

# Kadampa Center's Past, Present and Future Times

By Barb Baranski, Sarah Brooks, Sandy Carlson, Julie Cox, David Machles and Mer Stafford; Photos courtesy of Kadampa Center.



*The Kadampa Center community gathers to celebrate completion of the Kadampa stupa, Raleigh, North Carolina, US, May 2013; Don Brown, Kadampa Center founder, late 1990s.*



The idea for Kadampa Center in Raleigh, North Carolina, US, took shape in 1990, and in October 1991, Don Brown officially founded the center. Our first home was in the basement of an office condominium, where we remained until we moved in 2007 to our current location, a former aquarium store in need of renovation. The community tore out walls, hung drywall, laid flooring, painted, cleaned and ran wires, finishing just in time for one of Ven. Robina Courtin's annual visits. It was exciting to have the space open for such a large gathering!

We have had many great visiting teachers, including several visits by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who encouraged us to first obtain a Kalachakra statue and then to build our Kadampa stupa. Our precious resident teacher, Geshe Gelek Chodha, has been with us for over 14 years, and we are pleased that several members of our community have become ordained, making a larger commitment to their practice.

Our programs continue to expand to fill the requests of our rapidly growing membership. Each day starts with silent meditation, and most evenings include one or more programs. On Sundays, like many churches, we offer the same teachings twice

along with our popular children's program that has age-based group classes and babysitting in the nursery.

We offer a wide range of classes, from basic introductions to Buddhism and meditation to instructions on bodhisattva and tantric vows. Our longest ongoing class is studying the *Lamrim Chenmo* with Geshe Gelek. We began teaching *Discovering Buddhism* in 2002, and haven't stopped since – starting over every two years. We've also started offering classes like "Food for Thought," exploring mindfulness when eating.

On the practice side, our monthly calendar typically includes Tara practice, Medicine Buddha and Guru pujas, and special practices on holy days. Weekend retreats both at the center and off-site also happen periodically, and we had our first family Dharma camp this summer. We also provide or sponsor special ritual services such as statue consecrations with mantra rolling, pet blessings and animal liberations.

We supplement our regular teachings with related offerings like our current year-long course on death and dying, covering everything from the death dissolution process to dealing with the American medical and legal systems. In 2013, we've been blessed





*Geshe Gelek hands out gifts to the children (Dorothy and her son Dylan) with Erin, who leads our fabulous (and growing) children's program in the background, December 2012; Chris and Scott celebrate another milestone in the stupa construction, May 2012.*



*Jampal Jhaua Lama, the artist who decorated the stupa, applying final touches in paint, April 2013; Students of all ages fill the Kadampa Center gompa on Compassion Day, July 2013.*

by visiting teachers Geshe Kelsang Wangmo, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. René Feusi and Ven. Thubten Chodron. These are just a sample of the incredible efforts and teachings happening at the center!

In 2000, while we were still in the rented basement, Lama Zopa Rinpoche requested that we build a stupa to make the Dharma more accessible and to help the center grow. He said it was very important to build it in front of a building, so that it would be visible to as many beings as possible.

We started raising money for stupa construction through bookstore sales. Finally, in 2010, our planning began in earnest, and we broke ground on February 23, 2011. Our new location just happens to be on a major road where several thousand cars pass daily and right next to a busy rail line.

Over the next two years, our community came together to plan, get permits, pour concrete, roll mantras, prepare cedar, paint, landscape and feed the workers. Tibetan artist Jampal Jhaua Lama led the creative effort and created the finely detailed forms and decorations. Thousands of volunteer hours went into creating the beautiful stupa, which was officially consecrated on May 25, 2013.

Kadampa Center hosts the Light of the Path retreat, a five-year commitment from Lama Zopa Rinpoche to teach the entire lam-rim by giving commentary on Lama Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. The first two years – 2009 and 2010 – were well attended. The third retreat will be May 4-18, 2014, in Black Mountain, North Carolina, after a three-year hiatus as Rinpoche was recovering from manifesting a stroke.

## YOUR COMMUNITY

Preparations for the next Light of the Path retreat started in August. We have secured the venue, created a budget and begun communicating with past participants and potential donors. Kadampa Center never wants money to be an obstacle for receiving the Dharma, so we do not charge a fee for any teachings at the center. We continue this practice for the Light of the Path retreats, relying on generous benefactors to cover spiritual program costs as well as supporting attending ordained Sangha. These costs are completely separate from the room and board participants pay directly to the venue.

Due to the kindness of so many, Kadampa Center is able to host the only retreat of its kind in the United States under the guidance of our precious guru Lama Zopa Rinpoche. It's a rare opportunity to experience Rinpoche's incredible bodhichitta first-hand. Just the idea of learning the lam-rim – the step-by-step path of how to attain enlightenment – directly from Rinpoche is inspiring enough, but add to that the opportunity to practice Dharma with a large number of Sangha and dedicated students. According to Geshe Gelek, it's incredible when so many different minds come together to think the same positive thoughts; there is no doubt that practicing in a group increases the merit. The retreat venue, in the quiet and beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, is an ideal place to step away from the distractions of daily life and to experience optimal conditions for practice of the Eight Mahayana Precepts. As Rinpoche might say, wow, wow, wow!

The Kadampa Center community is vibrant and growing! As Geshe Gelek often says, "The center really belongs to the members." In 2010, to guide our leadership's efforts going forward, we began a process of "visioning" to get a sense of what our members would like the center to look like in the future. We started by creating a timeline looking at the center's history. We looked at how membership numbers have grown since 1990, using these to project how we might continue to grow going forward. We held meetings that included both our members and leadership team, generating lots of input and discussion.

Based on all of this input, a smaller group compiled and created a "vision" plan that was presented to center leadership and currently serves as our "roadmap." Periodically, the smaller group meets to revisit our progress, account for change and tweak the plan for the future. In 2013, we needed to address overcrowding at the single teaching being offered on Sundays. Using our roadmap, we added a second Sunday teaching. Currently, we are working on establishing a solid staff and volunteer base so we can move on to the next big thing – perhaps a larger space? A nunnery? A school? The Kadampa Center community continues to "think big"!

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Enjoy a short video interview with Geshe Gelek Chodha, Kadampa Center's resident geshe, as part of this issue's online content at [mandala.fpmt.org](http://mandala.fpmt.org).

For more on Kadampa Center, visit [www.kadampa-center.org](http://www.kadampa-center.org).

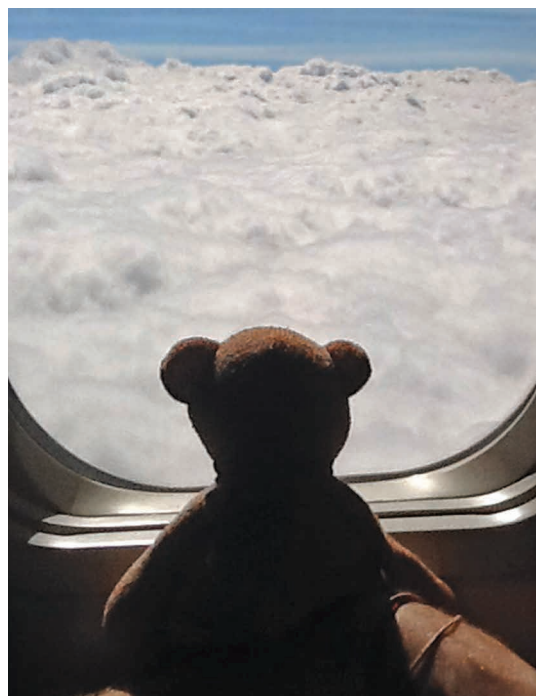
# Teddy Tulku Sees the World

By Steve Milton

*Few have traveled so far and met so many FPMT notables as Teddy Tulku, one of Centro Nagarjuna Valencia's most unique (and cute) students. Steve Milton, director of the Spanish center, tells the story of how Teddy became the center's mascot and what he has been up to since he was "recognized" as someone special.*

As Teddy's fame extends worldwide, more and more people are asking about Teddy Tulku and how he came about. From the conventional point of view, Teddy was discovered a few years ago in a car belonging to one of our center's members, where Teddy was living a humble life on the back shelf along with a few other fluffy friends.

Every year Centro Nagarjuna Valencia organizes a retreat with our resident geshe – Geshe Lamsang – in the countryside. One year, I was getting a lift in Teddy's car and, as you do when you are on a long car drive and you are only thirty-eight-and-a-half years old, I couldn't resist playing with him. When we



*Teddy sees the world. Photo by Erwin Grey.*