche had a strong commitment for FPMT Mongolia to play a key role in achieving this goal.

Rinpoche had invited a devoted Malaysian student, MK, and his wife, Ming, to join him on this tour of Mongolia and asked MK to take overall charge of the huge task which FPMT Mongolia now has. Those of us who have the incredible good fortune to be here working to fulfil Rinpoche's wishes look forward to this task with joy in our hearts.

The work which has already been achieved by FPMT Mongolia, and which was referred to by the President himself, has only been possible due to the generosity of many kind benefactors, both in Mongolia and around the world. You know who you are. Please take this opportunity to fill your hearts with joy and rejoice. We look forward to your continued support in the mammoth task ahead of us. ☸