

THE GURU

MIRACLES OF A
LIVING BUDDHA

BY VEN. THUBTEN KONCHOG

With palms together,
To Dearest Ani konchong,

To know Phuntsok Rinpoche is to know Geshe Lama Konchong. Thank you for sharing your incredible journey with a great Being, which few had the privilege to experience. You have kept these beautiful memories alive through the years with your unwavering devotion to a Guru which has always been the foundation of our practice. Your infectious humour made us laugh, your tears made us cry and your joy made us smile. Deeply indebted, we Thank You again.

To Geshe Tenzin Zopa,

As always being the inspiration in our lives and in this book, you shared your divine journey of emotion.

To Phuntsok Rinpoche,

Thank you for returning and turning the dharma wheel for generations to come.

We bow down to our Teachers with gratitude.



Ani Konchong, Phuntsok Rinpoche and Geshe Tenzin Zopa in
Brisbane, Australia August 2015

And the rest of Anila's family.....



Tully -Wally



Clarence



Percy

THE BOOK

My greatest wish and prayer is that this book will be a written account of the miracles that a highly realized being performed. It is the telling of the miracles performed by a living Buddha. It is the telling of supreme compassion, wisdom and methods used to help and bring others onto the Path where he would show his light to guide us.

The book is a personal attempt to record the miracles that proved beyond doubt that Geshe Lama Konchog is/was a living Buddha.

This is not a story about me; it is a story about the methods and wisdom of a Highly Realized Being, merely labelled 'The Guru'. This is an anthology of teachings, lessons, obstacles, transformations and miracles that happened to a very ordinary being, by a very Great Master.

It is simply one person's personal account of a relationship that went beyond the parameters of normality. It transcends western thought and behaviour, culture and customs and even religious belief itself.

This is an account of miracles – performed one after the other by a Great Master to 'bring home' a wayward disciple by means of obstacles.

This is a story about compassion and kindness of all the Buddhas.

This is a book about The Guru!

IN GRATITUDE TO THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE:

First of all, I would like to thank everybody who helped get the book *THE GURU : Miracles of a Living Buddha* completed and printed.

Most especially I would like to thank the very kind benefactor who has chosen to remain anonymous, for the printing and the free distribution of this book. This initial edition of the book has been offered freely, both by myself and the benefactor, as I gift to you.

I would also like to ask the reader to bear with the fact that the book has not been professionally edited. It is as I have written it; therefore, the practice of patience and tolerance will be a by-product from reading it. ha! However, if there should be any value and insight to be gained from reading this amateur version, in the future it may be produced on a more professional level.

As I have mentioned, in my opinion, such a book should never be written – especially by a simple person - because it can give causes and conditions for the minds of some to impute wrong concepts, and by so doing, give rise to suffering due to anger and so on. I simply ask you to see *your* version of The Guru *your* way according to *your* causes and conditioning. If my interpretation of the Guru fits in with *your* idea of the Holy, then we see things as they truly exist.

Once we have found, and connected with, the outer and inner Guru on a devotional level and taken heart felt refuge, then the journey into our own mind begins. This is the experiential journey and it is the path that leads to the higher states.

I wish you the very best of journeys on your own particular path to the state of Enlightenment - by whichever name you choose to call it, and by the means of the merely labelled - Guru. I simply offer you a tale about my journey with my Guru.

If you wish to contact me, my email is - kwanyinhouse@yahoo.com.au
December, 2009. copy right to Ani Konchog.

FORWARD BY GESHE TENZIN ZOPA

The practice of Guru Devotion is the foundation of all goodness up to everlasting happiness (state of enlightenment) and that state very much depends on the disciple's unshakeable faith. This conviction is gained through knowledge and the blessings of the gurus and it brings about a pure view on the disciple's mind that allows him or her to see the guru as oneness with all the Buddhas and the Enlightened Ones. This strength of mind allows the disciple to be able to transform every adversity in Samsara into bliss - this is the path to enlightenment.

No doubt the qualities of the great mahasiddha Geshe Lama Konchog are equal to the past Buddhas and beyond comparison, but Venerable Ani Konchog did try her very best to describe Geshe Lama Konchog's qualities in this book, due to her relationship and connection to him and her pure view and devotion that teaches the reader to see how wonderful and amazing and enlightening Guru Devotion can be.

Thanks to Ani la for her great work on this book to bring it alive.

Ani la is true practitioner of Buddhism who dedicates the rest of her life to being a fully ordained Tibetan Buddhist Nun in pure and dedicated practice of The Three Principles of the Path and is also a secret practitioner of Vajrayogini. She has accomplished all the preliminary Nyodro retreats during the past 15 years, including the 3 year great retreat of Vajrayogini.

She currently still lives in retreat and tries to benefit, to her best ability, whoever comes in contact with her. She dedicates the rest of her life to doing the gurus work - which is to become Buddha.

With much prayers
Geshe Tenzin Zopa

9/12/2009

miracles of a living buddha

THE GURU

BY THUPTEN KONCHOG



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#2 PHOTO OF KHENRINPOCHE LAMA LHUNDRUP

ABBOT OF KOPAN MONASTERY



1
A heart-felt apology

I apologise from the bottom of my heart to Geshe Lama Konchog for writing this book. Due to my ignorant, arrogant and deluded mind, I have spilled the contents of my heart onto open pages. He, himself, would never have stooped to such a low level and exposed his inner thoughts, words or expressions. He was a true secret yogi.

If, however, by the telling of this story about a living Buddha from the perspective of one so deluded, courage is gained by another to follow the path of Guru Devotion, then the merit can be dedicated with rejoicing and happiness, to the following Buddhas who have manifested in the Nirmanakaya form as merely labelled 'Humans':

This is, however, an unusual book in as much as it has been written by a very deluded person masquerading as a Buddhist nun. It is a book written about an extraordinary Tibetan Buddhist Master in the guise of a mountain yogi and the miracles that he performed. Only a labour of love could have produced such a book.

It is generally not the practise to write about such intimate and spiritual experiences with one's guru, and most especially it is not usually permitted to speak about manifestations and visualizations concerning deities and other non-worldly beings. However, this book was requested by Geshe Tenzin Zopa who was Lama Konchog's life long personal attendant and also by the Abbot of Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu.

This book is an historical record of the experiences that one very ordinary person had with The Guru and the associated Miracles performed by a Living Buddha. I simply offer it to your sense of spiritual awareness and your a priori awareness. We are all aware, but our level of awareness is an individual experience based upon certain causes and conditions, therefore I have agreed to write this book in the hope that it may benefit others by an understanding of the role of the Guru and of the Disciple.

*This book has been written expressly for the wish
to perpetuate the memory of Geshe Lama Konchog.*

*It is dedicated to the new form of Geshe Lama Konchog,
Lama Phuntsok Rinpoche
and to Geshe Tenzin Zopa, his true disciple.*

*May their every wish, hope and potential for the future
materialise and bring light to the minds
of all suffering beings.*

*I offer homage to all the Gurus of all the religions of the world.
May they show their light on the Path that leads to no more suffering.
May they bring compassion to this suffering world.
May they bring hope for the future
by teaching non-discrimination, patience, tolerance
and most of all loving kindness to one another.*

WHAT IS THE GURU

The path that leads to no more suffering is difficult. It is long and it is thwart with obstacles. Without the guru, we would not even know there was such a path. Until we begin to walk that path and turn the obstacles into lessons that lead to no more suffering, we are wasting our life

What is 'The Guru'?

To me, the guru is the one person who represents the idea of the holy and it is his or her job to connect us with it. However, this connection can only be accomplished by first understanding what it is that the guru represents and then, and only then, devoting to the external guru until finally connection is made with the inner guru.

We all have different minds and different persuasions in life due to the influence the world around us has had on us. We have been influenced and conditioned by our parents, our culture and our peers. This makes us *what* we are. Our religious beliefs make us *who* we are. The connection with the inner guru makes us whole.

THE EXTERNAL GURU

For Tibetan Buddhists the guru represents the idea of the holy. The external guru is our beloved teacher who we can see, hear, touch, smell, taste and feel with our normal six senses. He or she represents in human form, the mind of enlightenment.

The mind of enlightenment can be perceived as being represented by God, or Jesus, or Buddha or your personal idea of the Ultimate State of Being. Buddhists, however, understand enlightenment to be the highest state attainable where the mind becomes awakened and illuminated. In this state, the mind has gone beyond grasping that causes suffering and happiness – and just IS.

The external guru is someone who introduces us to this enlightened state by showing us by example and by instruction, this path. The external guru represents the Mind of Enlightened and shows us that we can all attain this state for ourselves.

The heart connection with the guru makes it easy because it becomes a personal and heart touching experience. By means of teaching, the external guru can awaken the inner guru and then we have a direct link to the Idea of the Holy, be it whatever label you choose to call it.

It is from this deep and profound connection that we communicate directly with the ultimate state of being within our own heart. From this connection we can receive 'callings' and inspiration to lift ourselves from the mundane to much higher states of mind. But it cannot be done unless we become aware of what is in our hearts to begin with. This is the supreme role of the external guru.

Strangely enough, the external guru does not always have to be a holy man or woman who teaches us. It can also be our worst enemy! From the ones who irritate us the most, we can learn our best lessons. For example, instead of connecting in a violent way with them, we can practice

patience, tolerance and loving kindness and save ourselves and them a lot of suffering. Enemies are the BEST external gurus.

This may sound strange, but we consider the guru as being more important than The Buddha because without the guru, there could be no understanding of the Buddha and the Dharma. One is reliant on the other and so the combination of The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are represented as being the Triple Gem. The guru represents all.

The Triple Gem is a pathway that leads to enlightenment and it is represented, thus:

1. The Buddha represents the mind of enlightenment. This is the ultimate state of being, consciousness, awareness and some would say, to god.
2. The Dharma is the path that leads to the mind of enlightenment. It is represented by the teachings, instructions, books, art works, icons and lessons in life. Everything can be seen as being the dharma.
3. The Sangha are the spiritual helpers, usually ordained monks and nuns, who assist us along this path by teaching and by showing by example, the right way to live without causing harm.

The guru represents the Triple Gem per se. The guru is the ultimate teacher, without whom there would be no known path. Without the guru, there would be no Sangha to teach us. Without the guru, there would be no Buddha.

The path of the Triple Gem leads to the way of transformation of the mind from a state of suffering into a state of no more suffering – true happiness. True happiness is everlasting happiness as opposed to just a happy state that eventually ceases. And to walk this extraordinary path, we need help.

We need help to understand the causes of suffering in the first place and we need to understand why we cannot possibly be continually and permanently happy. And then we need help to guide us through the many lessons, or obstacles, that we must endure while walking this path. It is by means of these obstacles that we learn to transform our way of thinking. This is the only way, or path, that leads to the connection to the inner guru – and enlightenment.

If we cannot overcome our ordinary mundane state of mind, where we blame everything and everyone else around us because we are unhappy and suffering, then there is no way we can touch the pristine atmosphere where the inner guru resides. We may get glimpses, but to connect on a heart basis requires great mindfulness and effort.

We cannot do it alone – we need the external teachers who will show us the path and those who must show us our own minds. And yet we must walk the path alone. Nobody can do this for us, not even the guru.

There are dangers associated with guru devotion and they should be clearly understood before one decides to devote to a guru. Devotion should not be offered simply because others believe a person is a fitting person. Nor should we devote to someone who makes us feel good or special.

All gurus must be checked out first before complete trust and devotion is offered. Solitary gurus offer no protection and can misguide others because they are teaching only from their own experience. We all experience the world differently due to our own particular brand of karma, so this can be a very real danger.

For instance, the Gelupa School is one of four schools of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Tsongkhapa in the 15th century.

Within that school is an organisation called the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, which was formed by the late Lama Yeshe and Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and it exists purely to preserve the teachings of this tradition.

The other three schools all preserve their own traditions. In this way the lineages and traditions remain unbroken and so the Buddha's teachings remain pure. The aim of the traditions is also primarily to keep the tradition of the gurus pure and trustworthy.

The establishment of the FPMT was brought about by the great wisdom and compassion of Lama Yeshe and it has now grown into a strong tree that shelters many countries all around the world. The roots of this tree are strong because the seed was planted with the right motivation by Lama Yeshe who had the understanding and wisdom of a Buddha. It has since then been nourished and lovingly cared for by Lama Zopa Rinpoche who was totally devoted to his Heart Guru, Lama Yeshe.

This is the greatest exhibition and example we can see today of true guru devotion. Both of these Great Masters devoted their lives to not only helping we beginners, but also in doing the works of the Gurus and the Buddhas.

The guru/disciple relationship is not an easy one. It requires great determination, great strength, implicit trust and absolute faith. It is the warrior's path. As with anything, it cannot happen without the causes and conditions to make it happen. If, and when it does happen, then the hard work really begins.

Most importantly though, we cannot, and should not, try to transform our personalities into something they are not. This is a big mistake many beginners make and this just leads to big time suffering. Often we get confused believing that we have to suppress our own personality and somehow instantaneously turn into a god.

When we take Refuge we take vows to transform our way of thinking, but at the same time we have to learn to make friends with our personality and use it effectively, as a vehicle on the path. Our personality is the result of karma, yet by learning how to transform our mind we automatically begin to change our personality, which in turn, helps us to be able to help others. Funnily enough, by transforming our mind into one of peace and harmony, the one we benefit the most is ourself. Warts and all. This is the secret to attaining true happiness. The vows we take not to cause harm, keep us on the right path, no matter what our personality.

'Happy, relaxed mind!' the gurus all say. What better path to walk down, than the road to bliss.

THE INNER GURU

The guru's responsibility to us is threefold:

1. First of all, he or she has to make us aware that there is a path that leads to enlightenment, or to no more suffering;
2. next, he or she must give cause for us to awaken devotion to an external form that represents the Triple Gem. This is the beloved physical guru that we recognize from long ago ages; and
3. finally, the ultimate job is to awaken within our hearts, the inner guru.

The inner guru is the ultimate guru. When the external guru's mind connects with the mind of the disciple, that is the place of the inner guru. All spiritual beliefs have this fundamental heart connection with their idea of the holy.

When this heart felt connection happens, when the external guru dies or leaves us, we are not left destitute and lost. We do not spend the rest of our life in sadness. We do not disrobe. We are sad that he has gone, for sure, but he has left the legacy of what all religions are based upon – connection with the INNER GURU.

PART ONE

My life before Lama in Australia

Lama in Australia

Lama leaves Australia

Chapter one

THE MIRACLES OF THE EARLY DAYS BEFORE MEETING LAMA

MEETING BUDDHISM

1960-1987

In the 1960's while living in Cairns, North Queensland, I stumbled across a book written by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama called 'My Land, My People'. Little did I know it then, but this was to become the beginning of an amazing journey into meeting my heart-guru, Geshe Lama Konchog, a Tibetan mountain yogi and great master. And little did I know it then, this would be the beginning of experiencing the miracles associated with a living Buddha.

Tibetan Buddhism was generally unknown in the Far North at that time, as it was in fact throughout Australia and yet when I read His Holiness' story I knew that I knew something, but just what that something was, I had no way of knowing. It was as if I had remembered something from the depths of my very soul, from the centre of my consciousness, from the centre of my whole being. The awareness of this not only shook me to my roots but it awakened something that had been long, long forgotten. I felt as if I had awakened to the real world somehow.

From then on I began a long and frustrating quest to try to find out if there were any Tibetan Buddhists in Australia. I rang every city in Australia seeking information but nobody knew anything. This was a time before the internet and things were very different then.

To seek something that was outside of the accepted Christian faith was something considered to be very dangerous indeed. To say that you were a Buddhist, which I did from that time on, was tantamount to saying there was no Easter Bunny or Father Christmas. The look you got in response was exactly the same.

It was not for several years later that I was to find the object of my quest. In fact, I had given up all hope of finding a Buddhist centre in Australia so I had forgotten all about it. But miracles were about to happen! Little did I know it then, but I was to find out that I had been living within a few minutes drive from a Buddhist Centre. This was Chenrezig Institute, the first Mahayana Buddhist Centre formed by Lama Yeshe and his attendant, Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Several students who had discovered Buddhism in Nepal and India had brought Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche from Kopan Monastery to the Sunshine Coast property at Diamond Valley. Eventually a devoted following of students of these two great Masters was established and a gompa (meditation hall) was set up in the 1960's.

HOSPITAL INCIDENT

Around the middle 1970's in Cairns, my health deteriorated suddenly and I was having severe asthma attacks that were progressively getting worse. During one attack I had a respiratory

arrest that lasted for several minutes. On one occasion I can remember sitting in the waiting room of the hospital getting more and more distressed and as there was no doctor in attendance, I sat there for over an hour gasping for breath. Eventually the doctor was summoned, but he immediately panicked. I was whisked off to a room where he, two other doctors and several nurses tried to get a needle into my arm to administer the necessary drugs, but they could not do so because the veins had collapsed. I can still remember the mayhem.

Suddenly I became aware of being over my body and looking down at the doctors and nurses trying desperately to get me to breathe. I felt a long tunnel behind me and a wind sucking me into it. Then a distinctly female voice said: "*This must never happen again!*" The next instant I was back in my body struggling to breathe and the doctor saying, "*It's in!*" Somehow my veins had opened enough for the doctor to insert the life-saving medication. I know now that a miracle had been performed even though I had no awareness, nor belief, in miracles at that time. I soon learned to accept their existence, but at that time I had no idea from whence they came – nor why.

Apparently what happened at the time I was in respiratory arrest was that the resident chest specialist had walked into the emergency room. He had not been expected, nor was it usual for him to do so. When he saw what was happening to me, he immediately took control of the situation and restored calmness and efficiency. This miracle undoubtedly saved my life. Everybody involved in this drama confirmed that this was indeed a miracle because had he been just a few minutes later in arriving and without his intervention, I would surely have died. I had been clinically dead for over four minutes the doctors later told me.

I suspect that even then, Lama was protecting me. I believe that this was nothing short of a miracle and everybody in the hospital was talking about it.

I was in the intensive care ward for several weeks after this happened and one day one of the doctors who had attended me in the emergency room came into my room and asked if anything had happened during the time I had 'died'. I told him about the experience and he said he was very interested in hearing these stories because he was recording them. I had never heard of out of body experiences or anything remotely like that, so it took a bit of persuading before I finally spoke about it.

FLOOD INCIDENT

Incidentally, this was not the first time I had heard the same female voice speak, loud and clear, when I was in great danger.

During floods in Townsville during the late 1960's, my children and I were travelling home by car in the late afternoon from Rockhampton. There had been a cyclone around and we were hundreds of miles between towns when we experienced torrential rain and buffeting winds that had forced us off the road. In those days the road was just a single laned bitumen track, more or less, with deeply sloping stoney dirt edges. If a car came in the opposite direction, both cars had to get halfway off the road altogether in order to pass each other. This road was nicknamed the 'crystal highway' due to the many windshields that had been shattered from the stones that had flown up from driving on the ragged edges of the road.

Due to having no alternative, I pulled the car up in a clearing just off the road and we bedded down for the night inside the car because it was not possible to see the road due to the wind and rain. We were totally alone and miles from anywhere. People often got stranded on this road in

those early days during the summer months when the rivers would break their banks and cover the roadways. I knew that I could not go back because I was aware that the low bridges that I had crossed so far would now be covered in water and I could not see the road well enough ahead to proceed safely, so we curled up and went to sleep.

We had a wild night with buffeting winds, but we did have water and some food so I was not worried too much about that, what I was worried about was being stranded with the potential threat of floodwaters engulfing us.

In the morning the rain had cleared somewhat, so I decided to make a run for it. We had been driving very slowly and carefully for some time when suddenly I could see a dip in the road ahead. Through the windscreen I could not quite make out whether I was driving on the road or not. There was no way I was going to get out of the car and go and have a look because branches were blowing fast through the air and it was definitely not safe to be strolling around, so I stayed in the car. I considered that we could have stayed where we were, but I did not have any idea just how safe that was, and now I was wondering just how bad this cyclone was going to be. I did not want to move, yet I knew I had to.

There was very little visibility because of the rain and gale force wind, so I crept the car along at a snail's pace with white knuckles gripping the steering wheel. Suddenly, without warning, the dip in the road disappeared and immediately the road turned into a raging river - right under our tyres. Because the road disappeared so quickly, I did not have time to stop and before we knew it the water had come up over the engine of the car. It was actually splashing against the windows.

I told the children to wind down the windows and to get out when I said so and to swim to the bank. It is amazing how clearly you think when you have other people to consider, because even though I knew it was impossibly dangerous for the children to jump from the car into the raging torrents, I weighed up the situation and made the judgement clearly that they stood more chance of survival to leave the car which, I felt was doomed.

However, miraculously; incredibly; inconceivably, just as the water was starting to come inside the windows and I took a breath to tell the children to jump because I could no longer steer the car due to the force of the raging water, I felt a strong hand on my left shoulder and a very strong female voice say: "***Keep going!***"

I fought the steering wheel for as long as I could in absolute shock and horror, and then just let it go. The moment I took my hands off the wheel I felt the car straighten up and go directly across to the other side, to where the road began again. The front of the car had been completely submerged and the inside of it was filled with leaves and sticks and it was soaking wet from the water that had splashed into it.

When we drove to the top of the hill a few seconds later, we saw men standing in yellow raincoats with lanterns. I stopped the car immediately. I remember one man running over to me yelling "*Where did you come from!*" When I told him, he said: "*That is not possible. You couldn't have! That road is closed because the water is three metres over the road!*" He could of course, see the inside of the car that was completely drenched, as were we all. We also looked and felt totally shell-shocked. And so was the man looking into the car.

That was the first time I heard – and felt – this strong female voice, but who she is, I do not know to this day, but some twenty years later I was to hear her again.

FINDING THE SUNSHINE COAST

Around the mid 1970's I quit my safe public service job, which was slowly but surely driving me mental, and said "Hooroo"! I bundled up all the cats and dogs, sold up my house and chattels, bought a tiny trailer and a marquee tent and just set off into the wild blue wonder – destination unknown.

This transient way of life was a huge step for me as my life thus far had been very orderly and consisted of work, study and deep sea diving. Almost every weekend I packed up my diving gear and joined the other members of the Dolphin Club scuba divers and sailed out to the outer Barrier Reef where we dived with scuba and hooker gear on the Great Barrier Reef. The Dolphin Club consisted of men who lived and breathed diving. I was the only girl diver in the Club in those days, but we were simply all divers. Scuba diving was in its infancy in those days, so we were free to explore all the wonders the reef had to offer without the paranoia of the restricting 'safety standards' that are set today. However, there were safety margins of course, and we did have to understand our equipment, decompression tables and so on, but I learned a freedom of body and spirit that transported me into another world and dimension.

I sustained several ruptured eardrums and considering that I had out-of-control asthma at the time, I was very, very lucky, and/or stupid. Nevertheless, life was very exciting and without limitation. My life at that time was at its peak of high level excitement and adventure so the thought of just taking off and leaving it all behind was certainly not in character, especially my high paying job that allowed all this freedom and excitement. And yet I did. And for reasons that I cannot explain with any certainty .

My husband at the time and I bought a 12' x 12' marquee tent and we set off south, eventually ending up at Golden Beach on the Sunshine Coast. I lived in the tent for quite some time before realising that this was a good place to settle down and so I bought a house with small acreage on the side of a small mountain, called Mount Mellum. My house was very isolated and secluded and it was the only house around for miles and miles. My husband lived there for awhile but decided to continue on to live and work in Brisbane.

After settling in, I decided to undertake an Arts degree through Queensland University and also to become a Lifeline Counsellor. Lifeline is a voluntary organisation that provides emotional help to people in crisis by means of either face-to-face counselling or via the telephone. I feel that both of these trainings was a bridge to helping me to understand the importance of isolating and then combining both hemispheres of the brain.

Both of these areas of right-brained academia combined with left-brained compassionate experience was later to help make the understanding of the profound Buddhist psychology of method and wisdom easier to understand. This understanding of method and wisdom was later a big factor to my gaining a little understanding of the relationship between Geshe Lama Konchog and myself. It helped me to understand the guru relationship. It helped in understanding the methods that Lama was later to employ with the most profound wisdom, even though those methods would prove to be so unbelievably tough.

The two areas of experience gained through academic study via the University, combined with the compassion needed to listen to severely suffering people, created an experiential lesson in examining my own mind. I learned to separate words from practice. I learned that words go in one ear and out the other until they connect with the heart. I learned the differences and I

learned to combine both experiences and make them meaningful. These experiences created a solid footing for later Buddhist study where I had to examine the nature of the mind.

What I gained from study at the university is still a mystery, but I did learn how to study and use the cold hard facts associated with academia. This gave me a *headache* because I was using my brain only. At exam time I regurgitated everything that I knew and then wiped it from my brain as soon as I could. The Lifeline counselling experience consisted of study as well as practice and it stayed with me. I experienced the suffering of others and this gave me *heartache*. From this I learned that there is far more to be learned than by study alone; we have to *experience* the study before we can truly understand.

So from these early years of finding my new home on the Sunshine Coast, I can now see all the causes and conditions that were being put into place to give cause to the understanding of the true nature of our mind, in order to see our true potential.

I believe this was all due to the great kindness of my guru that I was given this insight, even before I had any idea whatsoever what was unfolding. I had to be separated from my complacency and idealistic lifestyle and this could not have happened in the environment in which I had been living in the Far North of Queensland where I existed for pleasure and excitement only. I had to leave it all behind before I could begin the journey into the mind.

In reflection, I can now see the intent of my guru.

THE MIRACLE OF THE GOLDEN GLOW

My farm was high on a mountain and I could see hundreds of kilometres of ocean coastline from the back verandah and a mountainous landscape from the front and both sides of the house. This is natural rainforest area covered with native trees and shrubs and there are deep crevasses covered with huge boulders that have been spewed from the dormant volcano on which I now lived.

One particular day I noticed a golden glow coming from a distant mountain in a northerly direction. Over a period of several weeks I watched this golden glow appear in the late afternoon and then disappear during the daytime.

One particular day, I had reached overload with my University studies, so decided to get in the car and go and explore in the general direction that this glow was coming from to see if I could find out what it was. I drove into the next small town named Mooloolah Valley and found a road leading off in that general direction.

In those days there was an extremely narrow dirt bush track that twisted in hairpin bends around a very high hill. It was an extremely dangerous road and as I had a new low-slung sports car, I had to weave around the gigantic potholes while avoiding going over the steep drop-off at the same time. The side of the road dropped off to sheer nothingness below. If your car slid off the road and went over the drop-off you would never be found, that is for sure. And this drop-off section was completely hidden by vegetation. So it was a hair-raising experience, especially in a sports car that was only inches off the ground.

I remember getting really scared at one point and wondered why the heck I was doing this, but there was no way that I could turn the car around and go back. On the way I encountered people on horseback, other cars and several wallabies all hurtling towards me at what seemed like break-neck speeds, all of which scared the wits out of me.

Eventually I came to a clearing where there were several cars parked in a car park. Instead of turning the car around and going straight back down, as any normal person would have done, I got out of the car. I had no idea where I was and worse still, I had no idea on whose land I was obviously trespassing. Crazy, when you think of it, but for some unknown reason I ventured on.

There were steps that had been roughly cut into the ground on the side of this very steep hill and I could not resist them, they just seemed to beckon. So up I went, mostly crawling on all fours because it had been raining and it was very muddy and very slippery. Why, you may well ask. I had no idea why I was doing this and considering I come from a long line of cowards, it was completely out of character for me to climb around unknown territory in my good clobber (clothes), leave caution to the wind, and in particular, leave my sacred sports car parked in the mud. All of this was definitely out of character, not me at all. I had absolutely no idea whether the owner of this land would appear at any minute with a bazooka and soot his big dribbling dogs with rolling eyes onto me.

This escapade was nothing short of a miracle, there is no doubt about that in my mind. It would have taken a miraculous feat of force to entice my ultra-conservative mind to venture onto someone else's property unannounced and then scramble up steps leading to god knows where. No normal person would do such a thing – not even me, but I did.

This was the first conscious awareness that a greater force other than my own will was making a huge impact on my life and making its presence known. I can only say that with the wisdom of hindsight. Without any shadow of a doubt, I believe now that Geshe Lama Konchog was directly instrumental in me going to a Buddhist Centre. He did not physically take me there, but he got me there nevertheless.

At the time however, I knew or suspected nothing. It has been only when I look back at all the separate pieces of the puzzle, I can now see how they fitted together to create the whole picture of where I am today. I often said to people that the things that happened were like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle slotting into place – and how right I was. But first the pieces had to be created, and then they could be slotted together. Even to this day, sometimes I see a piece of the jigsaw that I know will fit somewhere, sometime, somehow, so obviously the whole picture has not yet been completed. I do believe that it was only through the guidance of the guru that these pieces of jigsaw were made in the first place. They were made piece by piece out of sheer frustration and oftentimes, pain.

FINDING CHENREZIG INSTITUTE

When I had reached the top of this hill, I found several people sitting around under trees. I remember walking up to one couple and asking, “*Where am I?*” They told me that this was Chenrezig Institute and that it was a Tibetan Buddhist centre and there was a resident Lama living there.

Someone asked how I had found the place and I remember blurting out something about following a golden glow. I think it was Phil who said, “*Well that's funny, because we have just painted the roof of the gompa yellow*”. I remember thinking, ‘I wonder what a gompa is?’ Maybe it was the roof that was catching the sun's dying rays that caused a golden glow to appear from where I lived. Not really possible. Maybe it was Lama's mind beckoning me. Now, that *is* possible!

The miracle was the fact that I had found myself smack in the middle of a Buddhist centre. I had never forgotten the story of the Dalai Lama and his escape from Tibet and his book was always sitting on the lounge room table. And now here I was right in a nest of them. And I had not even been looking. Big miracle.

I was gob-smacked when I looked around and saw the gompa. A gompa is a Tibetan style meditation hall. The landscape was beautiful as young trees had just been planted and it looked so cared for and loved. This hill was so high you could see the valleys below and the view extended to the ocean way off in the distance. Every one seemed very relaxed and, amazingly, I remember that nobody seemed too swayed by this announcement about a golden glow, so I ventured further into the unreal realm that was beginning to whirl around inside my head and asked: "*Would it be possible to see this Tibetan Lama?*" I heard the words come out of my mouth but they shocked me. I do not think I thought them, they just popped out.

I remember thinking that here I was inside the book "*My Land, My People*". I had no idea what a Tibetan Lama was, but presumed he was something like the Dalai Lama. And I felt so strongly that I knew *him*. When I read his book, I felt so deeply affected about his escape from Tibet and his great sadness for his country. So here I was in the Dalai Lama's environment and territory, which was not only right in the middle of Australia, but about three miles from my own home! After all the seeking, here I was standing right in the pages of the book, and I knew it. And I had not even been looking. I was just simply following a golden glow. My heart did a double flip then and I entered another realm, never to come back out. I knew I had connected with something that was familiar - and yet it was so absolutely not. A very strange feeling.

REMEMBERING

This couple who I think was Phil and Polly, quite calmly asked a tiny Tibetan Nun to take me to see the Lama. I remember thinking that none of this seemed real and I must be dreaming, yet these two people acted as if nutters walked in from the outside world every day, having followed a golden glow. Maybe they did. I was taken up to see Lama Yeshe's brother, Geshe Thinley. I shrink in absolute horror when I remember my complete lack of manners and protocol. I walked in with shoes on, sat down on the couch and rabbited on about goats and sheep and continually asked if there were any in Tibet. I really don't remember what I said because my mouth just continued to issue non-sensical words because my mind was doing loop the loops.

I cringe to this day about just how ignorant a human mind can be and it was one of the best lessons I have ever painfully experienced, looking at mine. Geshe Thinly was so very kind and no doubt very confused for sure, yet he offered me tea and biscuits and listened with head cocked to one side, obviously not believing what his eyes and ears were telling him: Here was a girl who got here by parking her holy sports car in the mud after following a golden glow. Oh, and yes, she has goats and sheep. OOOhhh!

We so called civilised western countries have become so ignorant and arrogant in our sophistication that we have lost gentleness. Gentleness means manners and respect for others. And sadly, we have not only lost this, but we are fast developing opposite behaviours. Well, I mean me!

When I saw Geshe Thinley standing there with such gentleness, I remember thinking how he looked like he felt such sorrow. I do not know why I remember this, or what instigated that

feeling, but it created such a feeling of deep respect for him. I think he knew a level of sorrow that was beyond my understanding then and now.

I could not take my eyes off what he wore, as his Robes somehow seemed so familiar. The smell of the incense was also familiar and yet this was the very first time I had smelled Tibetan incense. I can only describe my feelings as stunned awareness. It was an awareness of something familiar but not of this life.

However, unbeknown to me, the seeds had been planted for the ultimate meeting with the guru. You could well think that this was preordained, but I did have a choice at every stage to give cause for the connection or to reject it. At all stages of our life and evolution we have choice. It is making the *right* choice that requires wisdom because that choice will bring a direct result.

I went home slowly and mindfully. I had touched on something that was solid, firm and wholesome in my view and I knew that my life would never be the same again after meeting this Lama and Chenrezig Institute. My mind was focused with a newfound purpose and determination. And I hit every pot-hole on the way down the hill.

From then on I went to Chenrezig regularly. I began taking the teachings being offered but I did not mix so much with the Chenrezig-ites because I did not know what they all knew. I did not know anything. I just knew that the gompa was the big attraction, and the Lama. I particularly remembered the gompa with total clarity, yet I did not know why; it was just so familiar and I was 'home'. So many people feel this when they walk into a gompa and they immediately say, "*I am home!*"

Inside the gompa was the place I wanted to be – not inside my own home and not even in my sacred sports car – home, inside the gompa.

I remember the first time I saw the big statue of Green Tara who rules in green splendour on the left hand side of the statue of the Buddha. She scared the wits out of me the first time I set eyes on her. I almost jumped out of my skin when I spotted her and had to stop myself from running and hiding under a table. She has always had that affect of me even to this day. I want to say, "Oh! I am so sorry. I won't ever do it again!" Doesn't matter what she thought I did - I never seem to know either - but whatever it is, I won't do it any more! Promise!

Green Tara is a much loved deity, a symbolic energy for 'quick, get up and help' and although she is sitting cross-legged, she has one leg bent ready to jump up and assist. For me however, she always has one leg out ready to pounce on me when I least suspect it. Why she frightens me so, I cannot even imagine. Yet she seemed to single me out every time I sat on my cushion for teachings. She seemed to scowl and wave her green finger angrily in my direction. I always tried to sit in spots where I could not see her, or rather, where I hoped she could not see me, but inevitably someone would move and there she would be, glaring at me with her retributive stance. Even to this day she always seems to be so real and not statue-like at all. I swear I can see her breathing and glaring, and usually in my direction. She still scares the wits out of me and yet somehow people bring me statues and pictures of her all the time, so she is everywhere in my house. Probably keeping a green eye on me, just in case.....

My first impressions of the gompa were the colours, the lights, the sounds, the atmosphere and most of all, the smell of the incense. I still remember the sensations of the Robes as the nuns brushed past me. Undoubtedly, I was home. This same familiarity with all things Buddhist seems to be common phenomena amongst many people when they first walk into the gompa.

ANIMAL AWARENESS

Over the years I have become friends with the monks and nuns at Chenrezig Institute and they often come down to visit me. When they do, my animals seem to act very devotional and sit so that the Robes lightly touch their backs. They also care for each other and never fight. When a sick or distressed person comes to this house, they sit as close as they can to them as if trying to give comfort. I mention this because the feelings that I experienced in the gumpa are, I believe, the same feelings of recognition that my animals sense today from their previous human rebirth when they were part of it all. I do not know for sure, I just believe it. I also believe wholeheartedly that they can feel the guru's presence in this house.

I had never sought a guru as others have done, but I did seek what the Dalai Lama described in his book called 'My Land, My People'. Everything he spoke about was familiar. But never did I seek a teacher. I was absolutely happy exactly how I was and who I was. No need whatsoever to change, I thought.

But obviously – Lama did not feel the same way.

THE SPIRIT

PHOTO 2 the land below the area where the goats are standing is where the spirit could be felt.



From the mid 1970's, as I explained before, I lived alone in a Bohemian fashion on a small mountain on the Sunshine Coast with several pet goats and sheep, dogs and cats, chickens and ducks and any other lost or forlorn human or animal that wandered in. This farm was known as The Funny Farm.

At the bottom of my fenced-off boundary, there was an area in which the goats and lamb would never go. This small area, roughly in the shape of a four metres wide triangle, was in full sunlight and yet moss always grew within it. No grass grew on this spot either, and it was on flat land, which was in contrast to the steep terrain of the rest of this section of land. Above this particular section of land, the land rose steeply and was covered in large rocks, like seats, in row after row. There were about fifty lines of seats in total. The whole area looked like an amphitheatre surrounding a flat, grassless, moss-covered area directly below. It looked like an ancient Roman forum. It looked very constructed and not at all a natural formation of rocks.

The seats were all grouped together in straight vertical lines and surrounding them were other mammoth rocks with what looked like chiselled sides. Some sides had five edges while others had seven edges and they were between three and seven metres long, by about two meters around. They were pretty much identical. At one end of these long rocks there was an indentation and the other end was rounded, so they gave the appearance that they could, or should, be butted together to make one long upstanding pillar. They too, looked as if they had

been constructed with a purpose in mind. I have never seen, nor heard of rocks shaped in such a way, nor lying in such a formulated way.

The whole area had the feeling of being ancient and of being long forgotten in this modern age. Almost every house nearby in that area has the same shaped rocks. It is commonly believed that they were spewed out of the nearby dormant volcano, but one would have to query why some were shaped like seats while others looked as if they fitted together, with chiselled sides? So much we probably will never know!

At the centre of this amphitheatre at the bottom of the fenced-off land, was this triangular spot that had the eerie-est feeling of stillness. There was no sound once you walked into this spot. It felt like it was an entry into another world and although we know that is not possible, nevertheless it did have that feeling. It did not feel good or bad, it just felt very, very different, but you could definitely sense something very strange there. Several of my friends came to see this area once I began to tell them, because I was curious to know what others felt too. It was then that I knew for sure that there was definitely a presence there because the other women felt it too. Although I always had an uneasy feeling in that area, the others I took to feel it did not feel threatened or uncomfortable.

In fact, one day a friend came to lunch and when I told her about the strange area at the bottom of the farm, she immediately took off at a gallop and sat on one of the rock seats just above the triangle area. When she told me that she was communicating with what she described as a spirit, I wanted to put my house immediately on the market and go and live somewhere else. Real fast. But before I could get my footing to run up the hill to the safety of the house, she grabbed my hand and we walked along one of the rows of rock seats. Suddenly, in front of her, the ground began to shimmer and before both of our startled eyes a small, white, almost transparent pippi shell began to appear. It was ancient and very fragile.

As I have already mentioned, this land was half way up a mountain so it was well above sea level and yet this type of shell comes only from the sea. But who knows, in a time before history this ancient continent of Australia may have been very different from today, and the environment as well as the lay of the land may also have been very different. This particular friend who was presented with the shell, believed that this area on the East Coast of Australia was part of the very ancient land of Lamuria (Mu). During the next few months, two other women friends were also presented with the gift of a similar fragile shell and by the same spectacular method of shimmering energy. They each said that the energy was very benign, and yet to me it had definitely become threatening. I never received such a shell.

Although all three women had a communicable awareness with this spirit, they were always very respectful of it and told me it was protecting its land. They told me that if I felt uneasy, I should not go near the triangle section. But of course I did. I might be a coward, but I am a very inquisitive one, and it was not going to get the best of me! In fact, when I walked inside this triangle the energy, or spirit, that was there would loom up at me. It looked like a large mosquito net and it was about twelve metres high by about four metres wide. It felt very, very threatening.

For most people that would have been enough to run for cover and get the heck out of there, but for me it was a challenge and I continued to go there and annoy it. When I got tired of my university study, I would go down to this spot and sit there just to experience the weird energy. The goats and lamb would never go near the area, they would just sit quietly from a safe

distance, and watch. Obviously they thought this was a good show worth watching, and of just how dumb some humans can be.

THE MIRACLE OF THE DRAWING

Towards the middle of the 1980's my health had broken down and I was becoming progressively worse. I had asthma that had caused three respiratory arrests and now my heart and lungs were causing a lot of concern. I was permanently trying to breathe and had chest infections one after another and I constantly rattled when I breathed.

One day I was sitting on the back veranda that overlooked the area where the weird energy was, writing letters and just doodling on paper and, as I am not an artist, I never think of drawing anything. Suddenly I became aware of what I had just drawn. The picture was of an Aboriginal man who was dancing with his left leg raised and the right leg was bent. His arms were in the air. It was drawn perfectly and he looked exactly as if he were right there on the very page. He had twine tied around his head and long curly hair that was pulled tightly back. Around the top of each arm and both legs, twine was twisted together with leaves and feathers. He wore ornaments like cowrie shells. He was naked except for what looked like a piece of bark drawn between his legs and secured with the same twine material. He had shells and feathers on a string around his neck. He held nothing in his hands, but his fingers were outstretched. He looked very fierce and challenging. His eyes were focused directly on me.

When I saw what I had drawn, I got the fright of my life and jumped three feet in the air and then ran around and around in circles, yelping. My imagination does not stretch this far and what is more, I cannot draw that well.

PHOTO 3 - some old-time Chenrezites. venerables hiliary, centre – pende hawter left of hiliary – yeshe khadro sitting. Me far right. Taken early 80's.



As you know by now, my funny farm was about fifteen minutes drive away from Chenrezig Institute, and that by this time I had begun to study Buddhism. At this particular time, there was no resident Geshe in residence but other visiting Lamas and Geshees would come quite regularly to teach and visit us. There were however, two resident Sangha (monks and nuns) members, namely Venerables Murray Wright and Hilary Clark.

After I had calmed down from the fright at seeing what I had drawn, I got in the car and went straight up to Chenrezig and took the drawing with me. When I got there, there was Venerable Murray standing like he always was, with a big smile on his face. The climb up to Chenrezig in those days was a feat almost on par with climbing Mount Everest. Well, some exaggeration maybe, but for someone whose lungs had turned to liquid, it seemed like it. Murray was concerned about my health and so he sat me down and we had a cup of tea. When I got some breath back, I showed him the drawing and he said, unfluffably: *“There is a Lama coming in a few days time and I think you should see him”*.

OK, I thought, I will do as you say, even though I had no faith in Buddhism or Lamas at that stage other than curiosity and fascination. But I would go and see this Lama and show him my piece of paper.

Chapter two

THE MIRACLE OF LAMA IN AUSTRALIA

THE MIRACLE OF MEETING GESHE LAMA KONCHOG

1987.

So the day came when I was to meet my Heart Guru, Geshe Lama Konchog (1927 – 2001). But little did I know it!

On this momentous day my breathing was particularly difficult and I rattled deep in my chest every time I tried to gulp in some air. I had a severe chest infection and I remember thinking that I should be in bed rather than climbing up the side of some mountain, seeing some lama from Tibet who I didn't know. But I had made all the arrangements so I *had* to turn up.

When my sacred sports car got me to Chenrezig, there was Venerable Hilary waiting to escort me to the place where this Lama was going to receive me, so up the 63 steps to the café area we climbed. I was far more concerned about whether I could muster up enough breath and energy to walk up the remaining steep hill to where this Lama was, than I was thinking about meeting him and just what I was going to say to him.

In a funny sort of way I think this helped my mind, because I had no pre-conceived expectations or ideas about meeting this lama and so my mind was open and just in-the-moment. If I had been my normal overexcitable self, I would undoubtedly have been bouncing around full of nonsensical questions and arguments and trying to think of ways to impress him.

It is clear to me now that the pathway to guru devotion is not an easy road, it is steep and rocky and it is covered in all sorts of pitfalls. The most difficult part is the taking of the first step. We have to commit. Guru devotion requires the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path which is: Right view, right intention, right speech, right attitude, right livelihood, right mindfulness, right effort and right concentration. And when I think about it now in retrospect, unknowingly, I created a new one for myself – to make the commitment to walk on, regardless of the unknown path ahead.

Guru devotion is the path along which we walk on the journey to enlightenment and the Noble Eightfold Path represents the rules of play. Without even attempting to be mindful of these rules, we have not even begun to take the first step. We can spend our lives dithering between Lamas and constantly seeking their advice in an intellectual, grasping way or we can follow the set path, which is called the Noble Eightfold Path. This path leads to finding the perfect Guru for each one of us as individuals, by experiential means. Play these rules with a deluded mind and we not only lose the hand that the guru offers to lead us effortlessly along the path, but we step off the path altogether. Rules are discipline and without discipline we would not be able to walk this difficult path. The Noble Eightfold Path is the path of discipline.

Lama showed this lesson right from the very time we first met. I know now that I had to make the conscious effort to go to see him even though I was so ill and it would have

been all too easy to say: ‘*Sorry, let’s make it some other time.*’ I did not know him, nor did I have any faith in lamas whatsoever and yet, I believe now, that I did what he wanted. It is not until now, so many years later that I can see this great lesson – he was testing, right from the very beginning.

We are all masters of our own destiny, but it takes a great master to make us understand this. We cannot lay blame on to someone else or duck out of responsibility or we suffer the consequences of not playing by the rules of the game. I have been presented with these lessons time and time again in the very hardest ways possible and yet I continue to stumble and fall until I vaguely grasp what it is that I am supposed to be learning, which is usually something painful like patience and tolerance. Without the totally compassionate guru to guide you by the best means that is suited only to you, we cannot recognize the right path from the wrong path. In my case it has always been a great whack on the back followed by landing head first in the mud before I begin to realize that I am going against the grain and will end up on the other side of nowhere.

Right from this very first encounter with Lama, he showed the entire path that needs to be adhered to – with right effort. This was the great secret that I learned early on in our relationship – applying right effort. We can wish and wish for something until we drop off the planet, but unless we apply the right effort to stay in there until we get what we wish for, we are just lost in space. Until I met Lama, I did not even know there was a gilded path that led to no-more suffering. And this path became apparent on the day I overcame my own physical suffering to meet this unknown lama who was to manifest in front of my eyes as my heart-guru. Huge miracle!

INSTANT RECONNECTION

Now, getting back to the part of walking up the hill to meet this lama:

Breathless, gasping, in a lot of pain and blue in the face, Hilary and I entered the room in the Sangha House at Chenrezig Institute and I saw this earth shattering, mind altering, heart pounding sight – a *Being* was sitting next to translator Dawa Dhundrup and *it* smiled at me. Total impact! My heart stopped and my blood stopped flowing dead in its tracks. It felt like layers and layers of something fell away and here we were again. Together again. This experience was one of total confusion.

My perception of the world as I saw it, from that moment on, was changed forever. I had fallen into the arms and heart of someone I had known deep inside me and now here he was, outside in the real world, sitting on a chair. I had never seen him before in my entire life and yet I knew him. I had no more idea of who he was than the man in the moon and yet I knew him. Instantly. Literally, my breath was taken away from me and I just stood there with open mouth.

None of this makes any sense, I know – unless it has happened to you, and then you will understand. How could it be that I recognized him? Why was he so familiar? Why was I feeling like a stunned mullet? My brain was screeching at me: ‘*Whoowaa! What’s going on? You have never seen this man before in your life!*’ There are some things the human mind is just not programmed for, and this was one of them. I still do not have the software that would make it all clear but it does not matter, it is on the hard wiring somewhere, on some subtle level.

Geshe Lama Konchog stared at me intensely for some time and then asked how my health was. I told him I was all right, but I do not think he believed me. I know I did answer, but how I did I do not know, because I was struck dumb.

Lama then beckoned for Hilary and myself to sit down. He and Dawa Dhundrup, the translator, were sitting on the opposite side of the table. I had been in this Sangha House several times beforehand but it never had an atmosphere and energy like what I experienced at that very moment. I sat down and my eyes and mouth opened simultaneously and then locked. While in that position, I handed him my piece of paper with the drawing of the Aboriginal man on it. For once in my life I was speechless. I could not say anything because my bottom lip was hanging over my chin. *A frozen moment in time.*

Suddenly my mind leapt to the side of a huge mountain range and I was standing on a goat track that led around one mountain and continued along the next one. The mountain was grey and seemed to be made out of rocks. There were no trees. It was very, very high and the sky was the most beautiful cloudless blue. There was a very strong wind blowing and it was bitterly cold. To this day I can smell that wind. The wind and the cold were severe and as well as that, I was hungry. I was a boy of about twelve years old and I was standing against the mountain, freezing cold, crying and desperately trying to run away. I was very thin, had no shoes and had a very dark complexion. Then I saw the same lama who was now sitting opposite me in the Sangha Room. Although they did not look physically the same, both figures were the same person; I just knew it.

This form of Geshe Lama Konchog was standing on the open side of the mountain with robes blowing in the wind and he was trying to make me go back to the monastery far, far below. He seemed very concerned and very kind, but I just wanted to run away. He seemed very big to me and his robes that were flapping in the wind made him seem even bigger. He had very, very big feet and he also had no shoes on his feet. He had a mole, or some unusual mark on his left cheek and a deep line down his right one. He seemed to be very concerned about me and even though I knew I loved and trusted him, I was desperate to run away. My heart was thumping because I knew I was leaving everything I knew behind, but I was desperate to run.

Far down in the valley below, there was a greyish coloured crumbling monastery that seemed to have at least two floors, or levels. There were dark coloured steps that were very wide and there were flapping prayer flags blowing in the wind. There was no grass or greenery and the ground was stony and harsh. The monastery was to Lama's left and to his right there were irregular fields of crops. These fields were not laid out in squares but were irregular in size and shape. There were beige and green coloured plants waving in the wind. The whole area was filled with stones and there was no colour in the environment other than the colours of the prayer flags and the robes of the monks.

I think there may have been snow on the ground near the monastery, but there was none on the mountain ledge where I was standing. Outside the monastery there were shredded prayer flags blowing fiercely in one direction. I thought the whole atmosphere was very cold and severe – and I was very, very hungry! *I just wanted to run away.*

Snap! Again my awareness was brought back to the room in the Sangha House where I sat completely stunned in front of Geshe Lama Konchog. For how long I hung between two worlds of consciousness, I do not know. I think my whole jaw had become unhinged

and it felt like it was touching the floor. I clearly remember this event like it happened ten minutes ago.

The next thing I became aware of was Hilary's arm shaking me and saying, "*You must request he come to your house and do the puja*". (Puja is an offering ritual.) Lama was laughing. I was stunned like someone awakening from a deep sleep. I knew it had something to do with something that I had just forgotten, but he saw something that caused him to laugh and laugh. I felt really rattled because I had no idea what was going on and worse still, what had just transpired. What was she talking about? What puja? And more importantly, why? Somehow I spluttered out, "*Please come!*" and left it at that. Then Lama got up and went into the kitchen and came out with a tea towel on which he proceeded to mark out the border with hand spans. He then asked me whether this piece of land where the spirit was, was actually on my land. I told him no, that it was not, but that I had fenced it off to give more land to the goats and lamb. Nobody owned the land below, as it was inaccessible to the roadway.

But he already knew that!

The whole area around this mountain where I lived is sacred Aboriginal land and there are several very, very old skeletons that have been trussed up and placed in trees around the area. Lama was obviously able to get in touch with all this and could see clearly what the situation was all about.

When we were standing up to leave, Lama took my hand. He had tears in his eyes and he looked so gentle and I remember that he looked very deeply into me. The ground literally shook and I nearly fell over in a dead faint. The connection then was inseparable and indescribable. He had found me again in this life. We both knew that, but only he was aware of it. I was just stunned and confused, body and mind felt slightly unhinged.

Lama said through Dawa, "*Do you want your drawing on the piece of paper back?*" I know I looked totally shell-shocked and like a proper idiot, but managed to stammer out something along the lines of, "*Oh No! It scares me!*" Again, Lama laughed and laughed until his eyes ran.

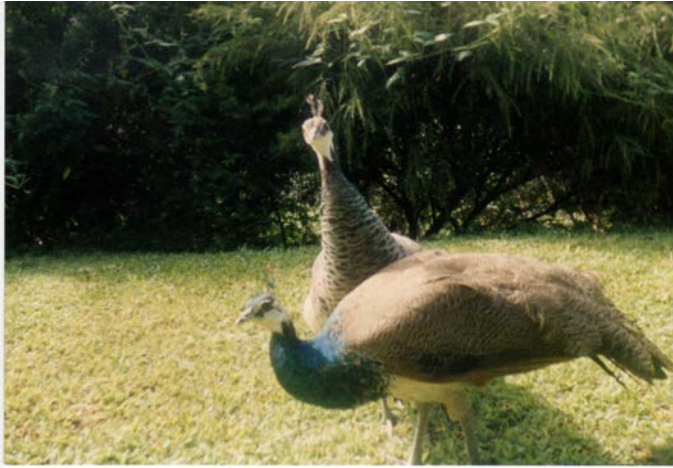
All of this came as an immense shock to me because I had no idea about gurus or the like. I had never understood why the other students were so attached and attracted to the many Tibetan lamas they were all constantly talking about. To me, at that stage, they were just special spiritual teachers, except for the Dalai Lama to whom I felt particularly close. So I had no preconceived ideas or awareness about the huge impact that this particular lama was to have on me. Or why.

Also I might add here, Tibetan Buddhism was still very new in Australia. As yet there were very few books that described Tibetan culture and religion and those that were around were not books that the general public had any need to access. Most of us Chenrezigites relied on the vivid descriptions given to us by those fortunate enough to have gone to India and Nepal. The Tibetan lamas who came and taught us were, for many of us, our first encounter with Tibetan Buddhism and they had only been coming for a few years. I, for one, had not built up any form of knowledge about gurus or the like, so to be overwhelmed to such an extent that I hallucinated when in the presence of one, was for me not normal. I was certainly never a guru groupie.

From this incredible meeting between a crazy, over the top excitable Aussie and a great mountain yogi who had come straight out of his cave at Tsum, where he had been in retreat for over twenty years – we both collided and reconnected.

From this incredulous and momentous meeting, I gained two realizations: (1) this lama understood the connection between the figure that I had drawn and my severe illness, and (2) I had come face to face with my heart-guru. From His side, I cannot even begin to wonder what he thought. Probably it was along the lines of: *'Here she is again – oh God, help me!'*

PHOTO 4. CHENREZIG RESIDENT PEACOCKS ANDREW AND WIFE



When Hilary and I left the steps of the Sangha House to go back down the hill, Andrew the peacock walked straight up the cement path towards us. He held his beautiful fantail proudly and erect looking for all the world like a rainbow. Hilary said to me, *"This is an auspicious sign, if ever I saw one!"* How right she was.

THE MIRACLE OF THE PUJA

PHOTO 5. LAMA SETTING UP THE TIN FOR THE MANDALA ON WHICH THE FIRE WOULD BE PLACED. VENERABLE MURRAY ASSISTING



In accordance with the instructions given by Lama, arrangements were made for this special puja to be performed and the right day was decided upon. The puja was to be carried out on the triangular area where the threatening energy would manifest, so everything was set up there. We prepared as best we could for this extraordinary event, but none of us could have predicted just how extraordinary it would prove to be.

Pujas are offerings made to beings in this and other realms and they are performed for a variety of reasons. Mainly however, they are offerings made to enlist the help of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, deities and land protectors. What type of puja this was, I do not know, but obviously Lama was enlisting the help of some other form of energy to help subdue the spirit that was on my land, that I had annoyed the heck out of, until it decided to get even.

On the flat piece of land at the bottom of the amphitheatre area where the spirit would loom up at me, we set up a big table to hold the puja offerings. It was all set up nicely with tablecloths and the best dishes and plates that I owned. We offered special water, grains, butter, flowers and incense.

Dawa, Venerables Murray and Hilary brought Lama to the house. When he walked in, he refused a cup of tea or refreshments and it was obvious that he wanted to begin immediately. Lama sat in the lounge room and performed some special ritual. It was apparent that he was transforming his mind into that of a deity's mind (another energy) in order to approach the spirit. He would in fact, approach the spirit in the form of a very high energy. Just what that energy or deity was, nobody will probably ever know. Geshe Lama Konchog was a highly realized being. There is no doubt in my mind that he could communicate easily and well with all types of beings, but to communicate with a spirit that was hell-bent on causing harm to a thorough ignoramus, required special

methods. By doing self-initiation, he was able to show his mind in the aspect of a Buddha to the spirit, and as such, show that he was without prejudice.

Although it was never said, although presumed, the spirit was a big factor in my ill health, which was slowly deteriorating. And it does not take much working out to figure out that the spirit had been pushed over the edge with me annoying it when I became bored. I had so obviously presented myself as a huge threat to it and to its surrounds. Even my goats and lamb had enough sense not to go near it – but not I!

As we were walking down the hill to do the puja on the spot where the spirit was, I became concerned that all this was going to happen near, or on, sacred Aboriginal burial sites, so I asked Lama if he was going to exorcise the spirit. I told him I was a bit worried about that, if he was. He looked at me very sternly and with obvious great dismay, explained through Dawa: *“This is the protector of the mountain! It is protecting this land! You are nothing! You are only here for the blink of an eye! I will simply teach it the dharma so that it will not cause harm to those who live here!”* (The Dharma is the teachings of the Buddha).

With that, he gave me a withering look that would have dropped an elephant at fifty paces and I slunk off to take up my proper position at the rear end of this strange entourage. It was obvious though, that Lama had great respect for this spirit and understood well what its job was.

This was the first of many such looks that made me wonder why I even had the audacity to breathe the same air as normal people.

Lama walked ahead of us and knew exactly where to go. He went straight to where the spirit would loom up at me like a mosquito net. I had a lot of land and he could have gone anywhere, but he went directly to the area. He knew *exactly* what he was doing. I tried to tell Hilary this, but she also gave a withering look and said, “SSSSHHH!” in the loudest voice imaginable.

Lama and Murray set up the many offerings on the long table and then Lama drew a sand mandala on a huge sheet of tin. This tin with the mandala drawn on top was then carefully covered in the wood that was to be burned to make the fire.

I tried very hard to be invisible so as not to annoy anybody, but this was hard because I had so many questions. If I got too close, or started to open my mouth, I got the same withering looks from everyone – including Lama. Somehow the monks and nuns seem to say a lot without opening their mouths. I can never figure that out. I constantly have a need to communicate and the only way I can do so is to open my mouth and make a big noise. Lama had a special way of glaring at me which, I am sure, was a condensed form of some wrathful teaching delivered by the wrathful deity himself. Whatever it was, it always worked because I would immediately try to practice instantaneous combustion. However, my curiosity was far more potent than was my fear and I soon got over it.

After about an hour everything was complete and to the approval of Lama, so we all sat down on a tree stump to have chocolate cake and tea before beginning the puja. Lama seemed happy with everything, although I knew he was sick. He had been to the dentist several days before this event and had some teeth removed. He had become very sick with a poisoned mouth due to infected teeth and he had these teeth removed without any form of pain killing medication! He refused it. No doubt he could send his mind away from his painful body. We had also taken him to a doctor for chest x-rays. So I knew that he was suffering.

THE YELLOW AND BLACK STRIPED SNAKE-LIKE-THING

While watching Lama silently eat his cake, I noticed a movement from under the offering table and then I saw a huge head and body begin to emerge. It looked like a big, round yellow snake with black stripes. It had a rounded end that was its head and it was about five metres long by about two metres around. It slithered out like a concertina slowly and noiselessly towards Lama. This whole puja business about Aboriginal protector spirits was way beyond my simple mind and now *this* was happening!

I started to mumble and squeal incoherently and bounce up and down on the log because I thought all of them could see this thing, yet nobody was doing anything about it, they were all still just sitting eating cake. Lama, of course, finally noticed me flipping out and asked Murray what was I doing, but Murray did not know, so then Dawa was asked to find out. I had gone pale and had the shakes by this time but after so many withering looks, I realized that I really should try to act cool and just accept whatever was happening, and trust that Lama did too. But I could not. So I flipped out.

As soon as I told Dawa what I was seeing, Lama stood up and ordered incense. Murray strolled nonchalantly over to Lama obviously wondering what all the fuss was about and trying to pull two or three sticks of incense from the box. When he got close to Lama, Lama leaped up, snatched the box and lit the entire packet. He also began to say mantras.

By this time I was silently rooted to the spot aghast with fear. For once, not one question escaped my lips. The snake thing then began to retract back under the table exactly as it had come out, in a sort of concertina movement. Lama then asked me what it was doing now, so I told him and he said, “*We start now!*”

THE MIRACLE OF THE UMBRELLA INCIDENT

Lama stood up and took his position on one of the rock seats that looked exactly like a throne, with the fire blazing at his feet. It was in the morning and it was a particularly hot day and Lama was distinctly looking more and more unwell. Sometimes I think that as a living Buddha he manifested this look to really touch my heart, yet in reality he was truly sick and probably in a lot of pain. Whatever the reason, it really worked because to this very day hot tears of absolute devotion and gratitude fall from my selfish eyes at the thought of his great suffering – on my account.

The rest of us were sitting on a log on the grassy area below Lama and the fire. I had taken an umbrella down to the site because I thought it would be too hot for me. *Can you believe it – too hot for ME!!* I cringe now at the thought of it. However, within a short time of Lama beginning the puja, I knew I had to protect his bald head from the blazing sun. But how to do it? I tried as silently as I could to ask Hilary if it would be all right if I crept up behind him and hold the umbrella over him, but I should have known better! All I received was, you guessed it, a withering look and “shhhhhhh!” And rightfully so. I sat there for about five minutes wondering what on earth to do.

Considering that this was a fire puja being performed over an open fire on the hottest day of the year, inches away from a Tibetan Lama straight out of his cave high in the Himalayas, who was ill, with a snake-like thing curled up under the offering table just for

good measure – I sat in absolute turned-to-stone bewilderment. What *does* one do in such circumstance? I had no idea about protocol and such things and being such an obvious nobody and a nothing, what *could* I do? To add insult to injury, I was fast becoming accustomed to the withering looks bestowed on someone of my great ignorance and arrogance, so I did the only thing possible a person of such low status could do – I prayed to Green Tara to help me to do the right thing! *Green Tara, Of Whom I was Totally Terrified!*

If you had even suggested twelve months prior to all this, that this is where I would be and what I would be doing, I would have bopped you on the head and called the men in white jackets to come and get you and take you to the funny farm where all the funny people go! But this really *was* happening and I was not coping. And for whatever reason, maybe from the assurance of my prayers to a green lady who frightened the life out of me, and the fact that I could stand it no longer. I began to crawl up over the stone seats, all the while trying to look invisible. I settled behind Lama, with my head and shoulders lowered over my bent legs so that my head was lower than his. With one bent arm I supported my whole body and with the other hand I held up the umbrella over his head to shade him.

This was indeed a true miracle, because *I sat in this position for hours and hours*. I did not move. I felt no pain in my arm or in my body, even though I was almost bent double. In fact, I felt blissed out, just like floating. ‘Not possible’ I hear you say, and I would agree. But you would have to agree that this really was a true miracle.

At the end of the puja, Lama turned around to face me and in perfect English said, “*Thank you*”. He said *thank you* to me! He was sick, he was in pain, he was hot, he was smothered in smoke, he had been threatened by a yellow, black striped snake-thing – and yet he said thank you to me. Again and again my heart broke into a million liquid drops. It was at that moment – *that very moment* – I knew deep in my heart that I must spend the rest of my life trying to repay him for such kindness.

THE MIRACLE OF THE DROTT

At the time the puja was being performed, my house was the only house within sight. It was totally isolated and quite remote. Most of the land down the side of this mountain where I lived had never been built on, but land was for sale everywhere and building was due to begin soon.

After about fifteen minutes into this amazing puja, a truck came down the hill and stopped several hundred metres away and in full sight of what was going on. There was a small valley between it and where we were. A man got out of the truck and climbed into the back and unloaded a drott (a motorised digging machine). He then started up the drott and began digging up the soil and sending billows of dust and soil directly to where we were. This machine also made a ferocious noise. This went on for about ten minutes. Suddenly Lama turned towards to the drott and, without missing a beat on the sadhana that he was reciting, turned his full attention to the man driving this offending machine. Immediately the drott stopped. The man drove it back onto the back of the truck and the truck left the scene. All in all, he stayed approximately fifteen minutes.

Dawa, Murray, Hilary and I all looked at each other in utter astonishment, none of us could believe what we had just seen. Lama did not bat an eye and he did not miss a beat,

he just kept on with the puja and yet he had performed some kind of communication with this man, who obviously became convinced that he had better things to be doing somewhere else.

Miracle or not. You decide.

Someone later told me that Great Realized Beings had the power to be able to control machinery. I do not know anything about this, I just know what I saw. What we all saw. Every one of us sitting there then realized that this Lama sitting amidst all the smoke and fire was no ordinary being. No ordinary maroon and gold clad Tibetan Lama.

LAMA'S ILLNESS

As I mentioned, while Lama was at Chenrezig Institute, he became ill. He was taken to a doctor and a dentist and had x-rays taken. Several of his teeth were poisoned so he was very ill. However, he continued to teach and help us to understand the profound esoteric teachings of the Buddha that are not often explained, but he also taught, or tried to teach, some of the rituals in Tibetan culture such as the Chum Dancing. Most of all though, he had the ability to show us our own minds, which he did constantly and which we constantly did not like.

It was thought that his teeth had become poisoned from the many, many *Nyung Nyes* he had done and also from practicing *chulen*. *Nyung Nye* is a purification fasting practice and *chulen* is a practice that yogis can do when there is no food, whereby they take the essence from rocks and the wind and so on. Such practices performed over long periods of time would have to have some affect on the physical body, even though that body belonged to a living Buddha. This is only my guess, and what would I know, but I believe that Lama manifested illness for one particular reason – to give us the opportunity to practice compassion.

While Lama was in retreat at Tsum, high in the Himalayas, he had learned to live on nettles and then eventually to exist from taking the essence from rocks and flowers by making them into pills. He was later to give me some of these pills to be offered to people with cancer.

His trainings were beyond imagining. He was a great yogi. Nevertheless, his great mind and consciousness were encased within a body and that body was still subject to all the sufferings that a body can experience, such as old age, sickness and, of course, ultimately lead to death. When I think about this, it almost breaks my heart. I was/am so indescribably ignorant. I should have seen that he needed help and that he needed taking precious care of. I should have seen and done so many, many things, but I was so caught up with my own feelings about him that I did not see his suffering. I did see it, but I did nothing to alleviate it. I think that many of us do not understand what our eyes are telling us during such emotional situations and it is only when we look back in retrospect that we can see more clearly and, hopefully, gain the wisdom to understand the teaching that is so obviously being offered. But first we have to be aware before we can see the lesson. It was obvious that Lama was suffering and yet he never asked for anything. He just did what had to be done with the whole of his Buddha heart without complaint or request. I do believe that he had good reason to question our motivations, but complain – he never did.

The final straw that breaks my heart every time I think about it is the fact that he came from his beloved cave at Tsum where he had everything he needed – solitude, peace and the wild animals that were his friends, he left the perfection of his environment, to come and teach us.

“To benefit ME!” I shriek at the top of my voice!

When Lama Yeshe died, I believe that Lama Zopa Rinpoche asked Lama several times to leave his cave at Tsum and to go and live at Kopan in order to help the west. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was Lama’s Guru, so he did what was asked of him simply to benefit us.

Whatever happened or did not happen when he came to Chenrezig Institute does not matter, I take on the full karma myself because the benefit of his suffering fell onto me. Without doubt, he changed the life of so many, many people, but it all starts with one – oneself. So the rest of my life will be spent trying to repay this extraordinary kindness and compassion that only a Bodhisattva can manifest.

It is not good enough to say that none of us realized that he was a Buddha, because we should treat all beings as if they were Buddhas no matter whether they look like Buddhas or not. Lama gave every one of us the opportunity to practice this very thing. This was a true experiential teaching. Most of his teachings were, I believe, experiential teachings. He was a true Master at all levels.

Lama taught in many ways. He taught different people on different levels and he taught different teachings to different students. He gave us every opportunity to learn lessons that we did not want to accept nor recognize about ourselves. He offered us the chance to really see our delusions head-on and, on seeing our naked mind, see the need to want to change. And he knew exactly how to do this. He showed each one of us our own mind and we did not always like what we saw. I saw this for myself and from listening to what other people said about him and their reactions to him.

I could not believe many things that some students would say about him and yet, I knew they were being given a direct teaching. However, at the time they could not see it and this surprised me greatly. It is one thing for an ignoramus such as myself to be presented with life lessons because I am not important, but when several long-term ambitious students convincingly labeled him as being rough, unkempt, just a mountain yogi and even having bad table manners, I began to wonder. It was then that I became aware of Lama’s great skills. The penny does not always drop immediately. Now those same students must surely be regretting such public displays of their deluded view based on self-centredness. But the penny does eventually drop and when it does, we all remember who dropped it. I mention this sad fact simply because we are all subject to defensiveness when confronted with our own delusions and self-cherishing nature and just how dangerous our opinions are when we try to influence others simply to make ourselves sound important and official.

There were, thank heavens, several students who could not understand how these negative labels could apply to the same object that we were all seeing, merely labeled as ‘Geshe Lama Konchog.’

This was truly a great lesson Lama showed us of the dangers of imputing our own minds onto objects. I learned that such labelling can, and does, cause great suffering. We do not always see objects in the same way, I discovered. The labeling is made from one’s own mind, I also discovered. I learned the hard way that nothing appears as it seems to exist. I learned that my label is not the same label that you have for the same

object. BIG lesson, and one that cannot be learned from books, it takes the kindness of the guru to make it an experiential lesson. And this is what Lama taught to every one of us at Chenrezig Institute during that special time.

Lama taught experientially. It was *this* that made him different. This was the great miracle. Lama was different from the other Lamas who visited us and who made us smile and feel good about ourselves. Lama did none of this. He did not smile much, except at my acute embarrassment and ineffectiveness and he had the great knack of making us feel not so good about ourselves. Skilful means, no doubt. To me though, this was the first of many incredible lessons that I was to learn, and from areas that you would never suspect to be teachings. To me these lessons were nothing short of miracles. From those days at Chenrezig, I learned about the dangers of imputation.

Lama was a big, tall, powerful man for a Tibetan and he looked every inch like a mountain yogi. Even though he was so ill at that time, photos taken of him later showed the healthy, strong man he later returned to being years later. Even so, at that time he had a very imposing presence. You knew you were in the presence of somebody very different, very, very powerful and very, very compassionate. And he had an air about him that he knew something that you didn't. He had a very powerful energy field surrounding him that I felt he tried to conceal with a very humble countenance. But he could not fool me, I could see nothing other than a living Buddha, even though I did not have an inkling what a Buddha looked like. He was truly humble, yet he was truly powerful. *He was like a nuclear bomb wrapped up in Christmas tinsel paper.*

Lama's external countenance was not good while he was in Australia. He was definitely not being looked after as one would expect a holy man to be treated. His precious Robes looked as if he had washed them himself and then he had hung them up, all screwed up, on to a log to dry. To him, this would have been nothing, *but for us it is a big shame.* For me personally, it is the cause for immediate rebirth as a lowly, wriggling worm. Sobeit – but even as a worm I will try to make sure he is comfortable. I promise!

This was a truly great lesson to every one of us at that time and place. Most probably this was one lesson he tried to show us – take care of everybody as if they were a living Buddha. I think this would be one of the greatest lessons that he left for us. But did we learn from it, I wonder? From my side, I was the most ignorant and the most arrogant and now I suffer terribly just thinking about it. I truly suffer. I truly hurt. My heart breaks. Another great experiential lesson on the causes of suffering.

PHOTO 6. CHENREZIG GOMPA AROUND 1980



Each time I went to Lama's teachings, I can remember very clearly going into the gumpa, sitting on a cushion and waiting for him to come in. I can remember him coming into the gumpa, doing his three prostrations and then sitting on his cushion. I can distinctly remember him sitting down, I do not know why, I just remember it very clearly. But then, I remember nothing from that moment on until the teaching was over. This happened at every session. Where my mind went, I do not know. It never happened with any other teacher, before or after.

One day I do clearly remember however, was one session when we were all spaced out for some forgotten reason and we were all beginning to collapse, prone, on the floor trying to keep our eyes open. No doubt we had had a 'heavy' morning of teachings by Lama and that had scrambled our brains, and then our tummies were full to the brim with the home made bread and other goodies we had had for lunch, so the blood had completely drained out of our heads. When you are a Buddhist one of the first things you learn is how to sit crossed legged with a straight back and completely go to sleep. No one knows, they just think you are meditating. But of course, we could not fool Lama! He could see with his special eyes that we were out-of-it and that he was teaching to unconscious bodies, so at one point he stopped talking and said, "*You are all paid by the government to be here – so the least you can do is listen!*" He was of course, referring to most of us who were on the dole. (The dole is unemployment benefit). We were all bright eyed and bushy tailed with straight backs after that and amazingly, our brains cleared instantly.

We were all a bit scared of him, of that there is no doubt. Why scared, I do not know, but I suspect that it was because he was so different. Or maybe it was because we reckoned that he could see our mind directly, no matter how much we tried to hide it. I think he had a presence that was beyond our normal perception of a smiling Tibetan Lama and we could not quite make him out. We could not quite stick an appropriate

label on him and put him in a recognisable box. However, to me he always looked like a chocolate-coated marshmallow, even when he almost stopped my heart from beating with wrathful, withering glares. I understood him, but why, I had absolutely no idea.

MOUNT MERU CAKES

After the teachings were over he would beckon me to come to the Sangha House and have some cake with him. The night before the teachings I would make him a cake. I cannot cook, so the cake would usually rise in very weird ways, usually vertical in the middle like a pointed sandcastle and be about 1 inch thick around the base. I would colour them green, or orange, chocolate or purple. They would usually be covered with a thick luscious, multi-coloured icing and then sprinkled with all sorts of brightly coloured things. I would then place the cake near his cushion in the gumpa. He obviously loved cake and one day he thanked me for them, even though I never said who had left them. He laughingly said to me, “*Just like Mount Meru!*” Again my heart wobbled in my chest and threatened to explode.

THE TEACHING THRONE

When Lama came to Chenrezig Institute, a special teaching throne had been made but he refused to sit on it. It had several demountable levels and he demanded that it be put on the lowest possible level. I asked him once why he would not sit on the high throne as it was intended for him and that it would please us very much if he would sit on it. He spoke to me so gently and said that he could not sit on such a high throne because he did not know if any of us were Buddhas, and he could not sit and teach on a level higher than a Buddha. *Only a Buddha would say that.*

Lama was a truly realized teacher. He could fix you with his eyes and you would get a direct teaching. Probably not what you wanted to know, but nevertheless you got the message. What you did with that message was of course, up to you. Many of us were awe-inspired by him and I, for one, swear blind that the hill shook every time he walked up it.

AN ESOTERIC TEACHING

We were all pretty much know-it-alls at Chenrezig by the time Lama came to us. Although we had had no resident Geshe (a Geshe is a highly trained lama equivalent to our PhD) for years, we did have constant visits from the Tibetan Lamas who were resident within Australia.

We dearly loved and valued the wonderful teachers who came, such as Geshe Dawa from Sydney, Geshe Doga from Melbourne and Khensur Rinpoche from Adelaide. Of course, when Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche came from overseas to teach us, we were ecstatic with joy. This was all very exciting and we ran around on our very best behaviour, dressed in our very best hippy clothes and being oh-so-polite to each other – and hoping this would all be noticed.

When Lama came the news quickly got around that he had been in a cave for many years and that he had done thousands of Nyung Nyes. When we heard this, we quickly

pounced and requested some very profound teachings. *Any* profound teachings. We considered that we had heard the Lam Rim (the Graduated Path to Enlightenment) just one time too many and now we needed something else, something much more exotic, esoteric, meatier.

When I say ‘we’ I use a collective term only, as I did not have the knowledge to even know what a ‘profound’ teaching was. Several of the boys had connived together and decided to ask for such a teaching. They were very good dedicated students so they knew what they wanted and they knew how to ask for it. Lama politely agreed and humbly said that he would give a teaching on The Heart Sutra. Oh no! This obviously disappointed a few because we wanted something that we had not heard before. We wanted something that would go well with the many and varied initiations that we were all clambering after and notching up on our belts. We wanted something we could impress our friends, who were not there, with.

We were all incredibly fortunate to have had the karma in the first place, to be offered so many levels of initiations and I will always be so grateful to the great Lamas who gave them. I pay great homage to each one. When you consider how many countless humans, animals, fish and insects never even hear a word of The Buddha, let alone be offered tantric initiations on Highest Yoga Tantra level, we were extremely fortunate *and* privileged. ‘Fortunate’ is merely a label, because we had all somehow, at some place, at some time, given cause to be offered this rare opportunity to take Tantric initiations again this lifetime. Due to the extra-specialness of Chenrezig Institute during those amazing days, the collective karma had ripened for us to be together again and to be offered teachings and initiations at such a high level – and by such highly realized Lamas.

Of course, the trick from then on is to maintain that incredible karma and to practice mindfully so that the karma continues to increase, so that again we will have this rare opportunity in future lives to come. We never know when the karma that we initially created will run out. Even though we have accrued the positive karma to have contact with the word of The Buddha, it is only through the guru’s extreme kindness that it can be offered. Without the guru, we would know nothing because we would hear nothing. We have, indeed, been extremely fortunate.

So, back to the tale: Here we were altogether again from some far off distant time, sitting at the feet of a Highly Realized Master, waiting for a discourse on the Heart Sutra.

At that time, we recited The Heart Sutra before every teaching and most of us knew it off by heart. We rattled it off, very proudly remembering every single word. Even more proud were we of the long prayers of dedication that we said word and rhythm perfect – in Tibetan! But *meaning*-perfect? But here, as always, I can only speak for myself and that is in the negative.

In those early days, many of the Chenrezigites had been to India and Nepal and had seen what the rest of us could only dream about. And feed our imaginations they did until we believed that we knew it all too. Of course, we all *completely* understood and *totally* comprehended the teachings that we did receive – and now we wanted something gutsier than Lam Rim. Ha! We wanted something to debate and skite about in our private little circles.

I do joke here, of course, because as Lama had shown us, who am I to criticize because who amongst us would even know a Buddha if we bumped into one. For all I know,

everybody there could well have been an enlightened being and really did fully understand the teachings being offered. How would I know?

Well, we got what we asked for. We got The Heart Sutra teaching by Geshe Lama Konchog! Even the ones who knew-it-all, had their socks blown off them. Incidentally, this teaching has been transcribed, but due to the bad state of the old tape it is unfortunately not truly as Lama taught.

CHENREZIG INSTITUTE

To be very fair, those early heady days at Chenrezig Institute were mind blowingly wonderful. Tibetan Buddhism was new to all Australians but some of us (not me!) had had the fortunate karma to have had first hand experiences of teachings in incense filled gompas with mystical thankas in far off exotic places. The rest of us could only listen and drink in every word and detail.

We wore wonderful flowing clothes with dangly jewellery as exotic as we could find. We wore tights *under* everything and wraps *over* everything. We all smelled of incense and wonderful oils. We all had red blessed cords around our necks and left arms as a sign of having had something mystical done and this set us apart from the rest of Australians. We gathered our mandala offerings with wonderful, meaningful, mystical things. We learned to say the prayers in Tibetan off by heart. We tried to look as Tibetan as we could and we tried to believe we were actually living in Tibet. We even flourished our exotic sounding Dharma names to all and sundry. The gompa was an exciting world within itself set apart from normal outside humdrum of reality and it was all somewhere that we all psychologically, emotionally and spiritually fitted. *We were all in a place that was truly our 'home'*.

Chenrezig Institute became not only a happening place, it became for many, the real world set aside from normality. It was our home and we were all family, dharma brothers and sisters, just as people do to this very day. It was truly wonderful and many of us even built our own homes there. We certainly looked the part and were easily and quickly identified by the general population on the Sunshine Coast as being *'the Buddhist hippies from up on the hill'*. Merely labelled! In those days we did have a bit of a reputation for hanging out of trees upside down and of being slightly 'out there'. Sadly, those days have now been lost forever. But great, they were.

From my side I did not mix much because I did not live there, I liked the other alternate world of sports cars, fancy clothes and excitement too much. I had my own form of attachment and it was what they were renouncing. Regardless of this, I still looked and behaved the part when I was there. For me however, the gompa was the attraction and the familiar feelings that were associated with what it contained was a magnet of meaningfulness. The gompa filled me with an explosion of feelings and memories that touched my very being. It was not until I met Lama for the first time that it all came together. It was as if the jigsaw puzzle suddenly began to show a vague picture.

THE FUNNY FARM

Lama was always very interested to hear about the sick and suffering people who had been coming to my farmhouse over the previous twenty years or so. I am not a practitioner of anything, but people seemed to find comfort in coming to the farm and especially in being with the animals.

Lama took great interest in stories about my farm, which he saw when he came to do the fire puja. For instance, I told him about one particular young boy of about ten years of age who was brought by his distraught father for a visit. This boy had lost his mother in a car accident two years previously and except for angry outbursts, had stopped talking and interacting with the rest of the family. Doctors could only offer medication and counselling which had not worked and had in fact, made things worse because the boy had retreated further and further into himself.

The first day he came we just looked at each other. The next time he came, we did the same thing. I was hesitant to see him again, but the father insisted. Not knowing what to do or say to him, I took him down to see the goats and Lambie. All the animals were pets and had no idea they were below the human realm and I knew he would be safe with them, so I left him with them for the hour. I watched from the window of the house and noticed that at first he just sat on a tree stump and looked glum. Slowly, slowly the lamb and the two goats came and sat near him. After a while they sat around him leaning on his body and chewing their cud.

One day just before his father came to collect him, I saw the boy wrap his arms right around the big male goat's neck and bury his head deep into its throat. Weed, the goat, just sat still and did not move, he just laid his head back and continued to quietly chew his cud. The boy cried and cried.

Weed was a huge neutered Anglo-Nubian goat that knew grief himself, and I truly believe that he understood that the boy was suffering and so he offered his body as comfort. When Weed was born he was undersized and his mother rejected him. He had a twin sister, Dumb Dora, who was not real bright as she had no idea which end of her mother the milk was and was continually sucking frustratingly on her mothers ears, hence 'Dumb Dora'. When the twins were born she was three times his size and he looked pathetic and sickly, so his mother considered he was a waste of good milk and every time Weed tried to suckle, his mother would kick him. Weed was bottle fed by me and 'sooked' to perfection. So much so, that he grew to be the most enormous goat with ferocious looking horns. He was an intimidating sight and yet he was as gentle as a kitten. If you put your face near him, he would kiss you.

The boy came for some time after that, we did not speak and he would go straight down to the goats and lamb where they all had a lovely time together just sitting quietly and cuddling. Slowly, slowly the boy started to talk to the animals and then eventually he gained the confidence to interact with his family again.

Of course, I believe that Lama had a great deal to play with all this, even though I was yet to meet him. I like to think that Lama knew this too. I consider this story to be a Lama Miracle.

Because of his deep grief, the boy had recoiled in to an isolated place within himself where nobody could get at him. Although family, friends and doctors had all tried their

best to talk to him, he was beyond their grasp, simply I believe, because they tried too hard. Also, because of his age he did not have the capabilities to understand grief and what was happening, so he just shut down.

Even though Weed would appear to be threatening and scary to a young boy, through him, the boy learned to trust again. He learned to accept comfort and caring. He learned it was all right to just cry and lean on someone, even though it was only a goat.

This boy made great friends with Lambie the lamb who was the size of a horse, and even with Dumb Dora who was slightly away with the fairies. He came to visit them for years and years. The animals did not expect anything from him and they did not try to make him talk. They just accepted the way he was at that particular moment, and he understood this. They imputed nothing!

CANCER PILLS

Many of the people who came to the farm were suffering from cancer and were very fearful of dying. Mainly we spoke about death and dying because their fears were very personal and they did not want to burden their family and friends with them. Also the house had a very special feeling about it, which I believe was created by the many Tibetan artefacts, books, statues, thankas and prayer flags that gave it a feeling of peace and refuge. Not only this, but now I know for dead-set sure, that Lama's presence was in this house even before I was aware of it. These people did not want answers or advice; they just needed to be heard. I believe that Lama not only heard them, but also guided them in their final days.

Lama asked me to tell him about all these stories of sick people and then he gave me about fifty roughly rounded pills about the size of a seed from a bodhi tree. These pills, he said, were pills to be given to people with cancer. He explained that he had gathered the ingredients and made them himself while living in his cave in the Himalayas. You could tell the pills had been made by hand because they were different sizes and shapes and there was considerable variation in the colour. Even though he gave specific instructions on how people were to take them, I did not really listen because I considered them far too precious to digest - put them in at one end and spit them out the other! Just look at what our body does to the delicious things that we put into our mouths.

As well as this, there were not enough pills to be given to so many people, so instead, I very seriously told these people to tie them into a little bag and wear them around their necks. My reasoning was that these were holy, precious pills made by a living Buddha and so would work on the mind far better than they ever would on a contaminated body.

Stoooooopid idea!

One day Lama beckoned me to go with him to the Sangha house. I followed along behind him like a little pussycat that had just drunk all the cream, until we reached the house and he very sternly told me to sit down. I sat! There was no chair other than the one he was sitting on, so I sat on the floor or rather, my legs just folded up underneath me at the order and I crashed onto the floor in the cross-legged position.

I suspected that I had done something not pleasing to a living Buddha and I started to go red and hyperventilate, but it was too late now to back out and run away. Lama leaned over the table very earnestly and with a very sweet, condescending smile, asked: "Why are you sending all these people up to me with the pills around their necks?" This

was not a *'I am pleased with you'* type of smile, it was more like *'I am sympathetic to your great ignorance and barbaric superstitious mind – but what the heck is going on in your head?!'* type of smile. With an after thought of, *'please explain!'*

Realizing that something was about to burst into a fireball, I felt myself going redder and redder. Lama's face became more and more stern until he looked just like Mahakala (a wrathful deity). And just when I thought I was going to faint, he yelled through the translator: *"If your doctor ordered antibiotics for you, would you wear them as earrings?!"*

I just looked at him dumbfounded for what seemed like the longest time. I could not move, I could not breathe, I could not even mercifully faint. All I could only do was go red. I just wished that the floor would drop out and I would go straight down to the hell realms, where, obviously I belonged. And still Lama glared.

Just when I was about to expire from mortification and lack of breathing, suddenly his face opened up and his mouth looked like the Grand Canyon and he laughed. He laughed and laughed until his eyes turned to water and then he sniffed, blew his nose and then began laughing again. When he could not laugh anymore, he came around to me and put his arm on mine and very seriously said: *"It's alright. I know what you meant. It's alright."*

After that little episode I began to doubt very much that he had any hope for me whatsoever. Also after that I realized that I could survive anything. Asthma attacks were nothing compared to that experience.

In retrospect, I still believe that the pills worked on a far wider scale than just digesting them. Most of the people who took the pills went into instant remission. However, their purpose was not always to prolong life. For instance, Venerable Chodron, a nun at Chenrezig Institute brought a young woman down to this house who had cancer and we made arrangements for her to speak to Lama who was in Singapore. Lama gave instructions to her over the phone and she took one of the cancer pills to give to this lady. Lama performed a miracle because she became ordained before she died. There is no doubt in my mind that Lama would have not only helped her find peace in the refuge of the Sangha, but he would have guided her through the bardo when she died.

I believe that these pills worked on a far wider scale than just on the physical body. They obviously could not stop one from dying if the karma had run out for living, but they were imbued with such compassionate and powerful energy that it is beyond my understanding or capabilities to be able to explain.

I believe that this was a great miracle of the Geshe Lama Konchog cancer pills.

If I may skip ahead a few years, there was another cancer pills miracle that was to unfold several years later:

I have lost count of how many pills I gave away during that time when Lama was in Australia in 1987, but it was most of them. When I went to Singapore to be with Lama for his cancer operation in 2000, I found the box with the pills in it and the box was full.

The trip to Singapore was an immediate and urgent trip and I had barely time to pack. The box of pills came in a dream the night before I left Australia and I knew I had to take them with me. I woke up, got out of bed and immediately put them in my handbag. I promptly then forgot all about them. One day while Lama was in the hospital, he asked

if I had brought the cancer pills. I could not believe it. There they were inside my bag that I was holding, so I immediately gave them to him.

He asked if he could have three and for me to take the rest home and give them to others with cancer. I said no, that he should have the lot, but we started to argue. I did not want to argue with him because he was so ill – and so kind, so I offered them all to Tenzin Zopa, his beloved attendant, later that day. I did not have to argue with Tenzin Zopa because there was no point. I just put them in his hand. He accepted all the pills except for three, which he handed back to me. These were the three that Lama had asked for and now they would be offered to others. I accepted them back and carefully wrapped them up and put them back in my handbag.

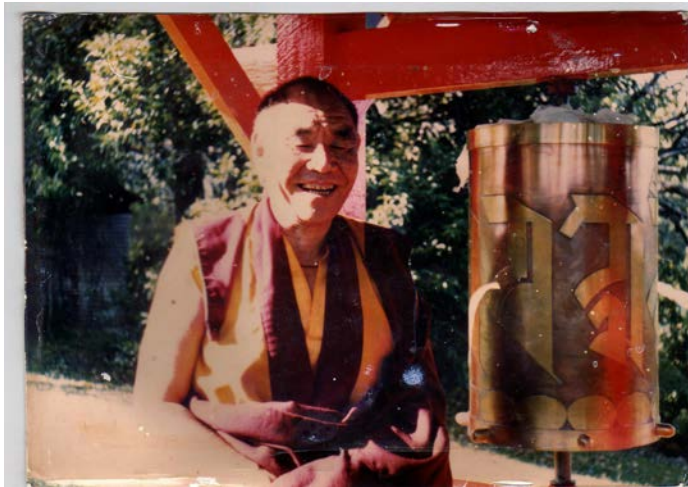
When I came home from Singapore after giving Lama the pills except for the three, I opened the wrappings to put the pills in another box on my altar – and the box was again full. I still have them as evidence, in their original wrapping.

This miracle is surely proof that Lama truly was a living Buddha who could perform miracles.

THE PRAYER WHEEL

PHOTO 7 A AND B.

A - LAMA STANDING NEXT TO HIS PRAYER WHEEL LOOKING VERY PLEASED.



B- THE NOW VENERABLE TONY BEAUMONT WITH MALA THE RESIDENT DOG



Lama decided that there should be a prayer wheel at Chenrezig Institute. Stewart and friends were to make it under strict guidance and instruction from Lama. This prayer wheel had the mantras of the Medicine Buddha placed inside on microfiche so that every time it is spun, the prayers would go out to the environment and bless all beings. Although a small prayer wheel by some standards, it is nevertheless a very powerful one.

There were several miracles performed by Lama during the making of this prayer wheel and in the last chapter an account is given of one, as told by Stewart Moore.

THE MIRACLE OF LAMBIE'S JUMPER

As I have mentioned before, the goats and Lambie were to play a role in a few of the miracles that Lama performed.

Lambie was a very special black Romney Marsh/Merino sheep. I had bought him at the annual exhibition in Brisbane when he was just two weeks old and he had been bottle-fed and considered me to be his mother. His name was Lambie. He lived with two female Nubian goats, Alpha and Beta who both mothered him. Beta gave birth to two kids, Weed and Dumb Dora and so Lambie had a brother and sister as well and from then on, thought of himself as a goat. The goats all thought they were humans, except Dumb Dora who thought she was a fairy. All were extremely well behaved and loving to each other as well as to everybody else who they met. We were all one big happy family and they thought I was their mother.

PHOTO 8 LAMBIE



PHOTO 9 DUMB-DORA



WEED

At the time Lama was in Australia in 1987, Lambie's beautiful long black fleece was beginning to go fairly grey due to age and it had specks of gold and silver in it, so I spun it and knitted it into a vest for Lama. Lama immediately had everyone at Chenrezig running around having it dyed maroon.

Again, may I skip to several years later:

Several days before I left for Kathmandu for the consecration of Lama's stupa in 2003, a student from Chenrezig Institute came down to my house with a parcel, all carefully wrapped up. She said, "*We have just found this parcel in some boxes and we thought you may like it, because we believe that it was Lama Konchog's.*" And here was the Lambie jumper I had knitted sixteen years before. To me though, this was a miracle sign from Lama that he knew I was going to his stupa consecration. To me, it was a gift. I have absolutely no doubts about that. Big miracle!

When I got to Kopan, I immediately took this Lambie vest back to Lama's house and laid it carefully where it belonged, on his bed. I knelt down and placed my forehead on his bed and offered the parcel as if he were still alive and taking it with his own hands. I am sure he would have been pleased.

To me this was an unmistakable miracle that clearly showed the incredible love and compassion of this great Buddha/yogi. Even after Lama's body had been cremated he was still able to perform miracles with his enlightened mind that gave so much pleasure to others.

TIBETAN PLAY AND CHUM DANCING

Lama left Australia when he knew we were to get our new teaching Lama – Geshe Tashi Tsering. He was at Chenrezig Institute for approximately five months only.

A special day of merriment was arranged by the Chenrezigites with play-acting, singing and so on. Lama took a big part in the ceremonies himself and arranged for costumes to be made by the girls and he even tried to teach several of the local lads Chum dancing.

Listening to the selected few who were chosen to learn and perform the Chum dancing, you get the impression that it was just a tad beyond their capabilities. Considering that they had absolutely no idea what Lama was trying to teach them because they had never even seen Chum dancing, and they were all too terrified to say so, so it was to be a truly amazing day. Lama was of course, an expert at the Chum dancing and was obviously used to teaching people who had at least a working idea of this ancient Tibetan dance ritual, but for us Aussies it did not come naturally. However, by all accounts the day of dancing, along with all the other festivities that happened to farewell Geshe Lama Konchog, was a good day had by all – including Lama.

I did not go to the festivities because I just could not cope with the thought of Lama leaving. I knew deep in my heart that I would not see him again for a very long time, if ever. I had never been so affected by anybody or anything in the whole of my life and my sadness was just too much to bear in public. Somehow I thought that if I did not go, neither would he.

I had got used to the withering looks at my all too apparent ignorance and the obvious hilarity at my expense at things I did not think were at all funny. I had got used to being with him. And I was getting used to my new life. And I just did not know how I could face life without him. Even my sacred sports car was not in the same league – and that is saying something.

Although he was at Chenrezig only for about five months, I could not bring myself to go and just talk to him. On the few times I found myself face to face with him, my jaw would drop open and refuse to shut. Lama always seemed to note that, and then give a good impression of wrathful agreement by nodding his head and laughing. One day I did pluck up enough courage to go and see him to ask what should I do now – now that I had been unstuck and unpicked and not put back together. Well, not quite those words, but pretty much. He told me that *I was to be a power-house of positive energy and to do his work in Australia.*

I had absolutely no idea what he meant and I was sure as anything that I was not going to ask, so I just nodded. Somewhere deep in the hidden recesses of my heart, I understood.

CHAPTER 3

AFTER LAMA LEFT AUSTRALIA

1987.

After Lama left Australia I knew I had changed. I was utterly confused and felt something I had never felt before and that was dependence upon another person. The worst part was, I did not know why. I only knew that now I had a different view of the world because I was looking at it from another angle and dimension. The confusion bothered me and the other feeling in my heart and gut bothered me; this was an inexplicable gnawing that was indefinable, but bordering on painful.

Except for a few disasters with men, I had always been a very independent and happy person. The disasters came with the need of others to change me into being something more to their own liking – and no doubt for my own best interests, but I have always been perfectly happy inside me. My usual reaction to this unsolicited attention was to exchange them for a newer model of the same make.

I had been a secretary to an Australian Senator, a public servant, spent most of my life at the bottom of the ocean scuba diving, graduated from Queensland University and, all in all, lived my life totally to its maximum limits all wrapped up in a Bohemian atmosphere of lushness and excitement.

I trusted nobody and until I met Geshe Lama Konchog, I was master of my own destiny and as free as a bird. That was until Geshe Lama Konchog came, *AND* saw, *AND* conquered. I was not the me anymore that I remembered. But more than this, he challenged me to review, re-evaluate and ultimately to reconstruct everything I that I had understood to be my type of reality. I think this was the seed of the gnawing in my stomach.

When Lama left Australia, I was left for the first time in my life feeling insecure, unsure of myself and what is worse, alone. I felt completely vulnerable and lost. None of these states of mind I had ever experienced before, so meeting Lama again in this life truly was a mind-altering experience of mammoth proportions. It was not blissful and devotional; it was unnerving and scary. And I had never EVER known fear before in my entire life, simply because I was always in command.

Lama had been able to separate my secure, familiar view of myself as being wild and free under the control of nothing and no one, in other words not dependent on anyone else, from what I now know, to be *his* view of reality. These two different forms of the real reality of things, as he saw it and from my perspective, were to change. Ultimately there would be only one way, and it was not intended to be mine. I feel from the bottom of my heart that Lama just thought there would have to be a few little adjustments from my side, and just how difficult they would be, would be up to me. At least I had a control over something! But just how difficult those initial, humongous, adjustments would prove to be was nothing that I could have even have guessed at, or been prepared for.

I believe that the weapon he used to achieve the desired results was separateness. By becoming separated from all the causes and conditions that had hitherto influenced me to be so carefree, such as my farm, money, self-importance, freedom and rebelliousness, suddenly they were not important any more. I was then left with insecurity and self-doubt. This

achieved the effect of being alone inside my own head, because the outside stimuli no longer held the fascination that this Tibetan Lama who scowled and laughed at me, did.

Something had happened and I did not know what. And I hate not knowing everything, because then you are not in control. And now, I was not. Something had changed and it was inside me, but this Lama had done it. That much I knew.

And then he isolated himself from me physically. But before he disappeared from my grasping attachment, he isolated my mind from the path I had always skipped merrily along and he used that isolation to force me into changing. He had brought my mind to a crashing stand-still. Worse, I was alone in that awful energy and there was no guide, no map, and I could see no path. And Geshe Lama Konchog had gone home!

What I did know for sure though, was that Geshe Lama Konchog was now a big part of my waking and sleeping consciousness, but yet I had no idea how or why we were connected, because I knew nothing about guru devotion and its implications. He had never spoken more than a few words to me during the entire five months he was in Australia and yet we certainly did communicate. His looks said it all. There were scowls, growls, and withering looks that literally dumped me into the scariest, darkest of places, which stripped away all feelings of self-righteousness and self-importance. Nobody had ever been able to do that before. Yet there were also knowing, loving, smiling and happy looks that set my heart soaring with the eagles. On the odd occasions when he would smile at me, I would wobble and nearly fall over. I would get such a shock that my only reaction was to hyperventilate and go red. No wonder his gentle smiles were followed by gut-wrenching laughter. Worse, I knew that the laughter was all at my expense. And I also knew there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. No matter how cool I tried my very, very best to look, I still looked like a boiling tea kettle every time he looked at me.

My eyes never left his when I was in his presence. Mostly I tried to be invisible so that I did not do something wrong in his eyes, which I inevitably managed to do anyway. It was better just to sit still with mouth closed and watch from a safe distance – hidden, if possible. This is always extremely hard for me, but Lama had a fierce way of looking that immediately folded my legs and sat me straight down and my mouth would slam shut like a big iron gate. Involuntarily!

After a week or so of his leaving, these feelings changed from sadness to confusion to anger to frustration and then back again. Anger, because I could do absolutely nothing to control the situation as I was so used to doing. I was also angry because I could not be with him whenever and wherever I chose and this was also a new situation for me. I was losing control of my knowable, predictable life and getting faint sniffs of things to come.

I was angry with him for leaving me in this situation and I was angry with me for having the karma to be left in this situation. And I did not know what to do about any of it because I understood nothing about any of it.

But this was only the beginning of the upheavals that were yet to come.

THE MEDITATIONAL PATH BEGINS

From then on, when I went to Chenrezig Institute, all I could talk about was Geshe Lama Konchog, Geshe Lama Konchog, and Geshe Lama Konchog. This was okay because they all knew him, but nobody had been smitten like I had been. I could not really understand why they were not all upset and wailing like I was, so I sat under the trees and knitted him

jumpers, socks, scarves and more jumpers. I would ask people passing by if they would like to do a few stitches for him too. Everyone thought I was nuts!

One nun had had enough of this month after month (or was it year after year?) and finally she came over to me and asked, “*Are you sure you just don’t have a romantised view of this Lama?*” She said this in such an accusing way that I was completely taken aback. *Crikey! Did I?* I went home and thought about this deeply. I shut the door on the world and focused on this question. Was I just imagining things? Was I only fantasizing? Were the feelings I had, just delusions? Was I so lacking in whatever it was that I latched on to a Tibetan Lama? Was I giving my own power away to some other person, mindlessly? Had I succumbed to first, middle and last stage dementia all at once?

The self-doubt got more and more deluded and intense until I got completely rattled and confused. I stopped going out with my friends, I stopped racing around the streets at 150 kilometers an hour in my sacred sports car defying the cops and I even stopped caring what I had on. I spent a fortune on op-shops (second hand clothing shops), hunting for anything that fitted the inside image of wildness and outrageousness, so abandoning this was really something serious.

It was at this point that I began to meditate. No doubt this was born out of desperation. I tried to remember the teachings that I had only half listened to and tried to get in touch with the place inside my heart where I thought the answers might be. But I could not find that place because I could not find any questions that made sense and without the right question, how on earth could I find, or know, the right answer should I stumble upon it.

So I began to meditate on Lama instead. I would sit and try to remember every detail about his face, his hair, his ears and most of all, his eyes. I tried my best to just *feel* his presence. I began to focus on his energy instead of his persona. I only had one picture of him and that was a cut-out from the local newspaper who reported on a Tibetan Lama visiting Chenrezig Institute. I still have that precious, precious picture.

Being a social butterfly, friends began to worry about why I was not answering the telephone, which rang and rang, so I took it off the hook. Friends came through the front gate and banged on the door, so I put up a big sign, ‘**GO AWAY!**’ But the sign was not quite that polite.

Somehow, somewhere I was going to find something that would give me a clue as to why my mind was suffering so much and I knew I needed to be alone on this journey. This was the beginning to learning how to close down. A huge miracle for a whacky extrovert. I think it was at this point that I began to learn how to connect with his holy mind. This is something you do not learn from books, it is something that you have to be absolutely driven to do with every fibre of your being. It takes an extraordinary guru to inspire such desperation. It also takes great skill and compassion from the side of the guru as well. The true guru will not always be kind and gentle with you because that is not their aim. Their aim is to jolt you into awareness that the path you are going down is going to lead to disaster, either in this life or next. I know that now, because I survived the kindness of the guru!

The more I meditated, the more clear my view of him became. It was not so much a remembering of his physical body that was becoming clearer, but rather a clearer understanding of his energy and how it was affecting my mind. I began to feel very strongly connected to him, so much so that my entire conversations from then on all revolved around Geshe Lama Konchog, exclusively. Even people who had never met or heard about him

before, heard so much that they felt they knew him too. I could not get him out of my head or off the end of my tongue.

The kind nun who had started me on this quest had unleashed a powerful energy called guru devotion, but first she unknowingly introduced me to meditation. I knew now that my thoughts and feelings had been right all along and that there really was a special, heart-felt connection with this Lama and that it was not just fantasy. But what did 'connection' mean, exactly? I wondered, and pondered, and meditated.

Because I felt so strongly about this, I wrote to Lama Zopa Rinpoche the founder of the Foundation for the Protection of the Mahayana Tradition, the organization that we belong to, to tell him what had happened and to ask for his opinion and advice. Rinpoche's advice was, in short, to tell me that Lama had been a pure practitioner all of his life and that if I had taken teachings with him, I could regard him as my guru.

XXX LETTER 0 LETTER FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE XXX



THUBTEN ZOPA

Mahamudra Center
28-10-90

Dear Jill,

Thank you very much for your kind letter, I'm very happy to hear you had a wonderful marriage. Especially thank you for your very generous gift, as long as the organisation exists I'm sure it will not be wasted but put to very good use.

Indeed western people are very fortunate to meet such highly qualified Lamas. Geshe Lama Konchog has been a pure Dharma practitioner all his life, if you have taken teachings from him, he is your Guru so you should pray to him, most importantly at the time of death.

Please continue to learn and practise more

with much love and prayer

Foundation for the Preservation



of the Mahayana Tradition

When all this happened, I was then completely sure that I was on the right track and that I must just let go of all preconceived ideas about this and that, or my life thus far and instead, take the bit between my teeth and get on with my new life and stop whingeing. Lama's body was here in Australia, he did what had to be done and then he went home. End of story.

But, this sudden awareness was not the end of the story. It was just the beginning.

First I had to learn to transform my mind and this was a big ask. Up to this point I was perfectly happy with my state of mind and now suddenly I was suffering. I knew I had to learn to devote to Lama's holy mind rather than the image of his holy body, that much I knew. That much was getting clearer and clearer. He taught this lesson well, very well, but it did not come with any guidelines or instructions. I had to do this by trial and error based on how much my mind was suffering from exasperation, frustration and mental anguish.

Where to go from this major point? I knew I had to apply every effort to keep on the right path to stay connected, but I had no idea how to do it. Maybe the books do tell you, somewhere, but until you find yourself in a similar position, you really feel like a fish out of water. Of course, the whole of the Lam Rim explains all this clearly, but as it did not get past my intellectual brain, I had to do it the hard way. Sometimes, I think, we get too caught up with words and not so much with the feelings they attempt to reveal.

'Write to him', I thought. He will explain everything and then we can go from there. He will probably say to me to come over to Kopan and see him. He will probably say that he misses me very much too. He more than likely will suggest that I go to live at Kopan to be near him. He might even say that he will teach me himself.

What rot! Well, you can always dream, can't you?.

So I sat down and rattled off a babbling letter all about nothing except my sheep, goats, chooks, dogs, cats and other odds and sods. And please, please could I come over to Kopan to be with you. I addressed it to Geshe Lama Konchog, C/- Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal, and skipped all the way to the Post Office to send it. With a big smile of expectation on my face. I felt empowered once again. But not for long ...

I expected a reply more or less straight away and started to feel down in the dumps after a week or so when no reply arrived. So I sent another one and left out the bits about the animals, but left in the bit about can I come over. Nothing. So I sent another one and left out everything except 'can I come over there?' This went on for years and years. Of course the topic changed slightly from year to year, but mainly it consisted of: 'can I come over there?' No reply – nothing.

During this time I continued to go to the teachings at Chenrezig Institute because they were beginning to make sense and somehow I had to get a handle on what had happened and what was still happening. None of which I liked, I might add. At no point did I feel all warm and fuzzy about Geshe Lama Konchog!

It seemed at first glance that nothing was happening, yet I could feel that something was. I felt confused, frustrated and annoyed and nothing seemed right anymore. I felt as if one moment I had been happily swimming around carefree in a blue ocean, when suddenly I got dumped on a desert island somewhere out in the middle of nowhere. And then the island sank beneath the waves and I was left all alone, floundering in a big heavy, rough sea. Lost. This was exactly how I felt.

The teachings of the Buddha were beginning to make sense, but nowhere in them did they tell you what to do after you meet your heart guru and then he goes away to another planet and refuses to have anything to do with you. I could not find that teaching anywhere. So I began to sing a sorrowful song to the Chenrezigites, which went something like this: “*I keep writing letters to Geshe Lama Konchog, but he doesn’t write back. Woe is me!*” All sung to the tune of ‘*How the Old Cow Died*’. Everybody felt very sorry for me – but not as much as I did.

I remember one letter I wrote in a fury of tears of frustration, telling him if he did not write back to me, straight away, I would never, ever, definitely for sure, without any shadow of a doubt – ever write to him again! Well, not for at least two weeks anyway. Then, every day I would go down to the letterbox and sit and wait for the postie to bring a reply to that threat. The loudness of the nothingness was deafening.

But I could not leave it alone. My mind would not let go. I tossed and turned. I searched and found nothing because I did not know what I was searching for in the first place, and anyway, I did not know where to look. And yet things were happening and changing inside my mind. I knew I was hooked, but what are you supposed to do when that happens? Especially when the one who hooked you refuses to have anything to do with you. Not a good feeling. And none of the Chenrezig-ites had a clue what to do with me either.

It would have been a different thing if he had left me with complete, explicit instructions with detailed photos, on what to do with the rest of my life. Anything! Something other than ‘*just do my work*’. **OK**, I am happy to do it – but **HOW!** I was neither a teacher nor even a good student, how could it be at all possible to do the work of a living Buddha? Frustrating! *Just how much can a koala bear*, I ask you! To come to Australia, stay for five months, turn a happy-go-lucky’s life upside down and inside out and then vanishes, was just way too much. I could not see the compassion in that at all.

The other Chenrezigites did not seem to understand my anguish at all and they certainly were not upside down and back to front, but yet they seemed to understand that a little bit of whingeing definitely was in order from my side and they responded with very therapeutic ooohs and aaaahs.

This all went on for years and years. I sent pleading letters, threatening letters, whining letters, I-am-abandoned letters, newsy letters, I-love-you-so-why-won’t-you-write-back letters, happy letters and even grumpy letters. I tried it all. For once in my life I did not hold the reigns and I felt alone and perplexed adrift in a dark blue ocean. Maybe this is the Samsaric Ocean that you hear ‘them’ talk about, and that all sounded a tad depressing to me. It is not in my nature to become depressed, I am far too scatty and excitable for that, but now I was beginning to think on deeper levels of my mind, instead of the airy-fairy woofy top layers from where we do our imputing and generation of wrong concepts. I was beginning to understand the samsaric state of suffering, and realized that I was in over my head and that I had to find a way out. Lama held the key to everything, I became more acutely aware of, simply because he would not do what I wanted. And I was hitherto, not used to that state of affairs.

I had a dream one night that is still with me. There was a big Spanish galleon with golden lights spilling onto the dark, deep ocean. The golden lights lit up the sky and ocean like a pathway. It was nighttime and there were stars, a new moon and a sun. The waves were very high and rough and they had white tips. There were several small rowboats behind the ship and several others on the left hand side. All were trying to reach the haven of the mother

ship. I do not know what it all means, but somehow it did mean something at the time of dreaming.

Anyway, after several years I changed tactics and instead of sending a letter every week to someone I did not know, who had changed my life, who never wrote back, who I could not get off my back, I resorted to sending a post card with just a big grinny face on it, or sometimes a growling looking face. I had finally run out of nonsensical and meaningless words! I laugh when I think about it now, because most probably Lama had been waiting for this to happen. I had finally run out of steam and yet I was still connecting. I felt that the picture on the card said more than I could write. Sometimes I drew 'a message' such as someone swimming from Australia to Kathmandu with flippers and a scuba tank. Did anyone get them? I did not know. But I kept sending them.

This became a weekly ritual and by this time I had given up all expectations of ever receiving a reply. It just seemed important that I keep the contact going from my side, but without knowing why. I was not even sure that he knew who I was. I was also not really sure if he ever got them at all. I just felt the overwhelming need to make a connection from my side. I just felt very happy sending the card down the mail chute at the post office. I had no idea where that card was going to end up. I just sent it off into the wild blue yonder, just like a child does when they post a letter to Santa.

But never for one second did I ever forget him. Never for one second did he leave my consciousness. He was on my consciousness day and night. I talked to him constantly in a silent voice. I asked his permission for everything and grizzled when I heard him say "**NO!**" in a big, loud, soundless voice. What is worse – I still do! Sometimes we have big arguments inside my head, but he always wins. This is not something one would freely admit to, but if it benefits someone else in a similar situation with their guru, I admit. I never claimed, at any point, to be very sane. Used to be - but no longer!

Poor Lama, he must have had a pile of cards and letters outside his front door equal to the height of Mount Meru. Also he must have had quite a pile of Aussie stones outside his back door. On several occasions I went up to Chenrezig Institute and picked up every stone I felt was different, put them in a jiffy bag, paid a fortune for postage, and sent them off. I tried not to look at the Postmaster's face when he asked, for official purposes, what the jiffy bag contained. I still do not know where all the stones ended up. Maybe they are still sitting on some puzzled Custom Officer's table waiting to be identified as something special, because who in their right mind would want to send common stones to Kathmandu!

I talked non-stop about Geshe Lama Konchog to anybody unfortunate enough to stand still long enough and told them all the miracles that had been, and were still happening to the sick people around me. Eventually people referred to Lama, as '*that poor Lama*'. People would come over and ask, "*Have you heard from that poor Lama at Kopan yet?*" I think they genuinely felt sorry for him that this crazy woman would not let him live in peace. Nobody ever called me a 'poor person!' This upset me no end because I had been hooked and I knew it and I had been left dangling. I do not like to dangle. I did not want to be at the end of a line with not even a carrot being offered as reward. I wanted to be wild and free and to live on the edge and not be responsible for anything. I liked that type of living. This was the way I had always lived. Until I met Lama, that is.

TRUE WISDOM

Hooking me was surely a huge miracle. Why he even bothered, who would know. Now, when I look back in retrospect, I can see the absolute wisdom of Lama's Buddha mind. If he had kept in touch with me and pandered to my every whim and allowed me to follow him all over Asia like a little puppy dog, I would have lost interest before too long. He knew that.

He picked me up and set me down on the end of a very thin branch on the top of a very high tree in a totally deserted valley – and then he walked away! I can just hear him say: “*Well, what are you going to do, now? I will just sit over here in my pink house at Kopan and wait until you fall off your perch!*”

He made me do the searching from inside my own mind – and totally alone. The answers were not in Kopan or mindlessly crawling along the floor behind him, or running around the world seeking the unfindable, or even in becoming ordained. Understanding that, for me is a miracle of mammoth proportions!

The answers are probably in the fine print of the Buddha's teachings somewhere, but you would have to have a magnifying glass to find them. Or you would have to have a guru such as Lama who presented you with the opportunity to search for the answers that only you can find. But first, you have to be undone and unstitched before you can be remade so that you can walk down a different path. Then, and only then, may you find the key that opens the door to finding the right path that will lead, guided by true wisdom, to a whole new world. But it is a dangerous path covered in pitfalls and dead ends, so we need the guidance of a guru who will prepare us well for this path.

Ultimately however, it is up to each one of us, alone, to take the first step and begin to walk. The path itself is founded on experiential lessons that have to be learned before we can progress further. The guru can only guide and support us; he or she cannot walk the talk for us.

The miracle in all this though, was that he was the key – and *he* had found *me!*

EXPERIENTIAL LESSONS

To digress a little, if I may: In fact, such tough, true wisdom was also shown to me by Geshe Tashi Tshering, when he sent me back to the depths of hell to cook an especially nice dinner for my then husband who had forced me out of my own home.

I was always running away to Chenrezig Institute when this happened and usually I stayed for a few days and then returned home. This particular time, I went to see Geshe Tashi Tshering amid tears and great drama and he manifested as a wrathful deity, right before my eyes and said “**Jill! – GO HOME!**” He further told me that I could not come back to Chenrezig Institute until I could practice patience and tolerance. To be banned from Chenrezig Institute was terrible suffering and yet, it had a purpose.

There was great wisdom in this advice as it ended the karma that was preventing me from going forward. It also caused the end of my short marriage and cleared the way to begin a new life as a nun. I did not know it at the time of course, and it all seemed terribly cruel and unfair.

However, both were acts of great wisdom and kindness shown by Lama and Geshe Tashi Tshering, but who amongst us could have seen them as such then. Nevertheless, it still remained my choice to do as both Masters decreed or not, but I did exactly as I was told. Somehow I was getting a glint of an idea that these were tests that I had to overcome, with my mind, and not succumb to the all too easy way (or path) of getting angry and dropping out.

There was another incident that I feel was a Geshe Lama Konchog compassionate teaching in disguise: As I just explained, in 1991 I was not happily married and sought Chenrezig Institute protection on several occasions and we had even been married at Chenrezig Institute.

When things were going from bad to worse, I was confused and needed spiritual help so I made an appointment to see a nun who I believed would have all the answers. I thought she would wave her magic wand and come up with all the answers and at the same time give me a clear insight in Buddhist terms as to what was happening and, moreover, what I could do from my side to stop this tormented suffering. When the day came, I turned up on time and waited to see her. Over she came in the gompa and announced: “*Okay! You have five minutes – shoot!*” Exact words. This nun fidgeted and only half listened and it was clearly apparent that she was itching to go away and do something else far more important than listening to my woes.

I never forgot that. It was not that I was fobbed off so harshly, it was the fact that I saw from my perspective, all those who chose to wear the Robes and who represent the Buddha’s method and wisdom, should be seen to be so uncaring. This has been one of the greatest lessons I have ever learned, because it affects the way I deal with people to this day. Buddhism is a religion of kindness and we must never forget that. If we wear Robes, then we must be seen at all times to represent the Buddha and this means that we consider the welfare of others as being more important than oneself. Simply put, to wear the Robes of the Buddha signifies generosity, most importantly, of time.

There is nothing of more value, than the offering we can make to another of ourselves. The motivation behind true generosity is kindness and this relies on patience and tolerance with oneself. When you realize you have helped someone else in a kindly manner, you and the other person have cause to smile. And this is the payment. The invisible resultant positive karma simply gives a glow to both faces.

I am so thankful to this nun for this great lesson. Without her shaking my mind, I would not have understood the importance of offering my time with generosity. This, of course, is right effort.

Lama was a true Bodhisattva and he showed the full extent of his great bodhicitta, which is ultimate compassion, by being generous with his time, even at the time when he was dying. Geshe Tenzin Zopa told me that he had tried to dissuade people from coming down to see Lama when he was so sick and dying at his house at Kopan Monastery, to try to protect him. However, when Lama heard about this, he told Tenzin Zopa that if people gained some benefit from seeing his body, then they must be allowed to come and be with him during those last days and hours.

What greater example of compassion and generosity could there be? His only wish was to help us, right up to his last breath.

I was told that he was always available to people at Kopan, either in his pink house, while having lunch in the public dining room, or just walking around the monastery. The Abbot of Kopan himself, The Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup is extremely busy, yet he is always freely available to anybody seeking help, guidance or just a chat. I know this first hand. You can wait outside his door or approach him anywhere, at any time. He is the true epitome of loving kindness and true compassion. He is the absolute presence of generosity. He is the True Guru.

To just be in the presence of this Holy Abbot is to realize you are in the presence of a Holy Being. This has incredible impact on ordinary people such as myself, because we can be inspired to be like him and the other great beings. And this is done through the practice of generosity – the giving of their time.

These Great Holy Beings have gone beyond all attitude of self-importance; the only thing of importance to them is that we reach enlightenment. Neither would ever greet you with: ‘*You have five minutes – shoot!*’ Their job, as they see it, is to be of assistance. However, it is my belief that you may not always be greeted with flowers and smiles by these highly realized beings, because it is not their job to patronise us and make us feel special. It is their job to show us our own mind so that we can want to transform it. Of course, both Lama and Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup no doubt can be wrathful, but the motivation behind this would be to teach us a lesson experientially – to shake us up, to wake us up. We really need to see this – understand it – and then practice it. We can only learn about the state of our own mind after we have been shown something that pulls us up and makes us want to examine where we are coming from. There is no other way we can learn.

To expect to be treated like VIP first class citizens at all times is a nonsense and it is only when we are confronted with an attitude that shows us that we are not so, that we meet the best of lessons – the experiential lesson. There is no doubt in my mind now, that this nun was in fact a Buddha trying her best to teach me something about myself.

Experiential lessons are the biggest test of your character because they reflect *your* state of mind immediately to *you*. If you react to unexpected, unfair and often unpleasant accusations and/or confrontation by others, with anger, jealousy, or worse still, hatred from your side, you make war immediately with yourself even before you do so with the other person. Defensiveness is a state of war with one’s own mind. And this in itself is the greatest lesson we can ever learn and it can only be learned from experiencing the not-so-nice mind of others. Once we can see that, we do not have to react with nuclear guns that will surely wipe out our good karma, we can just let it go.

All of a sudden, out of the blue, I discovered that there were no answers. There was no simple way to know the unknowable. There were only paths of understanding that led to even more questions. What I discovered was, it is the *question* that is of paramount importance. Without reaching a level of understanding that formulated questions, which in my case have been born out of sheer desperation, a true understanding of what the Buddha taught can never be experienced

We could apply academic study forever about this understanding of the suffering caused by the mind, but we would never be able to *experience* that wisdom for ourselves until we questioned, and became aware of, our own state of mind, especially when confronted with aggressive people. The true answers lie, not in the mind of others, but in our own mind.

I would never have found this natural progression of never ending questions of what was happening to my mind, had I never been pulled up so abruptly and forcefully by the kindness

of these people. They are the true teachers, so be thankful. It was they who presented me with so many opportunities to look at my own mind, instead of trying to find the answer in theirs.

Our mind – not the minds of others - holds the secrets of why we get upset or why we do not and once we realize this, we have total control of whether we choose to be upset or not. It is practicing mind control! Nobody causes us to suffer unless *we choose* to do so! Once we realize this, then we can rejoice. Then we thank the person who gave us the chance to practice taking control of our own mind at all times, instead of getting into a big fight with others who are simply acting out their own minds. We might not like it, but it is *our choice* as to how we react to that action.

THE CHASE BEGINS

Anyway, getting back to the pathetic story about my woeful condition of trying to make sense about what was, and what was not, happening to this crazy mind after Lama left me stranded out on a wobbly limb. And how I had been unceremoniously dumped there by several other wisdom beings as well. Talk about being cruel to be kind!

I have always been a very headstrong person tuned solely to the sense pleasures in front of my nose. I never ever had any inclination to follow anybody. Why should I? I was happy the way I was. But Lama knew exactly how to make me chase him. Of course, I had to want to do this for myself, but he gave me no options. Being a Buddha, he knew there was no point in my being attached to his body – it was his holy mind that I had to find, isolate and connect to, not his physical form.

Before I could do any of that, I had to find the level, deep in my mind, where the key to doing this was kept. There is a key to every stage, I now painfully know. But, this is the miracle: *It was the chase that changed me!* Only a living Buddha with such wisdom could have made that happen.

The chase became a marathon. After Lama left Australia, I fought against the easy way and so I ran uphill and fell over every obstacle I could find. I got bashed and bruised by every pothole I fell down. My ego remained steadfast and I refused to go down the road that I was by now feeling compelled to follow. I did not want to change. I renounced renunciation. I rebelled. But yet, I was utterly compelled to keep going. But, with the wisdom of hindsight, and truth be known, I was pushed. Shoved, by hob-nailed boots smack in the middle of my back!

Every time I fell and bruised my powerful ego, I began to learn something about myself that made me stronger and I began to submit more and more. Moreover, I began to learn more and more about Lama's mind. I knew my mindset was changing and I knew I was on another path that conflicted with my current lifestyle, yet I could not let go of Lama and his pull became ever powerful.

And he would not acknowledge any of this by sending me a letter. So tough!

The stronger I became by connecting to his mind, the stronger I became spiritually until I realized that I had the power to give up the chase and just do what he had told me to do in the first place: *“Be a powerhouse of positive energy and do my work!”* This sounds so simple if you take it at face value, but I knew it was far from that because I knew that Lama wanted me to change from what I was, to what I could become – a nun! And in order to do that, I had to fall off my perch.

VICTORY – OF SORTS

Eventually I realized I was getting nowhere fast and suffering more to boot, so eventually I ran out of steam. I finally saw the light, so to speak, and stopped fighting what was now apparently an unwinnable battle, so I gave in peacefully. And then a miracle happened and he made contact.

But before that happened, I had to give in to the fight, and to know that the fight was only between me and my own mind. You would wonder why, wouldn't you? Most people would blissfully connect to their guru and follow him or her everywhere, but Lama did not want that – he wanted connection to his Holy Mind only. Tough ask for someone like me, so he performed miracle after miracle to get this effect. But first came the experiential lessons delivered so skillfully that I began to see a reason why I should begin to want to change. I had to make up my own mind, by myself, and to find an answer to 'why'. Lama could not do that for me.

Looking back on all this, there is great comparison between my mind and a horse's mind at the thought of becoming broken-in. Neither wants to lose their own will. But just like the horse, I finally understood that it was not my *will* I was losing, it was my *willfulness*.

This feeling of dependence on someone who would not even acknowledge that you lived on the face of the earth, was not an easy one. I was not free anymore. No matter what I did, my mind was constantly connected to his and this prevented me from running amok and being free to form my own attachments and ideas, not dependent upon anybody or anything.

My willfulness was becoming less and less effective, yet my inner strength was growing. Little bit by little bit, I changed the way I thought and my view of myself and the world in general changed. I changed because Lama was at the centre of every thought process.

I believe now that it was not Lama's intention that I chase him for the rest of our days here on mother Earth. That would have been meaningless and would have accomplished nothing. However, the chase was beginning to make me look at myself in a different way and this is what I believe he wanted. I had taken the first steps as he had fully intended and now it was time to move on and take a few more.

My fiery, independent willfulness was certainly being broken by the chase, and now it was time to break the mould completely. Ouch! Little did I know just how much this was going to hurt.

MARRIAGE

During all this time I still lived a wonderful eccentric life on my funny farm and had absolutely no thoughts whatsoever about giving it all up and becoming a nun. Absolutely none! The thought just never entered my head. I also believe that Lama knew this too. There was no way I was going to leave this self-indulgent lifestyle voluntarily – only a Buddha could perform *that* miracle.

And so I got married. Why? Who knows! However, I do suspect from way back in the hidden recesses of my mind, where nobody ever gets privy to, maybe I had the thought that this would get Lama off my back.

Anyway, we even got married at Chenrezig Institute and Geshe Tashi Tsering gave a wonderful talk in the gumpa where the whole entourage of wedding guests sat and listened in

sheer delight. But this venue was a clear cut indication of things to come, I realize now. An unmistakable sign, as they say.

There are no words that can describe my mental state during those three years. I lived in total abject fear for my sanity, my carefree way of life, my animals, my funny farm and least of all, my money. All of which I eventually lost.

The cause for all this to happen was not because of someone else, I now know that. The causes and conditions had simply ripened to become a nun – exactly what Lama wanted. He maybe just helped it along a bit. Maybe even a big bit. Or even one big, enormous bit. A miracle, I do declare.

When I was sent home to face the demons within my own mind by Geshe Tashi Tsering on that fateful night to cook ‘*an especially nice dinner*’ for my husband, as torturous as this sounded, it turned my head around and resulted in this being the very last time I was to run away, because I learned how to become a warrior. This is, and was, a major miracle because I realized that there are two types of warriors: One is fearless in the face of the enemy and the other is a frightened coward. Once I realized this in myself, I then realized exactly who and what the enemy was and from that, I understood how to defeat that enemy with indestructible weapons.

Being a live-for-the-moment type woman, thoughts of warriors, enemies and weapons never entered my head because I never before had to stand and fight an enemy that was surely destroying everything around the place. Up to this point in time, I simply blamed everyone else if my life became a misery. But now I had to realize that it was my mind, in retaliation mode, that was the real enemy. Lama undoubtedly showed me my own raw mind due to these exceptional circumstances and I got a big shock. I did not like that realization one bit. It hurt and I felt exposed and defenseless because I could no longer hide from myself. I saw the real nature of my suffering and I was deeply embarrassed and ashamed. So, for the first time in my life, I learned to be patient, tolerant and compassionate with myself and then, miraculously, my anger disappeared. Like a snap of the fingers.

I could have spent the rest of my life being forced from my own home by this man, but Geshe Tashi Tshering was very wise to see this and so he did what had to be done. He threw me back to the pits of the hell realms to do battle with my mind in the face of adversity, due to certain causes and conditions.

I do not remember cooking an especially nice dinner as instructed, but if I did, it would have taken some doing. Some things you blot out of your memory, don’t you! But funnily enough, I obviously did not lace it with something that would have put him to sleep for a looooooong time, either. Now this was *surely* a true miracle!

Driving down the hill to go home after Geshe Tashi Tshering had banished me from Chenrezig Institute, I tried to connect with Lama’s mind and seek not only guidance, but strength and compassion as well. I truly believed that what I really *did need* was a good sooking! But then I remembered what Lama said: “*Do my work!*” and I wondered how *he* would deal with this? I remembered the episode with the spirit and how he was so compassionate in teaching it the dharma instead of destroying it. At that moment, while driving down the hill I do admit, I had ‘destroying’ on my mind!

I went home and all hell broke loose, literally. My beloved funny farm had changed energy and become a hell realm, which resulted in the calling of the police. After the police had left, I realized that the karma to be in such a situation was finished. It was the strangest feeling of calmness, just like a big heavy curtain had lifted. That part of my life was finished

and I knew it. In my mind, I had survived that particular hell realm. I had not escaped it, I had just run out of the karma to be there. Well, for the time being at least. I knew then, the wisdom behind Geshe Tashi Tsering's advice to go back home and not return until I had learned something.

The karma had to end but only by experiencing it as a warrior and not as an aggressor. A warrior is brave and fearless on the side of light, whereas an aggressor is a coward and on the side of the dark. *And the enemy is one's own mind!* I had to face up to that. This awareness was a huge miracle and an even huge-er experiential lesson!

I knew then that the trick from then on was not to knowingly create any more negative karma. I knew that it would be so easy to get back into a similar situation. It was at this point that I realised there was only one thing for me to do and that was to offer my mind wholly to Geshe Lama Konchog as purely as I could.

I immediately put my beloved farm on the market to be sold, as I had to pay for a property settle to end this marriage. However, I did not contest this, nor did I even engage the services of a solicitor. I just accepted that what was about to happen was karma finishing and I had to make sure I did not create any more. Money was an easy option to end it.

I believe this was Lama's full intention. I believe that the intention from his side was to strip me bare of what mattered most to me and then turn me into a nun, right from the very first time he saw me – and by whatever means it took.

It is also true that I lost everything that I valued and loved: my funny farm, the animals, the sacred sports car and my whole irresponsible, self-indulged way of life. I got stripped back to the bare bones. What better way could he have inspired my mind to become ordained other than by showing me a living hell realm? But, strangely enough, this was the first time for a long, long time that I felt empowered to make a big decision. It was the first time for a long, long time that I felt that I alone, was in control of making that decision. It was at this time that I began to realize the strength that I had gained from having total faith and trust in Lama.

I began to understand the teachings of the Buddha on a deeper level than just by studying them. I began to see that the things that were happening to me were causing great suffering and it was only when I began to really read the Four Noble Truths of suffering, that I could see with some clarity the experiential lessons I was being confronted with. From then on it was relatively easy. Relatively!

'Bye, bye good life' I do admit I bemoaned a few times, though. Nevertheless, I knew I was on another path and it surprised me just how easy it was to get off the old one. I also knew that Lama was walking this new path with me. I had no doubts about my future, but dealing with the here and now was not going to be easy, I also knew that.

People often asked me if I felt angry about the loss of my farm and lifestyle and all I can say is, I understand karma enough to know that you get back what you give out. Compassion overrides all other emotions. And I am so grateful for this incredible lesson.

I sent a fax to Lama telling him what had happened and that I did not know what I was going to do. A fax came back to Chenrezig Institute saying: '*Now that you don't have husband, very good you become nun*'. That summed it up completely. I feel happy with this decision now because I had created such faith in my head and heart.

However, he still had not replied to one of my letters or cards, just an email saying to be a nun. How funny is that.

By this time, 1994, I understood that something extraordinary had been happening slowly, slowly since 1987, when Lama left Australia and now it had reached a crescendo. It was as if

a mountain had suddenly turned into a volcano and blown its top spewing its contents until it was empty.

I was going to be a nun! I had now reached the point of not recognizing *me* anymore. I was homeless and penniless, both states in which I had never, ever envisaged myself to be - *and I was going to be a nun!* I had now become an empty canvas and I strongly believe that Lama fully intended this to be so, so that he could paint another picture of me, as a nun. How could I possibly not agree?

I did however, have a niggley feeling in the back of my mind somewhere, that I had been donated. BIG TIME. But for the first time for several years I could once again feel my heart light shining and it felt good. During the past three years it had almost gone out. I knew deep down that this new life was going to be very different and very, very difficult. I just knew it!

Sometimes feelings are right.

A PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SHIFT

A week after receiving the fax from Lama saying to be a nun, my house was sold. After paying out this man's claim, I had just enough to buy a tiny, broken down house in a very poor neighborhood a few minutes from Chenrezig Institute.

I met Lama in 1987 and I took first ordination in 1994, so nothing happened fast until the last three years when my view of reality and his collided and he won.

Chenrezig Institute does not take animals and as I still had two cats and two dogs, I believe this was not a coincidence either. I believe that it was Lama's full intention that I live in isolation so that my life of retreats could begin in earnest. I would have had a lovely time with the other nuns, but of course this was not Lama's intention. He wanted complete strictness and that would not have happened if I had been allowed to have any form of a social life, even as a nun, in a nunnery, with other nuns.

And so it happened. I live alone in this house in the second worst street in the whole world (there must be a worse street somewhere) with a few spoilt cats and dogs. And Lama's mind lives here too. Many people have felt his presence. I am never alone and often I smell flower incense or have an awareness that he is here. He was later to confirm this himself, sitting on his bed in Singapore in 2000.

FIRST ORDINATION

After the freedom, beauty and serenity of my farm, this new house was an absolute nightmare. The morning after I moved into this dreadful, smelly, dirty house that had had pet rats in the ceiling, I flew from Brisbane airport to Sydney to be ordained by Geshe Dawa.

PHOTO 11 GESHE DAWA FROM SYDNEY. 1994



Another minor miracle is that this house was painted inside and out, pink. Lama's house at Kopan is pink. I joke here of course, but to me it means something special. Most of the neighbours around accredited the colour to several cans of pink paint that 'fell off the back of a truck'.

A few nights before moving to this house amid all the mayhem of packing and panicking, I made most of my robes except for the dingwa (sitting cloth) and the churgu (yellow, patched shawl). These are very complicated items to make and there were no patterns to follow. Yeshe Khadro met me late at night in the Gompa at Chenrezig Institute a few days before ordination and she layed out the complicated yellow churgu with all its patches and showed me how it all went together. I went home and made it along with the dingwa. I stayed up all night to sew them as time was running out and I was beginning to panic that they would not be ready on time.

I was also given a brief indication of how to put them all on, which looked far too complicated and so I did not mentally register any of the instructions.

The ordination was in Sydney. This meant that I had to leave my house at the crack of dawn to drive the hour and a half trip to the airport, leave the car in the car park and get on the plane for the 7am departure to Sydney. I arrived back home that night, well after dark. A very, very long day, but one I will never forget.

On the day of the ordination I was quite ill with a severe chest infection and out of control asthma and the thought of flying alone scared me, as I did not want to end up in hospital in Sydney so far from home.

I was also slightly 'out of it'; a state brought on by the traumatic events of the past few weeks where I was wrenched out of my beautiful farm, stripped of everything I valued and then plopped unceremoniously in a lolly-pink house smack up against the neighbours from hell.

As well as the scary thought of ending up in a Sydney hospital, I had the worry of leaving my beloved animals alone in a strange house in the middle of a very strange neighbourhood. I was worried about them because they too, were very frightened and unsure of what was happening. I did not know any of the neighbours, so I could not ask them to rescue them in case I did not make it home that night. We had only just moved in the day before.

Now I look back and think how wonderful! There could not have been a better way to offer right effort to Lama. There could not have been a better way to practice guru devotion. If I had not been pushed to the brink, I would not have set sail into this abyss in the first place. Nothing so far had been anything other than torturous and I knew I was fast becoming more and more brave. At no time did I think of abandonment or isolation from Lama's mind.

When things are difficult, you remember them better and most importantly I think, you learn your best lessons from them. That is, if you survive.

When I arrived home that night, it was very late and I was at the point of emotional and physical exhaustion and just could not muster the strength to get out of the car. I sat there and contemplated all that had happened during the past few weeks in the dark with the car lights off. My whole life had completely stopped and a new one was beginning. Where any of this was leading, I had no idea. I was just too tired to move or care. But one thing I was definitely sure of was that Lama's mind was connected to mine. I could just *feel* it and it gave me a distinct feeling of strength.

Weirdly enough, there had been no word from Lama to this point indicating that he even knew who I was, until the fax saying about becoming a nun. But I do remember having the thought somewhere: *'What if he has the wrong girl! What if he thinks I am someone else!'* Now, this thought really freaked me out. But even this did not deter me. Somehow I had been placed on a path and somehow Geshe Lama Konchog was responsible. That was as much as I knew. I had simply given in to being swept along on a big current of powerful energy that I was beginning to trust. That big current was in a deep dark ocean.

THE KONCHOG CAVE

While sitting in the car on that dark night, I looked at my new place of residence through the car windscreen. It was terrible. It was dirty and a mess. And it was lolly pink. Nothing much had been unpacked, the animals were all stressed out, the bed had not been made and I had no idea where the kettle was to make a cup of tea. I put my head on the steering wheel and just burst into tears, big hot, sloppy, choking tears wondering what on earth had happened to me.

Another little sidetrack if I may: Nobody had helped me to put on my new robes in Sydney, and it is an art unto itself, so I had just sort of bunched them altogether and tied them around the middle. When I got out of the car after arriving home, the whole back of

the shubtab (skirt) was dragging on the ground, with a big gaping hole from the belt down. For how long it had been like that, I hate to think!

This negative state of mind was no good, I knew that. I had to change my view of what had happened and see the positive side of it, if I was to survive and stay sane. I knew I had to bite the bit and devote to him completely and be the best nun I could be. So, I got out of the car and immediately imagined that this house was a cave somewhere in the Himalayas – Lama Konchog’s cave – no less.

When I was later to see a photo of Lama’s cave at Tsum, I realized this was the very same cave that I had imagined in my mind. I was truly home and from that moment on, I feel as if I am living with Lama in his cave and so it has become known as Lama Konchog’s Cave. This is a cave where the inmates consisted of two dogs, two cats and me, the Head Nun, otherwise known as the chief cook and bottle washer. What better place in the whole world could I be?

But before I came to this realization, I stood on the footpath in the dark and looked straight at the house and yes, it did look a bit like a cave – a pink one.

But, Ye Gods and Little Fishes, that night was the worst night of my entire life, all previous lives included!

I walked inside, fed the animals and we all just flopped straight onto the bed - clothes and all, as I was too tired to do anything else. Just as I was getting used to the awful smells around, the first train went through – and blew its horn.

Not only was this house lolly pink, but it is also one street away from the railway line where the train drivers take much sadistic delight in blasting their horns at mega decibels in the wee hours of the morning. All of us, the two cats and two dogs, simultaneously jumped three feet off the bed. We had all curled up together in a ball in a single bed trying to pretend we were at home in our lovely safe funny farm, when we were so rudely made aware of our new environment.

The next day one cat had cleared out and went missing for three days. Eventually she crawled out from under the couch where she had hidden all this time. None of the others would eat and they just sat around glaring at me accusingly.

The next morning after arriving home from Sydney, there was loud banging on the front door. The animals and I stumbled out of bed wondering what on earth was going to happen now. We had survived a night of expecting trains to go rumbling through the bedroom, a fight next door that necessitated the police coming and dragging someone away screaming and yelling, and now someone was banging on the front door.

I timidly opened the door and there was a sea of smiling faces. All the nuns from Chenrezig Institute were standing there loaded with goodies for breakfast. Even in the midst of hell, there are angels. I raced inside and got dressed and in the meantime they had laid out the most delicious breakfast I had ever seen. And they were so happy.

PHOTO 12. WELCOMING PARTY. YESHE KHADRO, TSAPEL, ANNETTE AND AILSA.



This was 14th May, 1994. I will never forget it, because first ordination day was on Friday 13th, a very significant date. Who else would get ordained on Friday the 13th?

These nuns had followed me all through this amazing journey with Geshe Lama Konchog for seven years. They knew exactly what I had been through and how my ego has suffered. I had often told them that I felt like a rag doll that had been unzipped, all the stuffing pulled out and then restuffed and re-zipped.

Things eventually settled down on the home front and I really began to feel that this house was Lama's cave where He is the Abbot and Geshe Tenzin Zopa is the Geshe. Both are in residence albeit in rainbow, light form only. The cats and dogs all walk around as if they are very important monks and nuns and as far as I can figure it out, I am everybody's servant. Geshe Lama Konchog lives in this house, of that I have never had any doubts. The first thing Lama said to me in Singapore in 2000 when I met him again for the first time since 1987 was: "*I live in your house!*"

When I first moved into this house, it was at the height of bad-boy war in this area. I sent an email to Lama and explained that I could not possibly live in such a terrible place. I had come from acres of pristine rainforest with very few neighbours and now I was in the midst of all-night parties and fights, barking dogs, screaming kids, blaring music and police and ambulance sirens going day and night dragging away the druggies. And not to mention the trains as they went thundering by. This was in direct contrast from my quiet, serene, beloved funny farm that was refuge to so many humans and animals.

Party time at the funny farm was a thing of the past now and I had to begin a new life as a nun. I bought a computer and so I had email, this was the first step. From then on Venerable

Fran from Kopan Monastery office in Kathmandu so kindly and uncomplainingly gave the squillions of emails to Lama from that very date. Believe it or not, he did reply to emails, but probably because I was now safely ensconced as a nun.

Lama's advice to the plea about the environment in which I was now living was to make *the Seven Point Thought Transformation* practice my main practice. It worked. This street is now peaceful. This was another true Lama miracle. Only the mind of a Buddha could have transformed this hell realm area into the quiet street that it has now become. I would recommend any Buddhist who lives with obstacles to practice this amazing and powerful practice. Of course, Lama performed this miracle without much input from my side, but I had to learn to control my mind under such circumstances. Well, try to.

It was immediately after moving into this house that the beginning of the long retreats began.

Some may say that a house in the middle of suburbia is not suitable to do retreat but I have realized, with my simple mind, that no place in the outside world can ever be perfect, because retreat has to happen on the inside – not the outside. Ultimately, retreat is an internal happening regardless of the external conditions or environment.

I remember the first letter Lama sent that was written by his beloved attendant, Venerable Tenzin Zopa. This was the first time I knew about him, so the whole experience was wonderful. The energy in the letter is incredible, and it still is, I still cry when I read it to this very day. I opened it with shaking hands because I had long given up all hope of ever receiving a real live, living, breathing letter.

Dear Ven Thupten Konchog
 Hoshi Delek!
 I'm Geshe Lama Rendogs attendant Tenzin Zopa.
 Here I would like to thank you very much for all the
 wish you had send with a good faith. Every time Geshe
 when he receive your nice card. he is very happy and
 stand to tell all story about his visit to Australia
 and he try to explain me, what the photos are in
 card. Here I Tenzin Zopa would like say sorry to you
 that I never write to you, you know my English is
 very poor so I feel shy. That's way. After then the
 what I thought is, once Geshe Las prayer are with you,
 then news in the letter is not that important. ^{but it?} Ani La you see.
 Geshe La Very Very happy that you had ~~at~~ complet your
 retreat. Geshe La all the time rejoice on your good
 hard chardama. and bring a very good Ani La.
 Last time after back from Hong Kong Geshe receive

your nice offering from Aus. From Paul & Tracy
 my best to write you behalf of Geste La. Okay.
 last time way we didn't went Thakwasan. is
 because of Geste La's health was ill.
 So doctor in Hongkong suggest not to be in
 hot wetland and busy. So I think way he will
 back to Nepal. Now he is bit better.
 So don't worry. Geste: hoping to see you
 again some time soon.
 La

ANITA. Mekey I stop here today.
 Please take care your health. If Any
 thing that we can do for you.
 please let know Geste La or
 me T. Zopa. Okay.

Thanks a lot for working hard.
 on Geste La's teaching.
 Best wish and Good Luck
 for ever to you.

From Geste La and Monchoy
 and his A Tenzin Zopa.

I tried to read the words but the tears just fell. If you have ever tried to read a letter under water, you will know how it was. I remember just sitting down and squealing. After an hour or so when my hands had stopped shaking and after several cups of tea, I read the words. But I continued to squeal. The feeling was indescribable so I will not even try – but I am sure you can well imagine.

Emails were one thing because they were sent care of someone else who had to translate and then the answer has to be translated back and then it has to be sent. To receive something tangible, written by Tenzin Zopa in his own hand, conveying the feelings of Lama were material things that touched my heart with an iron-fisted whack.

Who says attachment to material things is not good? In this instance, they do not know what they are talking about.

When I got myself somewhat together again, I sat down immediately and wrote a babbling letter about absolutely nothing other than grasping, grasping and attachment and would he please write me another one. And another one and another one

I kept strictly to myself in this house and asked Lama before I did anything. I either sent an email or else I just asked with my mind. I could hear him distinctly in my heart saying “NO!” when I tried to go and have lunch with the other nuns, or go to the pictures or just nick off and have a bit of an escape. I was really learning to be kept in total isolation under lock and key. I could always feel his hobbed-nailed boot smack in the middle of my back if I silently thought of deviating from the path he had chosen and set for me.

However, to be fair, I was given permission to travel for three days to see my son in far north Queensland a few times, stay for one week and then travel the three-day trip to come home. Then straight back into retreat.

GIFTS FROM LAMA

Several years after novice ordination, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama came to Sydney in 1996. The nuns from Chenrezig rang me and suggested that I seek permission to go with them to see him. I said I doubted very much that I would be allowed to go, but I would ask. Miracle of miracles, I was allowed. I was so excited.

It is easy to see why I have been locked up in retreat alone in The Konchog Cave, because any interaction with the outside world and I instantly revert to the level of an excited babbling monkey. So there really was not only the cause for retreats to happen, but also the necessity.

We all went down to Sydney to see His Holiness. One morning before the teachings began the party that I went down with decided to take a walk in a park near the bay. Suddenly I heard a voice calling out “*Ani Konchog! Ani Konchog!*” Two tiny Asian nuns came running over with the most wonderful smiles on their faces. I think they were from Taiwan. They said they had a present from Geshe Lama Konchog and that they would bring it with them the following day for the teachings with His Holiness. Everyone with them was overjoyed and happy that they had successfully performed this task set by Lama. They all obviously were very close to him, so this made the offering even more special.

The next day before His Holiness came into the room, these nuns came and handed me a small parcel that was so carefully wrapped up. “*This is from Geshe Lama Konchog. It is for you!*”

I did not know what to do, but the communication between all of us was amazing. They said so much with their eyes and smiles. I just hugged the parcel and thanked them from the bottom of my heart and sort of blubbered incoherently, yet they understood completely.

The venue that this miracle took place was a miracle in itself. His Holiness had only been to Australia three times before and on top of that, how many times does one's beloved heart guru make an offering of acceptance that you are his disciple? So many years of being in the wilderness and then, in front of the awe inspiring great presence of His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, acknowledgment and acceptance! His Holiness, who I knew I knew! I had always been aware of that fact.

I really felt that Lama had chosen the very moment and knew exactly where and when this offering would take place. However, I doubt if he could have foreseen my reaction and thank my lucky stars, he did not. Sitting in the second front row amid an ocean of Sangha, dead smack in front of His Holiness, I began to overflow and sniffle in body shaking gulps with an occasional shudder, all through His teaching.

Another nun on the end of the row was continually offering a mandala and the sound of the rice and beads was like exquisite music being offered to His Holiness. His voice merged with the sound of the musical mandala. This nun was so devoutly offering this mandala and I felt that she did it on behalf of everybody there and I am sure the Dalai Lama would have been so delighted and pleased. As back up sound effects, there were the muted sounds of sobbing and sniffing!

The whole experience was overwhelming – here I was sitting with my friend the Dalai Lama, dressed exactly like he was, holding an offering of acceptance from my beloved Heart Guru and listening to the sound of this lovely nun offering the mandala with such blissed-out devotion.

I will never forget the incident of that miraculous offering.

Incidentally, another nun came over to her and whispered in her ear and she immediately stopped offering the mandala. She put it away and folded her hands in her lap. *I wonder what His Holiness must think of us sometimes!* Sometimes I wonder too.

I began to think at that point, that what I had been doing thus far was maybe the right thing. This might sound nonsense, but considering I had been donated as a nun; lived in seclusion away from the monastery; lived in the worst end of the second worst town in the entire world; advised to only do retreats; all without any feed back or any apparent back up. How would I *know* if I had been doing anything right or not? As far as I was concerned, I was a brand-new nun whose guru's mind abided in the Pure Lands while her's abided in No-Where land, and yet he had accepted her as a disciple. And in the presence of His Holiness, to the tune of a mandala offering. I was truly overcome.

Even at this point however, I was not totally convinced that Lama knew who I was. There was always that nagging suspicion in the back of my mind that he had hooked the wrong person. I never at any point felt worthy of his attention, although I constantly demanded it. But was it me who he had in mind all these years?

It was while we were sitting in the charismatic and holy atmosphere and energy of His Holiness, that I began to understand the difference between grasping with selfish attachment to the physical body of the guru and the real connection with the mind-only of the guru. Something had been triggered somewhere in my heart and I realized the difference.

I say this like I mean it, but if the real truth be known, I would do triple summersaults on the top of Mount Everest if I could just see once more, even for an instant, Lama's holy

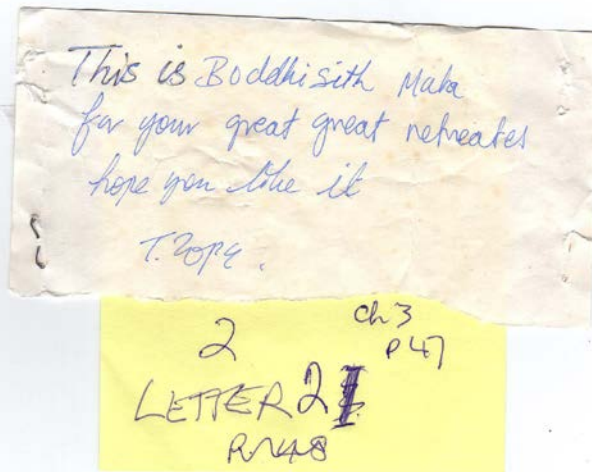
body. If I could walk up to him and fall flat on my face at his feet. If I could just once more hear his gruff, soft voice and look into that kind, kind face I grasp! And grasp! And grasp!

THE PARCEL

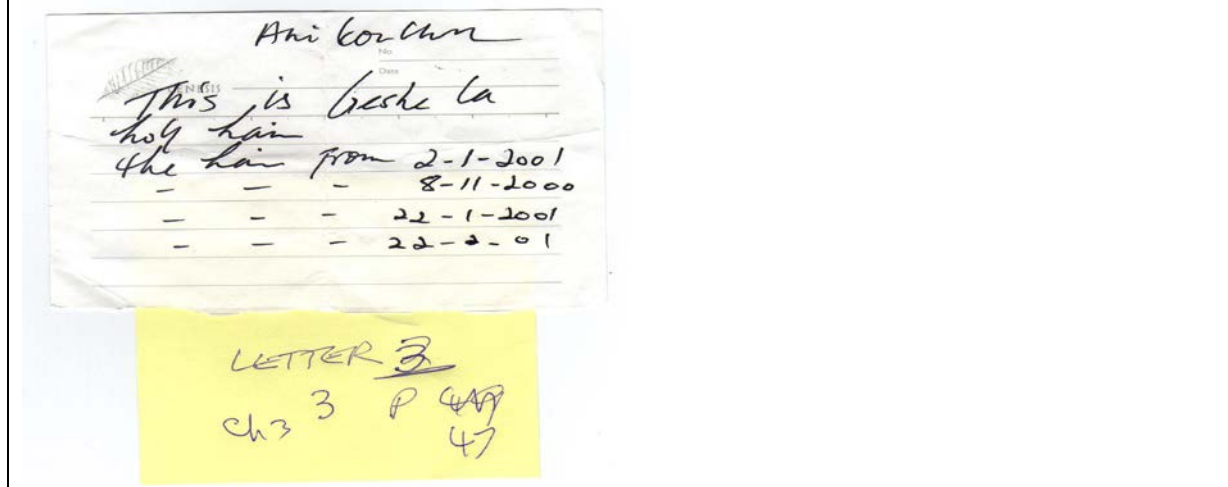
It was the gift of the parcel itself that changed my mindset.

The material gifts were incredible, but it was the parcel itself that represented the miracle. The parcel represented Lama's holy mind, the contents were just a bonus. From that moment, I do believe, my mind changed and I deliberately tried to become the nun that he wanted. Inside the box were special pills, a bodhiseed mala and Lama's hair that had been cut on special dates.

//////////////////// **LETTER 2** "this is bodhiseed mala for your great great retreat. Hope you like it. T. Zopa



////LETTER 3. "this is Geshe la's holy hair. The hair from 2-2001/ 8-11-2000 / 22-2-2001 / 22-2-001.



So! Looking back in retrospect, it is clear now that Lama knew I would eventually do the Great Retreat of three years in isolation and I believe, he also knew he would not be there to help me, so he offered the mala to be used for it while he still was alive.

Nobody could deny that this was a great miracle.

Sitting in front of His Holiness on that day was the point of no return, I knew that. I visualized myself on bended knees, mindfully and knowingly donated myself as a nun to My Guru in front of His Holiness. The atmosphere was vibrant yet still, the sound of the mandala and His Holiness' voice and holy body all combined to make this commitment real and potent.

I had done what Lama wanted up to this point under duress and now, for the first time, I was doing what I needed to do willingly, joyfully and with the whole of my heart. Most importantly, I realized for the first time exactly what Lama meant when he said 'Do my work'. I had to experience guru devotion completely before I could help others find their connection with their own guru. This has been, and always will be, my work.

From my side, this was the biggest miracle I could ever, ever have imagined and it came unexpectedly out of the blue. I also understood that the guru does not need to be a Tibetan Lama, for some people Jesus is the Guru, or Mohammad. It is the connection with the idea of the holy that is the source of bliss.

Because of a simple parcel, I understood the relationship between my mind and Lama's holy mind, which had an a priori basis. It could not be accounted for, nor understood, it simply had an a priori quality that is beyond the labelling of religion, faith or belief.

Of course, any proper disciple would have just smiled a Mona Lisa smile on accepting this parcel and kept mum about it all. But I went back to my hotel, sat down and wrote *another* dribbling nonsensical letter to Lama, showing him faultlessly and implicitly that I was still engaged in the wild pursuit of grasping and attachment. I left absolutely no doubt.

KOPAN

After this memorable day, the situation had become clearer of what was expected from me henceforth and I liked to think that Lama remembered me. I knew now that I had gone through everything under his guidance. This parcel said so much. I had no doubts now about our unusual relationship, but until this parcel I did not know that Lama was too aware of me at all.

Once I grasped this fact, my woeful tune about *'please answer my letters'* warbled sorrowfully to the tune *'The Old Cow Died On'*, changed to: *'When can I come over there'* sung with full emotion in true Deep-South Blues style. I asked time and time again if I could *pleeeeeeeese* come to Kopan and the answer was always the same. **"NO!"**

Once I really pushed hard and asked why was it that I could not come and the answer was, *"There are bad flus here and I would be too worried."* So maybe, on some level, even the Buddhas have some form of attachment. Ha! With my deluded mind I like to think so, anyway.

It is ironic to realize that it was not until Lama had left his earthly body that I was allowed to go to Kopan, and this permission was issued by The Abbot himself, the Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup. Incidentally, I was to go to Kopan Monastery several times and every time I ended up in the Kathmandu hospital with chest infections from the 'flu. He *knew!* Another miracle.

Once I asked a nun, the late Tenzin Konchog who was going to Kopan, to pretend to be me and to get down on her knees in front of Lama and beg if I could come to Kopan. I asked her to tell him to see her as me.

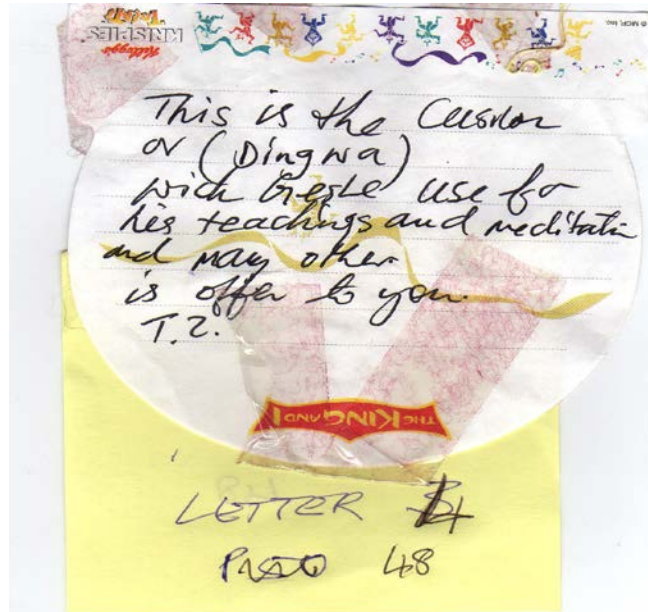
She did exactly as I asked one day when he was sitting on a bench with Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup. Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup translated for Lama and the answer to this moving plea was, *"She must stay in Australia. Her mind is in emptiness and my mind is in emptiness – and they merge. There is no need for her to come here."*

When Tenzin Konchog came back to Australia, she immediately rang and told me all this, word for word. She said she could hardly speak because she was so moved to tears. After a stunned silence, my reaction to her was, *"What's that mean!"* I cannot repeat what she then said, but as I so obviously knew everything there was to know about absolutely nothing, she eventually forgave me. Anyway, I got the message that I could not go over, so I stopped asking.

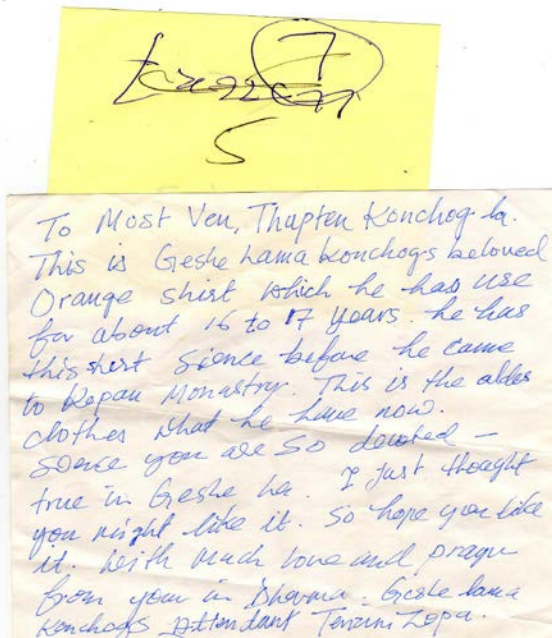
PARCELS AND PATIENCE

Another time shortly after this, Ani Fran emailed saying that a student from Chenrezig was returning home from Kopan and she was bringing a parcel from Lama to me. The parcel contained his shabta, zen, dingwa and an orange silk shirt. A shabta is a skirt, zen is a shawl and a dingwa is a sitting cloth. Immediately I heard this, I could not wait.

XXXXXXXXXXXXX **LETTER 4.** “this is the dingwa which Geshe la use for his teachings and meditation and many other. Is offer to you. T.Z”.



XXXXXXXXXXXXX **LETTER 5** “To most ven. Thupten Konchog la. This is Geshe Lama Konchog’s beloved orange shirt which he has use for about 16 to 17 years. He has this shirt since before he came to Kopan Monastery. This is the oldest clothes that he have now. since you are so devoted – true in Geshe la, I just thought you might like it. So hope you like it. With much love and prayers from yours in dharma – Geshe Lama Konchog’s attendant, Tenzin Zopa”



XXXXXXXXXXXX“LETTER 6. “The orange shirt was used by Geshe la since before 1984 when he was still in cave at Zum. That shirt put on Geshe la most of the time till the year that I, Tenzin Zopa, send to you because your devotion to him is amazing great – so I thought it would be very holy object of your health and devotion. Is sure that he likes the shirt the most amongst his robes. So I have faith that this shirt was very very blessed and very holy.

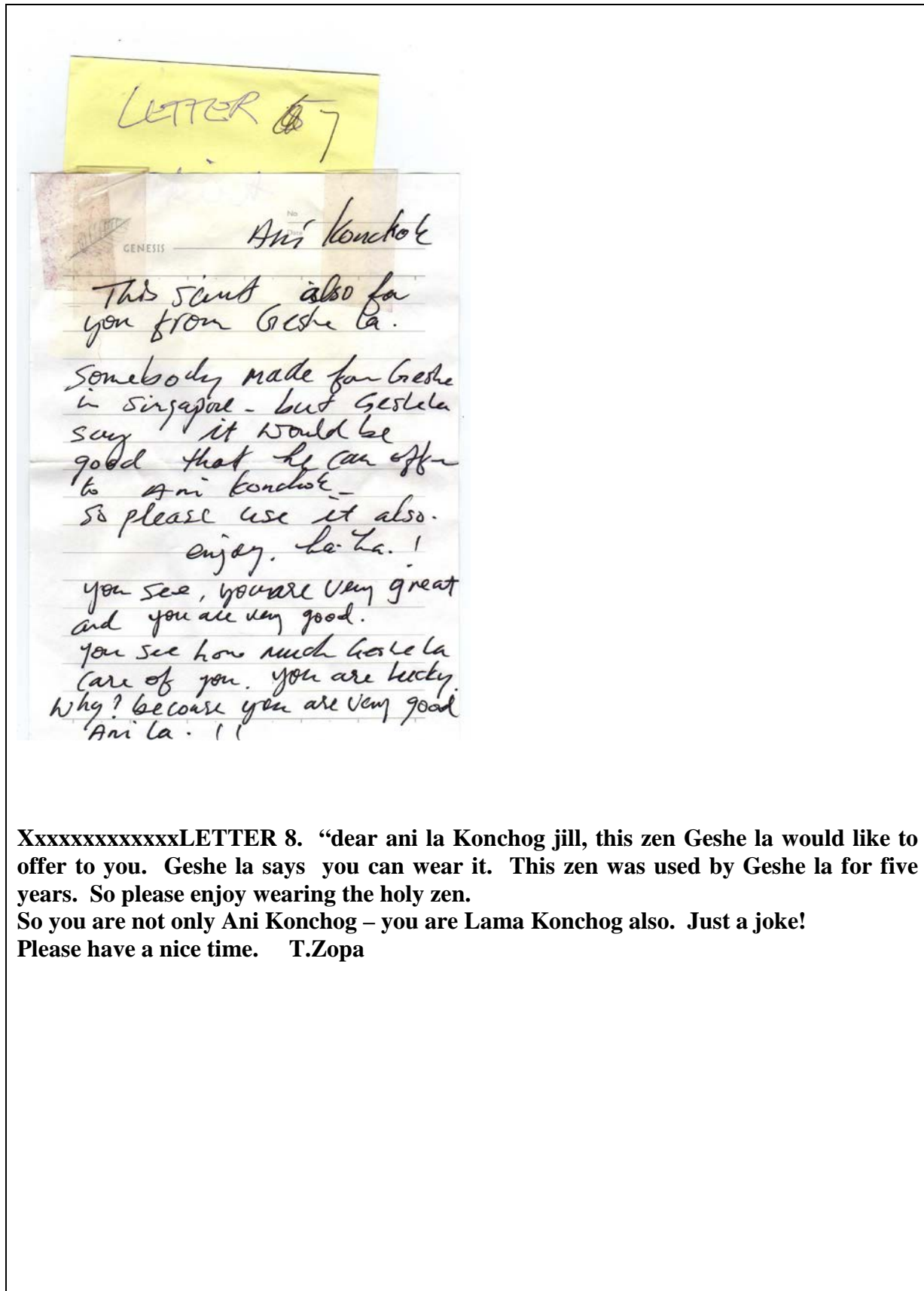
LETTER 6
Orange
shirt

GENESIS
The orange shirt was used by Geshe la since before 1984 when he was still in cave at Zum. That shirt put on Geshe la most of the time till the year that I T. Z. send to you. With Geshe la permission. I send to you because your devotion to him is amazing great - so I thought it would be very holy object of your health and devotion. Is sure that he like the shirt the most among his Robs so I have faith that this shirt was very very very blessed and very holy. T. Zopa.

T.Zopa”

XXXXXXXXXXXXLETTER 7. “This skirt also for you from Geshe la. Somebody made for Geshe la in Singapore – but Geshe la say it would be good that he can offer to Ani Konchog –so please use it also. Enjoy. Ha. Ha!

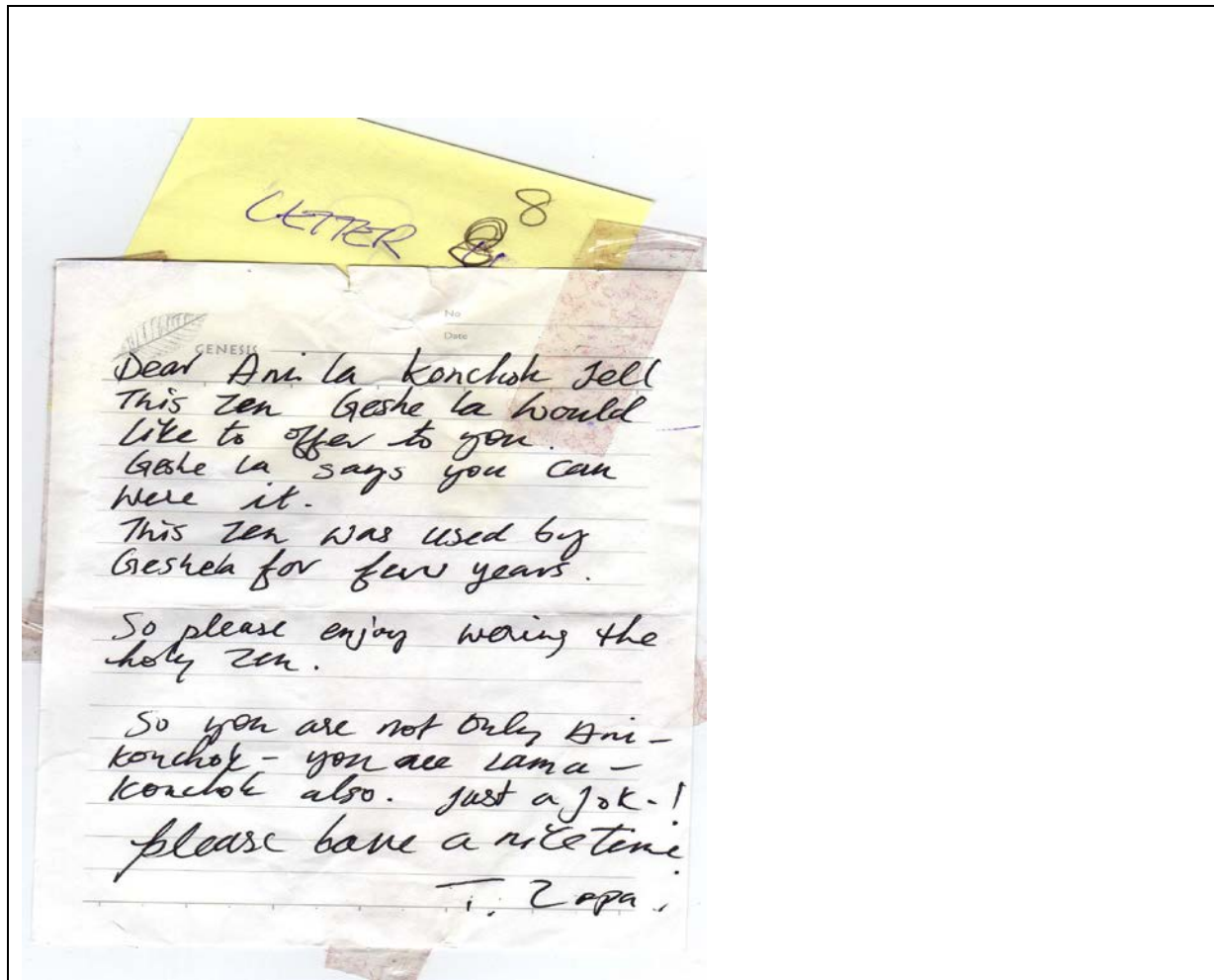
You see, you are very great and you are very good. You see how much Geshe la care of you. You are lucky. Why? Because you are very good ani la!!”



XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXLETTER 8. "dear ani la Konchog jill, this zen Geshe la would like to offer to you. Geshe la says you can wear it. This zen was used by Geshe la for five years. So please enjoy wearing the holy zen.

So you are not only Ani Konchog – you are Lama Konchog also. Just a joke!

Please have a nice time. T.Zopa



Along with this holy, holy parcel, Lama also sent another gift – the lesson of patience and tolerance. Again he showed me my own mind.

This was an entirely different parcel from the first parcel that had contained his hair and mala beads. That had been a parcel offering his actual presence in physical form. It was an offering of his body to help me do the job to be done several years in the future when he would not be there in physical form to help me.

But first came the lessons. . .

A month or so later, I knew the lady who was bringing the parcel had long since arrived back in Australia and the parcel was here, but it had not been delivered, nor had I heard from her. After some time, I rang her and waited. I waited and rang. I could not sleep waiting for it. Finally, I could stand it no longer and phoned to ask if I could come and pick it up. But no, that would not be necessary, she had been sick and I would just need to wait.

I have absolutely no idea how to practice patience. And what is more, up until this point in time, saw no good reason why I should want to do so. If there is something to be done, in my view it is done immediately – if not sooner.

Thank heavens not everybody has this deluded attitude and I do respect those who can just sit and wait until the time and conditions are right before they act. They drive me nuts, but I

do respect them. It is due to these people that I am forced to practice the hardest lesson in the book: patience. I was born without this quality, I do declare.

I laugh now, because it was so typical of Lama to not let things be easy for me and he found the most remarkable ways to show me my own mind so that I could learn. Of course, what I saw I did not like, so then I had to find ways to transform it so that I could live with myself.

I had to be presented with huge lessons that caused immense suffering and these holy gifts of his precious Robes were no exception. Before I could hold this precious gift with my grubby little paws, I first had to take a good long look at my reactions and see the intolerance and the non-practice of patience and humility. I have so much difficulty with all of them.

After several drawn out weeks of waiting, I had created such impassioned feelings about this parcel that I had begun to suffer. The suffering, of course, was due to attachment to Lama, attachment to the items in the package, attachment to my own self-importance and attachment to the way I thought things *should* be. I got angry! I said nothing to anybody; I just sat at home and stewed. My mind got blacker and blacker.

My practice suffered and my mind transformed from being peaceful and content to being totally disturbed by intolerance and annoyance. Instead of patiently waiting and preparing my mind by subduing it in readiness to receiving such holy objects, I turned everything upside down and turned them into a cause for negativity and crankiness.

By the time the parcel was delivered, I had seen what suffering I had created in my mind. I knew exactly the lesson Lama had sent with the parcel. *I had practiced the exact opposite of Guru Devotion.* I had practiced self-devotion and parcel-devotion instead. Without the kindness of this lady and, most especially, the kindness of Lama, I would not have had the opportunity to watch the reactions of my mind to circumstances that I could not control. I realized through this great experience that patience and tolerance are the greatest virtues. Without it, we are nothing but a minefield of suffering.

We can control nothing in the outside world, we can only try to control our own mind in response to that out-of-control outside world. This is what the Buddha has been saying over and over in his teachings for over two thousand years. Then I began to get a glimmer of light to understanding what he meant.

These holy objects are now sacred because they are relics. They were actually sacred the moment they were placed on Lama's holy body as they contain the essence of a living Buddha. We all know that now, but I was fortunate enough to experience something else along with the Robes – a lesson.

I wore all of Lama's holy Robes for my Gelongma ordination in 2003. Even though they were recognized by this time as being relics, I wore them purposely for two reasons: (1) to remember the lessons of being patient, tolerant and humble, and (2) to be wrapped up like a parcel in Lama's Robes to be offered to the Buddhas.

Parcels from Lama contain much more than the material object they contain.

During the ordination, I was wearing in completeness, the offerings my beloved Heart Guru sent in those parcels: his holy Robes, the mala beads and I even took some of the pills from the first offering in Sydney. And yes, I did wear his beloved orange shirt.

I knew Lama was with me during the ordination, so I tried to transform myself into a parcel that only he would have understood. I tried to make an offering to him of my weird, untamed mind by wrapping it up in miraculous wrappings. I hope he saw the funny side of it and delighted in it.

TRANSCRIBING

After I took the vows of my first novice ordination, I wondered what I could do to be of most use for the rest of my life. How could I do Lama's work? I knew my path was to shine the light of the guru and to help others understand guru devotion, but just how to do this, I had no idea.

I knew this path was going to be different from the other nuns at Chenrezig Institute inasmuch as my role was not as a teacher. I am not important and I know nothing, so educating me by daily studies to become a teacher would be wasted and anyway, this was not to be my role. I needed to do something that would bring Lama to the notice of the world, so I decided the best plan would be to transcribe all Lama's teaching tapes that I could get hold of. They would, I believed, greatly help to transform people's mind, so what better way to spend the rest of my days. Also, I would be learning at the same time. I thought this would be all too easy, and all too blissful, and all too fun, fun, fun. I should have known better!

Amitabha Buddhist Center in Singapore sent a lot of tapes and so did Kopan Monastery. Unfortunately, because many of the tapes were of inferior quality and also were quite old, many were beyond transcribing. I just pray now that what has been transcribed will be printed and offered to people. They are the true, unmistakable teachings of a living Buddha.

One enormous miracle Lama was to produce was the effect of the one on one teaching that I received while transcribing. I listened to exemplary teachings on a whole range of topics, but especially on the Lam Rim. I understood then what a great Kadampa Master Lama really was. These teachings were an experience in themselves because I could hear his soft gruff voice speak and then the translator's voice would interpret and then I transcribed onto the computer. Such joy!

Sometimes I just sat and let the tears fall onto the computer keyboard because the sound of his voice touched my heart so. Once again I was listening to him and I imagined that I was sitting at his feet, transcribing. I experienced such joy at hearing these holy teachings spoken by a true master and what is more important, I felt supreme joy thinking that other people would ultimately be able to benefit from this too. I was happy because I felt that this was *'doing his work.'*

Sitting typing this book now, I realize that in this house imagined as Lama Konchog's cave, there is the Body of a Buddha (the relic bones and the hair), the Speech of a Buddha (the tapes) and the Mind of a Buddha (his energy, his presence, is everywhere inside this house). I feel very blessed.

Would you consider that was a miracle performed by a living Buddha?

PRISON VISITS

As I come from a long line of cowards, although I am the first one to put up my hand when it comes to volunteering to do something deliciously exciting, confrontation with other people is not my forte.

How the prison request came about, I have forgotten, but I found myself being asked to go to one of Queensland's maximum security prisons to visit an inmate there who had requested

a Buddhist Sangha visitor. No Buddhist teacher had gone to see the men in this prison, so there was no established formula to be followed.

As well as being a coward I am neither a teacher nor a leader, so I did wonder why they picked me. My first reaction was to say 'No Way' and suggest they get a proper nun, but by this time I had begun to do Lama's work without too much quibbling, so I meekly said 'OK', shaking in my boots.

As the day got closer, I sent an email to Lama and explained what I was about to do. Somehow I expected a return flurry of emails saying, '*Oh, don't go – you stay home where it is nice and safe!*' But no, nothing of the sort arrived down the email tube. Instead, I was told to go and do what I had to do. Lama also explained that I was to be strong with the men and that it was all right to be wrathful. He *stressed* that I should be wrathful. And this is not 'me'! I can get cranky and blow a fuse occasionally when pushed too far, but wrathfulness requires discipline and compassion, and that put a whole different slant on things.

After all the checks and paper work had been completed, surprise, surprise, the prison accepted me as a religious visitor. Shock number one. The prison Chaplaincy rang to confirm my visitation and I spoke to a Father Brian a Catholic priest, who turned out to be a pure saint. This kind man helped me above and beyond the realms of duty.

When I arrived at the prison, there was Father Brian waiting by the humungous doors to meet me and guide me through the scary maze of steel doors, corridors, x-ray cameras and guards with dogs that sniffed you with a suspicious eye. This was all very new to me and frightened the living day-lights out of me, in fact I declared I would never even *think* of anything untoward that could end me up in a place like this.

Visiting this one man soon grew into seeing more and more prisoners and after going to the prison fortnightly for several years, several of the prisoners requested that I apply to join the prison Chaplaincy Board, as they felt there was need for all religions to be represented on this Board. In Australia we have a large number of Asian prisoners, so there is a high percentage of Asian based religions being practiced.

I wrote the relevant letters to the prison and to the Chaplaincy with my request. The prison was very encouraging and they had no objections, however the Chaplaincy refused completely. In fact, the following are excerpts from a letter that one prisoner wrote to me telling me about a letter he wrote to Venerable Robina Courtin, who now runs the prison visiting project run by the FPMT.

Venerable Konchog,

It is with great joy and appreciation that I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to your moral support and most encouraging advice.

I am reminded about the letter I wrote to Venerable Robina Courtin after her visit to Woodford in 1st of December 2000. I wrote -

'Venerable Jill Konchog was probably the first Buddhist Nun to visit this centre about 2 and a half years back and then we got the opportunity of being blessed by Your presence back in 1998.

Venerable Jill Konchog kept coming consistently out of her compassionate heart for two years and is known by the management of this centre and several inmates whose heart she has touched over her numerous visits to this Correctional Centre.

She did contact few local authorities to have access to a proper Religious Study on regular basis and even offered to be a member of the Prison Chaplaincy Board, who are officially responsible of management of Religious Support for prisoners in Queensland Prisons. She probably could not succeed in her efforts as they come up that she did not have a proper authorised Religious Body to support her'.

(signed) Suchakum.

Several times I experienced the anger and frustration of those who did not want any intrusion into this closed Chaplaincy group. I felt very much intimidated on several occasions but somehow managed to stay polite and distant. It was not so much myself they were upset with; it was the thought of admitting another religious belief that did not quite fit the acceptable mould. But this is only my understanding.

I realized for the first time in my life just how aggressive people can become in defending a spiritual belief that they believe is the only path and that all others are wrong. It is truly the stuff from which wars are made. There are dangers associated with imputing wrong views and concepts on alternate beliefs, which are based on fear, suspicion and intolerance of each other, which unfortunately, some beliefs do foster. There is such a need for spiritual reconciliation in the world. We all should, and do, have a choice as to which spiritual path we wish to follow. Well, this is my understanding anyway. I hope I am not wrong.

Eventually, I was told to just sit tight and not stir up any emotions and eventually my acceptance might happen. I should have followed this good advice, but I knew that this could take the rest of my life. I also knew that I could not wait that long. So I blundered ahead full steam knowing that the prison authorities were backing me, until I realized I was creating more disharmony than harmony.

However, I must say to be very fair, any prisoner who requests a religious visit can have one, but it is in a tiny, intimidating cell that is not conducive to religious instruction.

Such religious visits are extremely difficult and strained. For instance, when I entered the cell the huge metal door that was one foot thick, was slammed shut behind me. The sound vibrated through my bones. The sound of the guards locking the two keys from the outside was very audible. Inside the cell there were two plastic chairs with a plastic table inbetween, all bolted to the floor. There was a camera on the ceiling with a blinking eye.

You are led into this room and told to sit on the chair and not move. The warden then locks the heavy door behind him as he goes to get the prisoner. He returns later with the handcuffed prisoner, un-handcuffs him and then leaves, locking the big heavy door on the way out. You are then left sitting opposite this man for an hour. If you are seeing two men – and that is the limit in the two-hour time frame, then after an hour the first one is handcuffed and taken away and the warden then returns with the other.

Of course this must happen as these men are murderers, rapists, drug barons and so on, but to not have access to a more suitable room for religious and/or spiritual help and guidance, is not good. It appeared to me that it was made as difficult as possible for ministers of other religions to visit the prisoners. For instance, I spoke to a pastor of a well-known, very well

accepted church but one of non-Christian persuasion, who explained to me that he had several prisoners who requested his religious visits. To do this, he not only had to travel, as I did, almost two hours to get there, but he could only see two prisoners in the morning and then wait until the afternoon to see two more. He did this week in, week out. In the town of Woodford where the prison is located, there is nothing to do but for him to sit in his car and read a book and wait. Then he had to travel two hours to get home.

The alternative to visiting in a cell is to visit a particular prisoner in the general visiting area where the families of the prisoners meet together. This is not at all suitable for a religious visit to some prisoners, as they feel they cannot relax because everybody is watching them sitting with a Buddhist nun. It is also not good because many of the men cry or become very emotional.

I valued so much the time spent talking to these suffering men, who had themselves, caused so much suffering to others. I learned so much. I did not preach to them but rather tried to keep the channels open for them to explore their own minds from within their own perspectives and without the often confusing labels of good and evil dictated by doctrine. I thought that in this way, I could bring my stories about Geshe Lama Konchog and his miraculous changes to *my* headstrong rebellious mind to a more personal note that may in some way touch some soft spot within their hardened hearts.

I tried to teach about experiential lessons that only they could understand and learn from. I simply tried to explain what the Buddha taught about suffering, what causes us to suffer and from that, how to change the way we think so that we do not create any more suffering – either to ourselves, or to others.

The big teachings I thought were more suited to the proper nuns and monks who would conduct precise teachings on specific topics. I could only speak from my own heart. And I think this did have some impact as several prisoners asked for Lama's photo so they could put it over their beds. They had in fact, taken refuge with him in their own way. I was chuffed!

However, I knew I could not continue to do this, so I wanted very desperately to establish a Buddhist monk or nun on the prison Chaplaincy before I gave in. I did the best I could, even going to the appropriate Member of Parliament to enlist his help, but he also said I would have to be patient as the Minister for Prisons was not too struck on the idea.

Slowly, slowly, it maybe would have happened, but I just did not have the time or the wherewithal to make it happen, quickly. Also I am not the right type of person/nun to engage into delicate operations that require finesse and diplomacy and that is because I am a bluster-bus that wants things right NOW. If not sooner. This comes from having no patience and tolerance, ho ho!

It seems logical to me to try to inspire a person to live a better life based on their beliefs and understandings of whatever their spirituality offers by way of vows, rules, ritual and behavioral limits. This way they can be re-connected to discipline and respect for themselves and others in a manner that is meaningful for them. But to do this within the confines of a prison, there needs to be a room that is set apart for religious visits; a room that has a peaceful environment in contrast to the harshness, brutality and hopelessness of general prison life.

Familiar ritual is very important, I believe. For example, for the Asian men in the Woodford prison each year they are given the opportunity to participate in the celebration of Chinese New Year with a full-length fluffy dragon that has a huge head with winking eyes

and it balances on four spindly legs that all go in different directions at the same time. This is a big step forward in prison management because it brings meaningful, familiar ritual that touches the hearts of the prisoners and instantly transforms their negative minds into positive ones, even if it is just for a moment or two.

One year at the time of the Dragon Dance for New Year, arrangements were made for a Chinese Bikkshuni and her attendant nun to attend and Father Brian and myself were also invited to attend.

PHOTO 13. Woodford jail prisoners and the Chinese Bikkshuni and her attendant. Me with Suchakum who first requested a Buddhist monk or nun attend.



It was wonderful to see these men with smiling faces. Special food was brought in for them and along with several of the prison officials, we all enjoyed it very much. For that one hour they were not generating any negative karma, they were not angry, frustrated, hateful, their hard hearts were softened by happiness and they were rejoicing.

There was much more being offered than just a Dragon Dance. There was ritual. There was a meaningful connection in their hearts and minds to something beyond the mundane, which gives cause for so much suffering. This is exactly what is needed to relight their heart lights with a feeling of connectedness to something positive and therefore joyful, rather than generating anger and hatred to all and sundry.

Of course, this is a very simplistic example to a stiflingly difficult situation, but if we lose touch with our spirituality and/or our particular type of ritual that meaningfully overrides our ordinary mundane existence, no matter what label it bears, there is absolutely no hope to live a life without either causing suffering, or experiencing it. Something is needed to lift us from our limited perception of ourselves and encourage us to transform our minds.

The Dragon Dance had a real impact on me as I saw it as a huge break through to transforming a thoroughly negative mind focused mainly on violence, into a happy and joyous one. If only for an hour. It is only a beginning, for sure, but sometimes we have to rely on some other means to create the method to be able to transform our thoughts and actions *before* we can delve into the mysteries of our own mind at a deeper level.

I realize it should not be the doings of a nun to beat a drum on a political bandwagon, but in this case I will probably get away with it – especially as I know Geshe Lama Konchog would have approved. And even though I failed to accomplish anything, I did try. Maybe he would not have approved of my inadequate methods that failed to do what needed to be done, but hopefully someone else will be inspired to take up this challenge and do this work – for *their* guru.

There are many stories about particular prisoners that I could tell, but this would be inappropriate due to their privacy. But I can tell you that several of the prisoners had pictures of Geshe Lama Konchog pasted on the walls over their beds in their cell. Several of the prisoners still ring me and we talk about Lama, even though they never met him in person, he nevertheless, touched their hearts.

There is no doubt that I failed at the big task, but I did get Lama's energy into the prison by means of a photo.

WHITE TARA INCIDENT

Many, many times under instruction from Lama, I did the White Tara retreat for long life. Although I got the benefit from doing this, mainly the practice was done for others. I did the retreats with the best of my simple ability motivated by the thought that I must live long enough to make Lama live forever in the minds of Australians. I had to do whatever I could to tell everybody about him and so encourage them to find their own guru.

One day while I was driving into the town to do some shopping, while crossing over a bridge suddenly White Tara appeared on the end of the bonnet of the car. She was facing me and she was about four inches in height.

I got such a fright that I stopped the car dead in the middle of the bridge. I stayed there for some time but she did not disappear. I continued to drive on but she stayed at the end of the bonnet for about half an hour before vanishing.

It was within a week of this, that I began to have very severe headaches. The headaches got worse until I could not move from my bed. It was found that I had a type of meningitis. A nun, Namdag, was staying with me at the time and I truly believe that she was sent to take care of me during this life-threatening time.

There is no doubt in my mind that Lama's mind appeared in the form of White Tara and that he had saved my worthless life. I believe from my heart, that Lama preempted this condition happening and set causes and conditions in place to counterbalance it.

SPECIAL PRACTICES - SPIRIT HARM.

Many people have found their way to this house suffering the results of spirit harm. I believe of course, that they have been drawn here by Lama's strong power. It is well known that he had the power to manifest simultaneously in many places at once to be of benefit wherever and whenever needed, just as all Buddhas can do. *And I know this for a fact!* In

one particular case of spirit harm where the clairvoyant had contracted cancer, I emailed Lama who told me to do a special practice for them and to tell the person that they had to say a certain number of a particular mantra.

The spirit became aware of Lama's intervention between it and the sick person and it told the person they were not to do as Lama said because he was trying to harm it. This spirit had such control over the person's mind that he did whatever the spirit ordered because he was being given clairvoyant information that enabled him to make a good living. The spirit gained from this arrangement too, because it had access to a physical body. Eventually this man died.

Because a spirit is formless, it requires a body to maintain contact with this world. This spirit had obviously been a human in previous life and when it died, the consciousness did not have the karma to be again born in the form realm as a human and instead took rebirth in the formless, spirit realm.

However, due to great attachment to places and people within this desire realm that humans live, it has to seek a body to be able to maintain that closeness to its particular attachments. To do this, spirits take 'possession' of a form body such as a human, animal or so.

There are many methods that we all know about that will allow a spirit to enter our body, for instance ouija boards, automatic writing, seances and so on. However, sometimes a spirit can take possession during the sleep time when the person has no conscious defence.

Sometimes the spirit is clairvoyant and so it can keep 'its host' connected by means of notoriety and monetary gain. Many spirits use their clairvoyance to offer advice and knowledge about people and places and so keep the partnership going easily. Some spirits are harmless but others are not and there is usually no way for a person to know the difference until it is too late.

Why would somebody allow this to happen, you could ask? Power and fame is probably an answer. With clairvoyant spirit help a human can easily become famous and rich. The human is not usually the clairvoyant one; it is usually the spirit.

One particular man I knew of would stay up all night long doing automatic writing. He had many clients who paid him well and so his fame and fortune rose very high. Because of lack of sleep, this man eventually lost his job, his family and eventually his physical and mental health.

There are different kinds of spirits, some are benevolent and some are very malevolent and cause nothing but trouble, sickness and death. Whatever the type, they will eventually leave a legacy of ill health as the two realms do not mix well and the result is usually mental and/or physical ill health. Mental institutions are filled with people who have had their brains and bodies twisted because of spirit harm. Cancer is another very common legacy and so are untreatable skin diseases.

Buddhists believe that there are three realms into which we can be reborn, namely: the desire realm, form realm and the formless realm. There are six types of migrators within these realms and they are: gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, spirits and hell beings. Spirits come from the formless realm, which is below the animal form realm. These realms can also be understood to be states of mind.

Spirits can be exorcised by various methods, for instance the Roman Catholic Church has special knowledge about such matters, as do the Buddhists and others, but it is more compassionate from a Buddhist perspective to attempt to teach the spirit the dharma so that it

will not cause any future trouble. Geshe Lama Konchog could do just that. But unless the person involved is truly committed and willing to do their part to be detached from a harmful spirit and do precisely as instructed, there is nothing much that can be done to help.

Even a high practitioner's practice cannot transform another's mind; they can only offer a key. Only we have the power to turn the key to be able to transform our own mind. You can be given the right wisdoms and methods, but unless you choose to walk the talk yourself and do it for yourself, you lose. The Buddhas cannot live our life for us – they would if they could, but we have to walk the path alone in the end, guided by them.

We create our own karma. We each have our own power. We are never power-less, unless we give our power away.

NAGA PUJAS

Nagas are classified as belonging to the animal kingdom. They are snake-like beings sometimes depicted as dragons, which some can see and others cannot. They also, can cause harm to humans either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, to pee under a tree that is inhabited by nagas can result in skin infections that do not heal. Some nagas are believed in Asia, to protect water holes where they have aversions to men and so they drown them.

Aboriginal people in Australia have similar beliefs and knowledge. Although the names are different, they all describe the same phenomena and this is so indicative of symbolism all over the world. However, I believe that many of us who live in the bush in Australia have a sensual awareness of these other entities, or beings, when we walk around the rocks and water holes. And most especially in the rain forest. Aboriginal people have strongly maintained their beliefs and symbols pertaining to spirits and other invisible entities, with whom they live in respectful peace and harmony.

On the other hand, many of us western university trained, left-brained vibrating, city slickers have pushed out this basic knowledge from our over-stuffed 'what you see is what you get' academic brains, to leave more room for technology and whiz-bang thrill-by-the-minute stuff. Something has to go, and this has been a fundamental loss of respect and reverence towards the deep and mystical. Our loss. And if wonder is lost, what is left?

Anyway, as I was about to tell you before I got carried away, a few days after my first novice ordination in 1994, Venerable Yeshe Khadro asked me if I would like to do a naga puja for a woman named Jill who had a skin disease that the doctors had been unable to fix. I said, "Yeah, sure. *What's a naga?*" The bliss of ignorance!

This is surely another Geshe Lama Konchog miracle. Who in their right mind would give someone straight out of a sacred sports car, covered from head to toe in glam and glitters, permission to act like a proper nun dressed in Robes, the job of going to someone's place to perform a naga puja? Especially considering that she did not even know what a naga puja was in the first place.

And I might also hint slightly here, that I had had absolutely no advice from Lama since he had left Australia other than to tell me that now I did not have a husband, better to become nun.

And so it happened. Yeshe Khadro gave me the bare bones of a sadhana that contained little more than the puja ingredients and a few prayers and with this, I knocked on Jill's door.

I explained to Jill (who I did not know) that I knew nothing about any of this, but that I would do my best. This lady had met Geshe Lama Konchog in Kopan, so she obviously had great faith in both he and Yeshe Khadro, so I was more or less somehow accepted. However, I felt distinctly uneasy about this poor woman being sent an apology for a nun.

Everything went along smoothly during the puja, until suddenly the milk jumped out of the jug that was on the table and splashed all down the front of me. We both just continued on and acted as if nothing had happened, but I for one, almost fainted.

This was my very first naga puja and there were very many more to come. When I think back on it now, it was apparent that Lama was letting me know he was in control. I just did not know it then. What the poor nagas thought about all this initial puja, I hate to think. They probably sent an email around to all their friends saying: 'Hey, come and see this!'

Nagas are great protectors of the dharma and they keep scriptures and teachings at the bottom of the oceans until the time is right for them to be exposed to this world's inhabitants. They live in the oceans, rivers and places where there are rocks and trees. They are exceptionally clean creatures so to pollute their areas will surely bring harm.

It is believed that nagas can be responsible for many skin diseases, cancer and mental disorders. Special Lamas have the ability to be able to tell if a patient is suffering from a karma related illness, from spirit harm or from naga harm. Geshe Lama Konchog was one such Lama. I only did these pujas at the request of other Lamas, never from my own side. The reason for this is simple – I had no idea what I was doing, but I knew Lama's mind was the instrument and I was just the puppet. So for me it was simple just to comply.

After I had been requested to do quite a few of these naga pujas, I realized that I needed to know a bit more than what was written on the scant sadhana, so I emailed Lama and requested more detail. He sent an email straight back with more instructions, some of which were a tad beyond my realms of understanding. Along with a list of new ingredients, he casually mentioned that hundreds of pills needed to be made - and they were to be rolled by a naga.

Rolled by a what!?

Because Lama was a great Mahasiddha, he had of course no trouble in summoning up a naga and requesting: 'Oh excuse me, naga, would you please roll a few hundred pills or so out of this dough, if you don't mind?'

But me?!

Imagine this with your wildest imagination: that I, (straight off the back of a Harley Davidson into a sacred sports car, me!) had the ability to recognise a naga in the first place; then as it waltzed past, catch its eye and give it a wink and when it sauntered over, be so bold as to ask it whether it would mind giving me a few minutes of its time to roll a few hundred pills for a puja. From my side, I would die of fright if I even bumped into one on the street, let alone ask it to do something! But for Lama, *no bother*.

But then, who am I to question the advice of a Master? '*Do or die*' seemed to be my new mantra now, so the next time I did a puja, I did my best to imagine that a nice little naga was sitting there beside me rolling pills with its little fingers – and happily! Of course, I rolled the pills – I just *imagined* the rest! But who knows? *Maybe Lama really did send a naga and it really was sitting next to me!* I will never know.

RED MILK

The puja ingredients specifically stated that milk from a white goat and milk from a red cow were needed. There could be absolutely no thought of just going to the supermarket and buying a carton of cow's milk and one of goat's milk. I had learned that what Lama instructed, one did precisely.

Also, in tantric practice, near enough is never good enough. It is one thing to visualise or imagine, but absolutely not in the context of acquiring the right ingredients for a special puja. This would be like a doctor telling you to go and buy some antibiotics when you are sick, but you buy aspirin instead because it is easier and cheaper. It is just not done.

The goat's milk was easy because on the packet of commercial goat milk there is a picture of a white Saanen goat. Miracle of miracles, I live in a small village where there are still cows grazing on dairy farms. Miracle again, the cows are all colours.

I tried to ask friends to go and ask for some milk from a reddish/brownish looking cow from one of the farms, but they all refused with the excuses that they were too busy, or too tired, or too something else and they told me to go and do it myself. I heard Lama's voice when they spoke.

So I swallowed my pride and went up to a farmhouse at the bottom of the hill where Chenrezig Institute is situated and spotted a few happy looking multicolored cows. There was one reddish- brown cow, very fat and contented looking, with an equally fat and contented reddish looking calf in tow. Perfect! I thought. Lama will be pleased.

I felt like a real goose, but up I went and knocked on the door. The man who came out of the farmhouse was Italian and I tried to rattle off something about 'could I please have some milk from that reddish cow over there, please?' I do not think he understood much of what I was asking, because he said: "*Whada you wanna red cow for, lady?*" This is exactly how the conversation went, I will never forget, it is etched onto my consciousness for all rebirths to come:

"No, not the cow – some of its milk. Please?"

"You wana reda milka from thada cow, lady? Whada for? You crazy lady! You go away!"

I am an extremely private person and would never dream of bowling up to a stranger's front door and confronting them. Especially ones who think I am crazy. It also did not help matters much that I was standing there with a bald head, tattooed eyebrows and dressed in maroon and yellow Robes. All of which this man had obviously never seen before.

I was starting to walk backwards, slinking off to the swallowing-up place where you go when you know you cannot remain where you are any more, which incidentally, is a place I was becoming more and more familiar with, when suddenly a lady with an apron on came outside waving a wooden spoon at me. *Oh, I thought! What are you doing to me, Lama!* She saw my distress and growing fear and came running over and took me by the arm.

"Donna you taka any notice of him, hesa crazy olda man! – whada you want, lady?"

I took a deep breath, went a whiter shade of pale and asked if I could please have some milk from *that* reddish cow, over there, please? Followed by: *“Sorry, please, thank you, sorry, sorry, very sorry!!!”*

“Whada you wana red milk for, lady?” Oh, not again!

“For medicine” I mumbled out without thinking, but by now ready to run and not stop until I had slammed my front door securely behind me.

“Oh, thatsa no trouble! I will milka her straight away for you. You comea witha me. Her baby won’t be too happy though, but if you holda the baby, I will taka some of the reda milk”.

The baby smiled sweetly at me while I hugged its neck. It did not seem to mind that a slightly ashen, shaken, tattooed, bald headed woman was going to swipe some of its mother’s red milk.

“You wanna the reda milka for medicine, I am so happy to giva for you. Don’t you take any notice of the crazy-olda man, hesa mya husband. He knowa nothing! But I understand. Hesa gota superstition! You can come any time for a reda milka for medicine. I am so pleased to givea you.”

Oh thank you Lama! I got out in one piece *and* clutching a jug of the right milk and lived to tell the tale.

This lady thought that she was giving medicine, so the offering was given with pure motivation and joyfulness at the thought of helping a sick person. A true miracle. However, I reckon the biggest miracle of all was that I stood there and did not run away. This lady was, no doubt, a bodhisattva in my eyes. Only her husband was not so convinced. The nagas will surely be happy with thisa reda milka, I thought. They had better be!

I believe that this was a big lesson in doing things the right way, the way that Lama would have wanted it done. It required the right effort, the right mindfulness, the right attitude and the right speech. It also required transformation of my cowardly mind into one of strong determination. It went a bit haywire, but in the end the miracle was produced and the right milk was obtained.

Of course, I would have no idea how Lama got *his* milk from a red cow, but for me I had to make every effort to do exactly as he instructed – to the letter. To me it is not good enough to just buy milk and pretend that it was from a red cow.

I saw with my own eyes how milk from a reda cow could be transformed immediately into medicine. The miracle was that it was offered with the right motivation obtained and it required one heck of a lot of right effort on the part of the procurer. Huge miracle! Huge lesson!

ANOTHER NAGA PUJA MIRACLE

Several months later I was again requested to do a naga puja for a sick woman. At the time another nun, Namdag, was staying with me and she very kindly offered to help. *‘Oh goodie, goodie I thought – she can go and get the reda milk!’* Considering that she did not have tattooed eyebrows, I thought she might not upset the ‘crazy-olda man’ as much as I had done.

All joking aside, this is one of the greatest miracles I have had the incredible karma to have witnessed and it proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that Geshe Lama Konchog was, and

is, a true miracle worker, yogi, bodhisattva, Mahasiddha and Buddha of the highest order. This is the story:

After explaining to poor, unsuspecting Namdag where she could get the milk from a red cow and careful not to mention any more, off she goes. Very shortly after she comes back happily clutching a jug full of milk exclaiming what lovely people the farmers were. I could not believe it! No dramas, no stress – life could not be more simple. Not only did she look the part of a proper nun but she obviously had the karma to charm people as well. Both credentials I sadly lack.

We then proceeded to sit on my front verandah and prepare the ingredients, the medicines, the tormas and the offerings necessary for the puja. All the while we were doing this we were laughing and talking about my previous attempt to get the red milk. So we were not being very serious.

I had previously emailed Lama in Kopan to let him know what time and date I would be doing the puja so that he could be aware of what was happening and when. But because so much time had been spent in senseless chatter, there was no time to settle down and relax before beginning the puja. I raced into my bedroom where everything was set up and flopped down on the cushion.

I knew I was in for a torrid time because I just could not connect my erratic mind with Lama's holy mind, as mine was away with the funny-bunnies. I sat on the cushion and tried to do the breathing exercises to relax my body and mind, but nothing worked. The more I did it, the more fidgety I became.

I will mention here that I never, ever performed any sort of special practice until my mind had connected to Lama's. In the early years it took between four and six hours of concentration before I felt the connection and then I knew that it was really Lama who was doing the work – I just went through the motions. It did, however, become easier and quicker the more I let go of me and connected more strongly to him.

Eventually however, I relaxed and did my best to place my limited mind into emptiness, when suddenly I saw a tiny pinprick of light way, way in the distance behind my closed eyelids. This light became larger and larger as it seemed to be getting closer. Suddenly I could pick out a form of what looked like a statue. The statue was moving and it was unmistakably eight-armed Avalokiteshvara. He stood clearly in front of me. I remember blinking and blinking, but he still remained.

Instantaneously, there appeared another form that was blue, sitting in the air to his left. This form did not come from a speck of light, it just appeared intact next to the other figure. Avalokiteshvara said to me, pointing to this blue form, "*This is Vajradhara!*"

I remember thinking, '*Oh crikey! I have overdone it and now I am hallucinating! I got too excited by talking and being silly and now I am flipping out.*' So I began to try to clear my mind by looking down and once again beginning to do breathing exercises to try to get it all together.

After several minutes I realized that these two figures were still there. I got the fright of my life. They did not help my mind at all to become peaceful – they jolted it into reality. I got such a fright at this totally unexpected sight and the change in my awareness, that I instantly became focused. Not focused on the puja, like I had intended to be, but focused on *them*.

Avalokiteshvara was standing facing me to my left and he was white and tall. Buddha Vajradhara was short and blue and he was floating in the air. He was sitting in the cross-legged position and the top of his head reached to about the height of the shoulders of Avalokiteshvara. Neither was smiling but neither looked very strict either. They just looked at me without expression. Neither said anything.

Just as my brain was beginning to process this information, suddenly I became aware that something was touching my right arm. *I looked, and there was Geshe Lama Konchog!* I almost fell off the cushion. He was transparent and in a greyish colour. He was seated next to me and he was looking straight ahead. He looked very, very stern. I can see him even now just as clearly as it happened then, in my mind's eye. Never – *never* to be forgotten.

When I moved my arm I could not feel his arm against mine. He was like a ghost-like figure and yet I could distinctly feel his left arm. It was not warm or cold – it was just touching me. I froze! That is the only way I can describe my reaction.

I knew that he was there and that I had been stupid - and then I felt the blood rush to my face. I sat looking at him stunned for several minutes until I realized I had better get on with what I was supposed to be doing.

I took one more sideways look and then my heart stopped beating. I do not think it began to beat again until I finished the puja several hours later. Lama remained touching my right arm for the entire time without looking anywhere other than straight ahead with a very serious face. He did not move at any stage. He looked like grey smoke but in very distinct form with all his features. I lost sight of the vision of Avolokiteshvara and Vajradhara somewhere in the middle of this shock. I never saw them again. And to this day I have never seen them again.

I have absolutely no idea what the significance of this vision meant. Absolutely none. I cannot even begin to imagine what it all meant. I did, however, get a very clear message from Lama though. *Be serious!*

Incidentally, the next day an email came from Ani Fran saying that Lama had done the Naga Puja over there, and it turned out to be at the exact time it was done in my house. You make of this, as you will, I have no suggestions.

In the sadhana (instructions) when it comes time to do the self-initiation as Avalokiteshvara, it is always so beautiful because I feel that I have met him, or at least been aware of his actual presence. This too, has been etched on to my mind.

As I have said so many times, I am nobody special, not even a good person, I am simply devoted to a Great Master and yet such a miracle truly happened to a nothing like me. This is evidence of the miracles the guru can perform.

I saw both Avalokiteshvara and Vajradhara and I saw Lama. They were all together in some other form that allowed such deluded eyes as mine to see and that is a truly incredible miracle. Only the kindness of the guru allows such miracles to happen.

For what purpose this all happened, I have absolutely no idea. But I have now a more condensed form of faith based on what I saw with my own eyes. This was an experience that cannot be gained from reading about and studying, it was given as an experiential, amazing gift from the Guru. *But it was a gift that almost killed me with fright.*

When I finished the puja, all signs of Lama had gone and the room was once again merely my bedroom. When I came outside to make a cup of tea, Namdag came out of her room where she had been meditating all this time and said:

“You know, Geshe Lama Konchog was here in this house. I saw him!”

LAMA MANIFESTED IN HOSPITAL

Many times I have been hospitalized with chest infections and I always go to the same hospital in Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast where I have been going for over twenty-five years, so the nurses know me well.

On one such occasion I had been admitted late at night. The next morning two of the nurses came rushing in and asked me if I had been ringing bells during the night. I told them definitely not, but they said that they heard bells ringing in my room and yet, when they came in to check each time, they found me fast asleep. One nurse said she thought the sound was more like wind chimes. I was alone in the room.

They said the bells were coming from my top drawer, but on inspection they could only find the photo of Lama, which is always in my ‘hospital’ bag. I had not had time to put things away properly so the photo had not yet been put on the bedside cupboard and was still in the drawer.

I do not know the significance of this story either. I just pass it on as evidence, in my point of view, that this was indeed the working of a miracle by a living Buddha. Maybe it was a sign from Lama that all was well, or that all would be well, or that he was just with me. I do not know.

EMERGENCY BELL

Several months before Lama manifested a cancer illness in Singapore, I had emergency surgery for an abscess in the bowel. The operation was performed in a major specialist hospital in Brisbane. After the surgery I was in the intensive care unit with a special nurse for four days in a semi-coma.

While I was in the intensive care unit I felt the most incredible feeling of bliss and calmness, even though there were four other beds screened off from my view and I could hear moaning and machines. I continually did the Medicine Buddha mantras in my head, when I was awake, for these desperately ill people.

It felt such a privilege to be in an environment of such terrible suffering and to be able to do this practice for them. I knew Lama was powerfully in that awful room and the mantras kept me calm and peaceful.

When I came out of that special unit and was taken to my room, a male nurse came over to me and said he was from the intensive care unit and he was the one who held me while they changed the sheets. He said that there was an incredible amount of peace in the room and the doctors had remarked on it. I told him all about Geshe Lama Konchog and showed him his photo. I know for sure that Lama was in the room watching over all of us, even the unsuspecting doctors were aware of it.

PAIN FREE SURGERY

There is no doubt in my mind that Lama's Buddha mind was in the hospital. I had lost a big part of my bowel and the surgery had taken many hours. The nurses explained that I was to tell them on a scale of 1 to 10 the extent of the pain because they said that I had been prescribed intensive painkillers and that I only had to ask and they would be given. I kept telling them I had no pain.

When the doctor came in to examine me, he also explained that there is a lot of pain after such extensive surgery and that there was absolutely no need to be brave and suffer. I told him I had no pain.

The next day two nurses came over and again asked if I wanted pain relief and I explained once again that I had no pain. One nurse then said: "*Look at her face, she is not in any pain!*" The doctors and nurses were all flabbergasted. I experienced absolutely no pain whatsoever during my recovery. I knew for sure that Lama had made sure I did not suffer.

I did, however, take several of the special pills that Lama sent as a gift in that magic parcel to Sydney. Whether this had something to do with it, I will never know. I believe that this was a miracle.

CATHOLIC/BUDDHIST FUN

The first two weeks after the operation were spent in the Holy Spirit Hospital in the centre of Brisbane. It is a Catholic run hospital and there was an elderly Catholic nun in the room opposite mine, very ill with cancer of the stomach.

We made great friends and had a lovely time shuffling along to each other's room clutching our stomach in one hand and a drip on wheels with the other and looking for all the world like the walking dead. We talked about our respective religions and compared what we had in common and contemplated meaningfully any shady areas around the fence. We both had stitches from stern to bow and at times we both feared we would split open from laughing.

Her room was constantly filled with priests and nuns who uproariously laughed and joked. Inevitably they would all wander over to my room when they found out I was a Buddhist nun, sit all over the bed and the party would continue on in my room. I was accepted as one of them with such understanding and unconditional love.

One elderly priest was very interested in my version of Buddhism and he and I talked often about philosophical ideas that were so compatible to both religions. We both understood there were differences, but they did not matter and we did not dwell on them.

I think we learned a lot from each other, even though I explained that I was no expert, other than an expert in the dealings with my beloved guru. He understood. We laughed a lot and he said he was no expert either, but I knew he was a deeply religious man who was so devoted to his Heart Guru – Jesus. I understood that, completely. And so did he. We understood each other completely on that level.

If only all religious groups could meet on common ground and work together for the benefit of all human kind. Maybe, one day

EMERGENCY BELL RINGING

After two weeks at this Brisbane hospital I developed pneumonia, so I asked to be transferred to my own familiar hospital and nurses on the Sunshine Coast. Also I could then have my own doctors who I was used to, and who were used to me. The trip to the Sunshine Coast took over an hour in the ambulance and it caused shock to set in and I again wobbled between this world and the bardo.

I do not remember much for the next few days other than what was relayed to me by nurses. When I arrived at the hospital the nurses wrapped me up in warm blankets, turned off the lights and kept everything very quiet. I was in a big room with other empty beds in it.

After leaving me quietly sleeping in this room, the emergency bell rang at the nurses' quarters. When they came in, I began to vomit. They said that the bell on my bed had not been turned on and yet they knew – and I knew – that it was not me who had turned it on. I knew nothing about it because I was unconscious. This happened several times during the day and each time they ran into the room, I vomited. The hospitals in Queensland are notoriously short staffed and so it is possible I could have choked, or worse, if the nurses had not been summoned at that exact moment. This is a fact!

On inspection, it was found out that the bell on my bed had not in fact been turned on and that it was the bell on one of the other beds directly opposite mine that had been switched on. I was unconsciousness therefore unable to get out of bed. I was the only one in the room and there was nobody else around. In fact, nobody other than the nurses had access to that room because it was at the far end of the corridor. In any case, anybody going to that room would have had to go past the nurses' quarters first.

Due to the prolific vomiting, my doctor was called to insert a nasal tube to my stomach and the vomiting stopped. And so did the bell ringing. The miracle was, I firmly believe, that Lama's great mind was there in the hospital and watching. No doubts about that, either to me or to the nursing sisters. Unfortunately I do not have the answers of how. I wish I did!

I believe this was a truly great miracle created by Lama. To have had such an extensive operation and to experience absolutely no pain is one thing, but to have an invisible hand ring for the nurses, is something else.

There were several set backs on the road to recovery, but they were not obstacles. I recovered very fast and within several weeks of coming home I began to go back to visit the prison.

To experience such compassion and unconditional love from Lama or indeed, any kind person, leaves a legacy that must be passed on to others. We must learn from these great acts of compassion and then pass them on. They are meant to be lessons.

OVER-THE-PHONE REFUGE CEREMONY

While Lama was still in Singapore after his operation for cancer, a young lady was brought down to my house from Chenrezig Institute and she was very ill with cancer herself. She was dying and wanted to take refuge before she died. Geshe Tashi Tshering was away overseas at the time and so he was unable to perform the Refuge ceremony.

Ani Chodron came with this lady to my house and we decided to ring Lama and request him to give her refuge over the telephone. Ani Chodron spoke to Lama for some time and then the arrangements were made for this lady to come to the house at a designated time and

date, where Lama so kindly and beautifully gave her Refuge over the telephone. This lady decided shortly afterwards that she would take ordination.

I gave this lady a Lama Konchog cancer pill when she first arrived. Not always the effect of the pill is to prolong life, although it usually did, but in this case I believe the pill gave her more than just an extension of time in that body. I believe that it provided a means whereby her consciousness, or mind, was altered to such an extent that her quality of life improved, rather than the quantity.

Although she died shortly after her ordination, she died as a nun. I am also sure that Lama guided her through the bardo. I am absolutely certain that he had a big influence on her becoming a nun and this, I believe, was a very, very beautiful miracle.

REFUGE CEREMONY FOR EIGHT AUSTRALIANS

Shortly after Lama performed this Refuge ceremony from Singapore over the telephone, several other people requested that he give refuge to them also. We all sat around the lounge room with a conference phone and Lama gave the Refuge ceremony so beautifully. The most amazing thing was that none of these people had ever met Lama and yet they were instantly so devoted to him and for the first time, they heard his voice.

The connection was instant between these people and this Great Master, and again in this lifetime they reconnected. Hopefully will continue to meet in the many, many lifetimes to come.

Each one of these people has been surely blessed by a living Buddha and hopefully they will spend the rest of their days practicing loving kindness to everyone they meet to share the special energy they received on that great day. Their inspiration should now be to do Lama's work, from the bottom of their hearts.

BHIKKHUNI ORDINATION MIRACLES

16th October, 2003.

The miracles that surrounded the event of my full ordination were simply beyond belief. I will try to give a brief but concise account.

This was the first time in Australia that full ordination had been offered to western nuns of the Tibetan tradition. Full ordination, or Bhikkhuni ordination, had been lost in the Tibetan tradition and there was reluctance to reinstate it due to old held beliefs and prejudices. However, be that as it may, Lama Choedak Rinpoche from Canberra, Australia became a most powerful warrior and did what had to be done! Alone, he took it upon himself to meet the challenge to right the wrongs of discrimination and try to better this world. He is a warrior as well as an initiator and Bodhisattva.

The reasons why the tradition had been lost in Tibet seem to be many and varied, but nothing happens without a cause, so there is no point in throwing stones and placing blame. It was lost and now it is up to us to again create the merit and karma to become fully ordained nuns. And Lama Choedak Rinpoche has begun this challenge. Homage to him! He convened and sponsored the first Tibetan initiated Bhikkhuni ordination ceremony in the world – and it was performed right here in Australia.

This Great Master, Lama Choedak Rinpoche of the Sakya Tradition, established a Council of Preceptors with the blessings of his teacher, His Excellence Chogye Rinpoche. With the help of another Great Master, the Venerable Thich Quang Ba, the Abbot of the Vietnamese Shakyamuni Buddhist Temple in Canberra, who not only provided the venue for the ceremony but officiated as well, invitations were sent to senior Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis and the Council of Preceptors of Bhikkhuni Ordination was established from the Dharmagupta tradition.

Why I call Lama Choedak a warrior is because he fought alone to do this and would not be deterred. Although invitations were sent to most senior Tibetan tradition monks and Lamas who are resident in Australia, all declined to attend, except one. However there were several monks from other traditions who were so pleased to be in attendance. This invitation was also declined by western senior Bikkhunis as well. Why, is anybody's guess, but this decline in energy did not hold any weight and the event still took place. I am sure the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were cheering. And so it happened that there were nineteen senior Vietnamese Buddhist Bhikkhus and seven Bhikkhunis from Australia and abroad who were delighted to come and help their fellow nuns attain this high standard of ordination.

There were senior Bhikkhunis and Bhikkhus who acted as Preceptors from Vietnam, Germany, USA and Australia. The *Ananda Bhikkhuni Ordination Council* as it is now called, ordained nine women: one New Zealander, six Australians and two Vietnamese at the venue of the Shakyamuni Buddhist Centre and Lama Choedak's Buddhist Centre, the *Virupa Retreat Centre*, in Canberra.

By the way, Shakyamuni Buddha gave full ordination to both monks and nuns but in Tibet the tradition somehow got 'lost'. No doubt there were causes and conditions for this to happen, but I hope that it was not lost because of prejudice against anybody or anything that could distract the minds of monks. It does happen!

The really sad part is, I feel, that the Bhikkhus and particularly the Bhikkhunis of Tibetan tradition who chose not to participate and in reality turn their backs on novice nuns, made a very loud noise in their silence. However that is their loss, I do suspect, in the long run of things. Its funny, isn't it – when we do a virtuous act we face people and show our smiling face with delight, but when we are ashamed we turn our back and hide our face.

Venerable Thich Quang Ba, the Vietnamese Master, exhibited the perfect example of generosity, grace and freedom from prejudice and yet he had been born in a country that had experienced such terror and torment at the hands of the west. For me, he epitomized the perfect example of the Buddha's teaching on loving kindness, acceptance, patience and tolerance. Greatest homage must be paid to him!

Australia is a new country and the beginning of a new culture of Tibetan Buddhism. We are a peaceful country with peoples from all over the world who call Australia home, so what better place to begin a resurgence of the lineage to fully ordain nuns? Being a new country, we must make new beginnings to get rid of the old negative ways and begin again with new positive inspiration to make Buddhism flourish, as the Buddha would have wanted. They say everything old is new again and this is so true. What the Buddha taught was not about separating and isolating some sections of the Sangha because they do not suit the rest of us, the Buddha taught about non-discrimination, non-prejudice and loving kindness to all.

Anyway, that's the way I believe it. Maybe I have been reading the wrong books. But there again, that is my very point – without the guidance of the guru on an experiential level, we cannot go beyond what we read and so be affected by *that*.

There is no wisdom in only reading about the teachings of the Buddha, the real wisdom is in the experiential teachings gained from the teachings of the Buddha and being guided by the guru. And this is what I believe that Lama Choedak Rinpoche did, precisely, when he convened and sponsored the first Council of *The Ananda Bhikkhuni Ordination Council*, in October 2003. *Yiiihaa!*

THE CEREMONY

For the ordination ceremony I was dressed in the full robes of Geshe Lama Konchog. Bliss. Even down to his underskirt. Most of all, I had next to my body his “beloved 17-year-old orange shirt.” Everything was a bit big, but I was truly floating on a bubble of bliss.

Of course, by this time these Holy Robes were Holy Relics, but for this occasion I felt it was alright to wear them because I felt they were Lama’s blessing. My no-good body was, at the time of full ordination, as pure as it was ever going to be, so I really felt blissed-out spectacular. This was truly a miracle.

I cried and shook all through the ceremony. This was not so much from the pain of kneeling for hours on crumbling arthritic knees, but because I was completely overwhelmed with the privilege of just being part of such a great event. I tried very hard to get a grip and not wobble and sob, but it was just too much for someone as unlikely as myself to be in the presence of such holy beings. Everybody present had gone to so much trouble to be there and to make it all happen so beautifully, so it was just more than my heart could bear. I am nothing, absolutely nothing, and yet here I was and a part of it all!

As I have already explained, there were Preceptors from all around the world who had come to witness and take part in this amazing ceremony. When I did manage to look up from my precarious position on fractured knees kneeling in a swelling pool of tears, there was a sea of smiling, compassionate faces looking down amid lights, incense, holy pictures, statues and objects. I believed whole-heartedly that I was sitting at the feet of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the midst of some Pure Land, out in space somewhere and light years from mother Earth. Lama Choedak Rinpoche sat facing us with the most proud, most loving face I have ever, ever seen. Well, maybe excepting you-know-who, that is.

Due to my great attachment, I saw Geshe Lama Konchog in every face in that Pure Land. It was as if he was smiling down on us all. I could feel his presence so clearly. None of these holy thoughts helped my knees much, though. To the Preceptors, I think I must have looked like a blob of maroon and yellow jelly, wobbling around swathed in Robes that were obviously four sizes too big, leaking vast amounts of fluid in big droplets from glazed over eyes and trying desperately to grab hold of the floor boards. Ooooooohhhhh! Not what you should look like! My nose was running from all the tears and I could not wipe it because I did not have a handkerchief – and in any case, I dared not let go of the floorboards in case I toppled over.

Not a good sight, I do admit, but I was in a Bliss Land all the same.

THE TRUE MIRACLE

The true miracle in all of this though, was the fact that this Bhikkhuni ordination as a Buddhist nun can only be attributed to the extreme kindness of Lama, the perfect guru. From my side I cannot even begin to understand how I could have possibly created the karma

needed to be so blessed. The miracle is, that no matter what the level of karma, he allowed and ordained that this should happen. Maybe not what the scholars would say, I admit, but nonetheless – this is what *I* say!

This is exactly how I perceive the situation: I have never been nun material in the first place as I have already explained because I liked the wild side of life too much. In fact, this non-nun-like characteristic went back even further to my very early childhood when I was sent along to Sunday School with the rest of the protesting kids from my small town of Bald Hills.

From the very beginning I got off on the wrong foot with the esteemed establishary of the local Presbyterian Church. I continually asked “But **WHY?**” in a very loud raucous voice to every lesson the teacher was trying to get across to us kids.

None of the others dared to voice their concerns, if they had any, and yet they edged me on enthusiastically. I could not understand any of the concepts being offered and I wanted to know why and how and when and what for. The more I was told to just believe, the more I wondered why and the louder I became. I knew I knew something, yet I had no idea what it was that I knew, I just knew it was not what I was being told. So I said so and I demanded explanations that would be meaningful to me and then I argued against the explanations that were given.

The other kids all thought this was uproariously funny and so they loved Sunday School very much. I got blamed for disrupting the class that was supposed to be very solemn, quiet, respectful and most of all, accepting.

We kids were supposed to be learning moral discipline to keep us on the straight and narrow for the rest of our lives, but unfortunately I questioned even the questions. I obviously lacked all forms of morals AND discipline, so something had to go – and yes, it was me.

The Pastor got very annoyed with me because I told him he did not make any sense. I further told him that the stories were terrible and that they frightened me. He eventually began to ignore the myriad of questions that were delivered one after the other like a submachine gun, but I had the loudest voice in the whole church and so I got shoved outside. Even though I was very sickly and pale, I had a voice like a jack-hammer.

My mother was told I was beyond discipline and my ‘tantrums’ (as was the word of the day), were being put down to a lack of a father’s strap! My father had been killed in the Second World War. This she did not accept too gracefully and so I copped it good and proper from her as well. So my poor mother finally received a ‘*Please Don’t Let Her Come Back*’ letter from the Pastor of the Church.

Before this last act of desperation could be metered out by the local Church however, I did something far worse than voice my concerns and complaints about the sermons - I stole from the plate as well.

Now, I fully realize that no normal person would ever own up to this, even at the threat of torture, but I am trying to show the low level of karma that I could possibly have accumulated that would have given the result of being accepted as a fully ordained Tibetan Bhikkhuni Buddhist nun. And I cannot see much.

At the time of expulsion from the local Church I was about eight years of age and lived in a world still hungry after the end of the war. As my father had been killed in the war, I was not only half an orphan, but a hungry one at that. When I figured out that if I put in the threepenny bit that my mother had given me for the offering plate and then invisibly took out

a shilling, I could run straight down to the local shop and buy lollies. I thought nobody would ever notice.

Not what you would call potential nun material.

However on the good side, I always took a gaggle of other kids down to the lolly shop with me because they were also half starved and so we shared the lollies. You got one heck of a lot of lollies in those days for a shilling. I suppose they were accomplices after the act, or something like that, but they never got expelled – not one of them.

Maybe this was the little bit of good karma that Lama was able to transform, purify and increase thereby allowing my nun-becoming karma to manifest accordingly.

Anyway, the pastor soon got sick of these antics and went to see my mother about what could be done about my religious instruction. She did not know. And she did not care. She had her own issues with religion, so I was left to be a free agent. That was when she got the ‘don’t come back’ letter.

My poor mother! She not only had a very unhealthy scepticism about all things religious in the first place, but to have her one and only child ostracized from the only Church in town was just a tad too much. I think her only motivation for sending me there in the first place was to get rid of me for a few hours and to stop the relentless unending questions on things she never wanted to think about.

So all of this added up to an absolute rebellion of the Godly way to live one’s life with discipline and decorum, and so I took up residence on the outer limits of all known respectability in defiance and total abandon on the exciting side of life where there were no restrictions.

I was free to think and ponder without prejudice and I began to become aware of unseen forces that others did not talk about because of fear. Fear is something that I totally lacked. Fear is what they tried to instill in me at Church. Funny thing is, it was *they* who became fearful – not me, I just argued and pinched their money.

I truly believe my rebellious and defiant nature was born from getting caught making a profit from going to Sunday school and from refuting everything I was told, without having the benefits or the capabilities of knowing what it was that I really *did* know.

Lama would fix that little problem eventually: ‘Be a nun, you will!’ And take 200 more vows than the average nun, just to make sure – you also will!’

I own up to all this now, simply because it goes to prove a point that only a living Buddha could have transformed such negative karma into the incredibly fortunate karma of being fully ordained as a Western nun. And happy and content, to boot!

An incredible miracle! And I thank Lama from the bottom of my heart.

RETREATS

After I had taken novice vows people would often come to The Konchog Cave with cancer, AIDS or mind related problems to seek help. Mainly terminally ill people just need to be heard and have confidence that someone in Robes will be with them at the moment of death. Other troubled people often say they feel a sense of refuge or protection within this house and I know that it is because it is Lama Konchog’s cave. Whatever it is, people do feel his great presence, even to this day.

I would email Lama about some of the people who I suspected may have had spirit or naga harm and ask for his opinion and advice. If Lama’s advice was for them to do pujas, retreat

or mantra count and they were not Buddhists, I was told to do it for them rather than disturb their minds with non-familiar practices.

They knew that Lama had given instructions, but they did not know that I did the practices for them. I did not always tell them because I did not want to delude their minds so that they formed an attachment to me. I was always simply just the puppet. This always worked, because I knew it was Lama who was in control so I always had complete confidence to do as he requested.

These types of retreat, as well as others including the Preliminary Practices to the Great Retreat, were done non-stop over a period of seven years and began from the first novice ordination in 1994 until Lama's death in 2001. During Lama's illness, death and the subsequent consecration of his stupa at Kopan, I remained in retreat doing the Medicine Buddha Practices. For him, not me.

Prior to the Great Retreat, no matter who banged on the door or at what time, I dropped whatever I was doing to see them. Even if I was in the middle of a sadhana or mantra count, I felt it was far more important to be available to troubled people rather than doing meditational practices on my cushion. I felt that this was what Lama would have done and there was nothing more important than to do exactly that. Also I always remembered the fobbing-off I got when I made the appointment to see the impatient nun when I so desperately needed someone in Robes to hear me.

I always had the fervent hope that troubled people would see and feel Lama when they told me their troubles and fears. From my side I am nothing other than a big bag of delusional wind, but if I could offer Lama to people, I felt I had done something more worthwhile than breathing in and out.

But this is just my way, for others it may be totally different. There is no right way or wrong way, we all walk different paths.

JEAN MAIDEN

Lama gave no indication as to the Great Yogi and Great Master he really was when he was with us at Chenrezig Institute. His hidden achievements and attributes were disguised in the form of a mere mortal monk Lama with a wrathful appearance and huge ears. To some. But I knew the moment I saw him that he was very special, but as I had no idea what a Buddha looked like, I had no idea just how buddha-like he really was. I just knew that he was 'something else'.

There were others however, who recognized Lama's supreme and great qualities. An elderly lady named Jean Maiden devotedly transcribed the many, many tapes that Lama recorded on teaching the Experiential Lam Rim that he gave at Chenrezig Institute. Dawa Dhundrup did the translating.

Lama had a huge impact on Jean and her adult son Ralph. Due to her devotion to Lama, this lady wanted to be ordained and so she built a nun's house at Chenrezig Institute and prepared all her Robes. Sadly, however, there were several obstacles that prevented this from happening.

This lovely lady contracted cancer soon after Lama left and eventually she died, but it remained her wish to be ordained right up until her death. She did not die at Chenrezig Institute as she had wished, but her mind remained at peace with her loving family.

Lama showed us all, through Jean, a great lesson on compassion, simple loving kindness and non-discrimination, but did we learn it? I wonder.

I saw her a few days before she died and she told me she had no fears or regrets. She said her mind was perfectly happy and content because she had met Lama and had done this work for him. She knew he would be with her. She made me promise to copy her transcriptions of Lama's teachings onto a computer, which I did.

Lama showed us our own minds, so clearly, in the ambiguous lessons that he taught to us at Chenrezig Institute.

THE EXPERIENTIAL MIRACLES

These are some of the miracles that happened to me after Lama left Australia. The big miracle was that they were all experiential lessons.

These life-changing happenings were obviously delivered to encourage me, and others, to take a good look at ourselves. By being presented with the state of our own minds, I believe that it was Lama's wish that we became frightened with what we saw of our disrespectful and judgmental mind and so would want to change. The big experiential lesson in this is, of course, that we really need to change our perspective of the outside world, by transforming the way we 'see' it through our view of judgment. It is not the outside world that has to change, it is our view of it. In other words, it is *we* who have to change. And then we don't suffer, nor do we cause suffering.

The miracles that happened up to this point were, I believe, preparations for the events that were to begin in the year 2000. Up to this point in time I had begun to accept what life (or is that 'karma') dished out, without rhyme or reason. I was beginning to feel somewhat empowered with the knowledge that lama was with me and I was getting used to the new me. I felt that nothing seemed insurmountable anymore and life would drift on like this, peacefully and meaningfully, until I took my last breath. But little did I know what was in store. Nothing, but nothing could have prepared me for the future.

However, if I had not been prepared thus far by trials and tribulations that had left a few bumps and bruises, I would never have been able to physically, mentally or spiritually cope with events that were to follow in the next few years. I had been made to stand strongly within my own mind supported by the mind of the guru, until I connected fully. I had to learn to do that. My rebellious mind was beginning to be transformed by the connection to the light that shone from his mind. I even began to think differently because I could feel his awareness around me at all times.

Even with ordination as a nun, I had initially felt that I had been unceremoniously donated until I realized that I had to donate myself – and more importantly, why. Not only did I begin to trust in him, but I realized that my mind had become somehow part of his. Inseparable, non-dual, call it whatever you like. And this is where I thought I would live out my days, in bliss.

So wrong..... *"Fasten your seat-belt!" I should have heard him say!*

PART TWO

Singapore
Leaving for Kopan
Bangkok

Chapter Four

SINGAPORE

2000.

“Geshe Lama Konchog has cancer of the stomach. He is in Singapore and they are going to operate”.

Due to the shock I received, I have totally forgotten who told me this terrible news. How could a Buddha have cancer? I thought Buddhas could control such things. How could this possibly happen? And why would this possibly happen? What benefit could this possibly have on other sentient beings? I thought all living Buddhas just blissed out and disappeared when they decided to leave their bodies – no pain, just ecstasy, just floated away on a cloud. Or something like that, but definitely not cancer.

Panic. I remember the blood leaving my head and almost collapsing on the floor. Ring Ani Fran at Kopan, she will know what is happening. At 9 pm my poor old brain is not what it should be by any means and after getting a shock like this, I wandered from room to room muttering to myself in total disbelief and helplessness. I tried to find a telephone number in my address book for Kopan Monastery, but of course could not find it. Finally I realized I could ring international assistance and that would be the starting point. They gave me the phone number for Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, which I rang and started blurting out breathlessly that I needed to speak to Ani Fran real quick because Geshe Lama Konchog had cancer.

The poor man who answered was so kind. He explained that I had the wrong number but that he would give me the right one where I could reach Ani Fran and that I should try to calm down. Yeah, right! Moment by moment the likelihood of that happening was becoming more and more remote. I had only just begun to freak out.

I rang the number but really did not expect Ani Fran to be still in the office at Kopan, but due to Kathmandu being four hours behind us here in Australia - plus the blessings of the Buddhas, she answered the phone.

“What?!” said Fran, obviously shocked. *“I know nothing about it, but you can ring Singapore and find out for sure, here is the number”.* *“Jill, try and stay calm.”* I ring, and a voice answers: *“Hello? Who? No, he is not here. You had better ring back in the morning!”* And the phone went down with a bang.

No, this can't be happening. It's all a horrible dream and I am really sound asleep. But no, reality has taken a leaping whoop into a dark abyss of fear at warp speed and I know this is a place where I do not want to go, and now this man has just hung up on me.

So I ring him straight back and have another go: *“Please listen to me!”* I took a big gulp of air and blurted out: *“Geshe Lama Konchog is my guru I am in Australia I have just heard that he is sick and going to have an operation I must speak to him don't hang up and I cannot ring tomorrow I am almost having a heart attack because I am in such shock and if you don't want the responsibility for another one in hospital, you had better tell me where he is! NOW!”* All in one sentence and all in one breath.

“OK, I will help you. Please calm down! Here is the phone number for the apartment where he is staying.”

Again my shaking fingers hit the phone without my even having to tell them to do so and then I hear,

“Hello?”

“Do you speak English?” Hopefully, I ask.

“Yees.”

“Oh thank god! Geshe Lama Konchog has cancer and they are going to operate on him! Do you know anything about this?”

“Yees.”

Silence.

“Do you know him?”

“Yees.”

“Is he there? Somewhere?”

“Yees.”

Silence.

Completely lost for words, I ask, “Are you still there?”

“Yees.”

“Ummm, who are you?”

“Lama Lhundrup.”

Complete stunned silence as my mouth slammed shut with an audible slamming of teeth. And then the penny dropped. “OH! Do you mean *THE* Lama Lhundrup? From Kopan?”

“Yees.”

I knew of course, that he was the Abbot of Kopan Monastery, but never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine I would be in a position to actually speak to him. This was tantamount to speaking to God himself. I knew my mouth and eyes were wide open by then, but I did not know what to do or say. My brain went just like a computer does when it freezes and then crashes. I now understand how they feel.

“Please, can you help me? Please don’t hang up, I am a bit rattled and I know I am not making sense and I apologise very much for this. I am Jill an Australian nun and I love Geshe Lama Konchog; he is my Heart Guru. It is late at night over here and I have just heard that he has cancer. I have had a big shock and now I am very frightened. Is this true? I don’t know what to do. Please could you help me? I am very sorry to trouble you.”

Then I got all mixed up with his title and called him everything from His Holiness to His Highness to Rinpoche, Lama and Abbot. He must have thought he had a nut case on the other end of the phone. Which he did!

“Yees.”

Silence.

“Um, is he at the apartment?” Where, and what apartment, I had absolutely no idea.

“Yees. Would you like to speak to him?”

“Oh, oh. *Oh! Oh! Oh! No! Oh NO! I just want to*

One minute I am sitting in my lounge room reading a book minding my own business, quite peaceful and quite relaxed, everything in the world was as it should be and then, suddenly, I am speaking to the Most Prestigious Abbot of Kopan Monastery about my Lama who has cancer! Way, way too much.

Even if I had had the latest whiz-bang computer for a brain instead of an obsolete, pre-loved model with quite a few loose screws, I doubt if even it could have grasped the nature of this reality. And now I am going to speak to Geshe Lama Konchog himself, who I have not seen for thirteen years. And, I might add, not 100% sure he knew exactly who I was.

Suddenly there was much talking in the background and then:

“HELLO?”

The deepest, gruffest, softest voice I had ever heard – and will never forget! I just sat motionless and stared into space. Suddenly I was silent. Deeply silent. My whole consciousness was focused on the ear that the phone was leaning on. I think my blood stopped running in my veins. My brain went into suspended animation, if I can use that term. And my heart chakra glowed, ready to explode.

“HELLO?” a tad gruffer.

“Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! It’s Jill from Australia. Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm! Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm! I don’t expect you would know me, but I am the one who sent you millions and millions of letters”.

This would have to be the dumbest and most craziest thing in the world to say to *anybody* – let alone to your heart guru who you have not spoken to for thirteen years, but say it I did. At such a time, you really do not have the means to be able to vet what comes out of your mouth, it really was just a reciprocal noise. And especially to someone who you are not really sure he even knows who you are.

Silence. But this time it was a connected silence.

“Are you sick!” I ask accusingly.

“NO!” The gruffness is a tad louder and without any form of softness.

“Yes, *you are!*” I said in the same tone.

How bad was that. Instead of being so humble, so polite and so respectful as I should have been, I growled at him.

The only thing I can offer in defence is that the shock rattled my brain – and manners. Anyway, after that I babbled on about what could I do to help and this sort of nonsense, with Lama saying words I could not understand. Neither of us understood each other’s words, yet we both said a lot. I knew he knew I was freaking out with fear and desperation.

Then there was much muttering in the background and gentle, calm Lama Lhundrup said: “*Lama does not speak much English, what do you want to know?*” Was this all really happening, that is what I really wanted to know!

“Please, please can I come to Singapore?” “Please.” “Please?” “Please!” amid much gulping and ‘on-the-threshold’ sounds, I heard my voice say.

Again much muttering in the background and then: “*Lama says if you really want to come, he has no objection.*”

I honestly do not remember what happened next, as my mind had gone into complete shut down mode. If this was an altered state of consciousness, then it was something I could well live without.

Go to Singapore? This was like saying I was going to the moon. I had absolutely no money – none. I had a mother in a nursing home totally dependent on me, plus four animals that could not bear to be out of my sight. Within the space of an hour my whole life had changed, never to be the same again.

I had been locked up in retreat for seven years and just going to the local village to do the grocery shopping once a fortnight, was a big day out. Suddenly and without warning my brain had been shut down and then rebooted with a totally new hard drive. Worse, there was no attached instruction book.

I went and made a cup of tea, which is always an all time problem-solving event and then I tried to get things into some form of perspective.

Problem number one, getting the money needed to get to Singapore. I receive a disability pension that is a struggle just to keep me and the animals all connected to the land of the

living after paying all the necessary bills that that entails. Food is a luxury item extended to my cats and dogs only and I live on what they do not like or reject. Well, it often feels like that at times. However, as I did not owe any money, I knew I would be able to borrow the money from a bank, so that was that problem solved.

Next problem was where to stay in Singapore. That was a big, big problem.

As it was almost midnight by this time, I looked through the Mandala magazine and found Amitabha Buddhist Centre and decided to ring them in the morning. When I telephoned them next day to see what accommodation could be had near Lama's apartment, I was told they did not know of any. I was also told that accommodation was very scarce and was very, very expensive in Singapore. Sorry, but they could not help me.

I am not a pushy or aggressive person by any means and yet I kept ringing back to the centre asking them for their help to find accommodation. This was the most important thing I would ever do in my life and I knew it. What I thought I could do to make Lama better, I do not know to this day, but whatever the reason I had, I simply HAD to be with him.

Borrowing would solve the money problem and somehow it would get repaid, but somewhere other than the streets of Singapore on which to flop was looking dim. Nevertheless, I was resolved to resorting to this if need be. I would not be stopped at the first hurdle. I had faith in the compassion of the Buddhas, but I also understood if the karma was not there to make life a little easier, then so be it. I would create new, instant karma and get there one way or the other. I was not going to give in. I was going to be with Lama, and that was that!

I rang again the next day ready to explain my situation and reason for coming to Singapore more clearly and more desperately with more urgency in my voice, when I encountered a gentle male voice who seemed deeply concerned at my predicament and said he would do his best to find somewhere for me to stay.

Lama was my first and only concern. For once in my life, I was putting someone else first. Now, that surely is a miracle.

This gentle man emailed back saying he had found some kind people who would take me in, but as they were away at the moment, I would need alternative accommodation in the short term. *"My name is Sin Kin Kok. I am a bachelor and my place is very dusty. I am not there most of the time, but if you can put up with it for a short while, you are very welcome to stay"*.

When I put the phone down I just sat there and let the tears fall down my face. Not only was I so very grateful, but now it was certain that I would be with Lama and not have fears that the police would come and haul me away for being a vagrant in Singapore. I really felt that my faith was so strong that the Buddhas had allowed this to happen.

THE KIDS

So now I had a return ticket and accommodation. There were just the animals to worry about now and this was a problem that was not going to be easy to solve either. I am nothing and I can put up with pretty much anything, but the pampered pooches that are only used to the high life who live in this house, expect to continue to live in the way most of us would envy. This problem was not going to be easy.

At times when I have been whisked away to hospital in a flurry of panic and mayhem, my first concern always was to ring the local kennels to come and pick up 'the kids', i.e.: the two tiny dogs and two huge cats. They were always looked after very well and moreover, they were still alive when I went to pick them up, but happy they are most definitely not!

For days and days after they got home, they would sit and stare at me and say in big loud voices: “*You abandoned us!*”

Anyone who has spoiled brats in the shape of cats and dogs will know exactly what I am talking about. You are damned if you do, and you are damned if you don’t. You would imagine that they would be just plain grateful that they *were* looked after at all. Obviously when you have the karma to live with a human servant who caters to your every whim, anything less is a hell realm.

Being thus well trained, as I had no idea how long I would be in Singapore, I really had to think hard about which way ‘the kids’ would suffer the least. The kennels they usually went to are for big dogs and they were always a bit frightened I must admit, but what do you do in emergencies, I ask. And so I sat and meditated and asked Lama to help find a good place for the animals where they would be happy.

“*NOT THOSE KENNELS THIS TIME!*” I swear blind I heard him say. Acting like the well-trained rat that I had by now become, I got out the yellow pages of the telephone directory and looked under Catteries and Dog Kennels. Oh well, just pick one. When I went to inspect the kennels I had randomly picked, there were Buddhist prayer flags flying in the garden and several other Buddhist articles around their house. The house was painted maroon and yellow.

Yes, Lama’s mind had chosen them to baby-sit the kids, and of course I knew they would be happy in Buddhist surroundings. Biggest miracle.

Incidentally, when I arrived back home from Singapore and went to pick up the kids, the two dogs were grinning from ear to ear and did not want to leave their new home at the kennels. I was later told that Dharma the boy Chihuahua who weighs 2 kilos after a big meal, particularly loved playing with the other dogs – something he had never done in his entire life due to the fact that he did not think he was a dog, but obviously now he did.

Apparently though, he did not take too kindly to being woken up before 10.30 am each day. Graham the proprietor told me he used to say to him, “*OK Dharma, up you get – its boot camp here!*” And Dharma just loved it. So much so that when he arrived home, he went into instant depression.

SINGAPORE

I have never travelled alone overseas before and always admired with wonder how the nuns scampered around the world without a care in the world, especially to places like India. It never seemed to bother them one iota about the toilet arrangements that they so explicitly told me about, which always left me feeling absolutely aghast and gob smacked with horror. I made a secret pact with myself that I would never set foot in India until it had been fully sewerred.

Singapore I knew was very clean and had proper toilets, but at this point it did not even matter, I still would have gone unabated regardless of the toilet situation. Even the thought of Sin’s ‘very dusty apartment’ did not faze me.

Now all the miracles had been set in place. The big miracle of the lot was that it happened without any drama and very, very quickly. All of this had taken less than a week.

The night before I left for Singapore, I had a dream. Lama was sitting on his cushion of air as he always does in dreams and he clearly told me to pack the cancer pills that he had left with me. I woke up and immediately went into the room where the altar was and packed them in my handbag. And then I forgot all about them.

The next thing I know, I am on a plane heading for Singapore. I have never, ever been outside my comfort zone *alone* before, so to lurch into this adventure was akin to entering

into the twilight zone. The only difference was that Lama was at the end of it, and he was Refuge. Nothing could be more right.

Only ever seeing Singapore on the big screen, I had visions of back alleys with lots of steam and clanging pots and pans, stifling heat, woks filled with smoking wonders and nobody in the whole place speaking English. The thought did cross my mind once or twice, what if I had an asthma attack, but it did not last long. No matter what happened I was going to be with Lama.

This man called Sin who lived in a very dusty place, was so kindly going to pick me up from the airport and take me to his apartment until the arrangements were ready to go somewhere else. I was so thankful for this great act of kindness, as my sense of direction lies in the same distant place as patience and tolerance.

While waiting at the airport console for my luggage in Singapore, suddenly the most awful thought hit me. I had absolutely no idea what Sin looked like. Here I was in a strange country with everyone speaking Chinese and I was to meet somebody who I did not know and I did not even know what he looked like! In my panic I did not realize that I would be the only dumpy old woman with grey fuzz for hair, tattooed eyebrows and dressed in Tibetan Buddhist robes, getting off the plane. How could anyone miss that?

As explained, I am not a worldly traveller and I had packed in a panic. I was certainly not in a normal state of mind when one is going on holidays and has time to take into consideration the climatic conditions and so pack accordingly. I had packed jumpers, sheets, towels and anything else I thought I might need. My bag weighed a ton, even though I only had two sets of robes – one on and one off. My clothes were of course, all that I really needed.

On arrival at Singapore I was amazed to see my dilapidated suitcase was one of the first whizzing around the carousel. This was just going to be too easy, I thought. So I grabbed the bag and just sort of set off in the general direction that everyone else was heading.

Suddenly, here was this tall man running at the back of the people lined up at the fence, keeping up with me and waving and SMILING. Oh, this was Sin! How wonderful and how familiar he looked. Immediately we became friends. He had studied at an Australian university and so he was quite aware of how nutty we Aussies can be.

I come from hot Queensland, but the wave of heat that hit me late that night was a real shock. I sat in Sin's beautiful car and I think the conversation went a bit like this: "*Have you got air-conditioning?*" "*Where is Lama?*" "*Have you got air-conditioning?*" "*Have you seen him lately, does he look very ill?*" "*Have you got air-conditioning?*" "*Does he know I am coming?*" And "*Have you got air-conditioning?*"

Poor sin. His extreme good nature over rode my total incomprehensive state of the horrors about the heat.

I know we Sangha members must always be seen to be cool, calm and collected. I do try, I really do. But it is not in my nature to be so, and sometimes I lose it when I most need to keep it. I had been imagining that I was going to bed down in the back of a shop with ovens and jets blazing in a very dusty room, sleeping in a bed some poor soul had been shoved out of. Why? I do not know, but I think it has got something to do with imagination running amok in unknown situations.

Sin and I drove and chatted as if we had known each other ever since forever through Singapore and then into the most gorgeous tree lined streets with ultra modern high-rise condominiums that you only see on the silver screen. Suddenly we turned into a driveway where a guard in an epauletted uniform stepped out of his little red curb side box, looked into the car and having recognized Sin, waved us on with a smile.

My eyes almost fell out of my head.

I am a country bumpkin from a tiny village on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland. Never in my wildest dreams have I encountered guards coming out of little red boxes to scrutinise me to see that I am not a baddie come to pinch something from the goodies.

I tried to say to Sin, *'I thought you said you lived in a dusty apartment,'* but my mouth would not work because it had dropped open and refused to shut. How we do impute!

You had to insert a special code into the lift that took you to the level of his apartment and then the door opened onto a sparkling pure-realm that was so spacious and beautiful and it overlooked a park with magpies. And I thought magpies only lived in Australia.

And there was not a speck of dust anywhere.

The next day Sin drove me over to the apartment where I was to meet with Geshe Lama Konchog. This would be the first time I had seen him for thirteen years. I was terrified.

PHOTO 14. LAMA FELIX AND SIN KIN KOK, BOTH FROM SINGAPORE AND A PROPER LOOKING DEMURE AND OH-SO-PERFECT NUN. NOT! BUT HAPPY.



LAMA'S APARTMENT IN SINGAPORE

Driving over to Lama's place, I asked Sin, *"What if he does not know who I am?!"*

I then got this terrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that maybe he really had mistaken me for someone else all this time. What if he was expecting to see a tall, slim, graceful nun who even looked intelligent, instead of a podgy, freckled, over excitable granny – and all offset by tattooed eyebrows. Sin just laughed, but he made no attempt to reassure me otherwise. What if Lama took one look at me and said, with a screwed up face: *"Oh! Its YOU!!!"*

By the time I got to Lama's house I was a complete mess. My mind had run amok and now I was ready to just leave a message at his door saying *'I love you. Please get better. Goodbye'*. Sin would have none of it and finally we walked into the apartment. There were monks everywhere and several people who I now suspect to be very high Lamas but, looking through a blur of terror, I could distinguish nothing.

Up to the point of meeting Lama I can truly say that I had never known fear. Since meeting him I seemed to be daily having the wits scared out of me. I am a great believer in the statement that ignorance is bliss, it is not terrifying. The events that caused this new

found fear were the unpredictable confrontations that my mind was continually being forced to face and accept. Nothing can prepare you for that. And nothing could have prepared me for what was yet to follow.

MEETING KHENRINPOCHE LAMA LHUNDRUP

I hung behind Sin until I saw Lama Lhundrup who I recognized from photos. He was seated with some other people but I did not focus on them, I saw only Lama Lhundrup. He looked so familiar and friendly as he smiled and beckoned for me to come over to him. I carefully walked over to him and clumsily did three prostrations without opening up my zen (shawl) as we are supposed to do and then I caught my hand on the edge of my Robes and almost fell flat on my face at his feet. Oh, so not what to do in front of one as high as the Great Abbot of Kopan Monastery, Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup. A living Buddha himself, without doubt.

I think that the higher these holy beings are up the enlightenment ladder, the more accepting they are of pathetic, miserable misfits such as myself who do everything wrong. Especially those who manage to botch up what should be a controlled, unemotional, show of respect. They seem to just smile and beam happiness.

Finally Lama Lhundrup said to me, “*Are you nervous?*” “*Um, a bit.*” I lyingly say, trying to control my shaking body while at the same time trying to rearrange my Robes, which had almost been wrenched off when I did the prostrations.

I sat next to him and tried to look like this sort of meeting with living Buddhas happens to me all the time, but I think he could see straight through that one. I then confessed and told him I was terrified of meeting Lama. I showed him my shaking hands and said I thought it might be better if I were to go back with Sin and just leave Lama a letter instead of seeing him.

Lama Lhundrup said then what he was always to say to me: “**WHY!?**”

I told him I was terrified I would do something wrong and embarrass the whole of the Sangha world. But his reply was not one of encouragement, or even sympathy, it was ‘**WHY!?**’ With a frown. He knew I was not kidding!

In my freaked out state I had failed to notice the Lama sitting opposite Lama Lhundrup at the table. This very respectful, kind and important Lama was Geshe Lama Chonyi, the resident Geshe of Singapore. I do not think he had ever been witness to such crass behaviour before in his entire life and I am absolutely sure that he had never seen tattooed eyebrows before either. He certainly looked somewhat startled, as I remember.

If only we could do a second take on some scenes.

I do realize of course, that every other nun in a similar situation would have remained very altogether, very calm and very aware. None would have lost their composure and certainly none would have been so unmindful of other holy beings around her. Oh.....

MEETING MY GURU BROTHER TENZIN ZOPA

Lama Lhundrup is the most kindly and aware Lama I have ever been privileged to know. I instantly felt protected by him and I sat as close to him as I could. Protocol had gone completely out the window by this time.

We sat together for a little while and just when I was starting to feel a bit more relaxed and could actually take a few breaths without thinking about it, suddenly I see this gorgeous, tall beam of light gliding across the floor with his feet not touching the ground. He was smiling from ear to ear. He was the epitome of grace, urgency and inexpressible age-less wisdom.

I instantly stopped breathing again because every nerve and fibre in my body focused on him. This was Tenzin Zopa and I *knew him!* Something about him I remembered. He was family. He came over and took my hands in his and said, “*I am Tenzin Zopa.*”

And I said, “*I know!*”

We both laughed. We both knew that was a stupid thing to say, but it did not matter to either of us. Words are just words. We both knew something, only I did not know what it was.

“*Lama is ready to see you now*”.

I went to get up but my legs would not work. I shot a frantic look at Lama Lhundrup who smiled and said, “*It will be alright*”. He must have been scratching his head by this time, wondering what on earth Lama had seen in me.

PHOTO 15. THE MOST PRECIOUS, THE MOST HOLY, THE MOST GORGEOUS, THE MOST PERFECT GURU BROTHER EVER THERE WAS, WITH SIN IN THE BEDROOM OF GESHE LAMA KONCHO, SORTING OUT THE RELICS



REMEMBERING

I digress here a little bit, but it has a purpose: When I was about ten years old I had a horse I insisted on calling Norbu, but sometimes I called him Nording. Nobody knew where the name came from and neither did I, I just knew that its name was Norbu. This was in the 1940's so we knew nothing about Tibetans or their way of life.

Fifty years later I was to see a horse exactly like Norbu on a television program about Mongolian horses. My horse always looked different from the other horses nearby because she was smaller and she had a different gait. I remember constantly refusing to sit in the saddle because I told my mother that the saddle was the wrong shape, so I always rode her bareback. This horse constantly reminded me of something I knew that was inexplicable and it was deep in my very soul.

I would always tell my mother about the time I lived in a round tent with a hole in the centre. I told her about the beautiful colours inside the tent and the fireplace where the food was cooked. The more I talked, the more I got whacked so I soon learned to keep it all to myself.

I constantly told her she was not my mother, which went over like a lead balloon and to add insult to injury, I insisted that I had the wrong skin. I had red hair and white skin with freckles, but I kept saying I should be brown with black hair. I got a thumping for this also. Nevertheless, I always wore my hair in plaits and refused to let anyone cut it. I would string beads together and put them in my hair long before it was fashionable to do so. Because of my fair colouring, you could not see my blonde eyebrows, so I would draw them like I remembered them.

Then there was the previous incident when I first met Lama in the Sangha house where I remembered so clearly standing on the side of the mountain with Lama. I was a dark skinned boy.

I have mentioned this because it was when I met Tenzin Zopa for the first time that it all seemed to fit together into a picture that was beginning to make sense. I knew from the bottom of my heart that I knew Tenzin Zopa. I already remembered Lama and the Dalai Lama and I also remembered being like them in appearance. It all began to make sense.

Like the flash of a camera lens, I remembered so much when we were all together, but yet I remember nothing. I think somewhere on my sub-conscious awareness it is all there and every now and again I get a glimpse of it when the conditions are right.

TOGETHER AGAIN

Now it was time to enter a room in a Singaporean apartment to be once again united with my two heart gurus, Geshe Lama Konchog and Tenzin Zopa.

If you had told me less than a week ago that this is what I would be doing, I would have told you that you were nuts. If that is not enough to give anybody the heebie jeebies, no matter how cool, calm and collected they think they are, I don't know what is. But all the while, at the back of my head something was still shrieking, *'What if he really does not know you! What if he really did have some other person in mind all these years? What if, what if, what if.* That is enough to make even the bravest heart stop beating.

I lose my grip very quickly when I get excited, so I had practiced over and over in my head *exactly* what I would do when I first saw Lama. I would not speak – that was the most important thing. I would do three prostrations and then hand him the khata

(customary white scarf of offering) and then remain silent until he gave an instruction. Most of all I had practised being very calm and cool.

This was all very clear in my head so that when the time came I would not waltz in babbling like a turkey in a chook pen. Most importantly, I had practiced not to cry. I would think of something else if need be, but I would not dissolve into a wet, sloppy bundle of over emotional spillage. No way!

When we got to the doorway, Tenzin Zopa instantly dissolved into thin air – and then even the air disappeared and I was left standing alone – and in the doorway was a huge form as big as a mountain. Here was the Himalayas. Here was the cave. Here was everything I remembered – the smell of the wind, my skin colour, my plaits and my horse Norbu. Here was the indescribable. It can only be described as a sensory jolt that shakes your whole nervous system.

It was at this very point that I knew I was in the presence of a living Buddha. My own personal living Buddha. No longer did it matter that he may not know me, I knew him and from then on, that was all that mattered.

I had not rehearsed for what happened next and everything that I had rehearsed for, instantly became lost in the dim dark past of ancient history. Lama was standing in the doorway with a long, golden khata in his hands. I had not rehearsed for my reaction when I looked into his face and saw tears. Nor did I rehearse for the feeling when he took my head in his hands and bumped his forehead against mine, saying, “Oh, Ani! Oh Ani!” Even though our bodies were different and unrecognisable, nevertheless, our consciousnesses merged instantly and welcomingly.

Being a true, fair dinkum Aussie from Celtic background, my nose is long and boney and pointed. Lama’s was soft and broad and soft. And I had a bruised nose for weeks. A holy bruise.

Lama then stood back to allow me to do what I had to do, obviously with full expectation that I could do it. I tried desperately to pull myself together and in a flurry of stunned bewilderment due to my computer brain crashing again, I tried to remember what I should do first – offer the khata? Prostrate? Shut my mouth? I just wanted to hug him. Luckily I had no control over my body, so I did not. I just wanted to stand there and look at him and tell him how much he meant to me. And how grateful I was that he had practiced so much patience and tolerance with me over all these years. And how grateful I was just to be in his presence again. And I wanted to tell him how happy I was and on and on and on, but neither of us spoke the same language. Most of all I had wanted to look cool and dignified and humble and oh, so, like a proper nun. And I didn’t. Not even in the slightest.

I got completely flustered and bundled the khata unceremoniously into Tenzin Zopa’s bodhisattva hands and then did a wobbly, sort of fall-on-the-floor prostration. But this was the most amazing thing, this was the true miracle, even though I botched it up, when I went down my hand accidentally touched his big toe. Here was the foot of a living Buddha and I had waited so long to be in his presence again, so on the second prostration I laid my whole hand on his foot, and then I did it a third time. I did not want to ever get up.

Out the window went all the rehearsals to do everything absolutely perfectly. I had now broken a rule three times in succession, and I had only been with him for less than a minute! On the first touch, I heard him say something to Tenzin Zopa, very softly. On the second touch, he said it a bit louder. But at no time did he move his foot, nor did he take his big toe out of my reach.

In my mind I truly apologised for someone as unfit as myself to touch his foot, but he was a Buddha and he was in touchable range and if anybody ever needed to touch a Buddha, I did. The closest description I can give you of how I felt at that moment is the world

famous painting by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel where the god and the mortal touch fingers. I did stay in that position just a smidgeon too long, too.

After awhile, he regained his composure and I stood still. Poor Lama, he really did practice patience and tolerance to the nth degree with me. But between you and me and the gate post, I felt I had earned a tiny touch and I like to think that he thought so too.

Lama led me to a chair and then he sat on his bed and suddenly Tenzin Zopa began to get ready to sit on the floor. Even though I may be an ignorant bag of nothing, I knew better than to sit in a chair while Tenzin Zopa sat on the floor, so I began to argue. And when this had no effect, I tried to sit on the floor between the chair and Tenzin Zopa. This had even less effect because I could only get half way down before both of them pulled me up and sat me in the chair with a unceremonious ‘plop’.

Not a good move to argue with two holy beings when you think about it now, but it was one of those situations where you just had to be there to understand. The whole feeling up to this point had been surreal with one thing leading to another in whiz-bang fastness. But this was different, I knew my place and it was on the floor, as low as I could get. I had been trained that way by withering glares.

However, neither of the two Masters would have any of this, so I gave in and sat on the chair, which immediately swallowed me up. I just gazed at Lama with huge eyes that refused to blink in case I lost sight of him, even for a split second. If he had told me to sit on the lampshade, I would have done that too.

He sat on his bed in a red, raggy singlet and shabta (skirt) and looked well and strong and very happy. We talked and he laughed. I was beyond happy; I was filled with light and bliss bombs.

I offered all the cards and offerings that people had sent from Australia and he took each card, had Tenzin Zopa read every word the person had written, and then he sat quietly and placed every card on his head. I just sat and melted into his presence. I knew at that time, I would never forget even one second of this meeting. Probably neither did Lama. No doubt, without question, he would never have seen a human being act exactly like a monkey before, but this monkey brought good news from Chenrezig Institute and he delighted in it. When I knew that I was going to Singapore, I got a card and took it up to Chenrezig Institute and had every one of the nuns sign it and write a message. He was truly delighted in this.

Tenzin Zopa was acting as translator but at one point I knew Tenzin Zopa had told a holy fib! Lama said something and Tenzin Zopa gave a little smile while Lama was laughing uproariously, then he said to me, “*Lama said you are thinner than he remembered you.*” What a whopper! Then we all laughed. I did not know why they were laughing, but I laughed because I did not know what else to do.

However, at one point we had been talking about his visit to Australia when he started to laugh and tell me how he had been sent back home to Kathmandu alone and very ill. Not only alone, but also he said that he could not even ask for a cup of tea at the airport. My look must have conveyed exactly how I felt. I died a million deaths. And he laughed. I told him I knew nothing of this and he laughed even more.

Usually, in those days, we were not told where or when the Lamas were either leaving or arriving, so we could not go to the airport to greet them or send them off. I tried to say how sorry I was and that I would have gone back with him had I known this, but the more I stammered and spluttered, the more he laughed. I went bright red with shock and with horror. He went bright red with laughter.

There was obviously a huge lesson in this, otherwise he would not have mentioned it. He thought the whole thing was incredibly funny. The fact that he was laughing so much

while telling these awful tales was symptomatic that there was something more at stake here than just bemoaning. Bemoaning he was not. He was laughing.

I knew how ill he was when he was with us and the thought that he had been sent home alone is terrible. And terrible karma for those of us who allowed it to happen. I was told that he almost died when he got home and it was only because some high Lamas asked him not to die, that he stayed with us. I blame myself implicitly. I should have known. I should have known! Although I did not know anything about these sad circumstances at the time, I was nevertheless part of the group karma of those who did and so I am equally responsible. I should have been more aware instead of being blinded by grasping and attachment. I should have known.

I did know he was not well, as I have already explained, as his teeth had been poisoned due to the effects of the many Nyung Nyes (a fasting, purification retreat) he had done and probably from the years of not eating food and practicing Chulen. (Chulen is taking the boiled up essence from stones, seeds etc.) Even though Lama's mind is enlightened, his earthly body was, nevertheless, still subject to the sufferings of sickness, old age and ultimately, death.

The situations surrounding the time Lama was with us in Australia were very different from times now. It was another era. But when all is said and done, he had come straight from his beloved cave in Tsum in the Himalayas where he was so content and happy, to teach us here in Australia. We should have been offering him the best food, the best conditions, our best ears and most of all, proper devotion. He was so kind.

I sat there absolutely riveted, stunned and mortified while he hilariously decanted these awful stories. I immediately made the decision there and then to take on that karma myself because I had been part of it. I had gained so much from Lama's visit to Australia, so it was up to me to take responsibility for it. I remember consciously making this decision sitting right next to him, but I said nothing. Maybe that was why he was laughing.

There is only so much information that one can process in any given moment in time, yet I had been bombarded non-stop with emotional and visual surrealism for thirteen years. Due to this, my thinking patterns and thought processes had changed from what we accept as being normal, to consciously making decisions that were certainly not normal in the normal sense. The decision to personally take on this negative karma was certainly not normal.

Even though Lama was so ill when he came to Australia, I believe that he not only came and found me again this life, but that he saved my life so many, many times since then. I had, and have, an enormous debt that is to be repaid for this kindness. Debts incurred by the miracles of a Buddha can only be repaid by offering the same kindness to others. It is the only way and there is no other way.

I sat there and wondered why he had stomach cancer. What could have caused it? Could it be stopped? Was there anything I could do from my side to stop it? What could a simpleton such as myself do? Was there anything *anybody* could do to stop this terrible harm from happening? What sort of karma could do this? Some of this I understood and some I did not. It was just all rattling around in my head like a washing machine while I was sitting in front of him and Tenzin Zopa and for once in my life, I was still and silent. And Lama laughed.

But miracles do happen! A few days later when Lama Lhundrup and I were waiting for a taxi outside the Singapore hospital, he became very earnest and leaned over and whispered in my ear, "*Lama's cancer has a cause. You can take on this illness you know.*" I looked at him stunned. I knew then that he could read my mind.

The impact of this information really struck home. His words were like an arrow straight to my heart and I took it very, very personally. Maybe I, alone, had caused this terrible suffering. Again my heart stopped beating and blood rushed out of control inside my body. Lama Lhundrup's words made it very easy for me to take his advice seriously and with the right motivation and intent.

I then asked the Great Abbot of Kopan, Lama Lhundrup, how I could do this and he replied, "*By doing tonglen!*" Tonglen is the practice of taking and giving. We try to take on the suffering and give our compassion. It is a practice of giving of oneself unconditionally, to a suffering person.

I knew precisely at that moment that Lama Lhundrup clearly knew of my intention. Being a Buddha himself, he has the clairvoyance to see clearly what I was thinking and so he formulated it into an order of direction that he knew I was prepared to undertake. I looked at him, but he said nothing more. His look was very strong. So I asked, "*Yes. But how?*" His reply was, "**You know how!**" The trouble was, I didn't.

I have heard stories about people who were very close to previous Dalai Lamas who left their bodies and offered the remaining time of their life to prolong the life of His Holiness. This is like offering him the life force that is unspent. Anyway, this is the way I reasoned for what I was going to try to do.

I did begin to practice tonglen immediately, but although my intention and motivation were 100% pure, my methods were clouded with profound ignorance and delusion. Maybe that is why it did not work. And I feel that I failed, to this very day. I am completely useless to anyone in this world and Lama was so vitally needed. I could not understand why he should die from this terrible illness and I should continue to go on living the good life. I still cannot understand that injustice.

In fact, I got the complete reverse condition from doing this practice because to this day my health has improved so much that I am completely fit and well. All signs of chest weakness have completely gone and I feel like a 16-year-old. It is not fair. This is not the result I prayed for. However, instead of getting miserable because I am well (sic!) I have come to the conclusion that maybe it is possible that Lama did not want me to take on this karma. But then again, maybe this is the product of extreme ignorance and delusion too. Who would know?

Another thought that has crossed my mind is the fact that this world is fast becoming an increasingly disturbed, violent and frightening place and who knows, maybe Lama considered that by taking a new body now he will be able to help the world in the near future. I choose to think this way because in the future times to come we will need as many holy people as possible to create the cause for peace to reign over us. The thought of a new incarnation who will carry the consciousness of the previous Great Master, Geshe Lama Konchog, is enough to give me great hope for the future. But to do this he would have to die and that I could not even begin to cope with, let alone face. When you think about it rationally, for someone like me to die, even with the right motivation, would simply be another being for the Lord of the Hell Realms to look after. Again!

This health improvement had not been the intended miracle I had been hoping for, yet obviously it has been a miracle performed by Lama. Why? I do not know. We just have to learn to accept the ways of a living Buddha. I think sometimes such unsought miracles can become an even more solid grounding for guru devotion because such miracles can help to pull out the weeds that grow along the path.

SINGAPORE HOSPITAL

Sin took me to the apartment to see Lama in the morning and that afternoon Lama was driven to the Singaporean hospital to have an operation to remove the cancer in his stomach. There were several of us who stood and waved him off, but I ran over to the car and he held out his hands. I remember that so much. I remember exactly how his hands felt – so strong, so soft and so kind. I will always remember that, as this was the first of only two times that his hands touched mine. Our noses had touched – and now our hands. Bliss-imo!

Sin drove me to my new abode at the beautiful home of Charles and Tina who not only offered a room, but two maids as well. However, this was not a holiday and I spent all the daylight hours at the hospital and so I was not able to fully appreciate the beauty of their home, which had been a British Naval Officers' home.

Daily I commuted to the Singapore Hospital, which was a very long and tiring journey because it went from one end of Singapore to the other. Nevertheless, it was such joy to walk into the hospital and sit in the lounge at the end of the corridor where Lama's room was and crochet. I sat there from about 7am until about 8pm each day.

I made no attempt to go in to see Lama because I did not want in any way to disturb him. It did not matter whether he knew I was there or not, that was not at all important. What was important to me was that I was there and although there was nothing I could physically do for him, I could sit and say Medicine Buddha mantras while I crocheted a small rug for his bed. Little did I know how important it would be to keep my hands busy and my mind focused on something else other than fear and sadness. This was practice for bigger things to come.

Lama and I could not speak because of the language difficulties and in any case, there was no need for words as there was nothing to say. There was no need to be under his nose as there was nothing I could do to help him. Just sitting quietly and contentedly in the lounge about twenty feet away from him was enough. My energy, for whatever good that was, was in his room like a big puff of pink loving swirls.

On a few occasions Lama invited me into his room to see him. His room looked like a gumpa. There were offerings, lights and statues everywhere and the whole room looked beautiful and filled with light and candles. Lama looked beautiful. Tenzin Zopa looked like an angel.

When I first went into his room I got a big shock though, because I had remembered him as being a big, strong man when he was in Australia, a true mountain yogi, and now here he was lying in a hospital bed. This scene just did not seem right. However, Lama showed absolutely no indication of weakness or illness.

When I first entered the room I left my shoes outside his door and did the three prostrations, perfectly, but this time I could not touch his feet. While I was on the floor I wondered whether he remembered that time too. Probably, I thought, he is relieved that his feet are well out of reach. I gave a little giggle to myself when I stood up and thought, *'Thank god I did it right this time!'* His great eyes shone in response.

THE CANCER PILLS

We sat quietly and silently, because what can you say? Lama then asked me if I had brought the cancer pills he had made. It just seemed so perfectly natural. He obviously knew very well that he had sent a message to my mind to bring them with me. He asked if he could have three and for me to take the rest back to Australia.

Of course I offered him the lot, but he refused them. He took three pills only. I tried to argue, but gave up because I did not want to disturb him with such arrogance. I just offered the entire container to him and he took the three pills and gave the container back to me.

After I had gone back to the lounge and Tenzin Zopa came to sit with me, I was able to be more forceful in offering the rest of the pills to him for Lama. He accepted the pills gratefully and we decided I should keep the three pills that Lama had requested and I would give them to other sick people. So I carefully wrapped up the remaining three pills and placed them back in the container and put them in my purse. How would anyone suspect that a miracle was about to happen to *them*?

A HOSPITAL PURE LAND

The next time Tenzin Zopa came to get me at Lama's request, was when he was being taken to the operating theatre.

I knew there were several Lamas with him and I did not want to pollute the air with my presence, yet I did as I was requested. Firstly though, I raced into the bathroom at the hospital and washed my face and hands and cleaned my teeth. I knew I was going to be in the midst of real live living Buddhas, so I had to be as clean as I could be. I thought, '*I will just lean up against the wall in the corner and try to be invisible*'.

I was visibly shaking as we walked towards Lama's room and it was then that I realized just how frightened I was at the thought of the imminent surgery to remove Lama's stomach. The thought of him suffering was just too much and now it was about to happen. I had just been existing from moment to moment and not facing up to why I really was here and just how dangerous this operation would be and that he might die. I really did not want to know about it, but now it was actually happening.

Tenzin Zopa was very quiet and pale as we walked to the room and just as we were about to enter, he turned to me and very fiercely said: "*Ani, **BE HAPPY!***"

Lama was already on the trolley and they were wheeling him out. He smiled when he saw me and took my hands with both of his and he motioned for the trolley to stop. I wanted to take him off the trolley, hand him to Tenzin Zopa and climb on to the trolley myself. This was beyond terrible. It should not be happening. He looked so vulnerable and defenceless. I wanted to rescue him and protect him but I was completely impotent. Helplessness is truly a totally debilitating experience. My heart was breaking. It was like the whole of the sky fell on me and the earth had given way beneath my feet.

I glanced at Tenzin Zopa and he mouthed the words, '**SMILE!**' as if he would smack me if I didn't! I never would have thought Tenzin Zopa could look wrathful, but he did. My face must have registered shock and total dismay and even though I immediately tried to pull the corners of my mouth up, they would not go. My eyes filled with tears. Lama whispered to me, "*It's alright!*" I think he knew exactly how Tenzin Zopa had clued me up and also exactly what a shock I had just received. Again, his concern was only for others.

I stood there for a moment after they wheeled him away, stunned and incapable of functioning. I was aware that there were several other holy beings in the room, but I did not look at them. The whole room had an energy exactly as you would perceive a Pure Land to be like. The room was ablaze with burning candles and lights.

Everybody was still and seemed to be floating in the air. For a few moments I was part of this amazing scene that was somewhere else. I wanted to sit on the floor and just 'be', to just dissolve into that atmosphere, but I was only a mere mortal and I was in the presence of truly holy minds, so I walked outside and then collapsed on the floor outside Lama's room and just stayed there for a few minutes. In actual fact, my legs would not carry me.

When I did attempt to get up off the floor a very kindly nurse came over smiling and offered me her hand in support. All the doctors and nurses were aware that Lama was no ordinary being.

Tenzin Zopa left with Lama and I believe, sat outside the operating theatre until Lama went to the recovery room and even there, he did not leave him. He lay on the bare floor beside Lama's bed the entire time.

The last time I was ever to see Lama in that form, was again at his request. He had had his operation several days before and was sitting up trying to eat his lunch. I sat with him for a few minutes while Tenzin Zopa carefully and so lovingly spoon-fed him. His body looked pale and old. Again, there was no need for words. Lama had allowed me to see him again and to experience his Buddha energy again. I knew he was suffering terribly as he tried to swallow the food knowing he did not have a stomach.

I will never forget that and it was a great lesson. Words cannot possibly describe the feelings of seeing one's heart guru suffer. The feeling of total helplessness is beyond words because there is nothing you can do to relieve it. You cannot offer your own body, you cannot say anything, you can only learn from it. In my mind I had taken on the responsibility for the karma that had produced this great suffering and somehow, accepting this made things somewhat easier for me because I then did not feel so useless. I felt I could play a small part identifying with his suffering rather than just being witness to it.

A few weeks later of going to the hospital every day, I told him I would have to leave now that he was better, and he questioned that decision. I did not mention that I had run completely out of money and could not pay for the expensive taxis I needed to get to and from the hospital. Obviously the money and the karma had both run out to be with him anymore, but the amazing miracle was that I had the karma to be with him at all. That truly is an amazing miracle!

One time I did catch a train to the hospital, but first I had to get a taxi from the house to the train station and this was just too frightening and scary because I had no idea where I had to get off and where to go to find a taxi that would then take me to the hospital. I spent an hour rambling around Singapore looking for a taxi stand. So it was easier and far less of a drama to get the taxi from the house to the hospital, but far more expensive.

The beautiful house where I was staying was freely offered and I was so grateful, it was the travelling that caused my demise. Everything costs a lot of money in Singapore compared to Australia, as I was to find out.

I did consider asking if I could remain in the lounge room at the hospital at night, but I did not want to cause any problems to Tenzin Zopa who may have thought that would not be appropriate, so considering my limited options, I decide I would have to go home.

After two weeks of being in Singapore not only the money had run out, but also the karma to be with Lama. It was obvious that he was doing well and he had the best of attention from his doctors and nurses and of course, Tenzin Zopa who never left his side. I was completely useless but felt so very, very privileged to have been there at all. I was grateful, happy, and sad all at the same time and did not want to leave.

When I was about to leave, Lama again asked to see me and told me not to prostrate when I left his bedside. To prostrate on leaving would indicate the end of our time together and Lama obviously did not want that to happen. Neither did I! When I left the room, I left silently, but when I got past the door I knew instantly that I would never see him alive again in this lifetime and in that form that I loved so much, so I turned back and did one prostration just outside the door where he could not see me. It was not an 'end of visit' prostration, it was a 'homage to a living Buddha' prostration.

Then I knew at that very moment we would not meet again for a long, long time, in a time when we would both have new bodies. I also knew that although that body would go, his consciousness, energy and vibration would never leave me. Realising this, the dam burst and tears of gratitude, love, joy and total bliss fell on the shiny floor of the hospital as I did the one, from my heart, prostration.

I did not want to go. I did not want to leave Lama and Tenzin Zopa. It broke my heart to leave them and I cried all the way out of the hospital, in the taxi, all night, in the taxi to the airport and even sitting on the plane. By the time the plane was taking off down the runway, I had no tears left but I made loud gurgley choking sounds similar to a chook with a sore throat and much to the dismay of the passengers sitting near me.

I had never been a crier, but since meeting Lama, I guarantee I have spilled enough water out of my eyes to keep the middle of Australia green for ten aeons.

By the time the plane reached Aussie shores I had changed my thought patterns and instead of being sad, I focused on how fortunate I had been. I also realized that when you experience such a feeling of fortune based on the highest level of spirituality, you have a responsibility to not only maintain it, but to share it.

I now had new stories to tell all and sundry about Geshe Lama Konchog!

A LIVING BUDDHA IN THE HOSPITAL

When I left for Singapore, I had taken with me the bundle of blessed strings that Lama had previously given to me to hand out to the sick people, so long ago when he was in Australia. When the doctors and nurses from the Singapore hospital would come and sit with me and tell me how Lama was getting on, I would give them one. I explained to them all that he was a living Buddha and they all agreed. It told them every story I could think about to make sure they knew he was a living Buddha.

After several days these original strings ran out, so Tenzin Zopa gave me some more. He arranged for the strings to be brought from the apartment and so I offered them to anyone and everyone. In my view, these people were so fortunate to have had contact with a living Buddha and I told them so. Consequently there were people in the Singapore hospital from specialist doctors to kitchen staff all proudly wearing a Geshe Lama Konchog blessing string around their neck. This obviously amused Lama, because these people would then go straight back to him and present the cord for him to bless it again.

The word got around that a living Buddha was in the hospital and if you went up to the lounge, this old crazy nun sitting there crocheting would give you a red string that had been blessed by a Buddha. Even in the canteen where I had lunch, people would come up and ask if I had any blessed strings from the Holy Lama. They always enquired how Lama was and to give him their respects. Anyway, I had great fun doing it and I thought it would make Lama smile. On a more deeper level than that, I felt these people were truly, truly blessed.

From where I was sitting in the lounge room I could see the elevator, so I saw the most distinguished High Lamas arriving to see Lama. Such a privilege and such incredible karma. Not to get too excited about the deserving karma bit though, because it was only through the grace and the extreme kindness of my precious Guru that I was permitted to be there at all.

From my vantage point I could also see spirits who would tend to mill around his bedroom door and so I would try to wrathfully force them away. These spirits are not only drawn to sick people but most especially to high tantric practitioners who are ill. If they wanted to get at him, they would have to tackle me first and I am not a pretty sight when

annoyed, as my tattooed eyebrows tend to twitch. And I reckon, that *that* should be enough to make any self-respecting spirit reconsider.

Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever way you see it, I have the ability to see in-between world creatures such as spirits. It is nothing special, nor something that should be bragged about as it shows a close connection to the spirit realm and as I said before, this world is lower than the animal realm.

When Lama and I were walking back to the house after the special puja that he performed that special day so long ago, I asked why he did not see the snake thing coming towards him and he said that he knew it was there but could not see it. He said that some women have special eyes to see such things.

On a more intellectual level, it is my uneducated guess that in ancient pre-history times when the men were out playing war games and catching wild life for dinner, the women were left alone to watch over the old folk and the children. Obviously they had to develop a special insight, or a sixth sense in order to pick up any seen or unseen threat that could be lurking around them. Ancient cultures had a strong belief in invisible forces that maybe we have lost due to our sophisticated, 'what you see is what you get' type of mentality today. Maybe in some, the sense still lies dormant and in particular, in women.

I had learned a lot during the past month or so about grief, fear and dealing with situations beyond my control. These were experiential lessons that only unusual situations like these can teach. They were lessons I had to learn about my own mind and how to transform negative situations into positive ones. And I know this will be of benefit in the future.

However, nothing – but nothing, could have prepared me for what was to come.

CHAPTER 5

LEAVING FOR KOPAN

2001

For the past twelve months I had had the time to realize just how fortunate I had been to have that special time with Lama. To see his face again was something I thought would never happen. There was absolutely no difference in time between when I saw him at Chenrezig in 1987 and then again in Singapore in 2000. It seemed like there had been a five minute gap and that we had never been separated at all.

Definitely our minds had never been separated and I fully realized this when I got back to Australia. Although his body was a squillion miles away on another planet in Kathmandu, his mind was ever-present inside my heart. I could hear him, see him and feel his presence.

Lama was cared for and treated like the holy man that he truly was by the people from the Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore and no doubt, by others too, and the virtuous karma that they accrued just in the short time during his illness there, will manifest very quickly and very powerfully, I am sure.

Eventually Tenzin Zopa took Lama home to his pink house at Kopan and this was probably as close to being in his cave at Tsum that he could get. I like to think this anyway.

I nearly drove poor Fran loopy in the office at Kopan sending emails to Lama and to Tenzin Zopa, trying to find out how they both were. I was however, becoming increasingly worried and frightened.

To be distanced from the Guru is difficult, even though I knew the mind connection was of primary importance, it really did not help matters much, I needed to know how the bodies were coping too. Not only were we separated by distance, but by language and culture as well and that is really separation in my book. The Buddhists would say that is grasping, but I say separation!

Why the karma for this bodily separation to happen ripened, I have no idea. Maybe when I was a freezing cold, hungry boy trying to run away from the monastery, I vowed not to be reborn in such a place again. And now I have been born in a land of plenty – and I am still complaining. Ahhhh, the suffering of suffering. To be separated from the guru's physical form is not easy that is for sure, but lo and behold, I did get reborn in a time of emails. Hooray! And now Tenzin Zopa had his own email address, so life was somewhat easier. Hooray again!

Towards the middle of the year 2001, I sensed things were not going very well with Lama's health and Tenzin Zopa's emails were full of such concern. I remember at one stage, several months before Lama died, timidly suggesting that Tenzin Zopa take him back to his cave at Tsum.

Deep down I felt Lama was getting ready to leave us. Being a true Bodhisattva, he would not have returned alone to his cave to die quietly and peacefully, instead he would have offered himself to be available to as many people as possible during this very auspicious time.

Lama had sent Tenzin Zopa back to Sera Monastery in southern India where he was studying for his Geshe degree and so I did not want to disturb his mind too much with my concerns because I knew it would worry him, however, as I had no idea what was happening I was getting really worried. I could feel an urgency that is difficult to describe.

An email came from Tenzin Zopa from Sera Monastery saying that it was no use him being there, because he could not study, he could not eat and he could not drink with worry. I was now getting very worried about *him* as well. This is when I suggested the two of them go back to Tsum. Shortly after, Tenzin Zopa emailed to say that he was returning to Kopan to be with Lama.

Around September 2001 I had heard absolutely nothing from Tenzin Zopa and I was getting more frantic by the minute until it turned into full on panic. I sent email after email to the office at Kopan, but got no reply. I knew – *just knew* that no news was not good news!

MY MOTHER

My mother had been in a nursing home for some fourteen years and I visited her three times a week and took her out for drives in the car. For the last four years she had been confined to a wheel chair so we could only sit and talk while she smoked non-stop and ate lollies. She was completely dependent on me as I am her only child.

Several times I went away for two weeks to go to my son's home in Innisfail, which is a three day car drive of about 2,000 kilometres. The whole time I was away I worried about her state of mind as she had suffered from depression all of her life and had several times tried to commit suicide while in the nursing home. So my holidays were not really an escape. This is the worst time when you are an only child.

My mother had always been very disapproving of my life style before becoming ordained and thought anybody who wanted to dive beneath the ocean was hell-bent on destruction. She did not want to be left with children, cats, dogs, chooks and anything else that had been dragged in off the street. My lifestyle and hers did not meet even half way. She was stifflingly Victorian in outlook and all outward appearances of constraint and manners meant everything to her, whereas I was free-go at everything and anything and with full abandonment of the niceties of manners and behaviour.

She also disapproved vehemently at the thought of an adult female attending university. This was totally beyond her grasp. She could never accept the fact that I was a Buddhist because that put me in the absolutely-too-hard basket. I had flunked Sunday school and the thought of being seen to be anything other than a good Christian and/or a well-behaved wife chained to the kitchen sink was beyond the realms of respectable living, as far as she was concerned. And none of this I was, or ever intended to be.

My mother had been totally blind for about ten years and she was almost totally deaf. I believe that she neither wanted to see or hear anything of this world, which was to her, a world of utter suffering. She was beyond understanding that she was creating her own suffering by her rigidity, so all I could do was try to comfort her by lighting her cigarettes and popping lollies into her mouth. Momentarily this gave some form of happiness.

A few days after I had been ordained in 1994 I went to the nursing home for the first time in Robes. I was feeling particularly self-conscious in my bald haircut and barely caught together Robes, so I was very quiet and subdued. Which is not like me.

The nursing staff were very curious about my new role and I was fully aware of being the subject of stares and remarks. I was just thankful that my mother could not see me and thereby give me a down loading of criticism to add to my discomfort.

I walked into my mother's room where she was ready to be wheeled outside into the open air and the sunlight. We had been sitting in the sun for quite awhile alone with nobody around, when she suddenly turned to me and with unseeing eyes, looked directly into mine and said: "*I know you are Jill, but you do not seem the same. But whatever you are, I am very proud of you!*"

You could have literally knocked me down with a feather. She could not possibly have seen me and as nobody was near us, she could not have heard anybody say anything either. And anyway, she was deaf. As well as this, she had not spoken a word for years and years. We very often just sat together for several hours not saying anything, just happy to be together.

This was the first time ever, that my mother had said she was proud of me simply because she did not approve of my way-out Bohemian lifestyle. It was probably not so much that she disapproved, it was more likely that she just could not understand what freedom meant, and that it was possible even for women. I suspect that all the while she was secretly wishing she could shake off the constraints that religion and her Victorian age culture had bound, captured and imprisoned her, and allow her to find the freedom that we all have today, to happen. But she could not and I did – and that caused her great anguish. Added to the fact that I noisily rebelled against anything and everything.

We really were poles apart and yet now she had bridged the gap and said she was proud of me.

ATTEMPTS TO GET TO KOPAN

Now, getting back to Lama in Kopan. After failing to find out anything about Lama's state of health from anybody, I decided to ask permission to come to Kopan so I could find out what was going on for myself. I was told that there were no vacancies at that time because the November course would be starting soon and I was asked to please not come, as it would cause problems for everybody concerned.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche conducts teachings at Kopan Monastery every November along with other eminent Lamas and teachers, so accommodation is in very, very short supply. I understood this reaction to my request, but later recognized it for what it was, merely an obstacle and obstacles can be jumped over. But first I did try to forget about going to Kopan, I really did, but it would not let me go. I got dreams and I *knew* I had to go to Kathmandu. I just knew it. This was the same feeling when I knew that I had to go to Singapore. It was the same urgency.

Once or twice the thought entered my head that I would just go to Kathmandu and pretend I was like the other worldly nuns and just book into something in down-town Kathmandu or Boudenath and from there go and visit Kopan Monastery on a daily basis. This of course would have been the logical thing to do knowing that the monastery had no

available accommodation, but this thought did not stay long because I knew I could not do it. I also knew deep down that I would not have to.

Leaping off the deep end into the unknown by going to Singapore alone was one thing, but to go alone to Kathmandu could only be described as going beyond all realms of comprehension. The thought of this gives me a mental picture of astronauts arriving on Mars. The only difference would be that they would have each other for support if they got lost. As far as I was concerned, they certainly would have it easier. I can also imagine the international crisis that would have ensued when one geriatric Buddhist nun, mental state questionable, is lost somewhere in Nepal. Nar, better not to even think about it. So I sent another email but this time I addressed it to the Great Lama Lhundrup who I had met and bonded with in Singapore and I knew he would understand my great concerns about Lama's health and now also, Tenzin Zopa's. I explained to him that I was aware that Lama was ill, but could find out no information and that I was very worried and then I simply asked if I could come to Kopan.

Lama Lhundrup sent back an email immediately: *'Of course you can come. Come immediately.'*

But I had no money!!! What to do? So I sent another email back to him saying: *"I am coming! I am coming! But I will have to re-borrow the money that I have partly repaid from the loan from going to Singapore. I will be able to do this, but it will take a little while."*

An email came straight back: *"If you have to borrow money to come, better you do not come. Lama is always with you, so there is no need to be here. Just do prayers for him."*

No way! I was going to go to Kopan no matter what obstacles turned up. If I had to walk the whole way, I would be there. I could do nothing less. I also had great faith in the powers of Lama Lhundrup and I knew that he understood my relationship with Lama. I also knew he would expect nothing less of me.

I could not accept the wording in this email, so I sat up all night pleading with all the gods of this and any other universe, all the Buddhas and all the Bodhisattvas, in fact anybody else I thought might have some influence and power - to please help me get to Kathmandu. I will be good for a whole year! I promise! I promise!

MY MOTHER'S DEATH

The next night about 7pm the phone rang and it was the nursing home. *"Your mother is dying, the doctor is here, please come straight away!"* Oh, No! I jumped in the car and broke the sound barrier to the nursing home, which is a little over half an hours drive away and I did it in about ten minutes.

When I pulled up outside the nursing home, I fully expected a squadron of siren screeching motorcycle cops to pull up in a cloud of black smoke behind me. But I doubt very much if they could have caught up with me, as they probably just saw a flash of white followed by a gale force wind pass by.

The doctor was still with my mother and she was very frightened and very upset. She was terrified of dying. I held her hand and she relaxed. The doctor left so I sat with her all

night. The next day at lunch time I remembered the animals, so I had to go home to feed them. I had a shower and went straight back to the nursing home. I took the little dogs with me and we all stayed at the nursing home for the next five days.

My mother was gasping for breath and semi-conscious but when I took her hand I spoke to her all about Lama Konchog and she relaxed. I talked and talked softly all about him and I am completely sure she understood what I was saying.

She had bad experiences with religion when she was a child as her father was a strong, staunch Irish Catholic with the family name of McCarthy and her mother was an equally staunch Scottish Protestant by the name of Jessie Roy MacGregor. Her mother was a direct descendent of the famous, or is it infamous, Rob Roy MacGregor. Maybe this is where I inherited by strong will and rebelliousness.

My mother's parents' fights over religion gave her a very unhealthy view of all things remotely religious. The belief that all religions were a product of intolerance and hatred could have been relieved had she let go of her rigid mind and studied Buddhism. Ha! That is another of my prejudicially conceived thoughts. I admit to being deluded, ignorant and arrogant, so please don't throw stones at me.

When I spoke to my mother about Lama, she quietened down and her breathing became easier. I did not want to disturb her mind so I did not say prayers aloud, I simply spoke about refuge with Jesus and going to a very safe place. I also spoke about Lama in the same breath. Jesus she was familiar with, so she probably thought they were one and the same. It did not matter. She became very peaceful with this so I am sure she understood on some level of her consciousness, some form of refuge.

The two tiny dogs knew their way around, as this was their second home and they were as happy as Larry being the centre of attention. They walked in and out of the automatic doors as if they were part of the nursing staff. Considering one weighed about 1 kilo and the other 2 kilos, they were VIP star attractions. The only problem was that they had to sit and wait for someone to go through the doors because they were too small to set off the trigger to open them. But this posed no problem for them as they have in abundance, the very virtue I lack - patience.

On the fifth day the nursing home ordered me home to have a proper sleep, so my daughter came to stay with my mother for a few hours and I planned to be back at the nursing home just after dawn the following day. When I got home I did all the prayers I could for the dying and around 2am the next morning the nursing home rang to say that my mother had died.

Although she died alone and although the dying experience was not too good, I felt she had connected with Lama in her mind so I am sure he was with her and led her through the bardo. I had heard that he could enter the bardo and rescue people and now I absolutely believe it.

I also believe strongly that Jesus helped her as well, as he had a very high place in her mind even though she would not admit it. It was just religion per se that upset her, not the individual holy person. She was very lucky to have had two gurus who, without doubt, guided her consciousness gently and safely into another dimension and so I felt happy and relieved that she was no longer suffering. Her whole life had been one of great suffering, with her mind.

I was - and still am, very sad I was not with her when her consciousness finally left her body. Maybe she chose to go when I was not with her, as she knew I would have been really upset. Who knows?

The next day I began to organise all her affairs with her solicitor, bank and so on, which was not complicated as she only had money in the bank. Suddenly it dawned on me that I would have enough money to go to Kopan and be with Lama. I went to my mother's bank and explained the whole story about Geshe Lama Konchog and although they looked a bit taken aback, they told me they could advance me some money for special circumstances until the will was finalised. *And so I had the money for the air ticket and the accommodation once again.*

There can be no doubt that these were miracles as there were too many coincidences to be anything else. All of these miracles made my close relationship with Lama's holy mind even stronger. He paved the way for me to be with him while he was lying in the Clear Light of Death.

An unbelievable miracle!

YELLOW CARPET OF FLOWERS

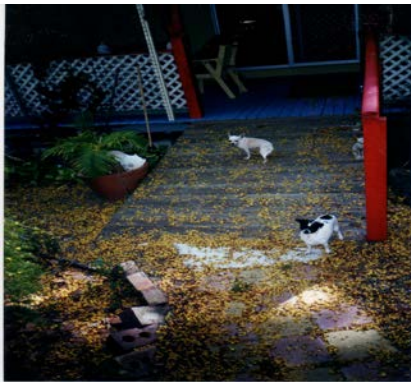
A few days after my mother died, before light fell on the morning of the 16th October, 2001, the phone rang and I stumbled out of bed and fell over everything between my bed and the telephone wondering what on earth was happening for someone to ring at this early hour. Sin's voice said: *"I want to be the first to tell you, Lama has just died. He has passed into Clear Light Meditation. This happened yesterday."*

"OOOOhhhhh!" "Please wait while I turn the light on!" I said.

When I turned on the verandah light, I saw a yellow carpet of flowers that had covered the verandah, the whole front yard, both neighbours' yards and it extended right across the road. I said to Sin that there were yellow flowers everywhere and he said: *"Ha, ha, Lama has sent you flowers before he left!"*

This was the first of such amazing miracles concerning flowers as you shall find out later.

PHOTO 16 A AND B . A - FLOWERS ON THE PATH WITH CHICHI AND DHARMA DOG



B - FLOWERS ACROSS THE FOOTPATH AND ROADWAY



The tree that dropped the yellow flowers is a Brazilian Palm and it had never flowered before and there had been no evidence of any flowers the day before. Suddenly, overnight, this palm had dropped its entire load of yellow flowers and they lay one inch thick all around my precinct. Since this date, the palm has dropped the same carpet of yellow flowers on the 16th October each year. (At the time of editing this book, this is some six years later.)

I knew that Lama had sent the flowers but if I had heard this story from anyone else, I never would have believed it. The neighbours still talk about the yellow flowers to this very day.

I also knew immediately that I would be going to Kopan to be with him because it was now clear-cut to me that this was a definite sign that everything was alright. These yellow flowers instantly gave me the confidence that Lama was still in control and I just had to have faith.

I immediately sent another email addressed to Great Lama Lhundrup explaining what had miraculously happened and that my mother was not suffering anymore and now I had the money to come to Kopan to be with Lama. An email came straight back from this Great Abbot saying, "*You can come immediately. It may all be over when you get here, but you can still come.*" I had no idea what he meant by '*it may all be over*', but it did not matter, he said I could come and that was all I wanted to know. I immediately tried to get an air ticket but was told all the flights into Kathmandu from Bangkok were fully booked because October was high season. I could put my name down on a list, but the travel agent did not give much hope. However, I not only had hope, I had faith too. I knew I would be going.

Miraculously, the next day the travel agent rang back saying he had a ticket for the next day. I packed my bags in 10 seconds flat and then ran down the road to the doctor demanding to see him immediately because I was going to Kathmandu and I had to get filled up with injections to ward off all the Nepalese bugs.

That afternoon my friend Graham, who was the head honcho of the 'boot camp' boarding kennels, drove me to Brisbane where I immediately got my passport and visa in order – straight away, no waiting. And I paid for the air ticket.

Miracle after miracle.

A thunder storm broke while we were in Brisbane and the rain was torrential. I saw this as a good omen that all would be well. I remember Graham and I frantically trying to cross the main road in Brisbane city in the torrential rain. We were midway between traffic lights of course, as always happens when you are in a hurry, so I grabbed his hand and we just lurched out into the traffic mayhem. I somehow felt invincible and indestructible due to all the obstacles that had been overcome so far, so what can crossing a main thoroughfare in the middle of a torrential thunderstorm do?

The doctor's advice was not to eat anything uncooked such as salad and definitely not to touch anything with milk in it. I said, "Okay," not listening to a word he said. I then went to the chemist and got a remedy for anything that the Himalayas might want to throw at me and so my bag was filled with pills and potions, none of which I even opened, along with one set of Robes and a towel.

I had learned my lesson about packing everything except the kitchen sink from the trip to Singapore so I was travelling light this time except for the bag full of pills and potions. Even taking these was not a waste of space either, because when I left Kopan I offered them all to the hospital clinic there.

As I was packing my bags in a flurry of excitement, suddenly I thought of wool and knitting needles. Why? I have absolutely no idea. The thought just came into my head out of nowhere and before I knew it, I was searching through a cupboard and found a big bag of multi coloured wools that I had totally forgotten I had. In the bag they went.

I like knitting but the only time I did knit was to make Lama something. The wool I used for his things were mainly maroon but sometimes yellow, so to have many balls of coloured wool in my house is still a complete mystery to me.

That night I could not sleep. My mother had just died and now Lama had died. I wanted to go and sit under a tree and just bawl and groan and yell. But I could not. Instead, I was off to some place on another planet where nobody spoke English, where there were countless people running around in the dust at break-neck speed, Brahmin bulls were sitting in the middle of the main road and you had to pee in a hole in the ground. Ooley-dooley! How the mind does impute.

I calmed myself down by having a severe talk to myself about how I had let my mind run away with me, but little did I know, this time I was right on the button. This is really what I thought, but it did not phase me in the slightest. Just to be with Lama for the last time was the only thing I could think of and all the signs and events that had happened thus far indicated that this was indeed, going to happen.

I sent an email to Ani Fran explaining that I was not a seasoned traveller, nor did I have a total abandonment clause written on my passport as I suspected the other nuns had. This clause seems to be tattooed on their foreheads rather than in the passports and it comes from being totally self-confident in all situations strange and most particularly, total acceptance of all things unexpected. I had no such stamp. Somehow these nuns seem to instinctively know EXACTLY what to do at any given time and place. Whether this information was handed out when they got ordained, I do not know. Somehow along the line I missed out, that is for sure.

I explained to Ani Fran carefully that I knew nothing about flagging down taxis on the top of the Himalayas, even if there were such things up there in the first place and also that I was terrified that I would end up in some Yeti's cave having a pink fit.

As I said, I would have walked to Kathmandu if that is what it took, but only if that was what it took and there were no alternatives. However, if this were the only option available then I would certainly have to take someone along who knew the route and who knew where all the clean toilets were. But it did not come to that. Ani Fran as always, was so kind and so understanding. We have known each other for many years and she was obviously aware that I am not the invincible type of nun that she is so accustomed to meeting from all over the world and so she replied: *“Well, we can’t have nuns having pink fits at airports, or in yeti’s caves, so I will send someone to pick you up”*.

Yiihaa!!

All was ready! I had a passport, visa, ticket, accommodation and even an escort to the wilds of Kopan Monastery. And all done in a few days, without a hitch. Unbelievable miracle.

The next morning my friend Edith drove me to the airport and it was not until we were sitting having a cup of coffee at the airport coffee shop, that it all hit me. She made the big mistake of asking me if I was scared. Ye gods! I had not had time to think about *that!* I then realized that I really was scared, in fact I was palpably so, I just was not aware of it until then, but it was too late now to worry. It was all happening, all I had to do was walk onto the plane, sit down, have some lunch and a sleep and then get up and walk off the plane and I would be in Kathmandu.

I should have known that getting on the plane would be the easy part, once I got off the plane in Bangkok the easy part was over and the wobby gobbles began. And I could not know that. In all the excitement and rush I had totally forgotten about overnighing in Bangkok. And nobody had bothered to enlighten me, either.

My ticket came with a free night at a hotel at the airport, how could I foresee any potential margin for drama or panic with that? No matter what happens it seems to me now, there is always a lesson attached to it and this journey to be with Lama was no exception. This innocent looking air ticket which included the hotel stay, was were I would supposedly be spending the night sleeping peacefully, recovering from the long flight from Australia so that I would arrive in Kathmandu fully refreshed and prepared to arrive at the monastery. This was to be my first lesson on imputing easiness and expected simplicity. ‘Never impute easiness onto anything’ is now my motto.

Also, the Bangkok drama is the most excellent example of why I should never be allowed outside the immediate vicinity of The Konchog Cave. I did survive.....but only by the skin of my teeth!

CHAPTER 6

BANGKOK

October 2001.

I have never travelled alone overseas before and always admired with wonder how the nuns scampered around the world without a care in the world, especially to places like India. I have seen travel shows on the television on India and although it looks enticing and oh-so beautiful, it is nevertheless, mainly unsewered. Shock horror!

Toilet arrangements never seem to bother these nuns who obviously have no attachment whatsoever to what I term the necessities of life. They just seem to take whatever is dished out to them in their stride. They do not even make a fuss about it, they just do whatever they have to do where everybody else does it. And so be it. Get over it. Well, I can't. There are some things I can renounce, well, sort of, and there are those that I cannot. And nice clean toilets are one of them along with nice pink toilet paper. Nice. I like all things nice. What's wrong with that?

It all just seems incredulous to me that anybody would even want to leave their nice warm, safe bed and go walk-about where there are no flushing toilets and everything that you put in your mouth could be an immediate source for a one way trip to the nearest hospital - or morgue. Nup! No thanks! Like 'nice'.

Whatever thought, word or deed gave cause for this outrageous phobia to arise, who knows. But exist, it does. And with such attachment to squeaky clean amenities, it makes you wonder what form I will take next life doesn't it? Maybe my consciousness will come back as a germ or bacteria. Or maybe I will be a cleaning lady in an airport somewhere. Probably Bangkok.

After listening to the tales many of the nuns tell, I have often secretly thought to myself that if ever I were forced to go to such a place, the first thing I would pack would be a porta-potty and some nice pink, scented toilet paper. I can live well with the bare essentials, live in the worst street in the world, be mother and nurse maid to a tribe of animals, no problems, but clean, white toilets with a button to flush is paramount to my very existence in this world. I never at any stage declared that I was perfect – along with being very sane.

Now how I ended up writing so much dribble about toilets has escaped me, but maybe it has a purpose somewhere in this sorry tale.

Now here I was sitting in my seat with my knees under my chin on the plane. Next stop Bangkok. All the miracles were in place and I would very shortly be with Lama. It had all gone relatively smoothly up to this point. Considering the fact that one momentous event had happened one after the other, it nevertheless felt like I was on some sort of emotional and physical conveyor belt that just kept moving along by itself. Yet somehow I felt safe and protected. It was all going to be all right.

The plane arrived in Bangkok at about 1.30am my time. We in Australia are three hours behind Bangkok time and this is not a good time to be wandering around anywhere loose, especially when you have no idea where it is you are supposed to be wandering.

I should have seen something was wrong the moment I got off the plane and I asked someone if they knew where the Amari Hotel was. My answer was a strange stare with the head cocked to one side. Everyone was in such a hurry. I asked someone else, but then realized that nobody was understanding a word I was saying. And why was everyone walking so fast? In my home town we wander – we don't walk fast. Shock number one!

I had not taken into account that not everybody in the world was familiar with a good, broad Aussie slang accent. English they probably understood, but Australian as it is spoken where I come from, they obviously don't. I had completely forgotten about taking the stopover at Bangkok into account when I went into freak out melt down point at the thought of having pink fits at Kathmandu airport.

It suddenly dawned on me that I was completely alone. Nobody was there to rescue me. For once in my life, I had to figure out what I had to do move by move for myself. And to make matters 100% worse, I have absolutely *NO* sense of direction. None whatsoever! I know the basics of up and down, left and right, but to go in a certain direction to find something, forget it. Anyway, most women do not have map-reading skills, so what. We simply ask, and we find.

Eventually I asked someone in a uniform the same question and he told me to just follow the path along which everyone else was going and I would find it. I asked how far it was but the uniform shrugged its shoulders. Why was everyone walking at break neck speed? Its 1.30 in the morning and nobody, but *nobody* has 100% of their wits functioning at that time. Right? And in any case, why the heck was everybody going to the Amari Hotel, I wondered? Everyone seemed to know exactly where they were going and nobody seemed to be at all tired or fazed and anyway the uniform said to follow them.

I again asked several people if they knew where the Amari Hotel was, but they obviously did not speak English, or truth be known, did not understand Strine. (Strine is the word other people think we Aussies are saying when we say 'Australian'). Whatever, nobody understood, or answered, because they were in such a hurry.

I kept following the other people like the uniform said to do until suddenly they all dispersed into different directions and left me standing in some sort of open mall. There were other people there who were either standing or sitting down obviously waiting for something to happen.

My plane had landed forty miles from the heart of the Bangkok airport, or so it seemed and I had to walk for about twenty minutes in what I hoped and prayed was a straight line before I came to a business like place with shops, but they were all shut. Again obviously, this was the place to be to find out where you had to go.

There were people everywhere but they did not look like they knew anything other than where they should be at that particular time. And everyone was hurrying. I felt as if I had just landed on some other planet in the galaxy and was just about to sit down and have a pink fit, when I spotted another uniform. He knew exactly where the Amari Hotel was and pointed in its direction.

Now I might not be anybody's idea of a proper, all-together, calm minded, wisdom looking nun, but I am not all that stupid either – I do know a hotel when I see one. I had been walking around and around in what very well may have been ever decreasing circles looking for a hotel – *stupid me!* There was nothing

that even remotely looked like a hotel, or even a façade of one. Of course not, this is Bangkok airport. Everybody else apparently knew this. So I hunted around for another uniform who eventually escorted me to a desk hidden smugly against a wall. No, not a hotel, instead there was a little hole nestled inbetween two closed shops with a tiny counter manned by several uniforms having a conversation. No sign anywhere, just a hole in the wall. You either know this is the Amari Hotel, or you don't.

I am mentally and physically out of it by this time. My legs and back are aching, it's about 2.30am by now and I am brain-dead and cranky. I don't want to be here – I want to be in Kathmandu. No I don't, I want to be back in my own bed sound asleep and having a nightmare about Lama dying and being lost in Bangkok.

I staggered up to the two uniforms behind the counter, leaned on the wall and asked, amazingly politely, did they know where the Amari Hotel was. They both asked each other the question in translation and then they shrugged their shoulders. Without any warning, my legs slipped out from under me and I sat down crossed legged on the floor in a heap. *'Nuh! I am going no further, this will do'*, I thought. At least I am at the airport so I can't get lost for the 10am departure to Kathmandu. Now that is a thought not worth thinking about, so I didn't.

I was also having serious thoughts that if I kept on walking, some anthropological group would have found my bleached bones in the year 3000. Sit on the floor and wait until morning, I will. You can push an Aussie so far and then they will spit the dummy and refuse to budge. Well, this one did anyway.

The uniforms promptly stopped their conversation and one of them came over and asked something about the Amari Hotel, so I nodded my head. Totally brain dead by now.

"Do you have your vouchers?"

What?! It did not sound like this the first few dozen times he said it, but eventually I figured it out. Much to his relief.

The other uniform had joined him by this time and he looked particularly nervous. I did not care about anything by this time; I was just going to sit there until it was time to get on the plane for Kathmandu – wherever *that* is.

I am cranky if I get woken in the wee hours of the morning at the best of times and now was no exception, so I asked him, *"Why do you want to know!"*

The talking uniform then became very concerned and asked the nervous uniform to help lift me off the floor. Well, I presume that this is what he said because the two of them bodily picked me up and propped me up against the wall. I suppose it did not look too good for business with a Buddhist nun collapsed in a heap in front of your counter. And a geriatric one, at that.

Again they asked, in a very slow voice, in perfect English: *"Do you have your vouchers?"*

I did not know anything about vouchers, so I fished around in my bag and handed them my air tickets and passport. That was about all that was in my bag. For what reason I did this I have absolutely no idea, because as far as I knew, they did not even know where the Amari Hotel was in the first place. That is what you do when you are brain dead.

Eventually after a lot of kindness on their part and a lot of don't-want-to-know-anything-about-anything on my behalf, the uniforms took me to a lift.

This lift was situated behind their hole in the wall and down an alleyway. They told me to go to the third floor, walk across the road overpass and that is the Amari Hotel.

How anybody ever finds anything in Bangkok airport is beyond me, especially hotels hidden behind holes in the walls. I truly reckon that there is a secret place at that airport, where all the lost souls who were found wandering aimlessly are gathered together to await their country of origin to claim them. Anyway, I follow the instructions and get out of the lift to find myself standing on an overpass with a never-ending flow of cars below. Rattled, you may ask? Well, just a tad.

But that is not the end - the worst is still to come!

It is after 3am my time by now and I am a dead nun walking. I must have looked not only bedraggled but also desperate, because some uniforms came over and escorted me to the foyer where they placed me on the end of a long queue to the registry desk. Nobody had bothered to tell me about registry desks either.

It is hot in Bangkok, stifflingly hot, and someone kept opening the front doors letting in the hot, sweaty air. By almost 3.45a.m. Australian time, I get to the counter where the girl speaks to me something undecipherable in triple time speech.

It is not until we Aussies go to the Asian countries that we realize just how slowly we speak and to speak to someone who is totally brain dead in triple time is never a good idea. I looked and felt like a zombie out of a Stephen King movie.

The girl kept asking me over and over and faster and faster for something until the man in the queue behind me came to my rescue and said she wanted my credit card, which of course, I could not find. In fact I did not even know if I had brought it with me. Nobody had told me I would need a credit card because the hotel had already been paid for as part of the ticket. Or so I thought. But find it I did and the triple time speaking receptionist did whatever she had to do with it and returned it.

At last our transactions were complete and she gave me what I presumed was the receipt. I remember thinking I must not lose it, as the travel agent is going to have to sort all this out when I get home, so I held it tightly in my hand as I wobbled off in the general direction that this girl pointed.

I had been told to go up the stairs and take the lift to the fifth floor. Simple if you know where the lift is in the first place. I could not find any stairs, let alone anything that looked like a lift, so I staggered back to the end of queue.

The same girl looked at me somewhat surprised when I stood in front of her again, but again she told me where the lift was, and again in triple speed speech. The more I could not understand her, the faster she spoke. She was wired to triple speed and my wires were unplugged. What a combination for disaster, so I gave up and just wandered off.

This time I found a uniform and she directed me to the stairs, which were of course, completely hidden by humungous pot plants that stood completely in front of the lift, which totally hid it from view. Then she took the receipt from my hand and inserted it into the panel in the lift. This, she explained was a floor only for women and I needed to use it to get to the fifth floor. *Yeah, right. I just looked at her like a stunned mullet. Whatever you say.*

I find the room without any difficulty, but no key! Triple Speech did not give me a key! Down I go again and get on the bottom of the queue once again. The doors to the hottest hell realm were continually being opened to let in the burning air and by this time I am ready to collapse in a screaming heap. It is now nearly 5am my time.

Somehow I managed to get on the queue to the very same girl, god help her and god help me. She looked completely startled this time and even more so when I told her she did not give me a key.

She says, “*Whaaaaaaaaaad key?*” Very slowly and very deliberately.

“**The keeeeeeeeeeey to get into the roooooooooooooom**” I say just as slowly and deliberately, with eyes that are beginning to roll around in their sockets. “*Yes you do, it’s in your hand!*” She says and turns away to the next customer, trying not to look at me any more. In my hand I was still clutching what I thought was a receipt. Silly me, anyone would know that is a key!

Time was irrelevant by now because I had reached a point where no human should ever go. Everything had ceased up - body, speech and particularly mind, so I staggered to a big lounge chair in the foyer and just fell into it while all the time making terrible noises that told all and sundry that I had just reached that very point.

A uniform immediately came over and sat next to me and offered his help. He spoke slowly. I do remember thinking, oh heck, he might be a police officer and he has been called to drag me away to the place where the nuisance tourists go, but I was beyond caring. Even jails had beds.

I sort of blubbered out the whole saga about Geshe Lama Konchog dying and that I had lost the plot about four hours ago, nobody had told me about Bangkok airport and that I had no idea where my room was anymore because there were humongous pot plants hiding everything. This tale of woe was by this time longer than Ben Hur. I also mentioned that I had been awake now for over 24 hours and that I did not know what to do with a receipt that was supposed to be a key.

Somewhere in amongst all this, I think I even said that I wanted to go home.

Poor man! Without any sign of shock/horror, he picked up my bags and offering me his free arm, helped me to the hidden stairs with the hidden lift, which obviously everyone in the whole world knew was there except me and escorted me to the fifth floor. He found the door of my room, inserted my receipt somewhere, went inside and asked could he make me a cup of tea. Fair dinkum!

Seriously not-good stuff, but again a uniform had saved me from certain god only knows what. Uniforms are truly kind people I have discovered. The girl at the counter did not have one. *Humans are different from uniforms. I had my very first realization.*

I would say that this uniform’s specific job was to scoop up people who are on the brink of cracking up and doing a wobbly, getting them out of sight as quickly as possible and into their rooms before the ambulance and riot police arrive.

The ones I really feel sorry for, and identify with, are the ones who never find the Amari Hotel in the first place and are most probably still wandering around Bangkok airport to this very day. These lost-in-space travellers are the ones, no doubt, that end up in a hidden, secret place of lost souls that lurks within that airport somewhere. Or maybe every airport has just a place.

A cup of tea is always a good remedy for what ails you I do believe, especially for solitary sixty year olds experiencing a full on dementia crisis. And what is more, I reckon this uniform had been well clued up and specifically trained to be on alert for any such customers.

Who cared what the time was now because it was far too late to lie down and go to sleep. What if I might not wake up in time to get the morning flight to Kathmandu? Of course I had not packed an alarm clock. So I sat on the bed and said Medicine Buddha mantras for Lama. I said a few for myself too.

It was a total waste of energy to have gone to all this trouble to find the Amari Hotel; I would have been far better off just curling up on a chair in the airport as I presume most sensible people do. However, I was just so thankful to be still functioning on some level of sanity and somewhat still alive as I left the hotel to board the Kathmandu plane that morning. This was all I could think about. I did not allow any other emotion to enter my head so I just focused on being with Lama. If I did not focus on this holy mission, I would have most certainly caught the next plane back to The Konchog Cave in Australia. And that is for dead-set sure!

Somehow, I believe that all this was a precursor to what was about to happen over the next few years. This was just baby drama preparing my mind and body for major makeover. Bangkok had just been an eye opener, or a key, to another realm.

I could not have even begun to imagine, even in my wildest dreams, what was in store for me in Kathmandu and the pink house at Kopan.....

PART THREE

Clear Light Meditation
Cremation
Relics
Stupa Consecration

CHAPTER 7

Clear light meditation

October, 2001.

The flight over to Kathmandu was very daunting because I knew I was getting closer to Lama's body and I could feel the tears all wanting to hurl themselves out of my eyes, along with big volcano eruptions of emotion. I knew this could not happen, so I just said Medicine Buddha mantras and looked out the window at the Himalayas. Nevertheless, my face was dripping from the overspill.

The Captain announced over the intercom that if we looked to the left hand side of the plane we would be able to see Mount Everest. He said that it was very unusual to have such a clear view of this mountain and so everyone got up and leaned over the seats on the left hand side. I was terrified the plane would tip over, so I just sat where I was and cried.

I was suffering emotional overload by this time and it was all getting just too much. Looking at Mount Everest just seemed to be the icing on the cake and I could have really cracked a real wobbly right there on the plane, but I didn't. How not, I do not know.

I am not usually given to such explosions of watery emotion, but I was fast reaching a point where I did not care. There were so many emotions welling up inside me while I was on the plane because now I had the time to reflect on what had just happened during the past few weeks. My mother had died, Lama had died, there was the hurley burley of wondering where the money was going to come from to go to Kopan and there was the running around after air tickets and visas, and most especially there was the emotional trauma of overnighing at the Amari Hotel in Bangkok airport. And now there was Mount Everest!

After we had lost sight of this great mountain, I had another one of those good long talks with myself, most probably to the horror of the poor passengers sitting either side of me. The 'I' that was more practical and unemotional told the 'I' that was strung out and blubbering to get a grip. *'You cannot waltz into Kopan looking like last week's washing! Wake up to yourself! Get a grip of the Right View of reality, Ninny! No need to show everyone around a vision of Wrong View of non-reality all decked out in Buddhist Robes!'*

I gave myself such a wrathful kick up the behind that the Wrong View me went and hid. It never goes too far away though, because it is always very ready to jump out again without warning. But for the time being, it left my mind and I could prepare somewhat to go to Kopan Monastery.

However, on the good side, it did seem more and more apparent that all these things had been previously arranged. Not logical, I know, but I felt that I was guided and led along a soft path instead of one fraught with frustration and failure. Even the event of Lama's death had been broken gently by a rain of yellow flowers and a gentle voice. Bangkok was not so good, but we will forget about that little bit!

Amazingly, everything (excepting Bangkok, of course) up to this point had happened effortlessly and people had gone out of their way to make it so. My mother's bank, her solicitor and accountant, even the people involved in her ultimate cremation, were unbelievably helpful and kind. I could really feel Lama's great presence and kindness overriding everything.

The kindness and compassion I feel for the Great Guru, Geshe Lama Konchog is beyond simple words. Hopefully by now you are gaining a bit of an insight into the wonders of the guru. I only hope that my simple words put together in such bad order here, can give some idea of the kindness of this Great Master and the miracles that he performed on someone as useless as myself.

MEN IN BLACK SUITS

When I arrived at Kathmandu airport, I had pulled myself together somewhat, so climbed down the stairs at the back of the plane and walked across the tarmac along with everybody else. In fact, I was feeling pretty happy and somewhat confident by this time due probably to knowing that I had overcome my treacherous and cowardly mind in Bangkok and did not turn tail and run home.

On the tarmac there were men in spotty uniforms shouldering big heavy guns everywhere and giving us all the evil eye. I particularly remember their nice, shiny black lace up boots. Not being at all used to such a show of brute force and dramatics, I did not take any of this too seriously. I just thought that some countries had to put up a good front, just to warn you in case you had any ideas about being naughty.

I even grinned at a few of them who quite obviously were not at all used to being grinned at. I got the kind of look in response that a frog gets just before the snake eats it. I thought how funny. This was something else that nobody had bothered to warn me about.

I made it to the baggage roundabout with the others and waited for my bag to arrive. As you do. Everybody else seemed to be standing back at a distance, but as I had no idea why, I stood slap up against the roundabout where I would be able to get my bag as soon as I saw it. My eyesight is not what it was fifty years ago and also, do you have any idea just *how many* black bags on wheels there are? Anyway, I presumed that this was what you did and it seemed quite normal to me. It was none of my business where other people chose to stand.

When the bags started to come out of the chute, I was amazed to see so many very expensive and impressive looking suitcases and bags. There seemed to be dozens and dozens of them. And my bag was in the middle of them, can you believe that!

My bag is battered and bruised and I had tied multi colored tape around it so I would be able to recognize it easily. It stuck out like a bandage on a flea! How it got in this prestigious group, who knows. Maybe they thought: *'The poor wretch who owns this bag is obviously skidding on thin ice – let's get them out of the airport quick smart in case there is any trouble!'* I don't know the reason why, but my bag was actually touching this fancy cargo.

Anyway, as I tried to get into a good position to wrestle it off, I got shoved to one side by big burley men in Black Suits. They literally pushed me away from the roundabout. (I wish there were some photos of these blokes!) *"Oh, no – you don't!"*, I thought in a quite loud Aussie voice! So I took a few steps forward again and stood my ground, which was surely slipping away from me.

Apparently there was some very high dignitary on board the plane and these men in black were there to get his luggage off and obviously they did not want his baggage touching the likes of mine. But I saw my bag first – and I was going to get it. Thank you, very much!

Coming straight out of a tiny country town, I knew nothing about waiting until danger passes and then meekly and unobtrusively taking what is yours and disappearing silently without protest. We don't have much danger in our valley. I think most Aussies would think this way in such a situation, because most of us have not experienced the conditions or causes to make us afraid and want to cringe or be submissive and intimidated by bully-boys. However, this was before the world began to become more and more paranoid with concerns about invisible fears we label 'terrorists'. So far in Australia we have been blessed to live in a peaceful country and have no cause to fear each other. But unfortunately this attitude is fast changing and we are fast getting to the point where we even *expect* danger.

But, at that time and that place, I felt no cause for fear and thought that most Aussies would have the same attitude: *'Oh, there's my bag, go get it and you are a dill if you don't. And what's more, don't let Men in Black push you around!'* On the other hand, maybe they don't think like that. Maybe I have been locked up just a tad too long in peaceful, blissed-out retreat.

Nobody, but nobody had mentioned that I had to be mindful, at all times, that I was NOT in Australia. However, after Bangkok I was fast beginning to get the message. Naivety and ignorance were the rules of the game, but now even the game has changed.

I tried again to get my bag off the roundabout and again I got shoved to one side. By this time I had been forced to the back of the line up, so I made one gigantic swoop and snuck under the armpits of the Black Suits and grabbed my bag and hung on to it for dear life. As you would! Wouldn't you? Trouble was, it kept on moving along and I could go nowhere because I was hemmed in by the Black Suits and as I would not let go of the bag, I got dragged along the belt too.

Nobody apparently took any notice of a body lying along a moving conveyor belt, grasping a bag, with legs and feet suspended over the edge. Maybe it happens all the time at airports! I got nearly to the end where I would have disappeared down the chute, probably never to be seen again, when a lady grabbed my shoulder with one hand and my bag in the other and pulled!

That was a bit scary, I do admit. But once I had my bag in my hand, I then had to try to get through the mass of people who were still waiting patiently in the wings for the Black Suits to get their luggage, so that they could get theirs. They looked a tad surprised when some of them made eye contact with me.

Anyway, I was first out and glad of it too. I looked around for a trolley for my heavy bag and then woefully realized that all the Black Suits had confiscated them. Not nice!

Another huge realization: Black Suits and Uniforms are not one and the same. Black Suits come in at the very, very bottom of the lineup.

KATHMANDU

When I got outside the airport and hit the thin polluted air and the sea of faces waiting for their friends or relatives, I then got confronted with the taxi drivers who were all screaming at me, so I very nearly had a pink fit on the spot.

One enthusiastic taxi driver pushed himself in front of my face and almost had me convinced that nobody was coming for me, that they had forgotten me and that I should go with him. He asked me where was I going and when I said Kopan, he scrunched up his face and said that he would not go up there. He then began to tell the people behind me that they had been forgotten too.

Welcome to Kathmandu!

However, by now I was becoming quite brave at facing the unknowable that seemed to go along with the customs of other countries, so I did not turn around in sheer fright and get back on the plane and go home. If I had not survived the experiences in Bangkok and stuck with it – I probably would have. A few times during the past few weeks my mind had been sent to scary, unknown places that I never knew existed, but always Lama's face loomed up in front of me and so I knew I just had to keep moving on.

It is so scary to feel so alone in unfamiliar territory, but Lama's face and the goal to be achieved were always presented. Sometimes it did not help much, but sometimes it did, a little bit.

Just as I was about to panic at the thought that I really had been forgotten and my mind was beginning to run away with me, I saw Venerable Thupten Lhundrup, Tenzin Zopa's younger brother. A familiar face. He came striding over with such confidence and importance and smilingly took my bags out of my hands.

I immediately relaxed and totally forgot about hotels in walls, paper keys, men in spotty uniforms with guns and Black Suits who push in! I *had* totally forgotten about it and would never have gone back inside my head to those scary places ever again – had it not been for this book.

PHOTO 17 PHOTO OF THUBTEN LHUNDRUP

I had met Thubten Lhundrup in Singapore and he often came and sat with me in the lounge room of the hospital. The sight of his familiar smiling face made me completely forget about being alone and scared and I ran up to him. I completely forgot that I was a bedraggled, decrepit old nun and that he was a young, gorgeous monk and I dropped my bags and gave him a big bear hug. *Oh, so not what to do!* And in front of a swarming sea of faces too! For we Aussies it is the natural thing to do, but obviously when you are overseas not everybody appreciates being squashed with exuberance at airports.

I was just so pleased to see him, but I should have remained calm and poker faced just like a real nun would have done. Should have. Didn't. I have a lot to learn I freely admit – but I *am* learning, even if it is through other peoples' embarrassing moments with me. It is just that I am learning things I am not really sure that I really want to learn. And they are things that I am *forced* to learn.

When Thubten Lhundrup recovered his composure after this explosion of emotion, visibly slap-bang in the middle of the airport, he piled me into a bright red, brand new, four-wheel drive Toyota as quickly as he could. Inside the

vehicle were about one hundred (maybe, slight exaggeration) monks who looked at me as if I had just landed from Mars in a space ship. After they got over their shock, their heads and zens (shawl) were to flutter excitedly outside the windows while we drove through Kathmandu.

Kathmandu. Such an exotic name for such an exotic place. We left the city and started to climb a bumpy, dirt road with potholes that the Toyota could have disappeared into forever had it not been under the control of all its four wheels – and the experienced driver, who was of course, Thubten Lhundrup.

My eyes began to spin around in their sockets the moment we left the airport and I kept my mouth tightly shut so the pollution would not be swallowed. We began to wind our way up the mountain to where Lama lay.

What an amazing trip. I felt like I was in the middle of the pages of National Geographic, completely spellbound by the sights, sounds and smells of this amazing country. My eyes almost fell out of my head with the sights I saw, and all from the luxury of a multi-chauffeur driven, red dream machine, filled to overflowing with excited monks.

For the first time in weeks, I felt happy. Relaxed and happy. I was with my own kind, even if they looked and spoke differently but I did not care, they were my family and I was safe. I just knew it. I felt as if our mummy had dressed us all alike.

The higher the road climbed, the more amazing the environment and the people became. At one stage I saw a moving haystack. As we drove past it, there were two feet underneath it, running! I distinctly remember wanting the driver to stop so that I could give the haystack every penny I had. There has to be an easier way to earn a crust.

There were chickens, ducks, dogs, goats and children all standing stock still in the very middle of the road watching us drive past and copping billowing clouds of dust. We drove around them without trepidation, so obviously all and sundry were quite familiar with these goings on.

I waved to the children and they smiled and waved back. What on earth did they think of us? We were worlds apart and yet we were no different. They just knew more pain and suffering than we, in our overindulged lifestyles, could ever imagine. But I wonder, who is the happier? This was a great lesson in karma and showed precisely how it can run out at any time – or be created, instantly.

People were sitting in their homes that were perched precariously right on the side of the dirt road. Nothing much seemed to move except the dust and pollution as we sped by. These beautiful, friendly people seemed oblivious to the pollution that covered everything. In one scene, the faces on the men who were gathered in small groups around the Internet cafe seemed to be happy, as did the faces on the children who played on this roadway. The women that I saw looked very thin and yet they smiled and waved as we drove past.

And yes, I did say Internet cafe!

On a piece of board lying on the side of the road I saw a dissected animal, maybe a goat, lying in pieces. It was covered in the dust and grime from the road but it was obviously for sale as chopped up meat for dinner.

I wanted to get out and sit with these people and talk about their ideas, life, troubles and joys. Maybe one day it will happen. We are all exactly the same under the skin; we just have different points of view of reality according to our conditioned mind, or consciousness.

We have a lot to learn from peoples who have not yet lost the plot, as most of we so called civilised countries have surely done due to our arrogant sophistication. How many of us in the western world would smile and wave a friendly hand to those in a car that belched out black clouds of dirt and pollution right into our homes and onto our meat supply? And to those who put your children at great risk by driving around them?

My eyes and heart were really opened that day and I hope they never close over. To sit in a cave and experience what the senses of the planet have to offer is my dream. Maybe next life?

KOPAN MONASTERY

After climbing up a very steep, small mountain with what seemed like one wheel at a time and with drop-offs like you would not believe, suddenly the dirt road turned into bitumen and right at the very top of this mountain, a huge metal gate confronted us with an appropriate looking guard. A Uniform! I liked him straight away.

Seeing we all had bald heads and were dressed identically, obviously we passed inspection and the guard opened the gate and looked in at me with a big grin. *'Another crazy westerner!'* I heard his mind say.

We drove through the gate and there before us was a sea of flowers in immaculately kept gardens, beautiful Tibetan style buildings and quietly walking monks. This cannot be real, I thought. It seemed to be like an exquisite scene from some exotic movie about a hidden world. I had entered a new world that had previously been hidden from my senses and awareness. Did I hear you say *'Shangri la'*?

To read about these mysterious places and people is one thing, but to actually experience them in real life is to know instantly what you have been missing out on. You instantly know that you will never be the same because they have added a richness to your life that transcends money, power and even ego. I think it is like always drinking black coffee, until you experience what it is like with cream added to it.

Sitting on the very top of this mountain is the jewel in the lotus – the gompa of Kopan - the temple. It rests on a base of white cement steps and is terraced with flowers and trees. It is a majestic sight. Kopan Monastery sits at the very top of a pyramid mountain. The gompa and gardens are the point at the top and the Kathmandu Valley far, far below is the base. In between the top and the bottom of this pyramid are villages and cut out terraces that wind around and around.

In the distance there are other such Monasteries perched on top of their particular mountains and they all have terraced sides on which they plant their crops. The general feeling is of stillness and peace. You literally breathe the air of peace.

Kopon is a very splendid offering to all the senses. The colors of the prayer flags and the flowers that adorn it are like icing on a huge child's birthday cake. The building has an air, an atmosphere, an essence, a charisma of Tibet. And yet, it symbolized much more than just another country. It awakened in me a connectedness to normality, another reality.

PHOTO 18 A, B, C. A -front of gompa. / B – close up of gompa. / C – huge doors of gompa



It is amazing to think that just a few weeks before I had been sitting on my meditation cushion at home in The Konchog Cave without a worry in the world, and for me this was normal. It had become my normal way of life since meeting Lama and I thought this would be it forever and a day, but without

warning my life had changed and now I was standing on the top of the world gazing at an unbelievable sight of such beauty and of such profound meaning.

I think we are not always aware of the *meaning* of such experiences, because we can get overawed by the physical attributes of such a place, or even a person, as in my case with Lama, and so do not awaken to the hidden awareness behind it all.

Sometimes you become aware that something you saw, heard, touched, smelled or tasted, immediately turned on your heart light. It was not so much the object itself, it was the instant recognition, or feeling, that is profound. The object is only a trigger to turning on your heart light. And it was at this profound and yet subconscious level, that I knew my view of reality had been shattered beyond ever being put together again.

This was a great lesson because it gave me an experiential lesson in understanding the nature of reality that Buddhist philosophy is based upon and somehow I understood that the way I had perceived everything to date had been seen only through the eyes of attachment. I believed the way that I saw and felt about the world and everything in it, was normal. Lama had begun to awaken this questioning of normality by shaking the day-lights out of me, but it was not until I was standing at Kopan Monastery that it hit me. Normality does not exist!

According to Buddhist philosophy there are two levels of truth:

1. conventional truth, which is everyday truth that this is an egg, etc. but that truth is open to manipulation according to what label you put on it.
2. ultimate truth, which is the truth about the way things exist. Without labels and description. Empty of imputation. Unable to be manipulated.

Until we understand and accept the Buddhist notion that the ultimate truth of reality is freedom, we will just live in the moment conditioned by what we *think* we hear, see, touch, smell and taste without realizing that none of it is permanent and that it will all change – including the labels. And so we become victims living in Samsara.

How I got into this teaching, I do not know. Maybe it was to share with you the understanding that hit me like a brick when my senses went into overload looking at the environmental beauty of Kopan Monastery. Kopan Monastery with all its wonder is, nevertheless, subject to old age, decay and eventual death, just like us, but Kopan Monastery was the awakening. I knew that, at that instant.

How the karma had manifested for this incredible experience to be at Kopan Monastery was beyond my understanding or comprehension, so I just accepted it and found a bench that overlooked the Kathmandu Valley and just sat. I felt like a sponge totally absorbing everything within sight. I sat and pondered what a change there had been in my mind, just during the past few moments. On entering Kopan Monastery my mind had changed from being fearful and nervous to completely calm and accepting. The change was not only miraculous, but also instantaneous. And nobody had even spoken to me yet.

PHOTO 18 THE SPOT WHERE I SAT WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED



When I came to my normal, proper senses, the monks had all gone. Everybody had gone and I was standing there with my bag all alone. Finally a few monks walked past, so I asked what should I do? They did not know. Well, I thought, I am here so what else matters. I look like one of them in my Robes, so I am one of them. I am home.

Then over came a smiling face attached to a monk, who told me where my room was and handed me a key. This was a PROPER key and I laughed. Obviously this monk thought I was a proper nun who had been here before and who knew the ropes. But it did not matter one bit. I had never felt so right in any spot on earth before. I wandered along in the direction that he pointed with a smiling face and for once in my adventures I was not at all concerned about EXACTLY where I was heading, or how to get there. I knew I was home and that was all that mattered. And what's more, I knew it was all right.

Although I knew in my head that Lama was here, it had not hit my emotional button yet. It still did not seem real. For so long Lama had been out of sight and as yet the great leap into my fully aware consciousness had not happened. But it very soon would.

I found the room with no trouble and it was as if I knew where it was all the time. As nobody had told me what I should do after this, I unpacked my one set of Robes and carefully put them in the spotless, solid wood and very ornate cupboard. I put all the pills and potions on the equally beautifully carved table and laid the toiletries and towel on the cupboard in the shower cum toilet room. The big bag of wool I left in the bottom of my bag and chastised myself for bringing it. When I went to Singapore I packed unnecessary superfluous things that were just a heavy nuisance and now I had packed my bag with balls of wool. '*You are a real drongo!*' I thought. I gave myself a proper scolding and made quite sure that I understood completely that I was a ninny and would never learn to be a proper nun. However, I soon got over this admonishing and

just sat quietly saying to myself, *'What a lucky ducky! I am here!'* just like a mantra of joy.

Then I sat down and waited. I did not know what I was waiting for, or even if I should be waiting. I thought at the time that a proper nun would know instinctively exactly what to do next, but I did not have a clue. Finally I walked back to where I started off, found a bench and sat on it. After all, I was home.

PHOTO 20. KOPAN MONKS



PHOTO 21A AND B. A - VIEW FROM KOPAN MONASTERY. B – AREA NEAR GOMPA



Miracle! Next face I see is Ani Fran's. I leapt on her like a lion on a rabbit and gave her a big hug and smothered her with kisses. And being an old-time Aussie she did not resist too much. She was the first face I had seen that looked familiar since I had left Australia way back in the dim past, so what else could I do?

I was so happy. The root of the happiness was that I was finally here with Lama. It was not that I was on holiday or just wanting to visit another Buddhist

centre, as this just never happened. I was on the Himalayas, in the sky realm with the consciousness of my precious Heart Guru, Geshe Lama Konchog. Who, without doubt, had made all this possible. That was the only form of reality that I was 100% sure of and so I was happy.

On the way to this sky realm, I reminded myself, I had the potential to be lost never to be seen again, but I was guided. I had the potential to be shot at dawn by Black Suits, but I was protected and I was helped by Uniforms, Lama in disguise. Lama had not only been with me since he sent the yellow flowers, but he had held my hand so strongly along the road that led to the place where his dead body lay. It was not until I got to Kopan that this fact dawned on me and I truly understood the great compassion of the guru. I was *truly* happy.

Next face I see walking towards me is The Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup, the most prestigious Abbot of Kopan! I held back my explosive nature of affection on him, thank goodness, and just beamed at him. He took Fran and I for coffee in the little shop and then asked if I had seen Lama yet? I did not have the heart to tell him that I had no idea where Lama was, so I just said 'No'.

Fran asked where my bags were and when I told her I was happily ensconced in a beautiful room with views forever, she said: "*Oh, no, you will have to move!*" What?! I immediately imputed fear and disappointment into what she said and drummed up visions of being put down the back in the old cow shed. True! It really is amazing what we do to ourselves. I *presumed* that there was no accommodation available. I *presumed* I was going to be turfed out of that beautiful room. I *presumed* total disaster all within a split mini-second. Spontaneously I had crashed from the heights of pleasure to the pits of disappointment! Unbelievable! But amazingly, I was learning to watch my mind – huge miracle. Never before in my whole life had I ever been given the amazing opportunities I was being confronted with to be able to watch my mind at work.

The lessons I got in Bangkok shook me to my roots. I am ruled by a mind that runs its own way based on wanting things to be nice, easy and predictable. This causes me – whoever me is – a lot of unnecessary suffering simply because I like things to be constant and familiar so that I do not have to impute bad things onto my mind and disturb it. Anyway, most of the fears that my mind drums up do not happen and so this causes me to suffer needlessly. I know that, yet I still do it. This is called imputing onto objects and people that which is not there, and it is not there simply because it comes only from within my own mind. This imputing is what we then label as being reality.

The Buddhists have a term that describes reality and it is called correct view. The correct view of reality is the understanding that nothing exists as we 'think' it does, or perceive it to be, as we have discussed in The Two Truths. The correct view of reality is called 'emptiness'. This means empty of labeling and imputation and understanding that things and people are empty of inherent existence. This means they do not exist independently from their own side because they are dependent on causes and conditions that make them appear as such to me, and differently to you. This is because I am conditioned by my own set of causes and conditions.

For what it is worth, they say each one of us even sees colours slightly different.

So much for the lecture, now back to Kopan: Fran immediately began to arrange for some kind Nepalese person to gather all my goods and chattels that had been so carefully unpacked, to be repacked and transported down to the luxurious premises directly beneath Lama's house.

Yes, I did say "*Under Lama's House!*"

PICTURE 22. UNDER LAMA'S HOUSE



I remember blushing with absolute horror at my grasping mind. Superb lesson. From my side, I have no such karma to be the recipient of such kindness and compassion and to be housed under the very house of Geshe Lama Konchog was beyond mere conceptual thought.

I talk too much and too loudly, I am a flipperty jippert instead of being cool, calm and collected and I have these absurd eyebrows. I am nobody's idea of a nun. And yet, deep down I know I am Geshe Lama Konchog's nun and that makes me feel perfect. I am so filled with Lama's light. Without that, I am just a waste of space. And now I was going to be under his very house.

This was a true miracle of kindness and loving compassion from a Great Master to his lowly disciple. However, as always with Lama, I truly believe it came with a lesson. The lesson was on imputing: I was given a beautiful room and then I thought I was going to lose it. Then in anguish, I realized my ungrateful, grasping mind by being placed directly in the bliss zone, beneath Lama's room. I got a shock at my arrogant mind and felt very humiliated. Humiliation is completely different from humble, but it is the first stage. Without feeling humility, how can we know humbleness?

There was no key to this magic sky realm, of course not. The only key that would open this door to the pure lands under Lama's house was humility and acceptance. Not grasping onto the good things in life. And only Lama could possibly have made me look at my mind like this. He handed me the key, which I accepted with a red face.

After leaving Lama Lhundrup and Ani Fran and following their directions to Lama's pink house, I set off down the side of the Kopan hill to where they told me Lama's house lay. Although they refer to Kopan as being on a hill, to me it was surely a mountain of mammoth proportions. I suppose to compare it to the colossal Himalayan mountains all around, it could be described as a hill, but it was a really huge one. With my heart beating like a snare drum, I walked along

the tiny track with one side that dropped off straight into the little village below, until I found the stairs that led down to Lama's house. A blue tarpaulin covered the foyer in the front and it had the most awesome energy emanating from it.

PHOTO 23. THE FRONT OF LAMA'S HOUSE. IN THE FOYAR WAS WHERE LAMA'S BODY LAY SURROUNDED BY A LIGHT REALM OF STATUES, WATER BOWLS, INCENSE AND LIGHTS



While walking along this track, I felt overcome with the knowledge that Lama himself had walked along this track so often, and now I was walking in his very footsteps. I immediately sat down in the dirt and dissolved into tears. You would have thought by this time my body would have run out of the stuff tears are made from, but I just let the feeling wash over me. I was almost beyond tears. This was not a crying situation; it was a deep feeling sensation from the secret voids deep within my heart and maybe the tears served a purpose – a purpose to put out the fire.

Far below was the Kathmandu Valley and above was the clearest, blue sky imaginable. I will never forget that moment.

PHOTO 24. THE TRACK THAT LED DOWN TO LAMA'S PINK HOUSE



I am fast running out of superlatives, but no spoken words can even get close to the sights from the top of this mountain. Because we were so high above the valley below, the air was fresh and the colourful prayer flags flapped strongly in the wind. October and November is autumn and the weather is perfect for walking or just sitting on your cushion and meditating. The air was clear of pollution due to the summer rains, and to the height well above Kathmandu Valley.

Kopan is a monastery and there are hundreds of eighteen and nineteen year old monks studying to pass their final year before entering Sera Monastery in southern India, where they will then begin their long studies to gain a Geshe degree.

Walking around mindfully were also several very young Rinpoches and special young monks who live and study at Kopan. In fact one afternoon I was sitting on the grass looking at the unbelievable scenery around me when I noticed an old monk sitting on a high spot reading a book. He had glasses perched on the tip of his nose and he kept looking over the rim of them at something that was just out of my range of sight. I moved from my spot and saw about a dozen very young monks playing chasey and doing summersaults on the grass. They were squealing with laughter and looked so happy in their freedom. Obviously this old monk had to baby-sit them while they let off some steam after their day at school.

PHOTO 25A AND B; THE YOUNG VERY SPECIAL MONKS AND RINPOCHES AT KOPAN MONASTERY DURING 2001



The architecture of the buildings in this monastery is truly beautiful and awe-inspiring, but most of all they have been designed to be perfectly functional. Many hundreds or even thousands of years of creating such buildings have produced not only a thing of great beauty, but also of amazing use of space.

The monks, the buildings, the statues, the prayer flags, the colourful gardens of flowers and most especially the Gompa instantly transform your mind from feeling mundane into a feeling of total joy and gratitude. This is because you feel that you are walking around in a Pure Land. It had that affect on my mind for sure, so it must affect others this way as well. Kopan Monastery gave me a direct vision of what a Pure Land must surely be like, so when I visualise as such from my cushion in Australia, I have a working knowledge on which to base it. For me, this works and my mind instantly transforms from normal to para-normal. Or is the word ultra-normal? You choose.

Gratefulness is expressed by everyone at Kopan for the miracle that Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche originally created in building this monastery,

and we are so thankful for all the Great Lamas and workers who have maintained this wonderful experience that we call the Kopan Monastery. Special gratitude must be given to Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup who keeps it all going.

Sorry, how my mind does wander, but the remembrance of sense pleasures associated with Kopan fill my head and I just want to babble on and on. But back to sitting in the dirt on the track that led to Lama's house....

I followed this little track until I came to the stairs that led down to Lama's house and then the stairs continued on to where my bags had been placed – outside the glass doors of the apartment under Lama's house. These quarters are only befitting to the most holy and yet here I was looking through glass doors and windows that gave an indescribable view of the Kathmandu Valley far below and beyond. And if that is not incredible enough, my bed was directly under Lama's bedroom.

I sat on the bed for awhile gazing unbelievably out of the window at the view in front of me. A hot air balloon was floating in the air just above Boudenath, which is not far from Kopan. I have since heard that this business is owned by Australians. To me, this was a direct sign from Lama that everything was as it should be. There were even Aussies floating in the sky.

When I recovered somewhat from all the excitement I had experienced to this point, I realized how fortunate I truly was to be there. I sat and dedicated this good fortune to all the many people who had shown such kindness and compassion in giving me the opportunity to even be there in the first place.

I had a shower, changed into my other set of Robes, washed the ones I took off and hung them over chairs in the bright sunlight outside and then went back upstairs to the heavy gate that led to Lama's house.

LAMA'S PINK HOUSE

I stood outside this big gate for ages waiting for someone to appear, but nobody did. I tried knocking very gently, but nobody appeared. I stayed outside like this for about an hour because I did not want to make a noise and disturb whatever or whoever was on the other side. Eventually I pushed the heavy door inwards ever so gently and quietly, and peeped around it. Inside I caught a glimpse of a heavenly realm - a Pure Land. I quickly shut the door and stood back just staring at it. I did not know what to expect, but I did not expect this. Everything that had happened to this point had been a preparation for the real thing. I caught a glimpse of Lama lying on a bed surrounded by lights, incense, water offerings, thankas and statues.

After several minutes of just staring and not breathing, I again gently opened the door and took an involuntary step forward. Again I saw Lama on the bed but then realized there were a few others sitting on cushions facing him. I immediately felt as if I was intruding because several faces turned to look at me, so I mumbled an apology and began to shrink back behind the gate again. Instantly Tenzin Zopa came floating over on a cushion of air, took my hands in his and said, "*Ani La! You are welcome. Please – come in.!*"

He introduced me to his aunty, the Venerable Tenzin Chodron and his sister and brothers who are also ordained. This was his family from Tsum. This was MY family from Tsum! And this was Lama's family. Then he offered me a

chair. As the couple there were sitting on the floor on cushions, I decided to do what my wobbly legs were dictating and to take up his kind offer.

Before leaving Australia the doctor had said, “don’t eat salad and whatever you do, don’t drink milk”. Immediately Ani Chodron came out with the most deliciously smelling warm milky drink and so beautifully offered it to me. The doctor’s warning rang in my ears, so I tried to politely refuse and ask for water instead.

Tenzin Zopa said, “*No, Ani, drink! You must drink because of the shock*”. And I did. How right he was.

Of course nothing diabolical happened and I did not grow horns, or even drop dead on the spot. This delicious drink was offered all morning in the most beautiful china cup and saucer. Ani Chodron and I instantly recognized each other from where – who knows, but we are truly sisters.

PHOTO -26 ANI CHODRON AND ME.



I realize this must sound crazy, but we have all felt a close connection to someone we have just met, for no reason at all. Haven’t we?

I was truly grateful for this kindness, because I had not realized until then just how shocked my whole system was. I had eaten or drunk nothing since leaving home two days beforehand. Even on the plane I could not eat or drink anything because my whole body was in shut-down mode. My whole life had completely changed during the past few weeks and here I was in Kathmandu sitting next to Geshe Lama Konchog – who did not look dead to me.

MEDICINE BUDDHA KNITTING MANTRAS

After sitting for a few minutes in the stilled, emotion filled silence of the meditation all who were there were experiencing and practicing, a huge lump started to well up in the pit of my stomach. I could not help it; it just sort of started to bubble up. Tenzin Zopa immediately came over and said, “*Don’t cry, it will disturb Lama’s clear light meditation*”.

Don't cry!?

I understood exactly what Tenzin Zopa was saying, but I did not think I could do as he requested, so I quickly left the room and went down to my apartment below Lama's house to try to pull myself together.

Every nerve in my system was in a state of shock and I just wanted to cry and cry, but I knew I must not because if I did, I would not stop. I had to get it all together and try to remain calm so that I could merge my simple consciousness with those in the same room as Lama. *'I will try to connect with them'*, I thought. I had no concept whatsoever of where Lama's mind would be, all I knew was that he had died two days before and I thought the best thing I can do, is to try to connect to their minds as I thought they knew what they were doing. Several times I began to walk up the stairs to return to where Lama lay, but each time I tried to push the door, I wanted to cry again. So I went back downstairs and meditated. I did this time after time. Finally, the thought came to me: **'The wool – you ninny! THE WOOL!'**

I do not know how to write this down in a format of words without it sounding like something that it was not. It was not a voice from heaven, it was not Lama's voice and it was not even a voice. The bag of wool just came into my mind the exact same way that it did when I was packing. As soon as I remembered the wool and knitting needles, I snatched them from the bag and ran up the stairs two at a time, to Lama. I knew I would not cry if I were focusing on something else other than my own sadness, grief and shock.

I gently pushed in the heavy door with heart racing and sat in the wicker chair and opened the big bag containing all the balls of wool. Suddenly it dawned on me that all the different colours of wool were the exact colours of all the Medicine Buddhas. They were remnants and I do not remember buying them, maybe I had had them for many years. I do not know.

I immediately put the wool and needles down in my lap and just stayed very still. This was surreal in every sense. My eyes followed Tenzin Zopa as he attended to Lama's holy body and I watched the three other people sitting on cushions so deep in thought and so totally attuned to Lama's consciousness. I just sat and let my eyes fall on everything very softly. Even when our eyes met, they connected so softly and lovingly on a deep level I never knew existed. Somehow the balls of wool helped my mind and gave it strength.

Being a flipperty jippert, it is not often that I sit very still anywhere, especially when with others. There is always something exciting to talk about, something to share, something to connect to and respond to. I am easily distracted and over-excitabile even on a good day, so it is not easy for me to bear the title of nun. As a nun, you really have to be on your mettle at all times because if you say or do the wrong thing, it can create a wrong impression of the Sangha in general. Oh, tell me about it! However, this totally profound experience was way beyond what you can experience through meditation, I do believe. No amount of mind training can prepare you for some experiences.

Deep meditation is a solitary experience, but the experience of those initial few hours sitting with those particular people in the presence of Lama in clear light meditation and becoming one with the altered states of consciousnesses that were contained within that room, was just beyond all description. This had an immense impact on me. It was as if I had lived my entire life as a child and now, suddenly, I was all grown up.

Tenzin Zopa was completely aware of the profundity of the situation and environment and he did what had to be done for Lama in total meditation. His body was functioning, but his mind was in total meditation and all the while he was tending to those of us who were doing nothing but sitting and meditating. In my opinion, he is unmistakably a true Bodhisattva. And I am not alone in that realization.

When I left that room, I walked around Kopan hill as if this was the very first time I was aware of the world. The air was new, the sounds were new and I felt new. And then I went to my room and slept. This was the first time I had slept for a very long time. My mind completely understood peace and bliss and I slept on a soft, white fluffy cloud in a blue sky.

The next day after breakfast, where I met the most incredible people from all around the world, I gathered up the wool and needles and went to sit with Lama again. I began to knit patches of the colour of each of the Medicine Buddhas. As I knitted a blue patch for instance, I concentrated on the mantra, the appearance and the position of the Blue Medicine Buddha. Each stitch my needles created was a syllable of the mantra. It became such a joy to do this and to focus and concentrate on the particular colour of each Buddha. I felt in doing this, in some way Lama would have been pleased. He would have been especially pleased that I was not crying. By focusing on mantras and colours and Buddhas I had been able, unknowingly, to transform my mind from suffering into complete joy.

I remember thinking at one point while I was knitting, that people may be getting a very wrong impression by thinking I was being disrespectful, but it did not sway me because the knitting definitely had a purpose, or purposes. Without any shadow of a doubt, I believe the packing of the wool and needles was a most incredible miracle created by Lama. I am sure you will agree.

I stayed with Lama for as long as I dared every day. I say this because I felt that Tenzin Zopa needed time to be alone with his beloved Grandfather, Guru and mentor.

The entire time I was in the room, I did my very best to send my love to Lama. I also dedicated the mantras of the Medicine Buddha practice to Tenzin Zopa to offer him strength to do what most of us could not even imagine needed to be done.

LAMA'S HOLY BODY

I did not look directly at Lama's body at any time, as I felt this may have been disrespectful in some way. His consciousness was very much still inside that body and he was at peace in the Clear Light Meditation. That much I knew. I was also aware that I must not disturb him.

To be witness to a true Holy Man's deeply personal and intimate experience where his mind is abiding in Clear Light Meditation, cannot be defined. It was due to his great generosity that he allowed those of us present, to share this experience with him.

I did at times though, feel sad, because the energy in the room was one akin to sadness, but on reflection I think I felt most strongly an altered state of consciousness to a much higher level than we can normally achieve. This was a very somber environment as opposed to sadness.

The term ‘altered state of consciousness’ is bartered around a lot in spiritual books, but I think this is the only way I can describe my feelings while being so close to Lama’s body

Of course sadness was there, but it was completely overwhelmed by the amazing feeling and energy that Lama was generating. His consciousness was very powerfully affecting me to the extent that I could feel nothing except his awareness. I am sure the others present felt this also. There was an unmistakable awareness in the room.

The next day I gave Tenzin Zopa the ‘beloved sixteen-year-old orange shirt’, that I had very carefully wrapped and put inside my purse so that it was with me at all times. This shirt was now nineteen years old. Tenzin Zopa took my hand and together we laid it along Lama’s chest. At no time did I look at Lama’s holy face as we laid it along his chest. I just could not trust myself to do that and not crack up completely. I focused on Tenzin Zopa and his amazing love for Lama, instead. I do not think, at that stage, my physical heart could have kept doing its job when the rest of the body and mind were flipping out.

I thought in my deluded mind that Lama may be cremated with his favourite shirt on, but it was given back to me after the cremation and so I was able to wear it when I was ordained as a Bikkshuni – for Lama! It had actually touched his body while he was in Clear Light Meditation. It is a true relic.

Then, after an amazing breakfast of the best porridge imaginable, I sat with fellow Aussies Anis Fran and Janne and with Ani Karen too. We ate our porridge and looked through the dining room window at Garnesh Mal, the ice mountain on which Tsum is located.

That day I sat in the wicker chair behind Lama’s head and concentrated on the knitting and the Medicine Buddha Mantras. I could not look at him, but I knew he knew I was there. In my mind, I joyfully sent him huge big bliss blobs like big balloons. I hope it did not disturb his profound meditation too much to see bliss blobs floating all around him.

I thought of the wool that I had brought with me and how necessary it had been in transforming my mind from sadness to bliss. Even in your wildest moments you would not even begin to think to bring wool and needles on such a mission. But I do not think the thought was mine. Previously, whenever anybody was going to Kopan Monastery from Chenrezig Institute, I would immediately buy wool and knit Lama jumpers and things so that they could offer them to him. I suppose he thought that this was all that I ever did. No doubt he probably thought that this would be the only way to make me sit still and be quiet – and how very right he was.

One morning I was sitting quietly in the wicker chair just looking at the faces of devotion on the few people sitting on cushions, when I hung my head and let one or one hundred silent tears drop – not in sadness, but in absolute gratitude. Tenzin Zopa immediately came over and said, “*Lama waited for you!*” I am sure he waited for every one of us who was there and I am sure that he called every one of us to be with him, but to hear Tenzin Zopa say this made me want to hug him. You will be pleased to know I did not, but it was close.

One does not of course, touch the Guru, but for someone like myself who is a grandmother it is sometimes very, very hard not to. I am at least learning this much but practicing it is still a huge challenge.

How was it possible that all of this was really happening, I wondered and wondered. Each one of us who was close to Lama knew for absolute surety that

his consciousness was in that room with his 'dead' body. I knew from that moment that there is no finality and separation at death. Lama definitely was, for all terms and purposes dead and yet his Buddha/yogi consciousness was able to control who was in his presence at this special time. No doubt he was communicating with every one of us.

After a few days, Tenzin Zopa asked me if I had seen Lama's face. *Oh, no, I didn't think I could look at him without losing the plot and dissolving into liquid!* It was one thing to sit next to him and focus on the knitting and the mantras, but it was quite another thing altogether to look into his holy face. I just did not think I was ready for that yet.

"Oh no, Tenzin Zopa, I can't do that! I am so sorry, but I am alright just sitting here next to him! Thank you all the same." But the next thing I know, I am standing with Tenzin Zopa's arm around me, looking at Lama's beautiful serene face. His consciousness was still very much in his body. At first I nearly fell down, so I put my arm around Tenzin Zopa's back to try to stop from falling and to take some of his mighty strength. I am fully aware that one does not touch their guru, but I am sure in such dire circumstances, it is permissible. I hope, anyway.

Lama's face was very, very thin but his eyes were slightly open and they gave the impression that he was very much aware of what was happening around him. There was no questioning that. And what is more, every person who had the privileged karma to be in that room with him during his great and last meditation in that form, was fully aware of it also. You could just *feel* it.

Standing there with Lama and Tenzin Zopa and being so close together, was the most surreal feeling. We were all three together again. I had the most intense feeling of togetherness that was ageless. We were and we always will be, together. Maybe I will simply be a mosquito buzzing around their heads, but be with them, I will.

Silently I bent down to Lama's face and whispered as softly as I could, *"Thank you Lama. Thank you for finding me again in this life. I will do everything I can to do your work. I will devote purely to Tenzin Zopa. We will see you soon."*

It was at this point that my New Heart Guru became my Guru Brother. There is no other word close enough to describe our relationship.

I wondered what Lama thought of Tenzin Zopa and I gazing down at him so lovingly with our arms around each other.

Then I went outside and walked around Kopan within a space in my mind I had never known existed. I seemed to just float on air. I saw nothing. I left my mind there in the room with Lama.

Until this extraordinary experience of being with Lama during his Clear Light Meditation, I had no idea that there were levels within our mind that have never been touched. These are subtle, subtle levels of consciousness. It takes the extreme kindness of the guru to give you the opportunity to experience this and it has to be an extraordinary experience to awaken it.

I found a bench facing the gompa and sat down. My body and mind were completely separate, my body just did what it wanted to, but my mind was still totally with Lama. I was there in physical form, but the rest of me was somewhere else. An inconceivable experience.

KHENRINPOCHE LAMA LHUNDRUP

The next moment, the gardener came over towards me with a rake in his hand and I immediately thought I should not be sitting there, so I got up to move. Instantly body and mind reconnected. He laughed at this look of shock on my face and pointed up to the top window of the Gompa and there was Great Lama Lhundrup beckoning me to go up to him.

I found the stairs and went into the area where Lama Lhundrup was seated. He got up and bumped foreheads with me. By now I was familiar with this greeting, but Lama Lhundrup did it so gently, so I had no holy bruise.

He had tea and biscuits set out as if he had been expecting me. We talked about things I have now totally forgotten, nevertheless I will never forget sitting there. Maybe I was not meant to remember our conversation.

TSUM FAMILY

Great Lama Lhundrup is as familiar to me as Lama and Tenzin Zopa and the family from Tsum. This form of familiarity is something you instantly know and feel. Most probably everyone has had a similar experience.

One particular day, a year later at the consecration of Lama's stupa, I found myself surrounded by several elderly people who had walked from Tsum to be at the great occasion at Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu. They had walked for six days. Neither they nor I could understand each other and yet we had this meaningful conversation together that lasted for well over an hour.

We walked around the stupa and every so often they would take my hand and we would walk and talk. They did not notice tattooed eyebrows and freckles and I did not notice their weathered faces and coloured aprons – we simply merged our consciousnesses on a level that I, for one, could not possibly understand. I just knew they were familiar.

THE MEDITATION

The next day I was sitting next to Lama when suddenly I became aware that my breathing had become very slow and very deep. I dropped my knitting into my lap and let whatever was happening, happen.

I had been having a particularly blissful time visualizing the Medicine Buddhas and doing their mantras. Suddenly they began to fade and there was nothing I could do about it, so I just went with it. The next instant, I was not sitting in the chair anymore, I was standing in a completely different place. I became aware that I was in a huge white marble palace with pillars and there was one step that separated the front part from the back. There were long wooden benches and a huge sunken bath like a small pond. The pillars led up to an open roof where the night sky was filled with twinkling stars. The sky was dark blue. At the back of this area there was no wall, the vivid dark blue sky met the white marble floor in open space. It seemed like the palace was floating in the night sky and it had no walls or roof.

In the center of this palace, Lama was sitting in a beautiful sparkling bath.

The bath seemed to have been made out of shimmering tiles and there were three steps that led down into it. Lama was sitting on the top of the three steps that were submerged beneath the sparkling water. The water was pale blue and

sparkling and shimmering. Lama was naked with the water around his waist. His body was shimmering with white light and he had a sparkling glow that extended outwards for about two metres.

Lama beckoned to me with a smile, to bathe him. I was fully aware of where I was. I walked to his side and wondered how one bathed a Buddha! I tried hard to remember the passage in guru yoga where one offers water, etc., but it did not seem appropriate so I just walked to his side and waited. I stood to his left. Next to the step that Lama was sitting on was a tall blue bowl that was a pinkish color inside. The bowl was filled with sparkling water. Next to this bowl was a natural colored sponge. I picked up the sponge and dipped it into the water and held it over Lama's head. *I then realized it was not water – it was sparkling light.* I held the sponge over his head and let the light sprinkle down over his body like stardust. It looked just like a cascade of silver moonbeams.

Lama stood up and I reached for the Robes that were lying, carefully folded in a stack, on a long bench in front of a pillar. They also were in light form. I carefully dressed him and tied the belt around his waist.

Nothing was said. Everything was still and silent. Lama smiled all the time – he did not look serious.

There was not color, as we know it, as everything seemed to be transparent, except for Lama's body, which was more of a translucent nature. The other colors were clear like crystal.

After Lama had been dressed, his appearance changed to white sparkling light. Before that he had been a normal pinkish colour. Even his Robes were now sparking white light and not the normal maroon and yellow. Everything had turned to clear crystal white. The colour was not really white, it was transparent clear light yet it had the luminosity of white.

Lama then stood at the place where the floor of the palace met the wide expanse of the dark blue sky at the far edge. He turned to me and raised his left arm as if to say goodbye, and he smiled. Then he stepped off into the blue sky and just disappeared.

This is not something I would have the capacity to be able to dream up. I would like to, but for me it would not be possible. It is not dream like stuff. This was what I would term a miracle because it was at this very point that I realized where Lama was. I saw his true holy body in light form. It is one thing to think you perceive another's consciousness, but Lama showed his mind in another kaya, or body.

As long as Lama is alive in my heart, he has not gone anywhere. As long as I can tell people about him, he will live on in others' hearts. There will be a new form for sure – a new incarnation, but this form of Geshe Lama Konchog needs to be remembered and revered.

More importantly, I saw for myself this miraculous scene. I now know for sure that the consciousness does not die with the body. Everybody who was in the room with Lama's body also must have realized this too. We were all privy to an amazing miracle of Lama's mind and I am sure Lama showed himself as he truly was, to everybody there.

It was not only those who were in the room who received Lama's mind miracles, because many people have told me since that they had strong dreams and experiences during this time about Lama – and they were far away in Australia.

During all this time, I knew my body was still sitting in the wicker chair, even though I also knew that I was attending to Lama in another dimension. I was aware that I was also transparent and not in a heavy form, but yet I was in full color, in contrast to Lama's form.

Just as Lama disappeared from view, I remember seeing Tenzin Zopa coming over and lifting my feet one by one and putting huge woollen socks on them. I tried to yell out to him, "*No! Please do not bend in front of me! Please put the socks on yourself!*" I know I got quite upset at the sight of seeing my beloved Guru Brother kneeling in front of me, but there was nothing I could do about it because he did not seem to hear me. And I could not move.

How long this meditation or visualisation took I have no idea. When I became fully aware of sitting in the chair again and my consciousness had returned to normal, I went downstairs to my bed and just sat there.

I looked at the big thick socks that Tenzin Zopa had put on my feet, so I knew that I had experienced something extraordinary that my normal state of consciousness would never be able to rationalise. This state is, I believe, even with my simple mind, the place described as being of indescribable bliss.

I sat with Lama's 'dead' body for five days and yet his mind was still with us. The aura that surrounded him was one of full awareness and sublime peace. His body emitted the most exquisite perfume of flower incense.

FACES IN THE ROCKS

I often sat and watched the men making the cremation oven. I transformed this terrible thought by thinking of it as a stupa for a deity. This small stupa that was in the shape of a brick oven would offer Lama's precious body to the fire god. It was so holy in its own right and it looked particularly poignant and mystical in the very early hours of the morning long before anybody was around.

PHOTO 26. THE BEGINNING OF THE BUILDING OF THE CREMATION MANDALA OVEN. FELLOW AUSTRALIAN MICHAEL



The day before the cremation, I was walking around the stone wall that supported the terraced area on which the cremation stupa was being built, when suddenly I saw some faces in the stones. The faces were of deities and they were very distinct and looked like they had been chiselled and then painted. On one stone there was a central black wrathful deity with three eyes and a crown of skulls. Around this head were the heads of three smaller deities. The stones on either side supported another two black deities with skulls as crowns. They were very, very clear and you could see the actual faces with eyes, noses and mouths.

I looked at them for quite a while and thought I must be seeing things. I know we often see things in stones or in clouds, but these faces were very clear. They were complete in every aspect. I walked away and tried to divert my mind by doing something else, but when I returned they were still unmistakably there. They were very distinct.

I went straight down to the house to find Tenzin Zopa to ask him to come and see them, but he was so busy it seemed unfair to distract him. I went back to the stone wall and found a group of monks who were sitting close by so I asked them to come over and see what they could see in the stones. Obviously not being used to old western nuns asking them to come and look at rocks to see what they could see in them, it took a bit of persuading before one gingerly ventured over. After pulling his face in about two hundred different expressions, he decided he could see nothing.

Can you blame him? If he had said yes, can you imagine the ribbing he would have received from the others.

I spotted another two monks later on and one of them took one look and declared that he could indeed, see the faces exactly as I could see them. On this confirmation, I immediately went up to find the Abbot, Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup, but he was not to be found. If I had had any sense whatsoever, I would have asked the monk's name, but I did not, and how do you tell one monk from another in a line up of hundreds?

An Italian lady was filming the whole sequence of Lama's death and the cremation, so I went and found her and asked her to come and look at the rocks and tell me what she could see in them. She also described exactly the faces and the colours that the monk and I could see.

Who these deities were, we will never now know because this wall was torn down to make way for The Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa that Tenzin Zopa was to create for his beloved Guru. This magnificent stupa was erected over the actual cremation site where Lama's body was soon to be transformed into relics of amazing proportions and types.

From my side, I believe that these faces in the rocks represented the deities who were awaiting Lama. Only my guess, who would know?

Great Lama Lhundrup was later to send an email to me before the rock wall was to be torn down seeking the location of the deity faces, but it was difficult to remember the exact spot from over here in Australia and nobody else could find them. Maybe they were not meant to be preserved.

BRINGING NORMAL REALITY AND ULTRA-REALITY TOGETHER

These experiences had a profound affect on my simple mind. I am not a dreamer by any stretch of the imagination and yet, what was happening to my mind was

for me, undecipherable. I knew I would have to go home and re-enter the so-called normal world where most people have no idea about miracles and the like. In fact, there is a huge gap between healthy scepticism and downright denial to the point of anger, to anything that is beyond some peoples' level of perception. I have seen this for myself with the relics.

It would have been so much easier to remain at Kopan and live in retreat for the rest of my life, but I am a westerner under the powers of a visa so I could not. I also knew Lama would not permit this, because as he said, I had to do his work in Australia. Maybe next life.

I knew I had to find a way to cope with this new level of spirituality that Lama had not only awakened, but had made abundantly clear by all the miracles that were even still happening around me. I knew I had to return to Australia and still be able to function in the every day rat race, and I knew it was not going to be easy.

Of course, Lama's plan was the retreat path, but even this presents many difficulties in the west. I really needed to shut right down and crawl into a cave that had electric lighting, carpets on the floor and of course, a proper flushing toilet. Oh yes, and a tree with yellow flowers outside. Naturally! So I did. The Konchog Cave, situated in the Bliss Realm of the worst street in the tire world.

TENZIN ZOPA

When Tenzin Zopa slept during this exceptional time, I do not know. When he did lie down it was on a thin mattress on the cold floor next to Lama's body, in the open foyer of his house. He protected Lama's body with his own right to the very end. The thought of this made my heart ache. I was curled up nice and warm under blankets in a soft bed, but what could I do? I consoled myself by thinking that this was Tenzin Zopa's special time with Lama alone.

I wondered what they talked about

His devotion to Lama is totally inspiring. They have been together since Lama brought his father and mother together with the sole intention of producing Tenzin Zopa to be his attendant. Lama himself told me this story. I can say nothing for sure about my understanding of the relationship between Lama and Tenzin Zopa, but I do believe they have been together for more lifetimes than we can imagine. I also believe that one finds the other so that they continue to be together, life after life.

What is more, from my point of assumption, I further believe that they are not just disciple and guru. I believe that both are great Kadampa Masters and as such, live their lives secretly.

Lama himself gave the impression of being a simple monk, but nothing could have been further from the truth. Tenzin Zopa is the exact same energy as Lama, so those of us who knew Lama also know Tenzin Zopa.

To see them, we have to use our sense consciousnesses and not our deluded eyes and ears. Lama showed this lesson to us when he was alive and there were those who criticised this living form of a Buddha. Nobody must make this mistaken view with Tenzin Zopa.

At Lama's death, Tenzin Zopa was everywhere at the same time. He organised everything and yet he had a smiling face to offer everyone. He offered every comfort and care to those who sat with Lama's body. He served his Master at the expense of his own suffering and need for sleep. Day by day I

could see him getting thinner and thinner. But what can you do? What can you possibly do to help someone doing a labour of love? The only thing I could do was to devote to him, totally. And to stay out of his way.

Tenzin Zopa told me one day when we walked together that he would sit on the toilet and cry. It would have been the only place that nobody could get at him and he could be alone to feel the pain. He did it all without any wool to knit too!

He must have been suffering terribly during Lama's pain, illness and eventual death. His suffering was beyond any of ours and yet he tirelessly made it possible for us all to be able to witness the miracles that Lama was still producing. I believe with 100% of my heart, that Tenzin Zopa is a living Buddha, the same as Geshe Lama Konchog.

Not one of us must make the mistakes we made relating to Geshe Lama Konchog. We must learn from these mistakes and make right the wrongs. We must treat all Lamas and Gurus as if they were our own precious child and take care of them accordingly.

THE CREMATION

It had been decided that Lama's Clear Light Meditation should end and he was asked to finish his meditation so that his body could be prepared for cremation. Several monks performed this ceremony by ringing bells to awaken Lama from his meditation.

The fire stupa was now finished and everything was ready for Lama's cremation. He was so carefully and lovingly dressed by Tenzin Zopa and a dorje and bell were bandaged around Lama's hands. He looked exactly like the deity he represented.

Lama was placed on a backed platform symbolic of a throne and carried up the vertical side of the mountain to the cremation site by several monks who also appeared to be in deep meditation. How he remained on the platform while the monks carried him, is nothing short of a miracle. The cement steps that lay against the vertical side of the mountain are not only extremely steep, but they are very widely set apart. The ground was not level from Lama's house to the first set of stairs and the way was particularly steep and rough. Lama's body looked just like he was sitting there in complete control of himself and everybody and everything else around him.

I walked behind the retinue that was carrying Lama's body to the place of cremation and stood alongside the hundreds of people standing there in homage.

He was gently placed, sitting, inside the cremation stupa and the fire was lit.....

CHAPTER 8

CREMATION

October, 2001.

The day before the cremation ceremony, I was sitting on the very top of the hill at Kopan where the King's Astrologer had once lived, looking down at the cremation site.

It was early in the morning and in the blue cloudless sky overhead there were about a dozen eagles floating around in circles within a tunnel of air directly over the cremation site.

Maybe even the birds knew this was going to be a special day.

THE ACTUAL CREMATION.

The moment had come and everything was prepared and the fire was lit. Great Lama Lhundrup and other dignitaries sat in the front row amid a mass of Sangha and people from all around the world. Everyone was silent, meditational and solemn. There was a huge amount of sadness in the air, yet this was overridden somewhat by the ceremonial procedure and costumes of the High Lamas, which created an unworldly atmosphere that took it from an ordinarily depressing and mundane event into one of a much higher realm and energy.

Lama Lhundrup and the holy entourage in the front row were dressed in ceremonial clothes as being representative of a deity. This was a very impressive sight. They were honoring a very special Holy Yogi whose mind was known to have abided in Vajra Yogini's Pure Land.

The atmosphere was almost electric, without being bizarre. It was a solemn and respectful homage being paid by all to a great Master. For me, the High Lamas being dressed as a Great Deity was particularly poignant because I felt that the deity was there in person, through them.

The fire was lit and eventually took hold.

MIRACULOUS SIGNS

White swirls

Giant swirls of light coloured smoke came out of the top of the cremation stupa in beautiful artful circles, almost like rosettes. They grew higher and higher as if trying to touch the sky. They seemed to follow the route that the eagles had taken earlier in the morning.

. Lama's consciousness was finally leaving his holy body in a cloud of smoke, for all to see. Lama was turning into light form before our very eyes. It seemed to me that he had become this transparent, almost white swirling mass of air.

This was the beginning of the miracles that happened during the cremation of his body.

I thought that when the smoke dissolved, his consciousness would then have taken its rightful new form in a Buddha's enjoyment Body (Samboghakaya form) in Vajra Yogini's Pure Land along with all the dakas and dakinis. Or maybe, he may have taken the Wisdom Body of a Buddha (Dharmakaya form) and experience emptiness directly and Gone Beyond. However, deep down I knew that he would again come back to teach us and I also knew that that new form would be the emanation form of a Buddha (Nirmanakaya form). So for me it was clear that the smoke represented Lama's consciousness leaving the mandala, which was represented by the cremation stupa. There were four doorways inside that mandala and rightfully seated in the middle was Lama's body, which I saw as being the emanation form of a deity.

No matter what you see or visualize, this picture was extremely difficult to look at because if this were, in fact, a true mandala with a resident deity, in my opinion it certainly would have been disrespectful to look directly at it. Well, for my gross eyes anyway.

But I did look. And much to my surprise I did not feel too uncomfortable at this amazing sight, nor as horrified as I had expected to be to witness my precious guru's body burning. I so strongly felt that Lama's consciousness was in the exquisite white smoke in the sky and not in the burning body and because I felt this so strongly, I was able to cope with this unbelievable situation and sight. Also, I knew that Lama's consciousness had already left his body at the request of the monks with the ringing bells.

I do believe that Lama showed us directly the consciousness leaving the body. I also do believe that this was in reality a true miracle.

I truly believe, that during the time of Lama's Clear Light Meditation, then being dressed as the deity and being cremated as such, and then showing us all his consciousness leaving the body in the form of white smoke, were all clear signs of his Buddha mind. Even though his body was dead, Lama showed us directly that his consciousness was still potent and that the body that had once contained it was now being transformed before our very eyes into white smoke swirls. And there was more to come!

(Incredibly, all these miraculous events took place in what is now called the Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park that houses the huge Great Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa. Tenzin Zopa was to transform this whole area one year later. So we all really were standing in VajraYogini's Pure Land while being witness to the transformation of the mind of a living miracle that produced these effects.)

Rainbows

Not too long after the cremation fire had begun, I felt a very strong feeling to look up. I could hear Lama's voice deep in my heart telling me to look up. I had no idea what I was supposed to be looking for in the sky because all the action was happening in the fire stupa. Nobody else was looking up at the sky, but I turned in little circles with my neck back trying to find what I was supposed to see. Suddenly I saw a very faint rainbow that began at the fire stupa and ended directly over Garnesh Mal, the mountain of Tsum, the place of

Lama's beloved cave where he was so happy. It was very high in the sky and it was very subtle. Slowly, slowly it became stronger in distinction but the colours were very faint and subtle. As it became clearer, it extended its direction and ended directly over the top of Kopan gompa.

In hindsight, I do believe that this was also a direct sign that Lama's consciousness would take another human form – and that new form would be found at Tsum! But of course, I did not recognize that at that particular time. Another true miracle.

Suddenly the crowd began to murmur very softly and people were pointing to the rainbow. The murmuring became louder and louder until people were openly pointing and shouting as everybody could now see this miraculous sight. The rainbow became clearer and brighter, yet remained as subtle as Lama himself.

Lama showed us his consciousnesses leaving the body as white smoke and now it was manifesting as a rainbow pointing towards the gompa and then directly towards Tsum. To me, unquestioningly, we were looking directly at the true body of a Buddha.

The rainbow was written about in the local Kathmandu papers. Everybody knew something great had happened. These were surely great miracles created by Lama. He gave everybody there a sign to show us that he was aware we were there and it was like a big 'good-bye' written in the sky for all to see.

This was a manifestation in the shape of a rainbow of the compassionate mind of a Buddha.

Relics

And then Lama began to transform his holy body into an offering to us all, by manifesting relics!

Lama's continual practice of generosity seems to be limitless. The old body was now no longer needed, so the residue that contained the holy mind of a Buddha, began to transform into relics. His great compassion turned into precious gems. This was transformation of the Mind in action.

Falling flower/powder bodhicitta

I sat there along with the hundreds of other people in the chilly evening air. Somehow, with the show of the rainbow all my feelings and emotions had begun to take their toll and I began to shake. I needed to be away from all the people and to be alone and yet I did not want to go away from this sight, I just wanted to stay with him for as long as I could. I knew when all the fire and smoke and rainbows had gone, so was he from my eyesight and I did not know how I was going to cope with that. And yet I needed to be alone.

I understood that this was just his discarded body burning, a body that was the cause for so much suffering to him, but I could not bear to look at it being devoured by the fire god. At the same time, I realized there was an incredible atmosphere of expectancy happening around the fire stupa. I think everybody felt it. You could actually *feel* his presence and you had this uncanny feeling that something momentous was about to happen.

It was quite cold and I began to shake quite noticeably, but I think it was more from shock than from anything else. My body was trying to cope with things that all its senses

were experiencing and yet all the while, totally incapable of comprehending. The feelings coming from seeing Lama's burning body somehow overrode this emotional no-where land and gave us all strength – and *great faith*.

Tod, an American who had just completed a long retreat below Lama's house, came and sat with me and offered much comfort by holding my hand. He too, had been very close to Lama and he too, was stuffing down a lot of pent up emotion because he had been with Lama during his last illness. We sat together away from the crowd and just kept quiet and drank in the amazing sight all around us. We both knew that Lama's amazing mind was tangibly still around us.

PHOTO (27) TOD AND VENERABLE ANI CHODRON, TENZIN ZOPA'S AUNT. THIS WAS TAKEN IN ANI LA'S HOUSE AT BOUDENATH.



Tenzin Zopa wandered over to us, looking completely exhausted and thin and asked to escort me down to my room under his (Lama's) house. Tod asked him to join us for a while in just sitting, but he refused politely and said he wanted to go back to his house. I knew exactly how he felt.

I say that, but I really had no idea to the extent his mind must have been suffering, or to the extent of his tiredness. His main reason for breathing in the last few weeks that culminated in that night's show of miracles, was to please his Guru. And this he did. It was obvious he needed to be alone with his thoughts.

I thanked him very much, but decided to stay with Tod for a little longer and gently talk about Lama in the middle of this amazingly overwhelming, heart wrenching scene. Somehow I needed to unwind with somebody who felt like I did – shocked, useless and spun-out. However, in retrospect, I should have done as Tenzin Zopa, my now Guru Brother, had requested. Maybe he needed to just sit and talk gently about Lama too. I will never know now, because I was centred on myself instead of focusing on his needs.

If only we could be so mindful as to watch our minds all the time and to be able to differentiate between wisdom self-awareness and grasping self-awareness. If only. . . It is the simple things such as these that we do not register as being lessons at the time, yet they are the biggest lessons we can ever learn. If only we had the wisdom to recognise instantly that others are more important than oneself.

These were the lessons that Lama taught and now Tenzin Zopa is teaching them. They are lessons that cause great pain after the event because we do not practice mindfulness. I think that the way to stop the heart pain of regret is to be constantly mindful of the dangers of our deluded mind. At least I know that much in a gut-wrenching way, but just how difficult is that to practice!

I regret very much that we did not have a few moments together walking back to Lama's house, because in the days to follow Tenzin Zopa did the work of all the Buddhas in all the Universes. He showed himself clearly to be a living Buddha. But here again, some will agree with me, while others will say I am deluded to think this way. It does not matter what other peoples' opinions are because they are only subject to their own mind, as am I, but can I smugly say with all true arrogance that that is their loss, if only they knew.

Tenzin Zopa's mind was in a million places at once, his body was running on energy that only love can fuel and yet he did what had to be done without one thought for himself. He did what he did for us, because this was Lama's wishes. He made it possible for every one of us there to experience the miracles of The Guru. Without the extreme kindness of Tenzin Zopa and of Lama, none of us would have seen any of this. The knowledge of this and of knowing that Lama and Tenzin Zopa could have returned to Tsum to Lama's cave for him to die there alone and undisturbed, made all of these signs and miracles even more heart touching and personal.

Lama gave every indication that he was not only Master of his own consciousness but he showed us directly what we can achieve for ourselves. We each have the potential to reach Buddhahood. He left us with an amazing gift.

Bodhicitta blessings

Shortly after Tenzin Zopa left, Tod insisted on taking me back to my room. While we were walking hand in hand in the pitch dark on the very edge of the steep mountain, without a torch, I felt something like talcum powder fall on my bald head, arms and face. It was so gentle and yet it caught my attention because it felt like someone touching me very softly. It felt like a butterfly's breath. I actually remember thinking those very words. I thought maybe it was a very light dew but when I touched it, it was not damp. There was a very fine dust on my fingers when I touched my head and it had a very soft fragrance like flower incense.

When I got to my room I expected my Robes to be damp, but they were not. There was, however, a very fine dusting like talcum powder that was almost invisible to the eye but you could just feel it between your fingers. My skin had the fragrance of flowers and I could smell flowers very strongly on my Robes.

I sat on the bed and just stared at nothing other than the lights far below. The lights looked so innocent, so disconnected from what was happening up there in the realm of the gods. And I was covered in this lighter than air talcum powder.

Manifesting relics

Suddenly there was a knock on the door and there was Sin from Singapore saying: "*You must come! Lama's body is turning into relics. It is an incredible sight.*"

But I could not go. I could not look at the burning body anymore. I did not need to see relics, I *knew* he was a Buddha and it had all got to a stage where I could not take in anything else. I had reached a stage where I just needed to sit amongst the lilies in the pond and not examine each and every one of them. And then I realized that I was sitting in a Pure Land, directly under the bedroom of Geshe Lama Konchog, literally sprinkled with an almost invisible dust of fragrant flower incense.

Next morning at breakfast, everybody was talking about the falling flowers of bodhicitta that fell from the sky.

I was astounded – but I said nothing. I did not understand what it all meant. Everyone was talking about the falling flowers, which I had not experienced, but I did experience their perfume and powdery touch. I leave it at that because I have no explanation to offer you. All I can say is, as I write now, the falling bodhicitta, the flower-perfumed powder, was reminiscent of the falling yellow flowers from the tree that signalled Lama's death on the 15th October, 2001.

The next day I sat on my bed and tried to make some sense and understanding of what had happened the day before. I think sometimes there are inexplicable things that we cannot understand with the logical mind. How could anyone possibly coherently explain the events of the preceding two weeks since I arrived at Kopan. Until this day, as I am trying to express my understandings and feelings about these extraordinary experiences and events, I have not even tried to make them logical. I never thought I would have to. Some things and events are beyond intellectualism because they are true mysteries and, I believe, true miracles.

Signs that Lama would return

Lama had promised to return to continue helping us along the path to enlightenment. To do this, his consciousness would need to take on another form that would enable us to see and hear him. I believe that this new form, as was his old one, will be in the Nirmanakaya form of a Buddha - merely in human guise.

I further believe that Lama's mind was, and is, fully enlightened yet in order to benefit us he would again have to manifest in a human form and to do this he would have to continue to undergo the sufferings that such a body would incur, and again he would have to experience the suffering of death. *I could not ask him to do this!* I just could not do it. All the Holy Gurus including Tenzin Zopa asked for us to pray for him to come back quickly. I tried to do this, but it almost broke my heart to ask him to do this when I knew he would again have to suffer.

Selfish? Yes, and I admit it. I understand the importance of his return and I apologize for not doing what was required of me, but I still could not bring myself to ask him to go through such suffering again for the likes of me. I wanted his holy mind to stay and

experience true emptiness in the Dharmakaya. I do not want to be the cause for his suffering, ever again. Wrong view, I understand that, but I cannot help the way I feel.

He will choose to come back nevertheless, and take another human body that will then be subject to all the woes a human body can be confronted with. Without a body, the consciousness of an enlightened being cannot benefit us. And without their extreme kindness in reincarnating to again teach us, we would remain at the level of the animals who cannot put into practice the path that leads to no more suffering until they have created the karma to have a body and consciousness that can understand wisdom.

When we begin to practice for ourselves and not just turn up at teachings and let the Lama's voice go in one ear and straight out the other, there will be no need for them to come back into bodies that are subject to terrible suffering. They will not have to leave their caves. They will not have to experience disrespectful attitudes. By then we will have all become enlightened. And it can happen.

AFTER THE CREMATION

One early morning around 2am after Lama's cremation, I was sitting huddled alone near the cremation site in the dark and the freezing cold. Several other figures were also huddled nearby and we were all trying to be invisible to each other

I had found a little hidey-hole that was completely covered by the branches of trees and it was precariously perched on the very edge of the side of the mountain. I had to remain very quiet and very still or I could have ended up several hundred metres below in a screaming heap. But it was an ideal spot to be invisible and yet have full view of the whole cremation area.

I had the inexplicable feeling that Lama was there with me. Not only was he inside my mind, my consciousness, but also he was swirling around in the mist. He was unmistakably there and so, so gentle. Again, I could smell flower incense.

The other figures eventually left and I was totally alone, hidden under branches against the side of the mountain. The mist gives everything an out-of-this-world atmosphere and softens everything it touches. Truly magic! And so intimate!

PHOTO 27. FIGURES IN THE MIST.



I knew then and there that there was no separation at death. We all understood this, I think. There could be no cause for grief as there was nothing to grieve for. Lama's great mind had totally overcome the mere trifle of death of the body and had shown clear signs that it could manifest in other forms such as the rainbow and relics. He showed us that this was possible and being so, we could do it too.

I have often smelled this flower incense in my house, even when I had no incense or oil burning. He gives every sign to my mind that he is always with me.

I think each one of us at the cremation of Lama's body experienced similar experiences of the miracles of Geshe Lama Konchog's great and holy mind. It was like a gathering of intimate family. He had drawn every one of us there to be with him. And he had made it possible for each and every one of us to *be* there. As in my case, he had created several miracles along the way to make this happen. What is more, there was no separateness between Easterner, Southerner, Westerner or Northerner, we were simply devotees of the Buddhas and in particular, Geshe Lama Konchog, in my view, a living Buddha. There were no labels, no boundaries no distinguishing between rich or poor, layperson or Sangha, we were all simply part of Lama's family. And as such, we all experienced exquisite, personal and public miracles.

This experience changed my life from that moment on and I would dare to say, changed the lives of many people living within the precincts of Kathmandu as they too, were witness to the great miracles such as the rainbows that appeared all over the Valley.

Lama's great mind was as powerful without a body as it ever was with a body and we all knew it. He showed each and every one of us an experiential lesson in Buddhism's greatest teaching on death and the intermediate state.

Not one of us there doubted this from what we had seen - and were about to see in the special days yet to come.

I knew it was time to go home to Australia, to The Konchog Cave. And I had no wool left to knit!

CHAPTER 9

RELICS

2001- present day

After I came home from Kopan things settled down somewhat, as I knew Lama was no longer suffering in that aggregated form, so I settled into retreat again. I felt sure that Lama was experiencing great bliss in Vajra Yogini's Pure Land, so my mind was happy and relieved. However, due to everything that had happened, my mind was now completely different and I had trouble recognising it. Since Singapore in 2000 so much had happened that had transformed my way of thinking, that my view of the world seemed to be seen through new eyes.

This affected me greatly, as Lama was now my main object of focus due especially to the signs that he had shown. Retreat was now completely different because now I had a better understanding of what it was all about. This is now my way of life, simple as that. And it is *my choice* based on the little understandings I received from all the miracles that Lama created. The path of retreat somehow seems more clear now, so I feel more equipped to make such choices alone. I am prepared to walk along this path secure in the knowledge that Lama's consciousness is still fully aware.

I wondered what, if anything, would happen next. I was soon to experience the miracle of all miracles – relics. I will say from the outset that I had absolutely no preconceived views on relics, as I had never seen any nor had I heard very much about them.

When I was leaving Kopan a few days after the cremation, I went down to Lama's pink house to see Tenzin Zopa, my Guru Brother, who was now rightfully my living Heart Guru, to say goodbye. He offered me a small piece of bone, a tiny pearl and a small bag of cremation powder that was Lama's holy body and these he said, were 'Lama's relics'. I took these fragile offerings and wrapped them in a khata and place them next to my heart for safekeeping.

KWAN YIN

When I got home from Kopan, I placed both the bone and pearl in a glass dish with a lid on top and put them carefully on the altar in my bedroom. Within a few weeks the small bone had unmistakably turned into Kwan Yin and the tiny pearl had produced a tiny replica about the size of a pin head.

It is difficult to even begin to comprehend the miracles associated with relics, but after all this is The Konchog Cave, so miracles are not off the agenda.

The original pearl has since changed shape and color and now looks like a water pearl. To date, there are four pearls that have manifested and I have given away three of them. The original one I have kept and it continues to change shape. There are several new ones appearing and growing and about one hundred that are tiny specs in the cremation powder. All the relics are continuing to grow, change and multiply and I continue to give them away to people who will cherish them.

PHOTO 28 PICTURE OF KWAN YIN THAT FORMED FROM THE ORIGINAL RELIC BONE



There is no photo of the original bone, but it looked like a burned, hollow, paper-thin bone that was extremely fragile. It was about three or four centimetres long. Over this period of time, it has completely changed in shape, size and colour.

During the first few weeks of changing, this bone turned completely white and had all the details of Kwan Yin from her face, to the way her arms are placed and she was standing on a pedestal. There had been no sign of a pedestal before and neither had there been the long piece of bone that had grown along her back.

The picture I took is not clear and unfortunately this is the only one that I have. However, it is fortunate that I did take the picture at all. I took the photo because this transformation of cremated bone was such a shock and I thought nobody would believe it.

Although I gave open invitation to everybody I knew to come and see these manifesting relics, only two or three people had any interest in seeing them. I could not understand why Buddhist people were not lining up outside the front door and the queue winding itself down the road and around the corner to see them. To see with your own eyes the changing relics of a Holy Being was incredibly fortunate karma. And yet nobody else seemed to care two hoots.

TRANSFORMATION INTO THREE PIECES

The Kwan Yin statue relic sat in a crystal lid with a crystal glass on top of it, until 12 noon on the First of January, 2002. (Coincidentally, I was later to begin the Great Retreat on the First of January, 2004.) On this day I had been sitting on my bed meditating when suddenly the glass toppled over and fell on to the floor, spilling the relics and cloth onto the altar.

There was absolutely no wind that could have caused the glass to topple over, nor was anybody near the altar who could have knocked it. Everything was perfectly still and quiet, it just fell over. When I stood up to look at it, I could see that the piece of bone that had taken on the shape of Kwan Yin had broken into three pieces. I just froze!

I left it on the altar in its three broken pieces, went outside and walked up and down my street trying to think what to do. After a few cups of tea, I washed my hands and got a new khata and got ready to try to put it back together again. When I looked at the three pieces, I saw that they had taken other forms and now they had become:

1. A white boomerang. It was perfectly formed but thicker at one end than the other. This boomerang had been formed from the piece of bone that had grown along Kwan Yin's back, although it had not looked like a boomerang before nor was it as big as this new form;
2. The front of Kwan Yin still looked like her, but not as distinctly and the colour had changed to a darker shade.
3. The pedestal on which she stood had become a separate piece that now looked like a sitting Buddha with a pandit hat on the head. It had three smaller Buddhas in the chest area.

PHOTO 29A AND B THE THREE RELICS FROM THE ONE BONE.



bone and the pearls in their box on Lama's bed, so that they were back where they belonged. When I was getting ready to leave, I went to pick them up and noticed a tiny white spec that was about as big as a pin head, if not smaller. It had not been there when I laid it on the bed.

Over the past years this piece of bone has grown and thickened and now looks like a piece of filigree lace. At the time of writing, it has grown to about 1 centimetre long by half a centimetre wide and is now filled in instead of being open and lacy.

While at Kopan I showed them to the Great Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup. He studied them and confirmed that they were still changing.

Because I took photos of the changes it is easy to see – and hopefully to be accepted – that these are the Holy Relic bones of a great Master.

At the time of writing, August 2009, the relics have multiplied once again. This time there are several dozen tiny specs at the bottom of the glass container and even more surprising is a foot about a centimeter long that is protruding from the base of the Sitting Buddha bone.

Who knows what will happen in time to come. And to the other relics around the world!

CUSTOMS MIRACLE

Before I left Australia to go to Kopan for the consecration of Lama's stupa in 2003, I rang the Customs Department to make sure I would be able to bring the relic bones back into Australia. As we are an isolated country, we do not have many of the diseases that plague the rest of the world, therefore we are paranoid about bringing items into the country that could well bring disaster to our flora and fauna. I was told that there should be no problem bringing the relics back, as they were cremated bone but that I should declare them anyway on my return.

On arriving back into Australia, I immediately showed them to the officer at the Customs section for items to be declared, and explained what they were. He looked at the glass box that contained the relics and, to my absolute horror, an ant walked out! The officer looked inside the box and there were dozens of Kopan ants. When the officer saw them he went white. He said that he was very sorry but the box and the contents would have to be destroyed. I went white too and almost fainted.

I am absolutely convinced that Lama intervened and worked a miracle in this instance, because for the longest time the officer and I just looked at each other – he did not want to do what he had to – and I did not want him to do it either. We both read, with dread, what was in the mind of the other. The box just seemed to sit there and look at both of us.

Suddenly, the officer began to squash the ants one by one on the counter. This was amazing, because he could well have just boxed up the whole lot – box, relics and ants – and put them in the bin for destruction.

I realized there was no point in trying to save the ants because they were doomed anyway. There was no point in the box with its holy relics being destroyed also, so I said in unspoken words to the ants: *“Please do not worry, it will only hurt for a moment and then you will have a very good rebirth!”*

Next, the officer set his sights on the relic bones!

I watched aghast as he picked each one of the three fragile bones up roughly, shook it violently and then banged and slammed it down on the counter. He was of course,

looking for more ants. No more fell out, and neither did one piece of fragment from the bones. There was not even a small quantity of dust that fell out. They remained totally intact.

Both this customs officer and I knew we were seeing a miracle. This story about the relics really is an amazing miracle, ants and all, and I am sure the Custom's Officer remembers this incident vividly to this very day too.

CHAPTER 10

CONSECRATION OF STUPA

February, 2003

A new Energy Begins

Lama had died sixteen months before and here I was once again at Kopan for the consecration of *The Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa* and the *Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park*, which were both created to honour Geshe Lama Konchog. Tenzin Zopa had orchestrated these magnificent achievements to leave a footprint for the future. He created the stupa and the park to be a place of beauty where people could come and feel happy knowing they were in a holy environment. It was created by a true disciple in memory, and for, his Guru.

As I explained, I took the relics back with me to Kopan because it seemed important that they should be back where they belonged, even for a short time.

The journey to Kopan Monastery this time was pretty much effortless and I arrived with most of my wits still intact. I thought I knew how to find my way around Bangkok airport and where the Amari Hotel could be found, so my heart was light and carefree knowing that this time was going to be a happy occasion.

I had time to prepare properly this time and I felt confident that I was somewhat in control of my destiny. When you meet causes and conditions that almost separate your mind from all known logical reality, and you survive somewhat intact, you tend to gain an inner strength that gives an ever so subtle feeling of invincibility. With this new-found invincible state, I just took on Bangkok and what it could throw at me with a smirk on my face. I should have learned by now that nothing is predictable, but some people never learn.

This confident state was partly due to the happy feelings associated with the celebrations that were to take place at Kopan. This visit was in direct contrast to the previous visit, which was an emotional overload on all accounts because I was drained even before I got there and then drained again when I got home. But this time I had had time to rest and recover and sort things out. I felt that I 'knew the ropes' so I felt happy and joyful and just could not wait to get back to Kopan again.

But of course I got lost at Bangkok. Of course I nearly missed the plane to Kathmandu. And of course I panicked when I got outside the Kathmandu airport and got swamped with the welcoming committee of taxi drivers who again did their best to convince me that nobody knew I was coming and I should go with them. All of this was old turf, I told myself, so I practised just breathing in and out and trying not to get that muddled up

Once again Tenzin Zopa stood out like a shining star. He was the perfect host and greeted all of us on the plane who had come for the consecration celebrations. He placed a beautiful white khata around everybody's neck as they stepped out from the airport and he made sure that we all felt very special and so very welcome. Again, we were all family. It was exactly as Lama would have wanted. Tenzin Zopa wanted the Consecration of Lama's Stupa to be a happy and memorable occasion for us all.

PHOTO 30. THE GREAT 4000 BUDDHA RELIC STUPA AND THE VAJRA YOGINI PURE LAND PARK.



PHOTO 31A, B, C. A - MATREYA STATE WITH STATUE OF GESHE LAMA KONCHOG IN FRONT. B- WATER FOUNTAIN. C SIDE OF STUPA





During the time of the Consecration of Lama's stupa the energy around Kopan monastery was completely different from the previous occasion. Maybe this was because there were different people there, with different reasons for being there. Maybe the energy around Lama was different. I cannot say.

The time of Lama's Clear Light Meditation and cremation was a time of spectacular miracles and we all felt it was such a privilege for those of us who were privy to it all and indeed, to even be there at all. It was a very closed, intimate and profound experience for us all. The energy was sombre and serene and emotionally charged. People kept to themselves and everyone was quiet.

This time, there were people from all around the world and the atmosphere was happy and relaxed. Everybody at Kopan was happily talking and mixing with everybody else. This time it was an energy of celebration. We were celebrating the beginning of something new. Sadness and great grief had been replaced by awe and wonder at the magnificent sight of the *Great Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa* and the *Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park* that Tenzin Zopa had produced out of thin air and in the space of a blink of an eye. I might exaggerate a tad, but not much! Although we had lost our much loved Lama's familiar body with the big ears, we now could see and touch a stupa that represented his holy mind.

The cremation had been a very sad time because we were completely focused on Lama's dead body and our own individual loss. However, it was also an exquisite time of deep feelings and profound connection with Lama's holy mind.

I learned a lot of lessons during this time, as I think many of us did. We all experienced miracles of Lama's holy mind, that is for certain. We had the privilege of connecting to the mind of a true Holy Man.

Lama's dead holy body represented so much suffering and regret to my deluded mind. I knew that he had suffered due to some harm that has, and always will, affect me greatly. As well as this, I felt sad that he had died far away from his beloved cave at Tsum. In my simple view, both these causes of suffering still cause me a lot of anguish when I think about them, but they are not cause for suffering in themselves. And Lama would not have wanted that to be. They are experiential lessons. He showed us our own minds through so many examples and he did it all the time.

Separation from guru

Because I had very little visual contact with him, I felt especially helpless and useless at the time of his death. There was nothing I could do to help and I will always regret this inadequacy very much.

Just to be part of the miracles that surrounded Lama's illness, death and the stupa consecration will bring a smile to many a face for eons and eons, because the closeness all of this brought with Lama's mind has been set in concrete and now it can never fade away.

During the early years of my connection with Lama, I often thought about the fact of being separated from the guru's physical form and I did worry about that. I often felt that I had created the karma to be separated from him and this grasping caused me a lot of suffering. So needlessly! The bemoaning letters saying '*you are over there and I am over here – what have I done to deserve that?*' were all too pathetic. Sniff, sniff, sniff! Especially considering that I asked permission to go to Kopan every other week and this was always refused. I just did not get it.

It seemed that, not only had I been born on another planet, but also he did not want me on *his* planet either. But this is how the grasping mind works. Instead of just accepting the fact that we *had* met again in this lifetime, I wanted more. I wanted to be right under his nose.

It has not been until Lama has gone that I have fully understood that the attachment to the body of the guru is not as important as the attachment to his or her mind. I was certainly never separated from Lama's holy mind, but this was only due to Lama's great kindness. To maintain that attachment from my side is a moment by moment process of right effort and right mindfulness. Right everything, in fact. It is so easy for delusions to creep in and upset the barrow and then you are left with self-doubt and insecurity. And don't I know all about that! I had to learn the skilful lessons that Lama was teaching and this did not happen quickly, nor were they handed to me on a golden platter. I had to realize them for what they were for myself and this took many years and many hardships.

Guru lessons

I often thought these lessons, or obstacles, were shoved into my mouth directly by Lama and then I had to chew like the clappers before I could swallow and digest them.

Of course, I could have spat them straight out and starved to death spiritually but most of us have a natural tendency to chew up what we get dished out. Don't we?

I think it is simply a matter of just how well we chew things up in our head chakra before swallowing them to our heart chakra, that results in whether we get mental and/or spiritual indigestion or not.

And for what it is worth, I reckon mental indigestion is just a fancy few words to describe depression.

THE THOUSAND BUDDHA RELIC STUPA

How I do waffle! So here we were, once again gathered together for the consecration of the beautiful stupa that contained Lama's relics that had been miraculously manifested just one year previously.

This was the beginning of new miracles that were beginning to happen, now being manifested by the new Master Disciple, merely labelled Tenzin Zopa.

Tenzin Zopa had produced a beautiful, condensed form of wonder in the form of a stupa that represents Lama's holy mind. He also produced the Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park as a Sambhogakaya pure land for the stupa's enlightened energy. To look at this man-made stupa, we ordinary beings can imagine for ourselves the mind of an enlightened mind residing in the Pure Land of the deity, Vajra Yogini. At the very least, we are offered the opportunity to see something with our eyes that will allow us to imagine the source of this amazing energy.

From my side however, I saw only the footprint of a living Buddha. Here was a holy object in the form of a stupa, set in a beautiful parkland which, to me, represented the physical footprint of Geshe Lama Konchog.

If we should be so particularly thick that we cannot *feel* that energy, then at least we can definitely see a majestic physical form, which is merely labelled 'stupa'. The beauty of the stupa and the surrounding grounds defies anybody's lack of sensual appreciation.

The physical form of Geshe Lama Konchog was no more and I saw it turn into white smoke and rainbows for myself. The consciousness that manifested as such is now within the form of a stupa and it will continue to benefit all sentient beings forever. My understanding is that the stupa and grounds represent the three bodies of a Buddha:

1. The Dharmakaya is the truth body of a Buddha and it is beyond form or formlessness. It is the state of enlightenment and cannot be perceived other than by Buddhas (enlightened minds). A stupa represents the enlightened mind.

As the Dharmakaya cannot be seen or perceived, it needs to rely on two physical forms, which are:

2. The Sambhogakaya (or enjoyment/bliss body). This light-body can only be perceived by Bodhisattvas, Dakinis and Dakas within the celestial realm. However to my mind, the rainbow, white smoke swirls and the falling bodhicitta were manifestations of this kaya, or form body, as shown by the great yogi Geshe Lama Konchog.

For ordinary people such as myself to be able to see this form of a Buddha, we need to rely on the yogis and great masters who have experienced this level of attainment

and then created representatives of it in the form of icons such as paintings, stupas, statues, etc., so that we can see them for ourselves with our normal eyes.

It seems clear to me that Lama's mind, represented as the stupa is clearly shown as residing in the celestial realm of Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park and in all that it contains.

3. The Nirmanakaya (or emanation body) can be seen by ordinary beings who have the karma to recognize it. Lama manifested as an ordinary being in the Nirmanakaya form while he was alive, yet some of us did not recognize it. Therefore it is up to us on which level we chose to understand and/or experience the stupa and the Pure Land Park.

The Essence of Nectar, from the Lam Rim spells it out:

As long as you are not free
Of the veil of karma and obscurations,
Even if all the Buddhas actually came to you,
You would not have the good fortune to see
Their supreme bodies adorned
With the marks and signs;
You are only fortunate enough
To see what appears to you at present.

(Liberation in the Palm of your Hand. Pabonka Rinpoche. P.285)

This is a feeling, an awareness that some call the a priori experience. It is not just a Geshe Lama Konchog phenomenon. If only we can realize just how unbelievably fortunate we are to have the opportunity to be presented with something that is beyond our normal range of perception of the way we *think* or *believe* things exist.

The stupa and the gardens are symbolic of things beyond our normal perception. They need to be experienced on a deep level of awareness that goes beyond the physical form that is built out of earthly materials – but only by those who want to see beyond. Our level of awareness and perception is up to us. We can choose to be asleep or we can try to awaken. This is the ultimate teaching of Buddhism.

Both structures tell us that the time of living Buddhas has not yet passed. There are so many living Buddhas around us today, as any devotee of a guru will tell you. This is why proper guru devotion is critical to being able to see beyond normal perception. The role of the guru is to make us aware so that we can then practice the path. We can all learn from Geshe Lama Konchog and the other enlightened Masters and Gurus of this world, be they Buddhist or not. *At all levels*, we can learn. We can treat all others as if they were a Buddha, or at least a highly realized representative.

One question, if I may be permitted to ask here – how would you know for sure if someone *were not* a Buddha, simply because they did not look Buddha-like?

Without the wisdom, compassion, generosity and great effort of Lama's pure, devout disciple Tenzin Zopa and the many benefactors who helped and assisted to make these miracles manifest, none of us would have had the incredibly fortunate opportunity to be able to experience this incredible sight. We would not have been able to extend our senses beyond the norm and experience for ourselves, a deeper, more subtle level of understanding based in the heart.

Visitors to Kopan can now be part of the Geshe Lama Konchog miracle, courtesy of Tenzin Zopa and his generous entourage of miracle workers.

When I first arrived at Kopan for the consecration, I went up to visit Khenrinpoche, Great Lama Lhundrup, the Abbot, who told me: “*When Tenzin Zopa came to me to ask if he could build the stupa, I said to him, ‘How can you? You do not even have two pennies to rub together!’*”

But do it, he did. He not only honoured Lama’s wish, but he carried it out to perfection as well. I was absolutely astonished to see that he had created land where there was no land sixteen months before. He had not only levelled the hill and added land to the side of a steep mountain, but he had erected a huge stupa bigger than a two-storey house on top of it. To my way of thinking this would have been impossible, especially considering that Nepal does not have the latest whiz-bang equipment that would have been needed to perform such feats. And he did it all within sixteen months. And it was done without strikes for better wages/conditions/child care facilities/workplace and safety and days off for getting over the night before! *Right effort was all it took.* The wonderful karma will be complete on all counts.

Not only this, but Tenzin Zopa and his benefactors also began the construction of a multi-storeyed tantric college at Kopan as well as preparations for the new accommodation for Baby Lama Rinpoche.

In between all of these super power constructions, Tenzin Zopa continued to attend Sera Monastery where he was studying for his Geshe degree. And if all of this is not enough to make you tired just reading about it all, Tenzin Zopa is now the Abbot of the nunnery at Tsum where Lama lived. He is rebuilding the nunnery and refurbishing the monastery to honour Lama.

I have no doubt whatsoever in my mind that Tenzin Zopa is a miracle worker in his own right. And he has only just begun. He not only organised everything himself, but he instigated such pure motivation in others by his display of Guru Devotion that people offered their labour and their hard earned money to this great effort and effect. He showed every one of us the unmistakable, correct form of Guru Devotion. He is the epitome of the true disciple and now he is Master in his own right and worthy to be labelled ‘Guru’.

He now will shoulder Lama’s heavy load with a new, fresh energy. He now has become The Guru in his own right. *And I am his first disciple!*

‘Poor man,’ I hear you mutter.

PHOTO 32 A,B,C,D SPECIAL EARLY MORNING PUJAS IN A TENT A- THE TENT FROM WHERE THE MONKS AND RINPOCHE PERFORMED THE PUJAS. B AND C – THE EARLY MORNING MIST. D- EVERYONE WALKING AROUND IN SILENT MEDITATION.





For three days before the actual Consecration of the Stupa, in the very early morning before the dawn had broken, special monks and a special Rinpoche at Kopan Monastery sat in a decorated tent and performed pujas, prayers and practices in anticipation of the consecration of the stupa and Vajra Yogini Gardens. I sat with a few others in the half light surrounded by swirling mist. We had all blended into our surroundings by courtesy of an amazing mist.

This first morning was freezing in the early morning air. February is still the middle of winter in Nepal and I had just arrived from 40-degree heat in the middle of summer in Australia, so it was just all too delicious – physically, emotionally, spiritually and sensually.

Can you imagine this: A very, very early freezing misty morning, the haunting sounds of the exquisite chanting of the monks reciting sadhanas, who were sitting cross-legged with little red tables in front of them - all on top of a Himalayan mountain. Sometimes the monks were totally hidden in the middle of a swirling veil of magical mist. Every so often the deep resonating chakra spinning sounds of the horns would vibrate through your very being and continue on to the invisible valley below. They were sitting under a big colourful marquee directly facing a wonderland of lights, waterfalls, statues and gardens of the *Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park*, and beside the great *Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa* itself.

This is something definitely etched onto my consciousness for all time to come. It was as if the earth stood still. The magic, the magnitude and the majesty of this was nothing short of awesome. Truly awesome. (Even if I am a little butterfly in the next life, I will definitely tell all the other butterflies about it. Maybe we can hitch a ride on a Boeing and a Kathmandu taxi and see it again. Most definitely, in whatever form, I will see it again in future lives to come.)

There will be better books to come that will describe the wonder of this sight of the park and stupa better than I can ever do, so I will not even try, other than to say it was truly a miracle. This miracle was offered to us by Lama and Tenzin Zopa, together.

ABORTED PILGRIMAGE

My friends Joy and David from Australia were ecstatic when they received an invitation from Tenzin Zopa to attend the consecration of Lama's stupa. We discussed the generous offer that Tenzin Zopa had made to us all to be taken on a pilgrimage to the holy sites around Kathmandu. I got very excited at the thought of all this and immediately flipped out, which for me, is quite normal. I rang all my friends and told

them and even told people who were not friends that I was going to crawl in and out of caves thousands of miles above the earth's surface. But one night Lama appeared in a dream and said, wagging his finger at me, "*You are not going!*"

I got the message loud and clear that I was not going to do the social trip in Kathmandu like everybody else and run around and have a good time sightseeing. How dare I even think it in the first place. I should have known better.

The reason of course, was because I would not have had the proper mindfulness required to go on pilgrimage to these holy sites, as I would have been delirious just experiencing the excitement of it all. I knew that! Maybe there were other reasons, I would not know: Lama did not give reasons, he just dictated.

However, after we all arrived at Kopan I changed my mind and decided that I would disobey him and go along with everybody else and have a really good time getting excited. I even got so far as to book in at the office. I honestly thought I would get away with it and there would be no repercussions. I was feeling very happy with myself.

The afternoon before we were to go on the pilgrimage, I was walking back from Lama's house. The narrow track was very steep and it really was just a rough grooving where constant footprints had left bare ground. This track suddenly turns to the left where one has to climb up cement steps that are very widely spaced. There are no handrails, so if you fall off the steps you could roll right down to the villages below. I can just see the headlines now: '*Crazy western nun falls off the Himalayas!*' This track would not be too difficult if you were young and fit and used to climbing around like a mountain goat, but for a 64 year old grandmother with arthritis who drives a car everywhere and *never* walks, this presented quite an obstacle.

I would usually walk up these cement stairs on all fours, and there is no need to go into details of how I got down them, but you may well imagine! Anyway, this particular day I got to the top and felt a sudden pain down my left-hand side. It was excruciating and it became very difficult to breathe. I did not say anything to anybody, but told Joy and David I would not be able to go with them on the pilgrimage to the holy sites.

They knew the long saga about Lama and my defiant spirit, so they laughed and jokingly said, "*Lama stopped you from going after all!*" This was no joke and I had to unfortunately admit it was just too true. Why I was prevented from going on the pilgrimage, I will never know. But I was properly miffed.

Incidentally, I was to go on this same pilgrimage a few years later – with dire consequences, so here again Lama did his best to protect me from myself!

When everybody had left Kopan in the buses for the great day of pilgrimages up to the tops of the great mountains, I wandered around Kopan for a while and then went to Lama's stupa where I sat mumbling grizzly words with a scowly face. I knew Lama's mind was in the stupa so I talked to the stupa as if it were he.

Of course, I never would have uttered such mutterings to him face to face, but this situation was not fair and I just had to let him know so. I really wanted to go with the others. Even though he did not have a face anymore, that did not stop me from seeing him look very indifferent to my plight and protests. And that did not make me feel any better, either. I was cranky with Lama for not allowing me to go with everybody else and have a good time and I was cranky with myself for having such a rotten body, so I sat near Lama's stupa like a big black thundercloud.

Strangely enough, the stupa seemed to offer comfort.

Bad attitude, I know. But I am telling the truth as I saw it at that particular point. I am nowhere near the stage where the mind resides in the bliss of perfection. I can see the path through Lama's eyes, but this body and mind cannot walk the talk.

DAKINIS

While I was sitting there alone, forlorn, cranky and in pain on the steps facing Lama's stupa and wondering why I was the only one not allowed to go on pilgrimage and have a you-beaut day, when I suddenly saw a real life amazing sight:

From the right hand side of the stupa (my left) I saw about five or six dakinis joyfully and laughingly emerge from the side of the stupa. They were big and they were very colourful, but they were translucent, almost clear. They had extremely long hair that hung in a swirling mass of curls. I could only see their heads and a few arms. They were grouped together with some above the others and they looked so beautiful. They looked like they were half in and half out of the stupa itself.

They were so happy and delighted that I immediately forgot about my bad mood, self-pity and miserable demeanour. I just sat and watched them in happy awe and amazement. I did not get a fright when I saw them because they were so happy.

I do not know how long I watched them but it was an incredible miracle performed by Lama's holy mind, I have no doubt. He *did* care that I was miserable after all. Ha! I have absolutely no shadow of karma that would have produced such a sight from my own side. Let me be very clear about that. This sight was produced by the loving, compassionate mind of a Buddha in the form of the Guru. Lama's loving mind never left mine, even when I was cranky at his decisions and I told him so.

In this particular instance he produced an extraordinary vision for a very simple ordinary being, and he produced it out of sheer compassion. Of this, I am absolutely sure.

This may sound far fetched to some, but it truly is what I saw. I did not imagine it nor did I dream it, nor do I tell lies. It was not in a dream-like state and it was not illusory. The dakinis were as real as the trees around me. The dakinis really came out of the stupa. However, whether someone else would have seen them at the same time, I cannot tell. But I did!

I walked back to my room which I might add, had full view of Lama's stupa from the window and took the text on the Seven Point Thought Transformation practice and went back and sat on the grass facing the stupa and did it with such happiness.

PHOTO 37 - ROOM AT KOPAN MONASTERY WAS A ROOM WITH A VIEW OF LAMA'S STUPA.



There was no particular reason why I had selected that text, it was just the first one I saw and I just wanted something virtuous to take to read sitting next to Lama and the dakinies while everyone else was away for the day. The rest of the day I spent alone in the company of dakinis! *Well, in my mind, anyway!*

This is a great, true account of a miracle that only a Buddha can produce for a lowly disciple.

CHEST PAIN

After a few days, the pain had not relented and now my fingers were completely numb. I had trouble lying down on the bed and I began to think I was having heart problems.

During the day time I tried to rest but it was difficult to lie down due to the pain in my chest and it was even more difficult to get up from lying down, so I mainly just walked around Kopan and chatted with people, or walked around Lama's stupa. There were so many interesting people to meet at this time. For instance, Nati and Liat Baratz were the filmmakers who were filming Lama and Tenzin Zopa's story. They were always walking around interviewing people for their stories too.

This young couple had ridden push bikes down from Tibet to Kathmandu! They did not seem too fazed about such a journey and it appeared to be just another ho-hum story circulating around Kopan. I heard similar stories from other people who were equally blasé about their travels around the Himalayas. Oh, to take a tape recorder next time and record them – what a wonderful book that would be.....maybe next life.

PHOTO 33 LIAT AND NATI. NATI IS A FILM PRODUCER WHO FILMED GESHE LAMA KONCHOOG'S AND GESHE TENZIN ZOPA'S STORY



Conversations with all these amazing and interesting people were endless and exhilarating and they made me forget about my dratted body. Amazingly, I did not at any stage experience tiredness even though it was almost impossible to sleep due to the pain. There was so much to take in and never forget and it was all making an imprint on my mind and I revelled in it. Also it is said that the mind cannot concentrate on two things at the one time, therefore I chose to concentrate on others and their stories, rather than my self pitying pain. Well, tried to – if only life were so simple!

Every moment was a new experience at Kopan and the real miracle was that it brought Lama even closer because I was in his world.

After the consecration ceremony, the pain had become very bad and it was now obvious that it was not going to go away. I explained all this to Ani Fran who arranged for Sanghe the monk/nurse at the Clinic to see me. He took my blood pressure and it was 250/140, so I was taken straight down to the Om Hospital in Kathmandu.

This very kind monk waited patiently while I was being seen by the doctor. The doctor immediately called in the local Heart Physician who came helter-skelter from another hospital somewhere in Kathmandu. He frightened the life out of me with a very serious, 'Oh, you are not long for this world' type of face and he poked and prodded and took x-rays and then declared I would need double by-pass surgery straight away!

He very calmly told Sanghe to go back to Kopan to get my things, and he told me that the monastery would send someone down every day with my food and so on. Now that was enough to make anybody have a heart attack right on the spot, there and then! Its immediate effect was to put the wind up me and my blood pressure followed suit.

I explained to the very kind doctor in a shaking, wavering voice that I tried to sound very authoritative, that I had no intention of having open-heart surgery. Thank you very much, but no thanks! Kind you are – but certain, I am! Nope – not on your nelly!

This doctor was extremely kind and I did receive the best of care. However, he did change my heart medication and eventually he reluctantly allowed me to go back to

Kopon with a very worried looking Sanghe. This doctor arranged for me to see him again the next day, but again I received the same advice, so I decided to come home to Australia and let the doctors here have a go at me.

This heart surgeon was later to ring Kopon to check if I was still alive! He really did his best and I am very grateful for that, but I also know who was behind the miracle that I did not come back home in a body bag. Not joking!

So up I go to see Great Lama Lhundrup and explain to him what had happened and that I was going to leave on the next jet plane back to the safety of my solitary nunnery in the worst street in the world.

Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup checked the situation by doing a mo (divination) and he asked me to please not go home as he felt I had a long life. He said I should go to bed and he would arrange for my meals to be brought to me and I should just rest. But I could not because I could not lie down due to the pain. This was so very kind of him, but I did try to explain that I had been told by the office that there was an awful lot of trouble getting body bags flown out of Nepal and that I should leave asap. When I explained this to Great Lama, I got the proverbial response: “**Why!**” It was not a question.

Great Lama Lhundrup, also being a living Buddha, has such skilful ways to make you drop all pretence and deception by saying very little, yet what he says hits you with the impact of a steam roller. He would not be swayed. He told me to email my doctors in Australia and do what they said. I did this and to my horror, got an email straight back from my doctor, saying: “*This is normal for you. Keep on climbing!*” What the heck...??!! The world has gone nuts, I thought. One minute I am not allowed to go on pilgrimage and in the next, I am not allowed to leave when I look like dropping dead at any minute!

Great Lama Lhundrup sent me down to Lama’s pink house to try to get in touch with Lama’s mind to seek out the answer on whether to go home or stay. But Lama was very quiet. He was not saying anything! He had given his orders and I had disobeyed, so what was there to talk about? I got *that* message loud and clear. Believe *that* if you will!

It did not bother me one iota to have a heart attack and drop dead at the base of Lama’s stupa at Kopon. What a way to go! If I had a choice, that would be it. They could chuck my no-good body on the rubbish heap and burn it along with all the other rubbish and then sprinkle the ashes all around Lama’s stupa. That would be just too good to even contemplate. But what did bother me was the thought of causing so much trouble to everybody should I have either a stroke or a heart attack – and surviving it. Someone might have to go back with me to Australia and the problems could be endless. I explained all this to Great Lama Lhundrup and his holy answer was, of course, “**Why!**”

‘I’m leaving on a jet plane, don’t know when I’ll be back,’ didn’t someone sing? Well, I did! And I will be!

When I got home I was properly cranky. I could not understand it. This time I had had the time to prepare for the visit to Kopon and so had arranged everything necessary to stay for five months. I had paid an incredible amount of money for health insurance so that I would be covered for the whole five months. And it all got aborted after three weeks. What a waste. But that is only how I imputed onto it in a negative way, because it was the most wonderful few weeks of my life; it was just short that is all, and I wanted more and more and for it never to end. Good lesson. *Exactly* what the Buddha taught about impermanency.

When I left home I had envisaged (imputed) that I would be alone, quiet, dreamily and peacefully sitting at the stupa and doing my prayers and practices all day. I also thought that after the ceremonies and everybody had gone home, I would spend some good time quietly and meaningfully wandering around the pilgrimage sites and exploring Kathmandu - alone. Just Lama and me. This would have been the ideal plan if you were the solitary, quiet, dreamy, peacefully sitting at stupas all day type of person, but unfortunately I am not. There is too much excitement to get caught up with, too many people to talk to and too many fascinating places to explore, and probably too much trouble to get into.

And so I got stopped dead in my tracks!

DISTANT NUNNERY

PHOTO 34. THE DISTANT NUNNERY



Every morning at breakfast I would sit facing Lama's cave at Tsum. You could not see it of course, but you could sometimes see the ice mountain where it is located. The whole area is an amazing sight because there are villages and houses dotted in the valleys below that lie in front of the big mountain ranges. At night these houses are little dots of light so apparently they have electricity.

There was one particular cluster of buildings that can be seen in the distance which were within the valley yet set on a high hill. These buildings always seemed to stand out and catch my eye. I often sat on the dining room verandah and just gazed at them. I felt a very strong connection to this particular site and somehow felt drawn to it. I asked several people about this place and was told that it was a nunnery and that it was at least a day's walk away and that it was quite a dangerous walk because of the wild animals in the area. I was told that the nuns there lived in total seclusion.

The person to whom I spoke thought the nuns may receive me because I was also a nun, but that they did not know for sure. That was enough for me, I made up my mind to go visit. This was before the chest pain incident. I thought surely this nunnery would have telephone access so it would be easy to ring and make arrangements. But even if they did not, that was not going to stop me taking my chances and just going in any case. Telephone?!

I knew some of the monks had small motorbikes, so I connived in my head to borrow or rent one and set off in that general direction to visit them. And maybe stay for awhile if I could. I cannot believe I just typed that! How things change when you are in the environment of the Himalayas – self-preservation just goes out the window. Maybe too much listening to the stories abounding all around of people doing extraordinary things, that I had become blasé about lurching into the unknown wilderness, too. And to think I was terrified of being alone in Bangkok airport only a few days before.

I have been on the back of many a motorcycle – Harley Davidsons are particularly poignant to me, but never driven one. But hey, how difficult can it be, they say you are never too old to learn. The thought that I was a decrepit old grandmother just did not dawn on me. And the mere trifle of a fact that I could not ride a motorcycle in the first place, did not dawn on me either. It must be the rarefied air of the Himalayas that is all you can put it down to.

By motor bike the trip would be very quick I was told, so you could get there and back within one day providing you did not meet any yetis or wild, starving animals with foot long teeth. I believe! I believe! And yet I was going to do it – no, AM going to do it. One day.

I never quite knew when the locals were telling fibs or not. I also did not know what wild animals to expect to be lurking around peeping at you from behind trees, trying to hide their teeth. In Australia we do not have any wild animals other than a few cranky kangaroos who try to play chicken in the middle of the country roads, so who am I to disbelieve?

Maybe Lama was again protecting this worthless lump of skin and hair from herself. Why, you would wonder, but just when I had made up my mind to go find this nunnery, I got chest pain and so my plan got thwarted. ‘Nup, you are not going *there!*’ maybe he said.

When I think back now to all the times I pleaded with Lama to come to Kopan Monastery and he always refused, maybe it was that he knew with the wisdom of a Buddha that I would get into all sorts of problems if I left the safety of an Australian village and decided I was up to scratch with the rest of the visitors to Kopan Monastery and attempted to do what they did. Only most of them didn’t do it – they understand the real meaning of The Middle Path. But for me there is no excitement in safe middle paths, all the action is in the fast lane.

For what it is worth, I have kept this intention on the top of ‘things to do’ for the next time I am at Kopan Monastery. I do not give up easily. The middle path is the boring path in my view, but I will try very hard to keep these thoughts under wraps from Lama’s all invasive mind, until I am seated firmly on the seat of the motor bike with the throttle at full blast.

Now, that truly would be a miracle!

ARRIVING HOME

Sobeit! I arrived home and was sent to the heart specialist who eventually got the high blood pressure down and examinations found out the cause of all the trouble. I had torn a muscle attached to the rib cage when one rib had rolled onto the next one. This had happened when climbing up from Lama’s house. This is the logical and rational cause for the pain. But was it? Not everything in my life with Lama has been logically rational by conventional standards.

In retrospect, Lama would never permit me to go to Kopan while he was alive because as he said, he would be too worried about my health. How very, very right he was. He had the true wisdom of a Buddha so he could see the future. He also must have gained a pretty good glimpse that I am not a sedate, quiet, sit-on-your-cushion type of person, over the top excitement rules my day, and ‘blow all caution to the wind’ is my mantra.

It was perfectly understandable to have to leave Kopan with pain and blood pressure that out of control, I knew that. Regardless of what advice I got, even from the highest source, I knew I had to go home. I will not speculate any further, because what is the point.

This was no doubt a not-too-happily-received Lama miracle. Not always he and I are on the best of terms. But of course, it is *my* mind I am dealing with. Having arguments with someone who is not with you in the physical plane is always a bit risky, but then I have already told you that I never claimed to be very sane! Ho-hum.

The purpose for which I was sent home I will never be even close to understanding, but Lama chose to do it, so it happened. (Incidentally, in 2004 again I went to Kopan Monastery for the Enthronement of Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche, the new incarnation and again I was subject to health scares that warranted six days in the Om Hospital. Again I did not get to the Distant Nunnery. But there is always next time – even if it may be in the next life!)

Lama keeps me in strict seclusion even though his body is no more, and if I get any ideas that now I am free to do what I want, when I want, and how I want, I had better get over it. And real quickly too. I do, after all, live in The Konchog Cave!

I learned well from this lesson that seemed to be like a final show of his great mind for me to do what he wanted and not to waste the rest of my life on meaningless things such as sight seeing around Kathmandu and visiting mystical nunneries. Tough. Very tough.

It is apparent now that I was there for the consecration of the stupa only! No holiday, no good time with the other nuns, no pilgrimages, definitely no staying for five months and absolutely no running off on motor bikes. ‘***Go home and do my work!***’ I can hear it now, loud and clear. And the funny thing is, I am so happy to do so.

Nothing is permanent we are told and everything is subject to change minute by minute. Maybe there is still hope that I can see all the wonders of Kathmandu and especially that beckoning, isolated nunnery.

Maybe Lama’s mind in the New Incarnation will say to me, “*Hello Ani Konchog! You are now too old and cranky to be of any use to me or anybody else, so get on your bike and go to that distant nunnery out in the bush at Kathmandu. They are welcome to you. With my blessing!*”

Aaaaahhhhh! You can dream!

So this ended my visit to Kopan for the Consecration of Lama’s stupa. I am now awaiting, along with everybody else, the event of the true, unmistakable incarnation of the mind and consciousness of Geshe Lama Konchog, the Great Mahasiddha, the Great Being who will again perform the miracles of a living Buddha.

I will know him the moment I see him. Again!

Post script: at final editing of this book in 2009, the unmistakable child has been found, namely Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche and is the subject of the movie of the same name: The Unmistaken Child. Directed by Nati Baratz.

PART FOUR

THE FUTURE

Retreat
The Beginning
Refuge
Lama's Legacy

CHAPTER 11

RETREAT

1st January, 2004.

THE RETREAT PLACE

When I came home from Kopan Monastery after the Consecration of the Stupa, it was decided by both Tenzin Zopa and Great Lama Lhundrup that I should begin the Great Retreat, otherwise known as the three-year retreat.

I was advised to do the retreat at Chenrezig Institute just a few minutes from my place, but when I approached the director I was told that it would be impossible as Chenrezig Institute was a teaching institution and long term retreaters could not be catered to as there was nobody who would look after them. And three years is a long time to look after someone.

Checking was then done by Great Lama Lhundrup as to where the retreat should be carried out and Kangaroo Island just off the southern end of Australia was checked and also Mahamudra Centre in New Zealand, but both places were deemed to be unsuitable due to potential health problems.

It was finally decided that The Konchog Cave should be the place. I was a tad surprised with this decision, as I had grand ideas about being alone on a tropical island with palm trees waving gently in the breeze and delicious tropical fruits just waiting for the picking. Oh yes, *and of course* I would do the practices - if I found the time. Dream on. Instead, I gradually became convinced that this house would be the best place to do such a long, intensive, strict and silent retreat because Lama lives in this house. Also, all I have to do is transform this house in my mind's eye into Lama's cave at Tsum and instantly it would become perfect. It is just a matter of transformation of energies and this is exactly what tantra is all about. Several Lamas have been to this house and blessed it, so what better place to transform into a Pure Land.

THE RETREAT PATH

I believe that the path for the Great Retreat was set at the time when Lama sent the bodhi-seed mala with the note explaining that it was for the great, great, great retreat, so many years ago. I believe he set the causes and conditions in place at that time to make this retreat possible. I further believe that he knew he would not be here to guide me and so he offered the mala for the retreat before he left. He had already set the mala beads with the mantra of the practice that I would be doing.

This retreat had not been at all what I had expected or intended it to be, but because I have been trained to focus on the mind of the guru, dealing with the sudden development of writing this book did not cause too much of a back flip. When I was asked to do it I had no hesitation.

Although I still maintained proper retreat procedure, isolation and strictness, the main purpose of this retreat I believe, has been the writing of the book. Maybe by the telling of these personal stories about the miracles I experienced with the mind of a living Buddha, someone else may benefit by gaining some understanding and so then relate more easily to the understanding of guru devotion. Guru devotion is not an easy subject or practice and if this book helps someone, then it has been a worthwhile project.

The path of the long retreat has been unusual but it has been very easy, even though there have been several obstacles. Incidentally, these obstacles were foreseen by the Great Lama Lhundrup who advised several thousand Vajrasattva, purification mantras, be completed first. And these I did. But all in all, by focusing my mind on the energy of the deity, of whom Lama was the living representative, the retreat has been an incredibly easy, equally difficult, profound and meaningful journey into hidden areas of my mind.

I have understood from this retreat that each one of us walks a different path, not only in life in general, but especially during the isolation of retreat. The path to a life of retreat is set by karma - from previous causes and conditions that make it possible in the first instance and by the generosity of the Heart Guru. Once I realized this, the path became very relaxed and therefore blissfully easy.

I had long since learned to stay happy and relaxed no matter what, so the thought of writing a book during the time when I had expected to be thinking of nothing else other than the tantric practice, did not phase me unduly. I just had to figure out a way to combine both the practices of the sadhana (instructions) with the book writing and blend them together to form one complete practice. I knew if I tried to separate them, I would lose the retreat mentality altogether.

The meditation sessions took four hours per session and there were four sessions per day with an hour or so in-between to do the daily chores. It was during the in-between sessions that I devoted to writing this book which, I might add, was at the expense of some of the nasties such as washing up the breakfast and lunch plates and vacuuming.

How I overcame the problem of trying to combine so much into twenty-four hours without something inside me rebelling and cracking up, was to see both practises as being a form of method and wisdom. By doing this, I was able to set the motivation for the whole day as a combination of these two skills, therefore the energy became centered and not scattered. The motivation became purposeful.

By attempting to use the prescribed method and wisdom as the path, I tried to practice transforming my mind into the mind of a deity energy during the meditational sessions and then wrote the book, still with the same energy, inbetween sessions. This worked simply and easily. I maintained that energy and it all seemed to flow without too many problems. I think because there was no break in between the sessions it became just one energy, one practice and one effort. There was no stopping and starting and I think this was, and is, the real secret to successful retreat.

Lama was a master of retreat and you can read all about his great epics in other books that pay him great homage. I believe that he set the retreat for me and all I had to do was walk it.

I saw Lama as the energy of the deity. He is my inspiration and motivation, he is my method and wisdom and it is as simple as that. It is as easy as that. The hard part was, and still is, to keep my mind stabilized on this thought and then automatically you understand the correct method and wisdom.

HOW THE RETREAT UNFOLDED

There were three distinct parts to this unusual retreat, and they are: the first part: meeting obstacles, the second part: the book writing, and the third part: dreams of a retreat centre.

THE FIRST PART: MEETING OBSTACLES.

Once the problems were overcome as to where to do the retreat, the rest was easy and everything just seemed to fall into place. It was entirely up to me as to how I overcame obstacles and still kept plodding along the path and not getting distracted or overwhelmed, because obstacles get in our path no matter what we do – or don't do.

The thought of breaking the retreat had never, ever entered my head although there had been a few scary moments when a few so-called obstacles lurched themselves squarely at my front door.

A retreator is completely dependent on a carer, unless you are of the same ilk as Geshe Lama Konchog or Milarepa. Unfortunately, for beginners like myself, we do need to rely on the kindness and commitment of a friend who will stick it out for the long run. And this can be a big problem.

Ideally, long retreat should be carried out in total isolation where one has access to naturally growing food, clean water and appropriate shelter. As yet this has not happened in Australia, so we are forced to rely on the kindness of others to maintain our retreat situation. Three years is a long time to commit to someone else's needs and people can get tired of doing it. This is one of the big dangers when doing individual retreats from home and not from a retreat center that can properly take care of you. Without a carer, there would be too many obstacles to make the retreat effective, meaningful or successful and so you could just give up.

I can only speak from my own experience of course, and as I said, all retreats and retreaters are different. However, due to the strict confines of retreating for a period of years in the middle of suburbia, help is surely needed to maintain a reliable food supply, pay the rates, electricity, gas and so on. For instance, when I needed something from the shop, or a bill had to be paid, I would put out a red piece of cloth on a tree like a flag and a neighbour would come and pick up the note and the money from the table on the verandah and do what needed to be done.

If you were totally isolated in the bush, with a running creek and a cave to crawl into, there would be no need for a carer. To do retreat under these circumstances would be ideal.

I personally feel that it is the guru who suggests that you undertake an extensive retreat because only he or she understands your retreating capabilities.

However, if we are genuine in our motivation for undertaking such a long retreat and we have already created the karma for it to happen, then all the right conditions will present themselves regardless of what we might think is ideal or not. It is just a matter of doing the best we can with what we have.

A point to be made here is that it would be very unfortunate to think that we could spend the rest of our lives waiting for the 'right' time and place to present itself before we could undertake a long retreat. This just means that such a person is not ready mentally, physically or karmically to begin.

However, no long term retreat should be undertaken unless there is specific instruction from the guru, the teacher, or respected person of authority. 'Long term' can be five minutes if the student is new to retreat and it is long enough for that person's mind to 'flip out'..

There is no point in beginning at all, if the student views the *outside* world around them as inappropriate or not to their wishes or expectations. People can spend their whole lives searching for the 'perfect place/environment/cave in which to retreat into, and so they never do retreat. Or they search for the perfect guru who will lead them. This only indicates that their mind is nowhere near ready to undertake the journey to the *inside world*. Letting go of the outside world is what retreat is all about.

It is so important that we have a content, happy and relaxed mind before we even step onto the long retreat path. This is why long retreat is only done under the advice and direction of the Root Teacher or Guru and not from the wish of the student him or herself. The spiritual teacher knows when a student is ready and then it happens under their supervision and with the right causes and conditions. The spiritual teacher will check everything out for the student and do every thing possible to ensure, as much as possible, a successful retreat.

I am sure that Lama's mind protected me during this retreat and without doubt, I believe he looked over me and sent help when I most needed it. At one stage I had not seen my carer for months and was down to the last grain of rice when suddenly another carer manifested out of thin air.

After this scary incident, I decided to go to the local fruit and vegetable stalls on the main road to get my supplies. I did this about every four weeks or so and as they sold rice as well as vegetables, I got used to doing this. I made no eye contact with the check out person, so nobody spoke to me and I continually recited the mantra, so I did not become disconnected.

This at first caused upset in my mind due to the thought of leaving 'my cave' and encountering people who were not within my retreat circle of helpers. However, I saw this, as another lesson to be learned about the mind and that retreat is not retreat *from* – but retreat *into*! I simply extended the retreat circle to include these food stalls. There are always ways around obstacles; it is just a matter of finding the right path and then choosing the correct method. You learn to go around obstacles rather than crash into them and knock yourself out. Obstacles are a big part of retreat because you have to retrain your thought process.

A big obstacle appeared out of the blue one morning shortly after I began, when a retaining wall between my property and the neighbours' house below began to deteriorate and it looked threateningly like it was going to give way. If it had, my house would have fallen on top of the house next door. Luckily, this was all taken care of without any effort on my part. But it was a little scary for

a few weeks. It was a good lesson in watching my mind freak out and not remain mindful. I had to force myself to sit on my cushion and let it all go.

Another time my cat Percy, developed crystals in his urine and had to have an emergency operation. Six months before this drama, an ancient, geriatric Chihuahua dog called Chi Chi died and created immense waves of sadness. A few months after her death, my sixteen year old cat Tara died. Again I had to force myself to sit on the cushion without dissolving into floods of self pity and grief.

No retreat will ever be without obstacles of some kind. Three years is a long time between dramas and anyway, I think this is one of the main purposes of such a long retreat - how to watch the mind under duress and still maintain proper mindfulness. No way did I achieve this, but at least I did realize it.

No matter if you went to the most beautiful, the most quiet, the most isolated, the most spiritual environment ever, you would still have your own mind to contend with. Something unexpected will inevitably pop up, no matter how hard you try to make it not happen – it will, and the trick is to stay unfluffable. And I had quite a few fluffable moments!

However, it is from such moments of unexpected drama that you realize it is not the environment that you are retreating *from*- it is your own mind that you are retreating *into*. You can only learn this, or realize this, from the obstacles that you get presented with.

Without having the diversion of sensual stimulation such as talking, listening to music, seeing friends, watching television and so on, retreat can be a very scary place unless you have been well prepared beforehand. This is why it takes several years to complete the monotony of the prerequisite preliminary practices. These practices not only train your mind to stay focused by doing the same thing over and over, but they train your mind to overcome the obstacles that turn up. In effect, you become very, very strong.

When you are alone with your own mind twenty-four hours a day, you have to fast become your own best friend because it is from your deluded mind that obstacles arise. You have to become quite clear which mind you are going to befriend – the deluded one that will want you to stop the retreat at the first sight of an obstacle, or the one that wants to connect without division from the mind of the guru. This positive state of mind based on devotion and trust, has the very real potential to gain the realizations needed that will lead to a higher level of awareness and then, ultimately to enlightenment.

The first virtue we have to master before beginning a long retreat is to be able to generate a *happy relaxed mind* – no matter what. This is the starting point. This is imperative.

If you are hard on yourself and only expect perfection from yourself then you cannot succeed, it is not possible because that is the deluded mind. What is more, you have not yet grasped what it is that causes a tight and unhappy mind and so you have no understanding about a happy and relaxed mind. In effect, this type of mind is separate from the mind of the guru, because the guru's mind is the source of all happiness.

The idea behind retreat is to learn to transform your deluded mind, but first you have to recognize that you do in fact, have a deluded mind. When you look it straight in the face, then you can do what has to be done, to overcome it. I believe that this can be done, because all the great masters tell us it can and they give specific teachings on this.

We Buddhists are told in the teachings that to practice being a particular energy such as Tara for instance, leaves a karmic imprint on our mind for some future time when we have created the necessary causes and conditions required to reach the state of enlightenment. By doing such a practice, we *can* become enlightened, because we have followed the instructions and practiced to be so. Therefore we have created causes and conditions to be enlightened. We cannot become anything at all, either good or bad, unless we experience and then practice something.

Part of retreat is learning how to deal with obstacles as they arise in an enlightened way, rather than freaking out and throwing up our hands and screeching, “*Its all too hard, let me out of here!*” and abandoning all further effort. This then may give cause to being even harder on yourself, or to feel a failure and even to succumb to depression.

So it is very important to have completed the preliminary practices well, and under the instruction of your guru before you contemplate closing off your mind from all outside stimulation. This is also why it is up to the guru to sanctify your great retreat, so it is not done simply to impress others from your own side.

Obstacles are a part of retreat, whether they are obstacles pertaining to within your mind or to the outside world, they will arise and you need methods to be able to deal with them. They should be seen as being learning curves and the tools needed to turn them into lessons to gaining a happy and relaxed mind.

If I gained nothing more from doing the great retreat than to loosen up and stop trying to control the world, I am thankful.

Self doubt

I had been in continual partial retreat for over ten years before beginning the great retreat, so I initially felt very confident and that I knew everything there was to know about being locked up, day after day. I thought the great retreat would be a piece of cake. This comes from having a too relaxed state of mind and an idiotic form of happiness. Overconfidence is another big danger to retreaters because it caused me to underestimate the rigors such isolation could manifest. I jumped in like Flynn, and then sank straight to the bottom.

This overconfidence even gave cause to doubt the faith, trust and confidence I had with Lama. An unbelievable thought! I was presented with huge lessons and I needed to learn them well before I could proceed.

Previously the retreats had been between Lama and myself and I simply did what I was told. But now that he was gone, I suddenly realized that I had to learn to stand strong and develop confidence in myself. I had to use my mind instead of his. I had never thought before just how much I had depended on him, for everything. I knew he would send an email and tell and up to this point in time I got away with it.

Suddenly I realized at this early stage of the great retreat that I had, in my mind, *given all my power away to him – instead of taking and receiving power from him!* This took a long time to realize: first I had to fall flat on my face in the mud, then I had to take a good look at my muddy face, get a shock at how horrible it looked, and then set about transforming it by washing it clean. My muddy face was my *mind*, of course.

This is how it all happened: The sudden realization that Lama was not contactable anymore to tell me exactly what to do and how to do it, almost

caused an instant heart attack. I was afraid to stand alone and face the fears within my mind. I had no fears whatsoever while Lama was in this world, living in his pink house in Kathmandu. Now I was afraid to be alone. I doubted myself completely without the physical contact with him, even though it was only by email. *Suddenly I realized that I had been hiding behind him all these long years.* Worse still, I was about to undertake three years of solitude with my deluded mind – *alone* with my deluded mind! I felt my heart had been torn out and that heart was Lama. He was not in the *outside* world anymore and I freaked out good and proper. I experienced the feeling of being separated from the guru.

I had been trained well and yet I faltered and fell flat on my face. All the training went out the window and I felt that I stood alone, naked and in the dark. This is what I would call a ‘deluded realization’. I got into ‘me’ for the first time in my life! And I got a big fright.

So I turned to everybody I knew to ask advice on the Three-Year Retreat and worse still, on the practice itself. I wanted to do it perfectly and yet I did not have the confidence to do it without someone else’s advice and approval. I needed Lama! I needed my guru! But he was not here anymore.

For the first time in my life I had to work with the only thing I had – my own mind, and I did not think I could trust that one bit. After so many years of learning to connect to Lama’s mind and of slowly, slowly letting go of the ‘me’ that belonged in the fast lane, here I was being thrown back into the big, deep blue ocean with huge dumping breakers. And my life raft had gone.

Of course this was another of Lama’s frightening lessons. He had changed me from the lighthearted, happy-go-lucky, live on the edge, not-responsible-for-anything person into a nun living in isolation. Then when I got complacent and happily accepting of this arrangement, suddenly he threw me back into the big stormy ocean without a lifeboat and said: *‘lets see how you deal with this little lot!’* I dealt with it by having a fit of the panics. These are nothing like pink fits that you get when you go to airports, these are seriously desperate wobbles that rattle your teeth loose.

It was not until several months of anguish and mortifying self-doubt had passed before I realized my big mistake - I had labelled ‘The Three-Year Retreat’ as a thing unto itself and then put it in a big steel box. Simple as that. That box then took on a life of its own and became a threat, and so I lost all confidence in myself and worse still, my caste iron faith in Lama.

How dare he die and leave me alone like this, just when I needed him the most! I had to get to this point, I realize this now, before I could stand on my own feet and peek into the hidden recesses of my own mind and discover the strengths and secrets that it contained.

Of course there was absolutely no difference in what I had been doing for so many years, other than the complete strictness and total isolation, but that was not the problem. The problem was that I had taken on board all I thought I had heard about such a long, arduous retreat and then imputed onto it all my own insecurities and fears. These insecurities and fears were all based on the fact that Lama had died and left me alone with myself.

Before I could settle down and begin the procedure of the retreat properly, I had to come a cropper. I had to be skillfully thrown off the horse of complacency and stretched to the limit before I could understand how to relax into the retreat and maintain a happy, contented mind. That meant happy,

content and relaxed with *ME!* Not with Lama – with *ME*, and this had to happen before I could begin to transform *MY* mind.

The guru cannot do it for you, this I learned. *I got it!* But before this happened, I truly freaked out. I began asking people for their advice and the more I asked, the more confused I became. I even asked people about the practice itself, which was completely wrong as their opinion began to undermine my own and replace it with even more deluded thoughts. This was a huge mistake and I got in a heck of a muddle. But without it happening, I would not have found the path that I was being led towards. And I could only find that path by standing upright and strongly walking towards it, armed only with Lama's shining light blazing within my heart chakra.

This truly was an amazing realization, because it was not until I had tied myself in knots trying to follow the advice that I was so generously and so kindly being offered by all and sundry, that I became really unstuck.

I really began to worry because I had imputed onto myself that I was not either ready, capable, or properly prepared to do this retreat. I had begun to convince myself accordingly, and it was not until I was told this very fact by one very kind person, that I really stood up and took notice. This was the deciding point.

I knew that Lama had fully intended that I do this Great Retreat way back when he gave the bodhi-seed mala, so I should have realized that I had been prepared and tutored since then and should not have had any doubts. But I did. And it was not until someone else agreed with me that shocked me into examining my motivation for doing it. Up to this point, everyone had been so kind by offering encouragement and advice and the more they gave their assurance, the more I doubted it. It was not until I was pulled up strongly that I saw my own unforgivable, mistaken view, of Lama's intention.

At this point of frustration, I sent an email to Tenzin Zopa saying that I was trying very hard to seek proper advice and trying even harder to please everybody and now I was getting lost, unhappy and full of concerns. Being so close to Lama himself and knowing me well, he gave this advice: It was simply, "*Do not listen to anybody else. Listen to Lama. Do exactly as he tells you to do!*" This was the best advice I HAD EVER RECEIVED. It was the only advice that I needed to hear and it was the only advice that made sense.

From then on I immediately settled into the practice and just could not wait to sit on the cushion and do every session. Instantly my mind had reconnected to Lama's Holy Mind, and not to my grasping mind, and I was once again happy and relaxed, completely one with my beloved heart guru. All was well with the world. Well, for the time being, anyway.

I realized then, that I had limited myself because I had become separated from Lama's holy mind. I realized at this very point the meaning of 'non-dual'. But what a huge drama my mind dredged up at the thought of going alone. And it took the kindness of someone else to agree with me! I had to get to a point where I fell down before I could stand strong. This is just like a small child who learns to walk. It takes little steps and many, many falls before that baby gains the confidence to get up and run.

If this lesson had not been shoved right under my nose, I would have gone blissfully through life thinking that nothing could possibly deter my confidence in Lama. I would have trusted my mind. I would have lived within a delusion. I knew Lama was perfect; I had no doubts about that. It was my own mind that

had veered off the path, due to deluded thoughts that brought insecurity. I had in fact learned nothing that had stuck. But now it has. But nothing is permanent – ha!

The first twelve months - 2004

The first twelve months of the retreat was a time of study and in-depth examination. It was a time of learning how to transform my mind and of maintaining that transformation when obstacles were presented. Slowly, slowly I gained the confidence in both body and mind to cope with the unexpected games that the outside world throws up to our mind, and then to watch how the mind reacts to them.

My body had to learn to adapt to the long hours of sitting and the lack of sleep. I had to learn to relax my body so that it could adapt and cope with the changes that were happening within my mind.

Most importantly, during these first twelve months of solitude and isolation, I had the time to examine the energy of the tantric practice and try to superimpose that energy - not onto what I perceived as being 'me' - but rather onto what I perceived that I had the potential to become. This was a truly amazing experience.

Now I realize that all you can do is your best. And as you do not have to meet the expectations of anybody else, you are totally free and limitless inside your own skin and most importantly, within your heart chakra. With this understanding and power, you have the potential to transform your own mind instantly. *You* have the power – not someone else's idea of power. This is the big secret.

By means of the practice that I was doing, I learned how it was possible to transform the energy of the mind. I understood for the first time that it was by transforming my mind when obstacles arose and of even seeing them as skilful means to allow me to think differently. So by the blessings of the obstacles I was given the rare opportunities to practice this.

It seems to me that the teachings are like lectures and the obstacles are the tutorials, where we get to practice the lectures. The combination of the two makes for an experiential lesson.

THE SECOND PART: THE BOOK WRITING - 2005

After twelve months I had settled down into deep retreat and was once again feeling very comfortable and complacent. It was wonderful and I enjoyed every moment of the isolation, study and meditation without being disturbed in any way.

The hours were long but they were regimented, so I knew exactly what I would be doing at any point of the day or night. There was no difference between day and night, other than one was dark and you needed the lights on and the other was light. Even so, mostly I forgot to turn off the lights. I also forgot to change my clothes from night time wear to day time wear. It all just merged into one time frame.

There was only three or four hours sleep to be had, which was between 11.30pm and 3am. Lunch was taken about 11.30 and sometimes I had a catnap for an hour after lunch, but that meant not washing up or vacuuming.

I began to think how wonderful the next two years were going to be. I should have understood that nothing is permanent! Isn't it always the way? Just when you think you are getting a handle on something, it tips up. Lama would never accept complacency, so the next step was about to manifest.

The book

Great Lama Lhundrup and Guru Brother, Tenzin Zopa had for several years, suggested that I write down my experiences with Lama, but that suggestion simply went in one ear and out the other ear as fast as I could shove it.

At the beginning of the second year of retreat, Tenzin Zopa requested that I begin to write the book. I then began having dreams of Lama holding up a blue book exactly like the cover on this one. He just sat there holding up the book.

The dreams had become very regular and clearer until one early morning before I awoke, I dreamt that Lama was sitting on his cushion of air and holding a blue book. It was an oblong shape and it had a vivid blue shiny cover that reminded me of lapis lazuli. The name of the book was in big bold golden letters **THE GURU**.

I did not like the title and believe it or not, had a big argument with Lama about the title – all in my head, of course! I wanted it called Miracles of a Living Buddha and he wanted it called The Guru. I have compromised and it is called both. So before any writing began, the book cover and title had been decided upon.

During the in-between sessions where I had hitherto done a bit of housework or gone for a short walk, I began to play around on the computer. But not having written anything before in my entire life, I had no idea of how or where to start to write a book. This was a thought that had never ever entered my head. And anyway, what *exactly* was I going to write about? Things happen and life goes on, you do not jot down details as they happen. More importantly, I did not think that anything could entice me to talk about the miracles that Lama performed and what I experienced with his mind. I just did not think it was of any interest to anybody else and also, it was nobody else's business.

Again and again the dream came with Lama sitting on his air bubble until eventually I saw clearly the chapter headings. They came over a period of three or four nights. As soon as I saw the chapter headings in the dream, I would wake up and stumble out of bed and write them down. Suddenly it all became too easy, I put the chapter headings into the computer and then it was just a matter of filling them in. I do not expect too many people would believe this, but on my word of honour, it is true.

After six months of writing, I struck a hurdle. I began to question the confidentiality between Lama and myself. I really questioned whether many of the miracles and personal things that had happened should be spoken about, let alone written down.

The whole thing sounded so far fetched that I feared everything I was writing would be the subject of ridicule. From my side it did not matter one bit, but I was very concerned that I could be giving a wrong impression of Lama. I felt that the things I was writing about were very personal and not for public scrutiny. There are many things that happen to us that do not make sense and so we keep them to ourselves and I felt that this was the case with my experiences

with Lama. I just did not want to do the wrong thing by him and give cause to delude peoples' minds about him.

The negative thoughts began to take over and I became more and more uneasy due to the fact that this was not a book about me - it is a book about someone else who was a great yogi and Master. And that creates a huge load of responsibility, and responsibility scares me. So I stopped writing altogether.

I spoke to Tenzin Zopa who was in Malaysia, over the telephone about all this and told him I did not think I should continue writing. I explained that I was fearful I would bring the Sangha in general into bad repute and worse still, I would give people a wrong impression of Lama. I explained to him that I had no skills in book writing whatsoever and that the whole thing looked like gobbely gook.

My Guru Brother said in a soft, gentle voice: "*When you think like this, you must visualise me on bended knees with hands folded, requesting you to do the book! And it must be written from your heart and not your head!*" Out the window flew any ideas of ego and self-consciousness! To me, Tenzin Zopa and Lama are one. I hear one voice. The appearances are different, but one is the other. This changed my perception about the book instantly.

Once I changed the motivation for doing this task, the rest was so easy, I just relaxed and let the words and feelings flow without imputing right or wrong. I realized that it was not up to me how others will perceive this book, I have just simply written words that I have tried to use to convey thoughts and feelings about the relationship that a crazy western woman had with her Buddha-like Tibetan Guru/Yogi. What else can you do?

From September 2004 until January 2006, I combined the retreat requirements with the book writing.

Amazingly the required daily mantra count of 10,000 became easier and easier. I think this happened because the in between time was taken up with the book writing about Lama and it was from doing the meditational sessions and mantra count, where I gained the strength needed to combine both practices.

The combination of both practices became one long, extended practice. This gave no time to lapse into any other type of energy. My mind remained focused all the time. A wonderful way to spend a day! Washing up and vacuuming became a thing of the past too.

THE THIRD PART – DREAMS OF A RETREAT CENTRE

While I was in the second year of the Great Retreat, early in September 2005, I began to have dreams of a retreat centre. These were very detailed dreams with Lama in the dream saying over and over the word 'Zion'.

I had no idea what the word meant so I asked my attendant Paul who gave me a copy of his bible and I began to investigate how this word related to the dream. We found out that Mount Zion was the place where King David founded a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. He built a new church.

I do realize that anyone can read anything into texts, but the reading of the biblical texts was indicated in a dream delivered by Lama. The potency and clarity of the dreams seemed to me to be indicative of things to come. This was the feeling that I awoke with every morning – and I remembered the whole dream, from beginning to end.

At the bottom of Paul's bible there were explanations given for the chapters and verses, so I was able to get a very clear view of how it related to the establishment of a new retreat centre.

It was clear from the dreams that this would not be exclusively a Buddhist retreat centre. It became apparent that it would be a multi-denomination one where peoples from all faiths could come and feel happy and relaxed in such a place. Most of all, this retreat centre would have the feeling of true refuge, no matter what your beliefs.

These are copies of the explanations given at the bottom of Paul's bible. Decide for yourself what you make of this, but this is what I found:

(I have added my interpretation in italics)

KINGS 1 Chapter 8. 1 – 11: Bringing the ark of the covenant' (*the dharma?*) into the temple.

'The City of David, or Zion, was south of the temple area (*Australia is south-east of the temple of Kopan Monastery*) in the south-eastern part of the city' (*My house is in the south eastern part of Queensland.*)

'The month occurred in the Autumn – September/October.' (*This relates to the Northern hemisphere of course.. I got the first dream early in September and they continued through the month.*)

'The dedication of the temple was therefore, postponed for eleven months'. (*In September 2005 I had no idea that I would be ending the Great Retreat exactly eleven months early! As it turns out, the Great Retreat was postponed as exactly as the Bible said, in order for the retreat centre, or temple, to be born.*)

PSALMS – chapter 48: The Book of Psalms was written by King David spoken about in the chapter of Kings I above. It says:

'I, great is the lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our god.
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth.
Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great king.
Within her citadels god has shown himself a sure defence.'

This is the stanza that took my attention at the time of the first dream in September, 2005. After a great deal of checking in combination with the directions given in the dream, I deduced that 'Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great king' could be seen to refer to the city of Kingaroy. This town is three hours north of where I live. Roy means King, so we have a city called King of Kings.

Although Kingaroy does not have mountains itself, it does however, have a big mountain range within close proximity called the Bunya Mountains.

I sent an email to Tenzin Zopa explaining all this, and his email dated 30th September, 2005 states:

'As for yourself going to see the site from your retreat, maybe why not wait until you finish your retreat completely. But you can still, at the same time, plan about how to start the project especially about funding and connecting to

people who clan support this project. Or even calculating how much capital would be needed for the project.

Also, try to find out more about the Land of Zion or other land.

My suggestion is that the place should be easy to reach from the city for people who want to come and study or do retreat.

Just is my suggestion only, is all up to you. Whatever is best in everything.

Good luck and I wish you all the best for the success of this great project.

May it benefit numberless beings and be able to serve all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Gurus.

May all the necessary conditions come true as you wish. I will pray non stop for the great success and greatly rejoice in your great wish.

tz'

He had faith in this! The Heart Guru was happy, how could it fail. But nothing is predictable due to the impermanent nature of reality where all things are subject to change; so even high hopes can be dashed into smithereens by unpredictable and unforeseen causes and conditions. That is the nature of reality. Thinking otherwise just gives cause for suffering, so the Buddha said!

As it turns out, Kingaroy is on the same latitude as the centre that would soon be offered to us, which is in the city of Gympie. Gympie is on the ocean side of the main highway, and Kingaroy lies to the west.

There were other indicators of the emerging retreat centre - one of the bone relics developed a dark arrow pointing to the north. Paul witnessed this arrow, which has now disappeared.

Now for the very interesting part: When I was leaving Kopan in March 2004 to return to Australia after the Enthronement ceremony for Rinpoche, Great Abbot Lama Lhundrup offered me a big wad of Nepalese rupees, and said: *"This is for your new retreat centre!"* I tried to argue with him and told him he had the wrong person, but he would not listen. He just laughed.

During this visit to Kopan I had had a long talk with him a few days previously about the dreams of the retreat centre and about the passages from the Christian Bible that I felt referred to the establishment of a new retreat centre and he was very interested.

I also explained that from my side it could not possibly happen because (a) I had no money; (b) I lived in total retreat and (c) I had no support because I was not a high profile teacher. I did state clearly to Great Lama Lhundrup that my big wish was to leave some sort of legacy of Geshe lama Konchog that would benefit people wishing to do long retreats in Australia. Considering that there were no retreat centers in Australia at that time that catered to long term retreaters, I felt strongly about establishing one. if the conditions were there to do so.

Then the day I arrived back home, two days after Lama Lhundrup made the offering, the neighbour two doors away, Peter Mort, came to me and said, *"Would you like a retreat centre? I have a friend who you should meet!"*

Peter tried to give me the telephone number of his friends who had absolutely no idea whatsoever that someone was offering their property to a complete stranger. I told him the story about my dreams and that the Abbot had given me an offering for a new retreat centre, and he laughed.

Peter insisted that I take the number and ring this lady called Angelika, but told him I could not do it. What on earth would you say? So Peter said that he would tell his friends Angelika and Max that he had spoken to me and for her to ring me. He said: *"She will!"*

Angelika had been to Chenrezig Institute some twenty-five years before and decided to create such a centre independently of the Buddhist one. She had never forgotten the feeling of having a monastery. One evening the phone rang and a gentle voice says, *"Hello, I am Angelika."* Angelika explained how

Peter had rung her as soon as he returned to his property at Gympie and she decided to ring immediately.

On the 12th April, 2006, Angelika, Max, Peter and his wife Caroline, Paul and myself met at the beautiful, spiritual, serene environment of the retreat centre. Paul drove my car there because I was still suffering from the bacterial pneumonia and was still very weak.

Angelika said that although she was not a Buddhist, nevertheless she wanted to give the property, which is on Aboriginal sacred land, in to Trust to someone for safe keeping for the future. She wanted the land to be protected and never sold or disposed of in any way that would cause harm to the environment.

We discussed our relevant dreams and Angelika told how she had her dream since she was a small child of having a monastery. Peter had a dream that is described below, Angelika had kept her dream alive by setting land aside for the house for 'a little Lama', accommodation for Sangha and she was in the process of building rooms for the nuns alongside her house. This had already well begun before she had even heard of me, or Tenzin Zopa, or more especially – of Lama Tenzin Phunsok Rinpoche.

The first time she saw photos of Lama Tenzin Phunsok Rinpoche, she cried. She remembered him, not the physical form of Baby Rinpoche, but she remembered nevertheless. The connection was very strong. She had always known a Baby Lama.

A few weeks after this meeting, Peter rang me all excitedly and said: "*I must tell you about my dream. I have had it for the past three nights! I think it has something to do with the retreat centre at Gympie!*"

This is an extract from an email he sent to Tenzin Zopa:

'.....The dream was in full colour. I was looking down at people dressed in robes, sitting shoulder to shoulder gathered in the retreat meditation building.

Just in front of these people, at the head of the room, was a bed/sofa area just to the left and set slightly off centre. On this sofa was a young, then the boy turned into an old wise man.

This man had dreadlock type matted hair, plus a wispy type beard; he looked as though he had been living in a cave. This image was repeated two more times: boy to man – boy to man.

All was serene; people were happy and outside there came seven dancers as in a ceremonial pageant carrying large umbrella frames made of pure gold. Their clothes were made of braided gold, with some light blue like sapphires or opals stones interwoven with beads and chains of pure gold thread decorated from head to foot.

The umbrella frames were adorned with gold and ornaments of pure gold with flashes of blue opal / sapphire stones all dangling around, twirling and turning around. This was all powerful and very ceremonial, celebrating the opening of the retreat.

I am not a Buddhist.'

Due to the many and varied obstacles that plagued this great venture, the idea was eventually abandoned. Tenzin Zopa emailed me and said I was to go into strict retreat for nine months and to forget all about the centre.

There were several reasons for this sudden stop to the great dream, some of which I felt were unfair and not without prejudice, but I did as my Guru requested. Therefore, I failed to fulfill a great wish I had to honour my Guru by making short and long retreats available to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike; a place where serious students of religion could be given every opportunity to find, and connect to, *their own* Idea of the Holy; a place where serious minded people could be cared for by Buddhist monks and nuns. But most of all, a place motivated only by the wish to help all sentient beings - *all* sentient beings – birds, animals and humans - without discrimination of creed, colour or customs.

But it was not to be. Sometimes we have to be gracious to ourselves, and accept the fact that often karma is not there to do as we wish. I personally did not have the karma necessary to make this retreat centre happen at that time and so the fault lies entirely with me.

However, as the Buddha said: “Nothing is permanent!”. One day it might happen – miracles DO happen - as you may well find out.....

His Holiness recognised and confirmed the new incarnation on 17th December, 2005.

Lama was merely labelled Geshe Lama Konchog by the people of Tsum out of deep love and respect for him, but this was not his ordination name. He had been ordained by a god when he was born, and given the title of Venerable Lobsang Phunsok. Lama told me this himself in Singapore. And now he has his old name back, *Phunsok*, but this time he is recognized as being a Rinpoche (precious one).

Geshe Lama Konchog was born in 1927, he died on 15th October 2001 and was cremated on the 22nd October. His new incarnation was born at Tsum on 16th October 2002 and he was enthronement as Tulku Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche on 3rd March, 2006.

Buddhists believe that when we die we enter an intermediate state between death and rebirth called the bardo, where we will take a new incarnation within a period of seven days and these seven days are extended seven times, making a period of up to forty-nine days in which we shall take another form. However, great yogis and masters are known to be able to control their next incarnation precisely, by selecting parents and the place to be born.

I was told by Tenzin Zopa that Lama was due to be born in August, but he delayed the birth by two months so that he would be born on the day that Buddha descended from Tushita heaven. This means that this holy child was eleven months in the womb.

Nati Baratz is a film director from Israel and he and his wife Liat had been filming the events of the consecration of Lama's stupa and the gardens surrounding it and he incorporated the filming done by an Italian lady, of Lama's death and cremation. Nati made a full length film about the events and life of Geshe Lama Konchog and also his relationship with his heart-disciple, Tenzin Zopa. The film is called *The Unmistaken Child*.

I met this amazing couple after they had just arrived at Kopan monastery after riding their pushbikes down from Tibet. They rode from Tibet to Kathmandu. Two Israelis. These are the people you meet at Kopan! Neither were Buddhists, yet they were so impressed and awed by what they had seen during the consecration of the stupa and VajraYogini Park Lands, and of meeting with Tenzin Zopa, that they immediately went down to Kathmandu and hired film-making equipment.

Nati was to tell me a year or so later during Lama's enthronement, that this film was about the most beautiful love story he had ever heard. It is about the great love between the guru and the disciple. But I know that it will also be about two great Masters – both Masters in their own right.

Nati emailed me many, many photos of His Holiness with Venerable Tenzin Phunsok during his ordination, which I believe were posted on the Internet. So I was able to see the intimate details of His Holiness with Baby Lama even though I did not have the karma to be there personally. A real miracle!

ENDING RETREAT

Coming out of retreat was like a new beginning, the whole world seemed new and different and now my beloved Lama was also new and different – and now, suddenly, here I was being invited to meet him.

Coming out of retreat and being around strangers was very daunting. I began to go to the beach and walk around by myself. I had gone to the beach two or three times before, but always with my assistant Paul, whom I felt buffeted me from the energies of others. In silent, total retreat you insulate yourself from the energies of the world around you. Slowly I progressed to speaking to strangers, but it was not easy. During the two years of the great retreat I had only spoken to two people, and even then, rarely. I had prepared myself for at least another twelve months of solitude, so it came as a big

wrench to tear myself away from that inward energy and extend physically and mentally outwards.

To come out of such a long retreat would normally take quite some time to begin to integrate with people again, but I had to get it altogether within the space of a few weeks. To jump from an inward journey where all your senses and focus are directed inwardly, to mixing with the external sense-driven, emotional roller coaster ride of the outside world, was going to be tough.

I began to get a bit scared, but then remembered what the retreat was all about anyway – transformation of the mind – so I began to think a different way, a transformed way. I imagined that the world I knew before retreat was dead and gone so coming out of retreat would be like entering a whole new world. Also, the old Lama that I knew was dead, but now I was going to see him again in a whole new body. Somehow, it all seemed to make sense. *It had to if I was going to survive the future!*

And now it was time to go back to Kopan Monastery.

Going to Kopan this time was going to be completely different from the previous two times. This time was not the ending and saying goodbye to our much loved teacher and guru who had died and left us, and it was not witnessing the wonders of the *One Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa* and the *Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park* that Tenzin Zopa had created to leave as a monument to his beloved Heart Guru, his Grandfather, one of this great master of the world, this time we were all going to see a living, breathing three-year-old boy who was carrying the same mind, the consciousness, of Geshe Lama Konchog.

This young boy, now ordained as Tulku Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche was the reincarnation of Geshe Lama Konchog and we were all invited to attend his enthronement at Kopan Monastery on the 3rd March, 2006. This new body will be the vessel for the new beginnings of the body, speech and mind of Geshe Lama Konchog, the Great Master, the Great Mahasiddha, the Great Yogi. A new era of consciousness is beginning with our brand new, old friend.

Incidentally, Buddhists do not usually refer to the term ‘re-incarnation’, as this implies something solid and tangible that has taken another life, such as a little mini-me or a soul. Instead, Buddhists use the term ‘a new incarnation’ because it is only a very subtle, subtle wind that carries the mind, or the consciousness, to a new form. As this mind, or consciousness is constantly changing, it is not fixed or solid in any way as it is nothing more than a subtle, subtle wind energy. This is the difference.

BANGKOK AGAIN – OR NO!

So, two years of stillness, silence and solitude – now get over it! Snap out of it and get ready to boogie. Well, get ready for Bangkok airport anyway.

Not being too sure that I would be able to cope with Bangkok in a retreat state of mind, let alone get to the airport in Brisbane, I decided to ask my thirteen-year-old grandson Rex to come with me. As he has a mental age far older and superior to mine, I thought he would be the very best choice as an assistant/minder. And what better way to experience your first initiation into the wonders of Tibetan Buddhism, high in the Himalayas, than with your Nan.

Luckily his father (my son) and mother were happy for him to come. So happy in fact was his mother, Pia that she decided to come too. Two miracles! They had to fly from Cairns in far north Queensland, which is about a three-hour flight to Brisbane airport, so we met there.

I told them about my experiences with Bangkok airport in the past and we all laughed and thought no, that could never happen again. But *could* it?! What is it about

Bangkok? What on earth did I do there in a previous life that the karma ripens every time I go through and suffer the torments of the lost and forsaken?

Of course we were whacked when we got out of our plane for the stop over at Bangkok, but I very confidently told them to trust me because I knew where the hole in the wall was. Well, I *thought* I knew where it was, put it that way. How could you move a hotel? I could not even find the hole in the wall. We asked and asked until we found some exasperated, desperate looking fellow traveller who kindly told us that he saw the sign for the Amari down the way a bit and around the corner. Gotcha!

After lining up at the hotter-than-the-hell-realms registration counter, we finally received our paper keys and collapsed into a mangled mess into our rooms. I was careful not to make eye contact with the lady who served us, just in case she was the same one from my first encounter with the Amari Hotel. I don't think she will ever forget my face. And to this day I am trying my best to forget her's too.

Next morning the three of us had the best smorgasbord breakfast that the Amari Hotel had to offer. Rex cleaned up every morsel of the food offerings that were laid out so sumptuously and, I do believe, he probably would still be there but for the fact that we had to get to the plane before it took off.

With full tummies, we slowly meandered down to face the barrage of moving mankind leaving ourselves about half an hour spare that we thought would be plenty of time. We were feeling quite calm about this, because when we left the airport at Brisbane, the person who checked us out told us we would not have to go through the line up at Bangkok because we were already inside the airport. Don't believe people who are not in uniforms! Each one of us distinctly heard this and so we walked blithely through the queues that went for miles and miles in one agitated mass of moving people with suitcases on wheels and we tried to pass through the next queue that lead into the airport proper.

"Where is your boarding pass?" Nope, we did not have one.

When we tried to explain to the official – in a uniform – that we were told we did not need to get in the queue, he said: *"Oh, yes you do! You have to check in your luggage and yourself before you go any further."*

"But we don't have any time now –our plane leaves in 10 minutes!"

"Sorry! But you have to go through the check in just like everybody else!"

Well, the three of us all looked at each other and decided silently that it was time to have a blue fit. Blue fits were specifically designed for airports. So we threw one real wobbly one, en masse. We all had ashen faces, teary eyes and wailed. We must have looked pathetic there is no doubt so the uniform had no choice but to melt. He told us to go along with him while he personally straightened out our papers and then he escorted us to the door that led to our plane. There he even waved us goodbye. Again, a uniform came to the rescue.

When we arrived at the plane, breathless from running, the hostess curtly explained that the plane had been held up for us and that she was not too happy about it. No doubt the uniform had contacted the plane and told them that three Aussie nutters were on their way and as he didn't want the responsibility of dealing with them, they should hold up the plane until they were all safely onboard. *And out of Bangkok!!!*

We slunk silently into our seats and sat with our knees touching our chins, like everybody else, and wondered how on earth everyone on the plane looked so calm and relaxed. Did their travel agents give them road maps for getting from point A to point Z at Bangkok airport?

However - we were not the only ones! Aha aha! Some other poor, lost demented soul with Bangkok problems was about to arrive too. After we sat down and I had received a loud scolding from the lady behind for putting my seat back and nearly knocking out her false teeth, the Captain announced that we were still waiting for a man who had lost

his passport. He thought that he may have put it in his luggage by accident and now they were dragging his bag off the plane to search for it. I will bet anything that a kindly uniform was doing that. Anyway, eventually this poor man came on board with a red face and wobbly legs and sat down exactly in the cringing manner that we had done. We tried to look at him sympathetically and knowingly, but what can you do.

These things happen, it is true. But how can it happen *every time*! But at least we are not the only ones it happens to – and somehow that is a comforting thought.

Next stop, Kathmandu.

OH, NANA!

Again we were met at the airport by the Kopan monks in their whoopy-do four wheel drive car who drove us through Kathmandu, through the villages and up the winding dirt road that leads to my beloved Kopan Monastery and my even more beloved Abbot, Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup, Tenzin Zopa, Lama Phuntsok Rinpoche, beloved monks and nuns, beloved Lama's Pink House, beloved flowers, trees, stones and proper toilets. All beloved and the cause for nothing but bliss and more bliss!

But Pia imputed other emotions on the whole of Kathmandu in situ, and they were not connected in way with the word 'bliss'. She comes from Columbia in South America and she thought that she had seen it all until she saw what Kathmandu had to offer, that is. Her eyes were wider than a dinner plate and all she could do was gape and groan.

However, before the arrival at Kopan, we had one more 'encounter' at the Kathmandu airport. I was home again and it was all so familiar and I felt happy. So happy in fact, that I forgot to get in the queue for the check out on leaving the Kathmandu airport. I just nonchalantly wandered through the gates grinning like a Cheshire cat on Cloud Number Nine, completely not noticing everybody else patiently waiting for their turn to be checked through the gates.

After wandering around for a while, I realized Pia and Rex were not with me. As I spun around to look for them, thinking *they* were lost, I came face to face with red-faced Rex who scoldingly grunted: "***Nana, you went right through the check out! How embarrassing!***"

Obviously nobody took any notice of a geriatric nun grinning from ear to ear, bypassing army uniforms and queues. No doubt they surmised that I was in the latter stages of dementia, so better let her do her own thing and not provoke her. Obviously I did not look like I had a bazooka or something banned, or alive, under my zen (shawl). But poor Rex was properly miffed – he is related to me! Big embarrassment. I did not notice that either, I was just happy.

Rex enjoyed everything that he saw in and around Kathmandu and remained cool, calm and collected, no matter what. In fact, when he got back to Australia, he wrote a short essay for his school about his trip, which he did all by himself based on what he saw and felt at Kopan Monastery. In fact, here it is, completely unaltered:

NEPAL - by Rex Greenleaf (13 years old)

Our trip started off in Cairns at about ten at night. We went to the Cairns airport where we got on the plane to Brisbane. When we got there we found our friend waiting for us at the airport. We went back to her place and went straight to sleep. In the morning we went to the Brisbane International airport, just as I was getting out of the car I saw my Nana had also just got out of a car at the same time. It wasn't that hard to find her because she was dressed in full Buddhist robes that are maroon and yellow and are very easy to see when the rest of the people that are standing there are

wearing normal clothes. After we had caught up on the last three years of Nana's life we waited around the airport for the plane to come.

The whole reason we were going on the trip to Nepal was because my Nana had been a Buddhist for the last twenty-six years of her life and had very strong connections with many holy people in Nepal. Her strongest connection was with a man called Lama Konchog. He had been Nana's guru for most of her life and he had sadly passed away about four years ago. All Buddhists believe in reincarnation and our trip was to see the new incarnation of Lama Konchog.

Our plane finally got in and we boarded the Thai Airways plane as soon as we could. The flight wasn't that bad but the only thing that was bad was that it went for over nine hours. When we got to Bangkok we had to find the Amari Hotel, because we had a stop over. It took us about an hour of yelling at people that didn't speak English asking how to get there and then when we did, we found that we needed to wait another hour in the line just to get the key to the room. After all that we finally got to our room. It was a nice little room that had three beds and a bathroom and not much else. We immediately went to sleep because it was about eleven o'clock at night.

In the morning we went and got a huge buffet breakfast in the hotel and sat down until our flight was ready to board. Seeing as my Nana had been in the Amari before and had no trouble getting in and out of it and seeing as it was connected to the airport we thought we would leave ourselves about an hour to get in to the airport. So when we went in we thought that we didn't need to go through customs so we went past that line, but in the next line we found that we did need to go through because the rules had changed. So after more yelling at people and convincing them that we would miss our plane to Kathmandu they got what we needed and ran us to the other side of the airport just in time to be the last ones on the plane. It was all smooth sailing, or flying, from there to Kathmandu. When we got to Kathmandu we found about half a dozen monks waiting to take us, and a few other people, up to the monastery. As soon as we got there Nana wanted to go talk to a very high lama, Lama Lhundrup Khenrinpoche who was the Abbot of Kopan Monastery.

Khenrinpoche Lama Lhundrup wasn't there when we first got there so we went and put all our gear into our rooms. Ours was very cosy and it had a great view of Kathmandu Valley. Nana, mum and I went to see if Lama Lhundrup was there and this time he was. We went to talk to him. When we got there we had to take off our shoes to go into his room. We entered and he was very nice the whole time we were there. My Nana had a long talk with him about many different things. He was always being nice and offering us things like tea and biscuits. We all went back to our rooms and had a rest for the rest of the day.

For the next couple of days we stayed at the monastery and just relaxed. A few days later a monk called Tenzin Zopa arrived at the monastery. Tenzin Zopa was the person that cared for Lama Konchog when he was alive and now he is the person that cares for Tenzin Phuntsok, the reincarnation of Lama Konchog. He is also Nana's Guru. We went to his house and on the way there we had to go up a set of stairs and coincidentally Tenzin Zopa and the 'Little Lama' as we nicknamed him, were coming down the stairs. They were in a hurry and they couldn't stop and talk. We said a quick hello and offered a khata to Little Lama. A khata is a piece of silk that you offer to a special person, they then bless it and put it over your head. For the next few days we just read our books and ate the food that was at the monastery. On one day it was the Tibetan New Year, this was when the celebrations really started for the enthronement.

During the enthronement there were many pujas. A puja is a ceremony which can have chanting and readings. There were many of these along with blessed foods and

offerings. The next day many people went on a pilgrimage to a place that had a huge golden statue of the Buddha. There were many pilgrimages for the next few days, the second one was to a big monastery that had lots of prayer wheels and these are wheels that when you spin them they give you good Karma. There were also many monkeys there. The next pilgrimage was to a place that one of the many incarnations of the Buddha offered his body to a tigress and her cubs because the tigress was going to eat her cubs.

All the places that we went to were very significant to the Buddhist people because they had a lot of meaning in them. A couple of days after that we went to a stupa called Boudenath, a stupa is a statue that holds relics of very holy beings. This stupa was the biggest stupa in the world and it held the relics of four brothers that had built a part of the stupa. The four brothers' mother had built most of it but they finished the top off after she had died.

During all this time we had been going down to Tenzin Zopa's house a lot of the time and visiting him and Little Lama. He was so kind and kept offering us food and lollies. One time Little Lama had a cushion that had a small motor in it and when you pushed it, it would vibrate the whole cushion. Little Lama and I had a good time playing with that and even though he didn't speak English and I didn't speak Tibetan we still played and had a good time together.

After this wonderful time and meeting friends for life, it was time to go back to normal life. When we got home, we had a category five cyclone hit our town.

MEETING LAMA PHUNTSOK RINPOCHE

As soon as we had found our accommodation at Kopan Monastery and sorted out our things, Pia, Rex and I met up to go up to The Great Abbot, Lama Lhundrup to pay our respects.

There are many steps to walk up to the offices and accommodation quarters of The Abbot, so I was concentrating on taking one painful, breathless step after another. Also, there were herds of people both going up and going down these steps and I was terrified I would fall and break my neck.

Suddenly Rex turned around and said: “**NANA!**” I looked up, and there on the same step as I was on, was Beloved Guru Brother holding this amazing baby. Both of them were grinning from ear to ear. Before I could get my wits into somewhat of a workable order, this baby leans out from Tenzin Zopa's arms and taps his forehead on mine. Again we had bumped foreheads just as before. I looked into his precious little face and instantly my mind went back to the day in Singapore when Lama so powerfully and lovingly bumped noses and I got a holy bruise. The intensity was exactly the same. Unmistakeable.

Rex yelled: “**NANA! THE KHATA!**”

The Holy Baby bent his head down and I pulled out the khata from my bag, which thankfully, I found in one manic grab – and clumsily offered it. With tiny hands, he placed it around my neck. Before I could embarrass myself and everybody else around with indecipherable mutterings of incomprehensible, meaningless emotional babble, they were gone.

I *knew* I had brought Rex along for a good purpose. I would probably still be standing on that step in a blissed out stupor if Rex had not told me what to do. These New Age children for want of a better word, know exactly what to do and when to do it – especially to Nanas who don't.

PILGRIMIGE

After we had settled in at Kopan Monastery and made friends with all and sundry, Tenzin Zopa had arranged and offered, three days of pilgrimages. The first day we were taken to the most holy stupas of Boudhanath and Svoyambuhnath. The second day we went to the holy places of Pharping, Guru Rinpoche's cave, Tara temple and the Vajra Yogini Temple. The third day we went to the place where Shakyamuni in a previous life offered his body to the mother tiger and her cubs.

We left on these pilgrimages by buses that arrived at Kopan along with the army who escorted us with guns and smiling faces. Strange mix, but I felt safe with them because you guessed it – they had uniforms on! Being an Aussie and therefore blithely ignorant of such dangers as might necessitate an army escort, I thought the whole thing was a bit of a giggle.

These pilgrimages around the holy places of Kathmandu Valley and way, way up the Himalayan Mountains were very special to everyone there, because we were accompanied by a very special Holy Baby. Tenzin Phunsok Rinpoche came along wrapped securely in Tenzin Zopa's arms and so we were given every opportunity to see Lama Konchog in a new form, in action. His mannerisms were exactly as I had remembered of Lama Konchog.

We were given the opportunity to not only be witness to this Holy Baby, but also to be able to make pilgrimage deep within our own hearts and combine the old and new forms of this amazing consciousness. And for me, this was the true pilgrimage.

DANGERS

You would have thought that by now I would have taken some notice of what Lama had been warning about Kathmandu and thereby taking every precaution, but not so. He had always prevented me going to Kopan when he was alive and then when I did get to go, I ended up in the Kathmandu hospital with chest pain and nearly had by-pass surgery. Well, some tricks you can teach to old dogs, and some you can't.

Last time I was tempted to go on these very same pilgrimages during the time of the consecration of Lama's stupa, I got whacked in the chest as a warning to not leave the safety of Kopan Monastery. It was not that I was prevented from going on the pilgrimages per se, it was to prevent the karmic weaknesses in my chest from ripening from breathing polluted air. In other words, I knew I should have stayed within the safety of Kopan Monastery and not walked around where the pollution was very bad and so give cause for chest infections to take hold. Very logical when you think about it, but I have never been known for logical reasoning when there is excitement to be had.

Illness is a major cause for concern to everybody at Kopan, because Kathmandu is one of the most polluted cities in the world and any sort of illness is just one breath away. If you do get seriously ill, you have to be evacuated to Bangkok. Kopan is clean and safe and there is no need to move around a lot, whereas walking around the environs of Kathmandu is definitely only for those with exceptionally good karma.

This knowledge would have been enough for most people to not tempt fate again, especially when most people had felt their heart guru had done everything possible last time to prevent it - but not me. I still wanted to go with the others and have a you-beaut time. Especially since I would be going with my two most favourite people in the world - as well as my two most favourite Gurus in this world. How could anybody resist?

SVOYAMBULNATH AND BOUDHANATH STUPAS

The first day's pilgrimage was a whole day walking around the most holy stupas of Boudhanath and Svoyambuhnath in Kathmandu Valley. The incredibly fortunate karma

just to be able to do this is unbelievable, and the benefits from doing this pilgrimage are just too numerous to be understandable.

But Pia and I only just survived.

We walked around and around Kathmandu for the whole day with all the Asian people who had come to Kopan for the enthronement, until I could walk no more. By late afternoon I had lost contact with Pia, Rex was off walking with the monks somewhere and I was covered in grime and pollution. And there was not one square inch that did not hurt. And my chest rattled.

I was all ready to think not too good thoughts about pilgrimage, and had already decided it was only for the fit and fabulous, when Thubten Lhundrup, Tenzin Zopa's younger brother came up to me. He must have seen me struggling and asked if I needed to go to the bus. I thanked him (but did not hug him!) and said "*Oh, god yes!*" What I did not realize was that he literally meant just that – 'go to the bus'. He drove me to the place where the bus was sitting, and there I sat for hours and hours, alone in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of down-town Kathmandu, with dust and pollution belching in through every crack and cranny of the bus. But it was better than walking.

Then I started to worry about Pia and how she was faring. I knew she would be utterly exhausted and I also knew she was not Kathmandu compatible. As it happened, she had bravely walked on and on, but by this time she had lost track of Rex, who was on a pilgrimage of his own, so she was alone, even though she was still with our group.

Rex loved it all. The pollution did not bother him, the holy sites, the walking, the monkeys, the monks, Baby Lama Tenzin Phunsok, Tenzin Zopa – he loved the lot! He had made friends with the monks and he felt that he was simply one of them.

When everyone returned to the bus it was nighttime and then they decided to continue on to Boudenath to walk around the stupa. Pia and I looked at each other in total horror, distress and exhaustion. We both looked like lost zombies from the planet Uranus, but Rex was firing on all six cylinders and would not be stopped. How could you stop someone who was in his very element? So Pia and I decided to get a taxi and go home to our nice clean beds at Kopan.

As Rex wanted to continue on, I found one of the monks from Kopan and asked him to keep an eye on him, so I knew he would be safe with his Kopan Sanghe family.

Pia and I melted into the distance as fast as our taxi would take us.

Pia had a shower and went to bed, but I waited at the office of Kopan for Rex's bus to get back, just to make sure he was back safe and sound. But of course he was! I asked him if he was all right and the answer was: "*NANA!*" in an undulating voice of utter exasperation that only a thirteen year old can make. He was obviously, again, embarrassed that his Nana was waiting for him.

I do not know what it is, the Asian people looked as fresh when they got off the bus at the end of the day, as they did when they got on. They had walked twice as far as I had, maybe more, yet they were smiling and looked so gentle and happy. I looked and felt like I had walked across the Sahara desert single handedly after all help had run away with the water bottles.

This Nana takes out the car to go to the local shops, which are about a three minute walk away. Maybe that has something to do with it.

PHARPING

The next day the buses again came to take us on pilgrimage and this time we were all going to a place very high up the Himalayas called Pharping, escorted by the army. Here we would experience the Temple of Tara, Guru Rinpoche's cave and the Temple of Vajra Yogini all of which were situated on a very remote and high mountain.

This could not be missed, so we took a deep breath and joined in the excitement and wonderment along with all the Asian students and disciples from Kopan, and climbed on board the bus. Again, Tenzin Zopa had so graciously and generously offered us all this incredible opportunity.

Pia and I sat next to each other and Rex sat in front of us happily talking to his new found friends from Asia. The woman over the isle from us offered to do acupuncture for anyone who wanted it. To my horror, Pia agreed and went and sat next to the woman who inserted needles into her legs. She believed that the acupuncture would make her feel better and even though I tried to dissuade her, she chose to have it done.

When we got out of the bus at a very high altitude, Pia was much worse than when she got on, and before the acupuncture! She was completely listless. I also did not feel so hot as I was having more and more difficulty breathing with a rattling chest. But my main concern was for Pia as she really did not look good at all.

We alighted from the bus and began to walk vertically up the side of a high mountain peak from where, I swear, you could see my house in Australia. We all converged at the entrance to Tara's cave and tried to fit into the narrow space at the entrance without falling down the side of the mountain. We were all squashed in a bunch, with some taking their shoes off and others scrambling around on all fours trying to find theirs to put them on.

It was in the midst of all this, that we lost Pia.

Rex and I were totally absorbed in what was happening around and within us, and I was especially focused on breathing the diminishing supply of oxygen at this level, that we both just continued on with the rest of the group thinking Pia was with us somewhere. We clambered further up the mountain along with everybody else and explored Guru Rinpoche's cave and then further on, the VajraYogini's Temple. Everyone was within their own space inside their heart and so we just walked together in silence and wonder. We knew how privileged we were to even *be* in such holy surroundings.

Suddenly we discovered that Pia was missing. We asked some of our group and someone said that she had been seen climbing further up the mountain. Rex took off to find his mother and to make a long, terrifying tale short, we eventually relocated and connected again. By this time Pia had had enough, and I think, really wanted to go home to Australia as fast as any jet plane could take her.

I will add here that there were two American nuns, Venerables Tsepel and Chonyi, who had been studying at Chenrezig Institute, who also accompanied us on these pilgrimages in the buses. They sat quietly, demurely and perfectly on the bus and looked every inch what proper nuns should look like at all times. They did not get sick, or tired, or cranky, or had trouble breathing with rattling chests. If they did, they did not show it. I do try, it's just so difficult in my case to be perfect.

Late that night we arrived back to Kopan safely, filled to the brim with new found wonders and experiences that will change our perception of the world and everything it has to offer, forever. Most especially I was so grateful that Rex, at such a tender age, was able to have his mind transformed in such a way that these experiences will benefit him in his future ahead.

Going on pilgrimages to these holy sites where yogis actually practised what we can only theorize and imagine, leaves an imprint on your consciousness that is hard to describe. These great yogis understood and practiced on a level of reality, wisdom and method that is beyond the comprehension of most others who live on the same planet. Yet they leave an imprint, a footprint of their energy that can be picked up by those fortunate enough to be so blessed as to be in their presence.

Pilgrimages to holy places are the experiences of a lifetime that leave an imprint on the mind that affects lifetimes to come.

THE PLACE WHERE BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI IN A PREVIOUS LIFE FORM
GAVE HIS BODY TO A MOTHER TIGER AND HER FIVE CUBS.

The next day we again took a deep breath and climbed on to the bus that would take us to the place where Shakyamuni, in a previous life and form, offered his body to a mother tiger and her five cubs who were starving. This pilgrimage was very, very high up in the Himalayas.

And this time I could hear Lama saying “No!”, but I was going anyway. Pia had decided that enough was enough. She had not recouped her energy after experiencing Kathmandu and its delights, and then Pharping with its wonders, so she decided to stay at Kopan and read a book.

I climbed in to the bus at Kopan Monastery with everybody else and then I heard Lama saying “**NO!**” I sat there for a while trying to separate my own mind from his by thinking that it was just me – but no, I really could hear Lama deep in my heart; I knew I had to get off the bus. So I apologised to everyone and told them to have a great day.

I told Rex to sit with David Jian who comes from Singapore and to stay with him. I knew that he would be safe with him and they both looked so happy sitting together in the front seat chatting away like old mates.

So I got off the bus and sat on a bench and watched them all sitting so happily with even happier expectation of the great day’s events. Nobody seemed tired or the least bit weary from the days before. And I wanted to go too.

I saw Lama Tenzin Phunsok Rinpoche get into a car with Great Lama Lhundrup and their car was going to follow the bus. What a great day everybody was going to have. All of this thinking became just too much and anyway, how could I really be sure that I really did hear Lama, maybe I just imagined it! Yeah, that’s it, I only imagined it. Nothing fatal had happened to me on the previous two days, so back on the bus I jump in one foul swoop. I sat down grinning and not looking at the faces turned with puzzled expressions towards me. But again I distinctly heard, or felt, Lama saying, “**No!**”

So I apologized once again, in a somewhat muffled voice, to everyone and got off. Or rather, I cringed off. I felt so stupid, getting on and then getting off. Rex paid no attention whatsoever to the antics of his Nana and did his best not to notice. I am sure he denies any hereditary connection with me after this trip to Kathmandu. Anyway, he and David just continued to chat away like old friends as if nothing was happening.

Again I sat on the bench and watched everybody in the bus – and then when I saw Tenzin Zopa get on the bus, that was it! I forgot everything, even Lama’s **NO**. Grasping attachment took hold and I ran to the bus and scrambled up the steps of the bus as fast as my fat little legs would scramble, before I had time to think about it. “*I am coming too!*” I shouted and everyone clapped, so I sat down two rows behind Rex and David and gloated. I was feeling very good about myself for striking it lucky and being on the same bus as my Guru Brother.

Then again I heard, “**NO!!**” Very loudly, very clearly and very wrathfully. So I got up from my seat, and said: “*I am sorry, but I had better not come as there may be problems with my health going to that altitude and I do not want to cause any problems for you all. I am very sorry. Thank you. Have a great day*”.

Tenzin Zopa grabbed me by the arm and said: “**Of course you are coming! What better place to die than going on pilgrimage to this great place. Sit down here and I will sit next to you!**”

Good golly, miss molly! My heart almost jumped clean out of my chest. Not only did Guru Brother *speak* to me, but he said he would *sit next to me!* How could I refuse? **WOULD YOU?** So I sat! Everyone had the giggles. My ‘me’ mind was in absolute

confusion, but my ‘heart’ mind did not care one bit. But I knew that the Buddha mind within knew better.

At the back of my mind I did think, ‘*Oh heck! I have one guru telling me to do one thing and another saying to do the very opposite and yet another one sitting in a car behind.* And just to thicken the plot a bit, the one sitting in the car and the one inside my head are one and the same, only one is dead! Aaahhh! Sometimes I feel that it must be nice to feel ‘normal’.

‘*Do what you are told*’ I thought ‘*and don’t make a fuss.* But who do I obey? What to do to please both gurus? I really, really wanted to go with the others on the bus, so I threw caution to the wind and shut my ears to Lama’s advice. I knew deep down I was going against what I knew I should not do; I *knew I was turning my back to Lama!*

The bus took off and we went hurtling down the bumpy dirt road that leads to Boudenath where Tenzin Zopa’s Aunt, Venerable Chodron lives, along with the Nepalese Army afore and aft.

Venerable Chodron jumped on the bus escorted by Tenzin Zopa who so lovingly sat her next to me. Bliss and joy and everything all rolled into one. Not only was I sitting next to Ani Chodron, but in the seats directly opposite were Tenzin Phunsok’s mother and father with their small baby. I was in the midst of the Tsumpas and it felt so natural. I was soooooo happy. What could possibly go wrong? This is going to be great. How could anything possibly happen at Pharping? *See, Lama, you were wrong!* Ooh!

I have explained previously that I hear Lama deep in my heart and not really as a human voice. No doubt most of us have had a sixth sense about something, so I presume that wherever that sixth sense comes from, is where Lama sends his messages – powerfully and unmistakably.

Over the years I have learned to separate my scatty mind from Lama’s enlightened mind and that is the only explanation I can give on what I ‘hear’.

I do not have words wise enough to be able to convey exactly what it is that I hear from Lama, it is very clear-cut and yet it is not anything tangible like a voice. Wherever it comes from, or whatever it is, I definitely get the message loud and clear. And I *know* that it is Lama speaking and that I *should listen*, but I do have a choice.

I think most of us have heard a hidden voice in our hearts at one time or another. Whether we fob it off with labels such as hallucinations or delusions at worst, or label it positively as conscience, insight, buddha nature, god, angels and so on, is our choice. But to be brave enough to act on that advice comes as a result of how we have been conditioned by our understanding, and faith in, the holy. This is just my thought. Who knows.

BODGIES ON THE ROAD

After we had left Kathmandu far below and were winding steeply up the dirt Himalayan mountain road, suddenly the bus stopped and several men came on board. They stared at all of us and started talking to the driver. Nobody seemed too fluffed at this and with everything else that was happening around us, I do not think anybody paid too much attention. But maybe they did! Maybe it was just that I do not know. I was simply deliriously happy to be sitting on the bus in the first place.

After some time, Tenzin Zopa walked down the middle of the bus and handed over a big bag to the man. I leave it at that because I have no idea about what happened and my mind tends to run away with me if I think there is a microspec of danger in it. Maybe they were Maoists, maybe they were just locals, maybe they were Buddhas -I cannot say, but after this, we set merrily on our way again.

I did get a bit spooked later on when I thought about it. After we set off again I got a bit worried about Rex. How would I explain to his mother and father that someone had snatched their son off the bus, on the top of the Himalayan Mountains, somewhere between here and nowhere. No, not going down that road.

Eventually the bus stopped and we all got out. We were very, very high and the view was spectacular to say the very least and very, very dusty. In fact it was blowing a force one pollution gale. Pollution was in full swing even at this height and we were not only covered with it on our outside, but there must have been a two-inch coating of it on our insides as well. The dust was blowing all around so we put whatever we had over our mouths and noses. But because we needed to talk, well, me anyway, as well as carry things, I forgot to cover mine most of the time.

We walked and climbed higher and higher along narrow foot-worn ridges and pathways. Rex said: "*Nana, lean on me!*" He is very tall and very strong. He and his father have a circus in far north Queensland called the Cane Toad Circus where they perform balancing acts and the like, so he is very fit. So lean on him, I did. Half way up a particularly high part, where we were climbing up and down ancient, dirt trodden steps that took us along a spectacular and breathtaking ridge, he asked if he could change arms. This was the first and only indication that he was tiring.

If it had not been for Rex, I would have undoubtedly fallen off the track and landed back in the Kathmandu Valley in seconds, or else, I very well could still be sitting on a step somewhere high on the Himalayas, near the god realm.

The winding, steep path meandered across the top of several incredibly high peaks until we came to the place where the Buddha in another incarnation and time, offered his body to a mother tiger and her cubs that were starving. This cave was very tiny and we made light offerings inside it, one by one. I took a candle and made an offering of behalf of Geshe Lama Konchog who I was sure was with us all, not only in the form of Baby Rinpoche, but in each of our hearts as well.

This cave was situated on the very top of the mountain and you could see forever. While we were standing near the cave at this holy spot, I wondered up to Great Lama Lhundrup and asked him about the special young monk who I had seen sitting alone on the very edge of the mountain meditating. He was totally absorbed in meditation. This surprised me for someone of his young years; he looked like an old experienced yogi. I wanted to go and sit next to him but there were other high lamas watching him from a distance, so I just passed by without disturbing him.

We get so caught up with our own importance and self-righteousness in the western world and we think that we have equal status with everybody around us. We are conditioned to think that way. It is not until you meet an extraordinary being such as the Lamas I have been speaking about, and in particular, this small boy, that you really realize your own insignificance in the scheme of things. So much we do not know and yet, we do realize there are others who are beyond perception and imputation – they just **are**. We only *think* we **are**. And what is more, most of us don't even have a clue what '**are**' is.

I walked up to the Great Lama Lhundrup and asked him who this young monk was, and he said: "*He is Venerable Losang Rigzin Rinpoche and he was Geshe Lama Konchog's best friend in the past life. Now they both have new incarnations and they are still best friends*" Great Lama further said, "*He was the Great Mahasiddha Rigzin Wangchuk from Tsum in the past life, so why don't you go and talk to him and ask questions?*"

But I could not. For the first time in my life, I could not ask any questions. There are some things that you desperately want to do, but deep down you know you are not of the calibre to do the asking, and this was one such time. But maybe one day I will again have the opportunity to talk with this most precious young Rinpoche, because causes

and conditions constantly change and somehow, I may create enough positive merit to have such a chance.

This was our last pilgrimage and when we got home late that night we were all totally exhausted and exhilarated. How fortunate to be able to wander around these amazing places where such extraordinary and holy people lived and practiced. How fortunate to have been in such esteemed company. We were in the very air of miracles. Just to breathe that air was more than a privilege, even if it was polluted.

For me, however, breathing was becoming more and more of a struggle. And I had a growing pain in my chest that just did not seem right. The rattling had stopped and it was replaced by glued-up lungs.

OM HOSPITAL

After a few days back at Kopan I felt a bit weak and just put it down to too much exercise and excitement for an old chook. I had brought several types of antibiotics with me to counteract most things, but because I was a lot sicker than I thought I was, I forgot all about them. One thing you do not do in Nepal, is get sick. The next thing you do not do, is forget your medication in case you do.

Venerable Sanghe, the assistant nurse at the medical clinic came to see me and apparently I had a quite high fever. He came several times for several days. These days were a blur and I now know that I was delirious.

PHOTO 36. VENERABLE SANGHE THE NURSE AT KOPAN CLINIC. HE IS HE ONE ON THE LEFT. IN THE KOPAN CAFÉ.



One morning I woke up and I knew I was very ill and I was coughing up blood. I staggered over to where Rex and Pia were and asked them to go and get Sanghe. He came, took one look at me and called the car to take me to the hospital in Kathmandu. I had bacterial pneumonia and by this time I was coughing up blood by the gallons and in and out of consciousness. I did, however, feel extremely peaceful and calm.

During all this drama, one night before I left for the hospital, I felt sure that Tenzin Zopa had been sitting on the bed talking to me. I told Rex about this the next morning, but he said: *“No Nanna, you imagined it. You were out of your head!”* So I forgot about it as fast as I could. However, when I arrived back to Kopan from the hospital, Tenzin Zopa told me, *“I came to your room to see you a few nights ago to ask you to join Lama Zopa Rinpoche and myself to go to Tsum. We went in a helicopter. You were not making any sense, you just muttered meaningless words with your eyes shut!”*

Can you believe it! I would have given away one of my spoiled brats (dog or cat!) plus an eye tooth for such an opportunity, but no, it was not to be. I did not tell Tenzin Zopa that I was desperately ill and had been delirious for three days, or that I went to hospital because he had more than enough worry dealing with all the carrying-ons at Kopan for the enthronement. He was run off his feet doing a million things at once and as well as this, he was introducing Lama Phuntsok Rinpoche to everyone. Why on earth would I want to go to him and say, *“I’m crook!”* I was just plain happy to be still alive. This really and truly was a miracle.

I was happy in the hospital where I had two Kopan monks who stayed by my side twenty-four hours a day. In the Kathmandu hospital you must take someone who will fetch your scripts from the chemist and get your meals from the canteen. If you are alone I do not know what happens. Anyway, I did not have to find out. I was in the Om Hospital for six days diagnosed with bacterial pneumonia and well and truly crook (sick) by anyone’s standard. Eventually however, I got well enough to stay at Kopan until it was time to go home as we had planned. It did, however take almost three years of antibiotics to have my lungs cleared, and then only by an operation.

No doubt I contracted this disease during the trips that were so high up the mountains and so dusty and polluted. With bung lungs anyway, what you expect? Whatever the cause, the real cause was that the karma ripened for this to happen, and I am absolutely sure that Lama tried his very best to prevent it. But then again, what would I know. Whatever protection I had, had worked because survive to live another day, I have.

Poor Lama Konchog, he must spend most of his time in some Pure Lands somewhere looking back over his shoulder at what that crazy western old-age pensioner woman is getting up to now. I really feel that. Ha, ha! One consoling thought is though, probably the Lord of the Hell Realms does not want me either. *Yet!*

One thing I have learned from these close encounters with the bardo while in Kopan, is that there is no point in worrying; either you are going to get better, so what is the point of worrying, or you are going to die and then there is absolutely nothing you can do about it, so why worry? Anyway, I thought what better place to kark (die) it than to be near Lama’s stupa. What I do know for sure is, that it was only due to the extreme kindness of Lama that I not only survived, but got better as well. Incredible miracle!

I had ignored Lama’s warnings and I went where no old granny with arthritis, bung lungs and a crook heart should ever go, but yet I was protected. And my happy mind got happier. But you would wonder wouldn’t you. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind that Lama forbade me to go to Kopan while he was alive because he could see things would be sticky for me, yet when he died, I went. Not only that, I went on pilgrimages even though I could clearly hear him saying not to go.

Well, sometimes you just have to take the bit between your teeth and run with it, don’t you? Who knows, next life we may not have the karma to experience the wonders of

this world. Or maybe we will not have a body that allows us the freedom to experience those wonders. Sometimes you have to be brave and step out of your comfort zone and take your chances, otherwise why bother breathing in and out? Well, that is my philosophy anyway – dare to be brave. As I see it, we take our chances every time we breathe in expecting that we will be able to breathe out. That in itself is a big gamble, because one of these days we won't be able to breathe in anymore – and we never know when that time will ripen! So why not live on the edge and experience everything this wonderful world has to offer, while we can still breathe in and out without too much trouble. .

ENTHRONEMENT

This great event will be covered in detail in videos and proper books that will do it due justice and respect. I can only offer a few details that touched my heart personally.

On the 3rd March, 2006 the gumpa was filled to overflowing. We all sat squashed up against each other with happy, happy minds. The people from Tsum and their children, Lamas, Rinpoches, monks and nuns from all around the world, Asians, Europeans and even a few Aussies - we were one big family.

The interior of Kopan gumpa was filled with golden hazy glows from the butter lamps and ancient smelling incense wafted up smoke and filled the gumpa with exquisite sensual pleasures that titillated our nose, ears and eyes. The intense feeling was of a raised sense of consciousness akin to what I would think, would be like being in a Pure Land. Truly, the overall affect of the sounds, smells and sights was undoubtedly, offerings to our body, speech and mind. The atmosphere was of another time, of another world. It surely was old Tibet. Everyone's mood was light and filled with excitement and the gumpa was filled with noisy chatter, it was not quiet and sombre, we were all in space of welcomed familiarity – somehow.

Lama Phuntsok Rinpoche was perched with his chubby cheeks smiling at everyone and wriggling around talking and making jokes. He had a bad cold and his nose was running. Tenzin Zopa stood either behind him, or knelt below him on the floor and whenever he tried to wipe Rinpoche's little nose, Rinpoche would push Tenzin Zopa's hand away and shout something I equated to: “**NO!**”

Nati Baratz has made a full length film about these events, called *The Unmistaken Child*, so you will be able to see this for yourselves.

IS TULKU TENZIN PHUNTSOK RINPOCHE – GESHE LAMA KONCHOG?

Without doubt, no matter what name or label he is given he is the strongest, cutest, most powerful three year old I have ever seen. He had such an air of authority that extended to everybody and everything around him. We were all smitten from first sight. You just could not take your eyes off him.

‘*He is unmistakably the new incarnation of Geshe Lama Konchog*’ are the words of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama and yet how do we, who live in a different world, know for sure? Maybe from reading these examples, you can decide for yourself:

THE PINK HOUSE

One afternoon, Pia, Rex and I went down to the pink house, which by now had been transformed by Tenzin Zopa to make it even more beautiful, to see Rinpoche and give him the gifts that people from Australia had offered.

This house is a real ‘home’ in every sense of the word. It is home and refuge to Tenzin Zopa and to Rinpoche. It is filled with their family from Tsum. Inside this

home were: Venerable Chodron, who is Tenzin Zopa's Aunt, Tenzin Zopa's sister and brothers, Little Rinpoche's mother and father and baby siblings, as well as other Tsum-pas (Tsum-pas are people from Tsum). These loving people keep a ready food supply on the boil constantly for whenever Tenzin Zopa drops in, and when he has the time to sit down and eat something, they put it in front of him. He never stops running.

It is an extremely relaxed and happy household, yet when Tenzin Zopa is there it has a sense of very strict, focused and powerful awareness. He is in absolute control and he is as powerful as Lama ever was. He is a true Kadampa Master.

Venerable Chodron, Tenzin Zopa's aunt, took care of Lama during his time living in the cave at Tsum. She would have wonderful tales to tell, if only *that* book can happen! This special nun is a Tsum-pa and has an indescribable energy that is very deep and profound. Obviously Lama saw this, or maybe she acquired it from looking after him, who knows, but have it she does.

I am continually in awe of her when I am in her presence, even though I feel strongly that we are sisters. Who would know? All I can say to describe the pink house at Kopan Monastery, is that it is a special meeting place of the Tsum family – no matter where on the planet you have had the karma to be born. It is home.

BLUE BAG

After Tenzin Zopa had rung that day so long ago to say that the new incarnation had been 100% unmistakably identified as being the consciousness of Lama, and for me to end the retreat, I began to think, and to question, and to doubt. Intellectually we Buddhists understand about reincarnation. Intellectually we are very, very sure that it really happens. And I was too – until Tenzin Zopa told me this news. But in reality, how would I *really* know, with absolute surety, that this new baby was my heart guru Geshe Lama Konchog? How could my mind accept two versions? Usually my eyes tell me a story and I believe what they tell me. But how can you trust your intuitive intellect when your eyes refute what you considered to be true and factual? Who is telling the true story – your eyes or your intuitive mind? How could I be 100% sure of anything anymore? So often I had been wrong in the past due to delusional thoughts that I thought were true and correct, so how could I now just accept and believe on a heart level, that this baby was really Lama? I did not know, and it really began to bother me. For instance, here is a three year old child, behaving like a three year old child. My eyes are not mistaken. Yet, at the very core of my psyche, my innermost awareness, I am standing in front of my old Lama, Geshe Lama Konchog. My psyche is screaming at me: "*this is the true reality!*"

What I did know for sure was that Geshe Lama Konchog was a living Buddha, a great being and I knew in my heart of hearts, without any smidgen of doubt, that my mind had connected to his. This was no problem, but now I am told that that mind is now in a new baby and he is now called Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche - new name, new body, same consciousness.

It is one thing for His Holiness, who has all the wisdom of the Buddhas, to know and accept undoubtingly such things, because his mind is free from delusions – but how would I know for sure? I only have eyes that tell me lies.

I began to get fearful with doubt. If I looked into the eyes of this new Baby Rinpoche, would I see Lama Konchog? What if I did not feel in my heart the same feelings I had toward Lama Konchog? The more I doubted, the more fearful I became. This fear really began to worry me, so I decided to be a bit deviant and make my own test. One way or another I had to have a sign that I could understand with my deluded mind. This would have to be a sign that I could not conjure up from the depths of my imagination. It had to be clear and it had to come from Lama – *my* Lama – not a new version of!

So I did. I wrapped up all Lama's robes that he had given me and placed his 'beloved, 17 year old orange shirt' on top of them and then I put them in a blue satin bag which I clipped shut. It looked like a small satin pillow. I thought that when I showed Rinpoche the silk shirt, which was his favourite, he may respond in such a way that I would see some recognition. And then I would be sure. I placed all the trust I could muster up onto this silk shirt, hidden inside a blue satin bag.

So, down I go to the Pink House once again to offer the new version of Geshe Lama Konchog a blue satin bag. I placed all the gifts that people from Australia had offered to Rinpoche into a huge paper bag so I took these as well.

Rinpoche sat in Tenzin Zopa's lap like it was a lounge chair and he eagerly began to delve into the paper bag pulling out present after present, ripping off the paper, throwing it aside and then showing Tenzin Zopa each gift. A few gifts were small t-shirts and he quickly put them to one side. Tenzin Zopa said: "*He knows that he is a monk and monks do not wear such shirts*". I thought this was particularly remarkable, because how many three year olds would give a hoot what they wore. But Lama did. Inside that tiny body was an ageless monk who knew exactly what was right and what was not. And colourful t-shirts were *so not*. *Sooo Geshe Lama Konchog!*

Suddenly he went quiet and his tiny hands went to the bottom of the bag and he drew out the closed blue bag with the robes and shirt in it. He lifted out the blue bag slowly and gently and then he looked directly into my eyes and carefully lifted the bag with two tiny hands underneath it - and placed it on his forehead. He did not open it, so there was no way that he could have known what was in it. And yet he did! *And then he bent forward and offered the bag back to me with his hands still underneath it*. I could not move.

Rinpoche then whispered something to Tenzin Zopa without taking his eyes off me. Tenzin Zopa knew nothing about my little test, so he bent his head to listen to Rinpoche, who spoke in the same quiet gruff voice *exactly* like Lama Konchog. I am very deaf, yet I heard his voice distinctly. Tenzin Zopa said: "*Rinpoche said, 'You are to take these back to Australia. You are to wear them the day after tomorrow!'*" And the day after tomorrow was his Enthronement day!

Enough said! What can you say? I knew beyond all doubt that this small child was harbouring the mind and consciousness of my beloved Heart Guru. He was, he is, he always will be Geshe Lama Konchog, no matter what he looks like or what he is called, so I will simply call him by his new name.

To have the amazing opportunity, and karma, to be able to see and truly understand the miracle of reincarnation is not only extremely fortunate but such a rare and precious privilege.

BEGINNING OF A NEW GESHE

Tenzin Zopa rang from Sera Monastery in August 2006 to tell me that he was now officially a Geshe. A Geshe is equivalent to our PhD, or Doctor of Philosophy. He was an exceptional student while at Sera, notwithstanding the fact that he had studied all his life with a living Master and had seen, first hand, all the practices that he had been studying about, being performed in a cave by a living Master -Geshe Lama Konchog. Without doubt, Tenzin Zopa was always marked for Stardom.

Tenzin Zopa was born to be a great leader and spiritual guide, call him by whatever title you choose, as it is only merely a label. For me however, this title is a label of true devotion, dedication and perseverance and it is highly respected. Such a title epitomises the strength needed to overcome obstacles of mammoth proportions of body, speech and mind.

Tenzin Zopa is the absolute example of courage. He completed his Geshe degree under the worse stress imaginable when his beloved guru, who he called Grandfather, was so ill and dying. He is an example to us all of the true disciple's dedication to his guru. He became a Geshe *for* his guru.

Geshe Lama Konchog begins a new life in a new form as a Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche, and Tenzin Zopa begins a new life as Geshe Tenzin Zopa. Both will become lighthouses of positive energy and shine their lights on this suffering world and help to bring hope, peace and harmony in the future, simply because they are both living Buddhas.

And this is precisely what Buddhas do.

CHAPTER 13

REFUGE.

The miracles performed by Geshe Lama Konchog have affected many people. Lama was no ordinary person and to be offered refuge by him, as being a representative of all the Buddhas, was indeed a privilege. To receive refuge given by a truly holy being is tantamount to finding a gold tooth growing inside a chook's (chicken) mouth. Or so the saying goes.

Taking refuge means to place your heart and mind securely in the sanctity of the Triple Gem, which is the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Refuge in the Triple Gem needs to be seen as the unmistakable inspiration needed to gaining the strength to overcome our deluded mind. The Lama who gives this refuge ceremony must be seen clearly as being a representative of this Triple Gem, or Jewel.

When Lama left Australia, those of us who were fortunate enough to have seen and heard him have been as blessed as when Shakyamuni walked this earth and those who took refuge with him were especially fortunate and blessed. I might be slightly biased as you may well have realized by now, yet to take refuge in a holy being as being symbolic of the ultimate state of consciousness, or enlightenment, or the transcendental mind is without doubt, the most rare of precious opportunities imaginable.

But there is a price to pay. There is no such thing as a free lunch unless the lunch is not worth paying for. And the way to pay for such a privileged offering is by commitment.

Along with the blessing, comes the heavy burden of commitment and only Right Effort can maintain the strength to carry it. Right Effort is joyful effort; it comes from the heart and not from the muscles. It is a happy willingness to pick up the load for your brother or sister, to do your best to alleviate suffering and to maintain the precepts and morality, as the Buddha would have done.

Refuge carries a huge and heavy commitment, but it is a commitment to oneself to reach this ultimate state for oneself. And the motivation for reaching this state is to be able to lead others to the state of no more suffering as well. The actual act of taking refuge is the easy bit, the responsibility it holds is very difficult to maintain.

Unfortunately however, it can also become a means for suffering because it can cause our mind to grasp onto another concept that can give rise to an even greater deluded opinion of ourselves than we already had. For instance, if our motivation for taking refuge is not altruistic, very clear and very pure, we will not be able to see the Lama giving the refuge as being a true representative of the Triple Gem. We may only be inspired by a new Tibetan Refuge name that we can then flash around like a beacon, saying – "Look at me, I am special".

Worse still, we can then try to influence others into treating us differently by giving clear signs that we have graduated up the holy scales. This may not happen often, but unfortunately it does happen and if this is all that we got from such a profound ceremony, then that surely is our loss.

And that is not right effort, that is the effort associated with a deluded mind.

Refuge is an inner happening, not an outer one. Ideally, the effects of having taken refuge reflect externally and then others will see and hear a different you. Hopefully they will see a better person because you will feel different about yourself and, hopefully, you will feel more secure within yourself because you

will be on a guided path of refuge with discipline that leads away from disillusionment and unsatisfactory states of mind.

This effect should then flow on to others in the form of kindness, respect, compassion and understanding and this is what others should sense in the change in you and it is in this way that you can influence others. These inner signs of refuge are reflected in a peaceful countenance - not a fancy sounding name, or title, or even fluttering eyelids and bald head - these are not necessarily the reflections of an inner state of mind that emits vibrations of peace and harmony.

Refuge given by a Master is as deep as any religion can get. *Any* religion. It is a refuge away from the normal mundane opinion of self and an allegiance with the altruistic mind of the holy. This is a oneness, a non-dual concept with the mind of the holy, or in a Buddhist's case, the mind of enlightenment which is symbolized as The Buddha.

Our mind can be our own worst enemy, as we all know, and it is good to know that we can take refuge in something that we can perceive to be 'holy' which will protect us from ourselves. All religions have the wisdom to know that our deluded mind will lead us to the worst pits of suffering unless it is refined, restrained and re-trained into another way. The methods of the various religions differ, but in effect they all accomplish the same goal, which is teaching how to subdue the wayward mind.

To take refuge mindfully and seriously requires a lot of bravery. It should not be taken lightly. We have to make a real commitment from our side to walk the first leg of the path alone. This means that we have to be prepared to take a really good, long, unbiased look at ourselves - warts and all. This is the first step and undoubtedly the hardest step we will ever take. But if we see that we are not happy and everything around us is causing us great suffering and grief, then hopefully we will realize that things must change.

The next step is realizing that *we* have to change - not the outside world. We have to change *our* mind. It is at this point, the point of total dissatisfaction that we need to realize that we need help. And not only help do we need, but guidance in the form of discipline and rules that will make sure that we keep on the path that leads away from dissatisfaction. This step is the realization of wanting to take refuge in our own enlightened mind.

We all - each one of us - no matter how gross we may have become, do have at our core, an enlightened mind. It is the sad truth that we dim that eternal light with negative obscurations until we awaken and allow the nature of our mind to shine forth.

The Buddha represents the mind of enlightenment that we all have, we just have to access it. The dharma is the knowledge of how to access it. The Sangha are those who will help us access it. This is why it is called 'The Triple Gem'. What we have to do from our side is to awaken our enlightened mind by taking refuge in The Triple Gem and then following the discipline of that path. It takes commitment, big time. *Nobody ever said it was easy.*

Once we decide to make the right effort to commit to undertaking this refuge in the Triple Gem, there are practices designed specifically to guide us step by step along that path. Different religions have named this path by their particular label according to their own doctrine, but for Buddhists of the Gelupa tradition, we have *The Lam Rim*, which is the Graduated Path to Enlightenment. (*see recommended reading : Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*). Other Buddhist traditions have different paths called by other titles, yet all lead to the one goal, which is the path that leads towards our awakening and the attainment of the state of mind called enlightenment.

Included in this Graduated Path to Enlightenment is the teaching and practice of the Seven Point Thought Transformation practice, which teaches how to transform everyday situations that can hurt us, or others, and turn them around so that they become the causes for the creation of happiness. This is not difficult, nor is it easy. It just requires practice to be able to think and behave differently. But first we have to be able to recognize how it is that we normally behave that makes our life unhappy, before we can begin to understand *why* we need to change. And then we must learn and understand clearly how to do that and then we have to practice and practice.

This is the miracle of the teachings of the Buddha. This is why the teachings of the Buddha are unique. Buddhists do not give their power over to some other form, such as a god. We learn to take responsibility for the suffering that our own mind causes us and then we can set about learning other ways and means to retrain our mind so that it does not give cause for the generation of suffering to either ourselves or others.

Such mind transformation may not lead to unlimited happiness because there is no such state, but it will lead to an awareness of a state of no-more suffering, or at least a wish to reach it. And we each have that power, unless we give that power away.

We all travel along different pathways inside the actual path. For instance, our particular pathway is set according to our own karma and to our own disposition and we have to learn to overcome the deluded traits that go hand in hand with our patterns of life. To overcome these deluded traits and behaviors, first we have to realize that they manifest as obstacles, then and only then, can we begin to learn how to approach these obstacles in an enlightened way. And then they disappear. True!

These obstacles are our greatest lessons. They are experiential lessons and without them we cannot progress towards the state of no-more suffering. Without them, we cannot learn. We cannot experience them from books. We have to experience them by the huge obstacles that we encounter during day-to-day life. Such obstacles we usually project onto someone or something outside of ourselves and so then we can become a victim. And if that fails, then our mind will want to shut down completely and go into a deep depression because we cannot control outside forces.

In other words, we cannot control the minds of others, yet we will do anything rather than face our own mind, our own actions, our own thoughts. Is this true or not?

So at all stages of our life we have a choice: go into the blackness of the mind of depression, of blame, of victim – or head for the light of enlightenment and wake up to ourselves and realize that it is *our* state of mind that has to change – not someone else's.

But first we have to look at our own state of mind, as it is, now.

The path that leads to enlightenment is certainly not easy. First we need to take inspiration and faith in the present and past Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gurus and teachers who have lived the path and learned from it. Then we have to recognize what we need to change about ourselves so that we stop suffering. This can only happen when we skin our knees just one time too many from falling over our deluded thoughts, words and actions before we decide enough is enough.

When we decide that we are going to get up, stick on a band-aid, dust ourselves off and mindfully jump off the path that we have been following, based on blame and fear, and take the high road that leads away from being a victim, to one based on compassion, patience and tolerance – aimed squarely at ourselves, can we

begin to retrain our mind. Eventually, on this path, we can get to the stage where we stumble, but we do not fall over. Finally, we can walk into the light, unaided with non-conceptual thoughts and non-dual bliss and wisdom. Then we will see reality in its true form because we will be beyond suffering and almost enlightened. Or so they tell me.

We can be guided by the teachings only so far, eventually we will have to walk the talk. This is where refuge in the Triple Gem will give us the wisdom and the strength to do it. The Triple Gem is symbolic of the body, speech and mind of the state of the enlightened mind as I have already explained and the guru is the living example of it, or the representative. But the term guru is only imputed from our eyes – not his or hers!

Enlightenment is gained through the understanding of the absolute emptiness of all phenomena. This means that nothing exists as we perceive it to be so, because everything is continually changing. Therefore nothing stays the same. And when things do change, we then give them another label, and so we get confused, which leads to anger and blame and victimization. In other words, suffering. Understanding this, even at some level, can give you a weapon to fight against the deluded mind associated with suffering.

On the other hand, if we had not taken refuge seriously and mindfully, it would simply become just too easy to give up and get depressed when the very first obstacle, or lesson, raises its frightening head. Then we would say, *poor little me, I am a failure, I am a victim, I am not understood, I am not appreciated or loved. It's all too hard so I will go and get depressed and blame everybody else for my state of mind.* We could further think that our suffering will fix them! However, they really could not care less because they have their own problems to deal with. The danger with this sort of behavior is beyond words.

This is the very first stage that we have to overcome before we can begin to walk the path.

If we do not begin to change our mind, our consciousness, our way of thinking and acting *NOW*, we cannot progress along the path at all and our next life will be exactly as it is now. They say that our last thought in the old body is the first thought in the new body. The really frightening part about that is we may not be in human form next life, so there will be even less chance of changing. Too scary to even contemplate.

So what exactly is it that we have to change about ourselves so that we do not suffer any more? The answer is simple - we have to change our own view of reality. We have to learn what is deluded and what is not. That simply means we have to separate what appears to be real and therefore only imagined, which in turn causes us great stress, from understanding the true nature of all things which is the emptiness of all phenomena. Not by imputing!

To do this, we have to have at least a bit of a grasp on the understanding of what causes suffering before we can begin to understand the path that leads away from it. We have to learn to transform our mind from the delusions that cause suffering into an enlightened mind that understands the right view of reality. The right view of reality is emptiness. This means things and people are empty of imputation, of labeling. Labels come from our own mind, and not theirs. For example, I see someone differently from how you see that same person because it all depends on how they have affected my mind previously.

People and things are empty of inherent existence. This means that they are not based wholly and solely on what we have labeled them. People and things also change. They die, they get old, they get broken and they disappear. They are one

label one day and tomorrow they have changed and this causes us to get upset, sad and unhappy. That is the true nature of reality.

We have to be able to understand the dangers of imputing the deluded garbage that is inside our heads onto outside objects and people. Nothing exists as we perceive it to be. Nothing! This is the true nature of reality, because everything constantly changes, disappears and reappears in another form. Everything. And continually. Understanding this liberates us from the bonds of Samsara. Samsara is simply the suffering state of mind brought about by not accepting that nothing is permanent and that nothing exists inherently from its own side. Everything is only labelled as we perceive it due to causes and conditions – and whatever it is – it is not permanent. It comes and it goes.

The road that leads to no-more suffering is long and it is covered in obstacles and pitfalls. We need guidance to progress along it. We need to take refuge in somebody who is seen to embody the wisdom of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha – and that is the guru who we feel most purely represents this Triple Gem.

Refuge is the key to opening the door that opens onto the path that alleviates all suffering and which then leads to enlightenment. That door is called the teachings of The Four Noble Truths, which are:

1. Everything is a cause for suffering.
2. Suffering has a cause.
3. There is a path that stops suffering
4. The path that leads to no-more suffering is called the Noble Eightfold Path, which is: right understanding, right thought, right concentration, right speech, right mindfulness, right effort, right livelihood and right actions.

The first Noble Truth clearly states that everything we do is a cause for suffering. But until we first of all look at our own state of mind and see how it causes us, and others to suffer, we cannot see what needs to be changed. Then we need to understand that we definitely can change our perception of things that causes us to get angry or depressed and that there is a release from suffering. But to do this we need to follow a procedure, or a set of guidelines. This gives us power.

That set of guidelines is the path and it is called the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the main power source, or set of rules for the practice of transforming your daily routine of thinking, speaking and general behavior.

Meditation is the skill required to turn on the power.

Often people say to me, “I can’t meditate because my mind will not focus or relax.” What rubbish! I will bet my last dollar that they meditate very effectively and focus single pointedly on their computer or television for hours and hours and hours every day, yet they can do nothing for ten minutes a day to enlighten their minds. The dark side is so seductive. But why? I ask you – do you know the answer to that? I don’t. Maybe it is easier to lapse into a fantasy world that requires no responsibility.

The real world, whatever that is, has obstacles and those obstacles are the deciding factors that lead either to a better or worse state of mind in the next life. *At any given moment we are the result of our karma. And what is more, what we are now, is what we will become!* Sobering thoughts!

Everything is thwart with danger; even meditation. Everything is a source of suffering because everything that we think or do will have an effect. Even meditation has a right way and a wrong way and even those causes and conditions

associated with meditation will surely bring an effect or a result. For instance, of course we need to sit and meditate, but it should be done in the right way and with the right motivation. It should not be done at the expense of others, nor should it be an exhibition of ‘*look how goody, goody I appear to be!*’ What this is really saying is look at me *pretending* to be a Buddha, instead of saying look at me *trying to become* a Buddha.

It’s the inside we have to change, not the outside, so we need to be a good example to others by showing we have taken refuge on the inside.

Right motivation is the secret weapon for fighting the delusions of body, speech and mind which lead to depression. And right motivation is about doing whatever has to be done with delightful joyful effort for somebody else – for example, the guru who gave you refuge. To constantly offer anything worthwhile you do, to the guru, is the ultimate cause for a joyous mind because you pat yourself on the back for a good job and at the same time, you have something worthwhile and meaningful to offer to someone else.

How can you experience depression with that thought and state of mind?

AFTER THE REFUGE CEREMONY

After the refuge ceremony, the new journey of self-discovery begins. We literally step from one pathway to another. At first we feel quite safe with the knowledge that we are being offered every opportunity to be shown the correct path that alleviates suffering and promotes happiness, but then... we realize we have to begin to WALK that pathway and not just look at it!

To be able to take the first step onto the path requires a slight shift in our consciousness into letting go of the ‘poor me’ syndrome and embracing the ‘how fortunate am I’ one. And fair dinkum, let’s be honest, we don’t like that. However, the thought of separation from the guru should be enough to inspire us quickly to practice positive deeds with body, speech and mind and then dedicate to this cause. This will build up the bank of positive virtue that will surely keep us closely connected to our guru for as long as it takes.

The guru shows himself as mind only to those who have the karma to recognize it and I think, to be brave enough to act upon it. The reason for him or her doing so, is to show us the obstacles that can have the power to turn into lessons, so that we will then have the perfect opportunity to be able to experience transformation of mind for ourselves.

Ultimately it is the need to *want* to transform our mind from negative and self-destructive to positive and awakened.

The guru shows experiential lessons as no other teacher can do.

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THE DANGERS OF IMPUTING ONTO THE GURU

At this point, it is important to stress that if we are lucky enough to reconnect with our own particular heart guru again during this life, the opportunity should not be wasted. We must maintain proper guru devotion in order to keep the deep imprint on our consciousness for lifetimes to come. To do this, we have to see the guru as being a true representative of the holy, or in our case, the Buddha who represents the mind of enlightenment. The guru is also symbolic of the body, speech and mind of the idea of the holy.

However, the guru should not appear to stand alone and call him/herself ‘a guru’ or show him/herself to be in obvious need of disciples, because that would be seen

as being separate from the Triple Gem. The guru is simply a teacher until he has proven himself to be otherwise – and even then, only in the mind of the disciple.

Guru devotion is a study that needs special care and guidance. It is also a path that we do not take the first step onto until we have checked out our guru, simply because it is only our perceived view. If it is in accord to the Right View from the perspective of the view of emptiness and not from the attached view, then we are relatively safe. Nevertheless, we must always check with the elders of our particular tradition of Buddhism, or religion.

However, even that may not be enough because as everything is in a constant state of change and motion, everything is unstable energy – even our own mind so even the perceived guru from his or her own side is subject to change. It happens.

Referring back to the Two Truths again: If we see the guru from the perspective of the relative level of truth of believing only what we see, hear, touch etc., then we will ultimately find dissatisfaction with that teacher or guru. However, if we can transform our mind by means of *feeling* the Buddha nature of the guru based on the second of the Two Truths – the ultimate truth, which is understanding the emptiness of all phenomena, then we have found the true heart guru that is one with the mind of the Buddha. And then we become non-dual as they say, meaning our mind unites with the ultimate mind of a Buddha - in the aspect of the guru – in the form of a man or woman. And so we become one with that blissful wisdom energy. This is as the Christians would say ‘one with god’.

This is the aim of tantra practice. Tantra practice is aimed at the transformation of energy – *our* energy becoming transformed into the energy of the transcendental mind of the holy and then becoming one with that *energy*.

Until then, the perceived guru must make it clear that he/she is not a Buddha, only a representative of one. *It is only through the eyes of the disciple that ‘the guru’ is labelled.* This must be fully understood. The label *never* comes from the perceived guru, or teacher. Ultimately it is our perception of the guru, based on the Two Truths, that we are guided to enlightenment or away from it.

Therefore, in the guru/disciple relationship there is a huge amount of responsibility from the sides of both. From both the guru’s side and the disciple’s side, there are many positive and negative energies that constantly arise between the minds of both and it is only through the skilful means of wisdom and method based on the correct view of emptiness, i.e. the ultimate truth, that ensures that we remain forever connected with each other until we are both led to the state of enlightenment.

This is the only wish that the true guru has for his/her disciples - not money, power, fame or even to be called ‘guru’. The true role of the guru is beyond politics or even being under the control of political institutions, the true heart guru is free from all prejudice, discrimination and ego. The guru should be as free as the Buddha was. But as I am the one writing the book, it is only my opinion! Ha.

So even in guru devotion there are many hidden dangers.

Another obstacle on the guru path is that we can become obsessed with one particular Lama or teacher and declare that we have loyalty only to him or her at the expense of all others. This leaves the door wide open to the wrong type of attachment and is therefore very dangerous.

‘Attachment’ is a difficult word to interpret, as there appears to be acceptable forms and non-acceptable forms. Attachment to the guru is acceptable on a mind only basis. Attachment to being in the presence of the guru is deemed to be unacceptable because it can be subject to imputation and as we know, imputation leads to suffering. So there needs to be very careful scrutiny of any contact with the guru outside of the normal precincts of the Buddhist community.

Attachment to the way the guru makes you feel when you are near him or her, is detrimental to the guru/disciple relationship because it is based on everyday feelings, whereas the true guru/disciple relationship is based on the merging of the transcendental minds of both. It is a connection on a very deep level. It has nothing to do with the state of samsara mind.

This is only my understanding of the potential problematic ‘attachment to the guru’ syndrome. I have eyes and ears and I impute the same as everybody else does. I don’t always like what I see or what is told to me and so I get a big shock and then I suffer when my mind becomes negative. Badly. Maybe a situation is true and maybe it is not. The fact is, the disciple and the guru must be very open, very honest, very pure at all times and never give cause for gossip or misunderstanding, because their relationship can directly affect the minds of others.

There is a very grey area in which irrevocable harm can be caused to the guru, to the disciple and to the Buddhist community at large if the attachment is seen as anything other than purely spiritual. In this case, appearances really do matter. Relative truth does play a role in causing untold misery to gurus, disciples and institutions, be they Buddhist centers or Christian, Jewish or Muslim churches.

Such an attitude prohibits the realization that the guru represents the enlightened mind of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In fact, it prohibits the right view of the idea of the holy completely.

If the guru/disciple relationship is based on physical attachment, then our view of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would also be subjected to that type of attachment and scrutiny and so we could take refuge in them only until we become disillusioned by them. This is of course, the wrong view of reality. And that is sad because it causes so much suffering in the long run when faith is lost.

An example of this can be given thus: Lama’s body in this life was simply labelled Geshe Lama Konchog. It was the form that carried his Buddha-like consciousness. And that consciousness could have manifested into any form of his choosing. So, to become attached only to the ‘pink house at Kopan’ form of Geshe Lama Konchog with the big ears and the craggy face, is to not understand the nature of the guru. Nor of guru devotion. *And it is to not understand the nature of reality at base level.*

However, this is not to say that we do not have a great need for a familiar form on which to devote purely, but to do this we need to feel a ‘connection’ or a feeling of personal closeness.

We all perceive the idea of the holy in different ways according to causes and conditions that have influenced our conditioning. For instance, most of us cannot see the Samboghakaya, the enjoyment body of a Buddha (only bodhisattvas, dakas and dakinis can see this) so we need to rely on the kindness of the guru to take the Nirmanakaya (enlightened beings in ordinary body) form on rebirth.

In this way, we can again identify our connection. All religions have their saints and prophets as being representatives of the holy and they engender faith and trust on a familiar and personal level to the devotee.

Without the guru, or the divine teacher, or realized beings, in ordinary form, there could be no identification of, or understanding of, the holy at all. Even though we all ‘feel’ things deep in our heart at times, without the qualified teacher’s explanation of the mysterious realm of the holy, we would have no means to be able to identify such a concept.

RECOGNIZING THE HEART GURU

Just to shake up the barrel a bit more - *there is absolutely no way to know for sure who is a Buddha (merely labeled) and who is not!* Even a wild, frothing-at-the-mouth animal may in fact, be a Buddha. The enlightened consciousness that took such a form may have been showing some aspect of our own minds to us directly. Think about it! Our worst enemy may in fact be a living Buddha. Even the worst type of terrorist may in fact be manifesting to show us our own ugly face of hatred and discrimination.

For simple landlubbers like myself who can only use objects to impute like and dislike upon, it is difficult to be able to see the guru in all his or her many forms and guises. It is even more difficult to look at them through our gross eyes full of doubt and superstition and realize that we need to use all our sense consciousnesses (inner awarenesses) to perceive him or her as being the deeply familiar spiritual friend who is the true representative of the Buddhas.

This sounds complicated, but it is not. It simply means that we need to focus more on our inner heart chakra when meeting the guru, rather than on the physical senses. It is a mistake to concentrate more on looking impressive and oh-so-spiritual on the outside, in the hope that they will see us this way, rather than trying to separate who we are, from what we are. Often times, the only one we are hiding from is ourself.

For instance, the sense consciousnesses are based in the heart chakra and this is where the inner sense comes from when we say that we just *know* something. This is the a priori awareness. These are completely different from our normal senses contained in our ears, nose, eyes, tongue and skin. We need to become aware by deeply sensing the emotions and energy within our heart chakra before we can trigger that remembering from the distant past where we knew the guru.

Having said all that, if we do not have the karma to begin with to be in the living presence of the heart guru during this life, it matters not. By using our perceptions based on the sense consciousnesses just described, we can feel instantly that all Holy Lamas who teach us are not only representatives of the Buddha, but of our own heart guru as well.

There is no difference, unless we create it in our deluded minds by segregating them into '*my*' guru and '*your*' guru, for instance, My team and Your team. Such segregation leads to war, we all know that. This seems to be intrinsic to our samsaric way of life - we even practice this one-eyed discrimination by devoting to the local footy team.

We do this because none of us perceives so-called reality in the same way. And yet we believe that others are wrong or deluded if they do not see things like we do and then we label them 'enemy' and so we can then legally kill them. We, of course are always right and on the good side. We are the heroes and they are the terrorists.

How ridiculous! Even 'terrorists' may be kind and gentle people with their children and animals, even other people – a terrorist does not inherently exist as such.

A terrorist is merely a label that we apply to another person due to certain causes and conditions that cause us to believe that he/she inherently exists as one. In other words, that he is rotten to the core. However, his beliefs may be that he is a warrior or even a martyr of his religion, therefore a great person.

He may or may not be a bad person, it is up to how those causes and conditions relate to us and affect our mind, that we label him so. His mother may not label him as terrorist, but as a loving boy.

On the other hand, the ‘good’ soldier on our side is capable of causing just as much misery, damage and harm as the ‘bad’ soldier on the other side, but because of our conditioning, we label him as enemy and bad. Therefore, due to our conditioning, we have created the causes to believe that our side is good and we are the heroes.

Karma is the result of perceived causes and conditions that create an effect which we then label as such and such, ie: nice/not nice; good/bad; beautiful/ugly; chair/stool; hot/cold; bed/couch – depending on our point of view at a particular point in time. We can, and do, change our minds!

As well as this, merely labelled things only exist because they are dependent on something else. For instance, everything depends upon our view of reality. The Right View of reality is classified as such as being in accordance to the Two Truths – relative truth or ultimate truth. But in reality – is it Truth at all? And what is the Truth? Is the Truth real?

So, it is in accordance to our perceived view of the Truth that we place labels on everything and everyone around us. (*read teachings on The Two Truths*)

Enough! How did I get into this?! I was talking about how we perceive the true heart guru..... I really just wanted to say that each one of us, at any given point in time, is the end product of all the experiential causes and conditions that have influenced our way of thinking thus far. However, our unsettled minds are constantly in a state of flux because everything around us is constantly changing and disturbing our set ways and ideas. But nothing is fixed; everything constantly changes and upsets us – including our own minds. And so we endlessly suffer. *Even our perception of The Guru is constantly changing because The Guru is constantly changing..*

I personally learned this amazing fact slowly, slowly by the extreme kindness of Lama who forced my mind to dare to leap into unfamiliar and scary realms.

NOT FINDING THE HEART GURU

There are many causes for the separation of the heart guru from the mind of the seeker. For instance, if we wasted the connection we had in previous lives due to wrong attitude, speech and so on, the cause would have deteriorated during this lifetime. Maybe the disciple has been born in another country, or the guru is still a baby. Maybe you are yet to meet.

Nevertheless, whatever the cause, the result lays within our own mind stream and not within the guru’s. It is just a matter of transforming our mind and seeing all others as the guru. In this way we can all experience the guru on a personal level. For instance, look at His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama; he is the perfect example of the Heart Guru. Or for you, it may be the Pope, Jesus, Mohammad or Abraham. Each one of us perceives the representative of the holy in his or her own personal way, depending on causes and conditions that influenced that perception. All views are right.

I know nothing, and yet I know this. And for what it is worth, so do millions and millions of other people who have had the instant guru reconnection happen in their hearts just by looking at a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or the Pope, or Jesus to name just a few holy persons.

So much for treating all representatives of The Holy as the same in essence, may I just say something in a whispering voice here – the form of Geshe Lama Konchog that I did not have much contact with, brings tears of most painful attachment and devotion every time I see his photo. I cry when I see his big ears and the mark along his cheek and his amazing eyes and on and on and on. I have

huge attachment! But I do believe in my heart of hearts that we *do need* a form on which to connect and attach, someone that we can see, and hear, and touch. We *do need* to feel a personal relationship with graspingness, because this leaves an imprint on our mind of devotion for future life to come.

But of course, the great danger with this sort of personal, one-eyed devotion to a physical form is that we may, at some stage find fault with that person and that body, and this would lead to disastrous results. Instead, we should try to get in touch with the mind only of the guru.

If we devote to the sensual form of the guru and how he makes us feel, we are in big trouble. If the guru is feeding our ego, we are in big danger of becoming so disillusioned that we could end up losing our faith altogether. Unfortunately, this happens.

Nothing in samsara is stable or fixed because our mind is continually changing. Read the Four Noble Truths to understand this. Someone who has a nice voice, or nice ways, or who flatters us, or worse still someone who seems to know all the answers, can easily seduce us, but they may not have a Buddha-like consciousness. Such teachers base their teachings on fame, fortune and big time ego. It happens! And then Buddhism gets a weak link.

Great caution is needed because not all teachers are practitioners, and not all practitioners are teachers.

FINDING THE INNER GURU

All gurus must be checked out! Their word and their reputation is not good enough.

We must have our guru checked out by the head of our tradition before committing to complete guru devotion. This is very important, because it is easy to get carried away with teachers who have charisma and sugary sounding voices or worse still, those who give great impressions of being know-it-alls and who look very impressive. These are the self-styled and self-labelled gurus. Unless we have the wisdom to recognize all this, we are in big danger and at their mercy.

The true guru will inspire you to find the inner guru for yourself.

The incredible fortune in finding the heart guru, to whom you have been rightly attached for many lifetimes, makes life so much easier. It also makes life so much more difficult and complicated.

Without understanding the importance of the inner heart guru, tantric practice would not only be ineffective, but very, very dangerous. This of course is my own uneducated opinion, but for me Lama has made my very little understanding of tantra very personal and deep in meaning. Whether it is of the standard that is required by others does not matter. Lama's mind and the deity's mind or energy, are for me, one and the same. I try to connect my simple mind with Lama's holy mind and so it all seems to work. But this works for me.

There are horses for courses and in my case I can only be labelled 'donkey', yet Lama's holy mind shows me clearly the lessons to be learned along the path. It is not a race track though, and although tantra is recognized as being the quickest path to enlightenment, in my case it is going to be a long row to hoe and a difficult one at that. However, I am inspired because my donkey mind rides on Lama's holy, enlightened mind so I am blissed as well as blessed.

It is the reconnection with your own familiar and totally trusted guru that opens the door to the non-duality of all the gurus' wisdom and blessings that leads to transformation of the mind into the realm of Buddhahood. Your particular heart guru simply opens the door to enlightenment for you. It is a personal path. And

no matter how much connection there is between you and your guru, he or she cannot walk the path for you.

The right attitude towards guru devotion is, as Lama told me, to be a lighthouse of positive energy and to do his work. And that is not easy – but it is full of joy. From my side, walking the talk is another matter, but I do try to tell people what Lama instructed me, so that they can do it for themselves.

TRUSTING THE GURU

This is the big one.

I believe it was Lama's great intention that I live in the middle of suburbia. Not my choice at all, but if this was what it took to offer troubled people access to a living Buddha named Geshe Lama Konchog, then this is his cave. And Geshe Lama Konchog was truly able to help people in whatever kaya (form) that took.

I learned to let go of preconceived ideas of the way I thought the world of a nun should be and I learned to listen to Lama. This worked for me, because I was not just sitting on a cushion mindlessly doing practices for my own benefit. I felt I was actually helping to alleviate suffering in its many forms by doing the work for a living Buddha. Just to be able to bring Lama to these people was in itself, a miracle.

The indescribable joy, contentment and meaningfulness of my life since ordination has been achieved by being committed to doing what I know Lama would have expected from me. He did not expect perfection, which I do not have even in small doses, but he did demand my absolute best with a smattering of right effort (joyful effort).

The main reason that I am so content and happy is of course, the motivation or wish, to repay his great kindness of finding me again in this lifetime and of putting me on the path.

Motivation is the most important principle in any practice and so are the retreats that teach discipline and isolation of mind, but most of all they give an opportunity to practice mind transformation.

If we can train our minds to become like an aspect of a Buddha's mind, just like the great yogi Geshe Lama Konchog did, then *EVERYTHING* has the potential to be the cause for joy.

I believe that unless we make the tantric practices experiential, they are wasted. It seems pointless to me, to take an initiation and then do the prescribed retreat as quickly as possible in order to be able to get back to normal life. It seems pointless to me to try to transform your mind for only a few weeks and then transform it back again.

In the early days at Chenrezig Institute many of us had no idea what an initiation was all about, nor why we wanted to do it. There was no guidance before we took it, so we did not understand the huge responsibility and commitments that went along with it, until it was too late.

Later when we got wiser, the first question we would ask when we knew an initiation was to be offered was "*Is there a commitment?*" Such wrong attitude! To take highest yoga Tantra level is a commitment for life. It is the most rare of rarest opportunities available to us in the Buddhist world today. It is such a privilege in this Age of Degeneration to have the karma to be offered such an opportunity. It is an opportunity to be empowered to practice being a Buddha during this very lifetime. However, it comes at a high cost. There are retreats to

be completed and daily meditations and recitations to be practiced and this requires discipline. Daily, minute-by-minute discipline.

Without complete trust and faith in the guru, and the motivation of trying to please the guru, taking such high level initiations and ordinations, would be way too dangerous for we mere mortals.

But here again, this is only my simple opinion, and what would I know? I can only write about my own personal experiences and pass them on for what they are worth, to you. Maybe you are a Buddha! In which case, I humbly apologize for such assumption and impertinence.

However, we all know that without discipline in our practice we just float around doing a bit of this and a bit of that, hoping that next lifetime – whammo! - the initiation might work - we might strike it lucky and be reborn Enlightened.

Might not, too!

CHAPTER 14

LAMA'S LEGACY

The legacy that Geshe Lama Konchog left to this world has been left on three levels: the gross level, the medium level and the subtle level. Some people were aware of all three levels and others saw him only on the first level.

THE GROSS LEVEL

The gross level is where we only see, and believe what we see, on face value only. What we saw and heard of his body, speech and mind, was only what we imputed onto him, brought about by our own state of mind. For instance, some people feel an instant 'connection' to other people and yet they cannot explain it. That connection is the result of previous causes and conditions gained through past experiences. In other words, we look at someone and 'feel' him or her by means of our mind. Our mind is like a computer that stores memories and Buddhists believe that those memories go back in time before this current body – previous lifetimes. So, therefore, we do not all see an object – any object - in the same way.

Lama gave the outward appearance of being a simple monk in crumpled Robes and that is all some people saw. He gave the guise of an elderly Tibetan monk with big ears and a quite stern face. And it was from this level that he gave us the opportunity to impute labels onto him - from our own mind - such as buddhalike, scary, enlightened, imposing, scruffy and so on. and yes, one student described him as “that scruffy Lama” but that shows the nature of her mind!

It was from this very level that he gave us the opportunity to look at our own minds and understand that not everybody had the same impression of him that you did. This was his greatest gift and the greatest lesson that he taught to us in Australia - we were confronted with our own minds.

Lama's body manifested illness in Australia and that gave us the opportunity to practice compassion and loving kindness. Some of us saw, and understood this, while others just saw a sick looking monk who necessitated medical attention. Some saw high levels of Buddhist teachings that awakened our curiosity and eagerness to learn more from this simple monk's sick body and highly realized mind.

He taught experiential lessons that can only be learned by meeting obstacles within our own mind and by seeing beyond what we merely imputed onto what we thought we saw as a simple monk.

Lama's level of teaching awakened a response in some students who could see beyond what the ears and eyes imputed onto him, to such students Lama gave evidence of his great wisdom and knowledge on an experiential level.

However, even on gross level of perception, he doubtless left an imprint on the minds who could see nothing other than a simple, dishevelled monk, because Lama certainly came under the term: 'once seen, not easily forgotten'. So, no matter that we could only perceived him on a gross level, undoubtedly he would have left an imprint on our minds for future times to come.

THE MEDIUM LEVEL

At the medium level, we began to see beyond the façade that Lama tried so hard to maintain of being a simple monk and yet, I believe it was at this higher level of awareness that he tried so hard to get us to experience for ourselves. All the Lamas and teachers that I have had the incredible karma to have seen and heard since, all want to get us to practice this, but Geshe Lama Konchog somehow showed us directly, the level of our own minds.

It was at this medium level where he showed himself to be more than just a simple monk who had meditated for over twenty years in a cave, therefore easily being labelled 'special'. This became apparent to all of us during the fire puja for the spirit on my property. We were all witness to a highly realized being who had the capabilities to be able to subdue unseen outside forces. Stories being told about him now, confirm his high status of realizations, but at the time he was at Chenrezig Institute in 1987, we were not aware of this.

People with cancer experienced this level during their illnesses, when he offered pujas and personally made pills for their benefit and showed himself to be a great healing practitioner. He had the knowledge of chemistry and of diagnosis. He was able to decipher the origins of an illness. He had the awareness to be able to diagnose and prescribe treatment for spirit harm and other unworldly related diseases.

He wanted us to get beyond the stage of *what you see, is what you get*. Lama showed us that there is more to be seen, or perceived, if we go beyond the limitations of our gross senses such as our eyes, nose, etc., and get in touch with the subtle levels deep within our consciousness – the medium level of feeling, or knowing.

THE SUBTLE LEVEL

The subtle level of Lama's mind was made evident at his death when the miracles and events that happened at the time of his cremation and with the manifestation of relics from his holy body.

For those who sat with him during the time that his mind was in Clear Light Meditation, the evidence of Lama's Holy mind was beyond doubt. We all 'felt' Lama's mind on a very subtle level.

The rainbows, the falling bodhicitta in the form of flowers and powder, the faces in the rocks, the energy encased in the Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa, and the Dakinis that I saw emerge from it, are all evidence of Lama's high level of spiritual, realizational and near attainment of the state of full enlightenment. But maybe that was all that I was capable of seeing, maybe there was much more to his state of mind that only Buddhas could understand and be aware of.

Although these objects that were produced by this subtle level of Lama's consciousness were vividly clear to our normal eyes, they were only made possible because of his great kindness, great compassion and his great level of achievement and attainment. He allowed us to see for ourselves evidence of the transcendental mind. He showed us by visible signs that he had overcome all concepts of rigid, permanent, emotional phenomena and he did this – not to show off his abilities - but to help us understand that it is possible for us, also, to attain the same state for ourselves.

For instance at Kopan Monastery we saw how Lama's body transformed from a living being into a dead body that lay for eight days with full awareness. This was the gross level. This body did not decay or smell. Then we saw the body being burned amid swirling smoke. This was the medium level. We saw his body actually turning into relics before our eyes as it burned. We saw evidence that he had transformed the energy of his holy mind and created rainbows over his cremation site and we saw and felt the bodhicitta in the form of flowers and perfumed soft powder. This was the subtle level.

These are miracles that can only be manifested by an enlightened mind. Such miracles are evidence of the transcendental mind. They can pave the way for others and inspire in them the proper guru devotion that will offer safe and meaningful refuge on the daunting path through life.

The reason why such miracles become apparent and obvious is to help each one of us understand the power of the mind and so generate in us the wish to devote purely and to practice properly as the Buddha taught.

Or maybe such miracles are Christian based. The great Christian sages and Holy men and women would ultimately have the same wish – for each one of us to devote purely and to practice what their God and Jesus taught.

Maybe the causes that influence us to become devoted instantly to *any* Lama, or any great Master, have been produced in a previous life. Maybe we are creating the causes now for future lives to come when we meet a Lama and instantly devote. Or maybe we are consciously prohibiting any such connection. It is all possible. Maybe we have had previous experiences with miracles that have left an imprint of belief or scepticism, devotion or doubt, faith or mistrust. Who knows for sure?

Whatever the reason, Lama left an imprint on the minds of everyone at Kopan Monastery for people from all around the world to interpret their own way, according to their own states of mind, by the manifestation of such miracles at his death and clearly, during his lifetime. This is something that we can grasp onto and take refuge in, or we can totally reject. It is up to us to make the right decision that will affect us positively in the long term and in the future times to come. It is up to us to let go of all preconceived phenomena and take a new look at reality.

Lama gave us the rare opportunity to be witness to a great yogi's subtle level of consciousness at the time of his death, and it is now up to us what we do with that information.

THE LEGACY OF THE RELICS

Lama's relics are continuing to change and to grow around the world. I know this from first hand experience, as the ones in my house are literally popping out of their box.

There is no logical or scientific explanation for such relics, yet all those who have seen the changes in the ones on my altar are dumb-founded with awe. They can see for themselves how they continue to change and grow and these are just the ones that I have. They are continuing to change all around the world.

These relics are, and will be, investments for the future. They are energies of transformation. They are lighthouses of positive energy. They will need to be placed eventually into stupas, so that they can radiate their energy in a condensed form to pacify this suffering world, but until they do, those lucky enough to see them - should.

THE LEGACY OF A NEW FORM

Highly realized beings and yogis such as Lama, can bypass the bardo (state between death and rebirth) completely and even forestall nirvana in order to come back to take another human rebirth and they do this specifically to help and guide us. They have reached a state where they can control their next rebirth. Such beings carry the title of 'Rinpoche'.

They choose to do this because of their ultimate compassion for those who are beginning to step onto the path and they do it for those who have not even heard of a path. Their one wish is to wait until all sentient beings have reached the state of enlightenment before they Go-Beyond.

Lama was infinitely kind and yet he was so strong and powerful, he knew exactly how to push our buttons and send us into self grasping. I do believe that he will make us walk this path *to reach him*. He will not give us what we want simply because we want it. I do believe

that he will make us work hard to reach the goal of re-connecting with his consciousness again during this, and future lifetimes to come. That path will be tough. I am so, so, so certain of that.

TENZIN ZOPA'S LEGACY OF DEVOTION

Tenzin Zopa, whose mother and father were carefully selected by Lama to produce him, is no ordinary being either. He is young, but he is as ageless as the mountains. He and Lama are beyond any perception that I can try to isolate and then analyze and so give a label. Anyway, that would only be *my* label.

Tenzin Zopa's legacy must be mentioned here because it is not possible to separate him from Geshe Lama Konchog. They are both Masters who continue to shine their lights on the world. We just have to see that light, without prejudice or superstition, from the depths of our heart and follow it according to our own capabilities.

Tenzin Zopa tended to Lama's holy body while he was sick and then when he died. He then created a cremation site, a huge stupa, and beautiful gardens with statues, a tantric college and more that I do not know about. And he has only just begun.

Not only is this astounding for one so young, but he did it all in the blink of an eye. And he did it without a cent to his name. He put it on land where there was no land. He did it all while continuing to study for his Geshe Degree in South India. And these are just the few things that I know of.

He left these holy objects as a legacy to his Heart Guru, his Mentor and his Grandfather for one purpose - to give everyone living on this planet the opportunity to see the man-made objects that represent an enlightened mind.

Although he did this for his Guru, ultimately he did it for us.

He has left a legacy of his love and devotion for the whole world to see and to experience on a heart level. He left a legacy of how the mind can transform a negative situation into one of pure joy and happiness.

With the great *Thousand Buddha Relic Stupa* and the *Vajra Yogini Pure Land Park*, he left a legacy of ultimate Guru Devotion.

THE LEGACY OF HOW TO CONNECT TO THE TRUE GURU.

I do believe that right from the early days Lama encouraged me to focus on his mind only and not to become attached to his physical form and run after that body. I believe that it is because of this that our connection became so strong. In this way I had nothing to impute onto except his powerful mind. He taught hard lessons about transforming my mind and not getting caught up with a wrong view about him that would eventually dissipate my connection to him.

I believe that on a deep, profound, emotional and personal level, Lama's true legacy were the events that happened at the time of his abiding in the Clear Light Meditation, his cremation and then at the consecration of his stupa. Here he showed his subtle mind so clearly. During these extraordinary times, we were given undoubtable evidence of miracles that completely changed my view, and no doubt every body else's view who were so privileged to be there, of the transcendental mind, and nature of, The Guru.

These events seem to be the culmination of many years of trying to understand the nature of the guru. I knew Lama was a so-called Buddha but what that term truly meant, I had no clear understanding until his death, cremation and consecration of his stupa and the manifestation of the miraculous relics. At these times I saw for myself, as did others, the true nature of Lama's mind. This has been his greatest legacy and it is one of extreme kindness and bodhicitta.

Due to this legacy, I have gained the strength to be able to stand alone, without make-up, fancy clothes, a husband or even a whiz-bang sports car. Without these things I have been able to grow, but it has only been through the nurturing and great skills of Lama, a living Buddha. Ultimately, I had to let go of controlling my world – and trust in his.

. By leaving these legacies of extraordinary events and miracles, we have the opportunity to understand with wisdom, the same legacies that so many other Saints, Prophets, Yogis and living Buddhas have left to us - of all religions. And they are legacies of hope. They are the legacies that loving kindness and compassion can bring to the coming world. They are legacies of a path that leads to enlightenment.

THE VERY BEST GURU

The one who teaches the hard lessons in life, the one person who you dislike the most, the one you do not want to know about, the one you do your very best to avoid at all costs, the very one that you blame for everything that goes wrong in your life, your enemy – these, each and every one of them, is your very best teacher and guru.

The Heart Guru that you love with your whole being, who you follow endlessly, who you give up your life for --- is not, NOT, your best guru!

This best teacher and guru, otherwise labelled the one you despise the most, gives you the experiential teachings that you have to learn before you can begin the path towards enlightenment. Without these obstacles, or experiential teachings, you would never have to practice self-control, patience, tolerance and loving kindness, which are the necessary steps along the path. Without these teachers you would never have the opportunity to begin to learn how to transform your mind.

Therefore, your worst enemy is your very, very best teacher, master and guru. There is none better. Your transformation in to a holy being is dependent on such a teacher.

The beloved Heart Guru can only hold your hand.

THE HEART GURU

The beloved, respected, honored, Heart Guru to whom we devote, represents all the Buddha's qualities and teachings. This is the teacher to whom we can feel a great connection and to whom we devote implicitly. This is the guru we trust without question to guide us on the journey to Buddhahood and enlightenment.

This type of guru and teacher shows us what we can become in body, speech and mind so that we can understand that we do have a higher mind and that we must connect to it in order to progress along the path. But the guru cannot walk the talk for us. We have to gain the strength from the wisdom and trust in the guru, to do it alone. This lesson comes through devotion.

The Heart Guru represents the body, speech and mind of Enlightenment. The Heart Guru is symbolic of the Triple Gem.

THE INNER GURU

I have heard sad tales about disciples and students, even monks and nuns, who get lost when their guru dies. When their Lama dies, many monks and nuns even disrobe. I thought about this a lot when Lama died. I wondered how the faith, the commitment and the vows could be abandoned simply because the focus of dedication and devotion could no longer be seen or heard by means of the gross senses. Somehow the motivation behind the attachment got

severed at such a time. It was then that I realized that it is the inner guru that Lama was trying to connect me to so strongly. My own inner guru!

The external guru's holy body is still subject to suffering, old age and death, therefore it is impermanent. Our view of the external guru is also unstable, impermanent and fluctuates constantly if it is based on a visual concept only.

When the guru dies, their holy mind or consciousness may take another form and if there is great attachment to the old form, great suffering can occur within the mind of the disciple. Such a state is very sad indeed because nothing is permanent, everything passes and everything becomes new. This is one of the many great teachings in Buddhism

So I began to wonder why people would disrobe simply because the guru was no longer in the living world. I pondered this question over and over again until I realized what the role of the guru was all about. I began to understand the role of the 'inner guru.' Until Lama left his body, I did not understand the difference between the inner guru and the external heart/teacher/guru, or even which was which.

When Lama was alive and able to tell me how to wipe my nose and when to go to the toilet, I did not have to stand alone and make my own decisions. I relied on him, totally. He was always at the end of an email with an answer or decision, but now suddenly, he was not and I got one big shock because I felt very alone and vulnerable. I then realized I had to depend on another level of my own mind, the level where the guru was stable and indestructible. I then made connection with the inner guru.

To find the Inner Guru, firstly we need to create the causes and conditions to be able to do so. Nothing can possibly happen until we create the causes for it to do so. It is my belief that firstly we must devote purely to the physical beloved Heart Guru who can teach, guide and eventually make us aware of the Very Best Guru who will create the obstacles that need to be overcome so that we can progress on the path of enlightenment. Without the obstacles, we cannot practice patience, tolerance, forgiveness, loving kindness and compassion – towards ourselves - as well as to others.

The Inner Guru is the one that does not die or go away, unless we kill him or her or chase him or her away. The Inner Guru is the Deity. It is the transformation of energy that allows us to change the perception of who and what we think we are into what we have the potential to become - enlightened. The inner guru allows for the transformation of our body, speech and mind.

All major religions say the same thing. They may give another name for the inner guru and they may impute more onto it according to their own particular methods and wisdoms and in ways that are meaningful to them, but basically they say the same thing: *We all have within us, the god force, the enlightened mind, the divine, the holy, the ultimate state* – THE INNER GURU!

We all have access to the causes and conditions that will produce this effect because the different religions offer this choice. Different people have different mindsets due to cultural, environmental, spiritual and peer pressure factors that create a persuasion towards one religion or another. If one 'feels' right then it is right, but only for you. I might feel something else and that is right too.

Different religions offer different points of view of the Idea of the Holy and they offer a chance to connect and devote in a way that is most meaningful to us, as individuals. And so they must. They offer a chance to transform our mind through devotion, teachings and practices. Without the teachings and the devotional side, the Idea of the Holy would be lost. Without the Idea of the Holy, a world higher consciousness would be lost.

All major religions show us the path to finding the Inner Guru for ourselves, therefore the Inner Guru, call it by whatever name is comfortable to you, is your own salvation. It is your most subtle mind that will take you on the journey to enlightenment and for as long as it takes.

THE LEGACY OF DREAMS

Every night while I sleep, Lama teaches. He sits on a cushion of air, cross-legged and animatedly teaches. He has done this since the first time I saw him in the Sangha House at Chenrezig Institute in 1987. I feel at the time of dreaming that I am fully conscious and not asleep. When I wake up I lay there and think, '*I wish I could remember what he said!*' I never remember any words that he says although I can clearly remember his arms and mouth moving.

He always appears in full colour. I feel that I am sitting on the floor and he floats in full size about the level of my head. Almost always however, when I first regain consciousness I hear myself saying mantras and in particular the mantra of the Medicine Buddha. This happens to many people.

Why would he do this if I could not remember, I wonder? Maybe it is because Lama's mind is enlightened and so it can connect with a deluded mind when it is unconscious in sleep. Or maybe it is on a subconscious level. In fact, that would seem to me to be the perfect time to teach and leave an imprint on the subtle levels of the mind when the ego-grasping mind is unconscious and then hopefully the imprint can be retrieved in some future life.

THE LEGACY OF LIFE LESSONS

The aim of this book is to tell about the life lessons that were delivered by a living Buddha merely labelled Geshe Lama Konchog, to a reluctant, fiercely independent woman who was under the dictatorship of nothing and no-one. It is simply a story about how causes and conditions brought about by a true Master, turned her into a devoted student and eventually a fully ordained nun.

It is a story about life lessons. Probably, it is more about how I learned to cope with bone shattering, mind bending, emotional tsunamis that can only be described in a positive note as being life lessons.

It is also a true story. It has not been embellished in any way to make Lama sound more spiritual, more aesthetic or more anything. It has been written exactly as I re-walked this amazing journey to put it into the computer. This is the true miracle.

The sole purpose of this book is to hopefully give a better understanding of the unique relationship between guru and disciple and the hardships that such interaction entails. The main wish I have for this book is to honour Lama's time in this world. The intention of this book is to show the importance of transforming obstacles that appear in our lives and then how to turn them around to be experiential life lessons.

Without learning how to transform our mind, life lessons would be a constant frightening barrage of mental suffering. We could then get locked into self pity and self abuse and there is no need for this to happen.

The methods that Buddhism teaches to turn our suffering mind around, is known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha clearly taught how to stop suffering, but first we have to recognize it for what it is: Suffering is not having the power to be able to transform negativities into positives. Suffering happens when we do not understand the lesson being delivered and this is due to not having the knowledge and wisdoms required to be able to discern this in the first place. And we cannot discern anything while we use our self-centred, self-focused ego grasping mind as our inner-guru. This is what all the gurus from all faiths and doctrines teach.

Life lessons are the only way to learn, grow strong and become a warrior. Succumbing to obstacles is the best way to become deluded, fearful and a coward. Being a pathetic being and

a practitioner of nothing, a truly worthless waste of space sucking in air, with a deluded mind based on self-grasping, even so, I have been showered with these lessons by Lama to good effect. I was forced to see obstacles for what they were – invisible apparitions cooked up in my own mind to cause me to distrust myself and everybody else.

Looking back in retrospect, I can now see that these obstacles did not cause weakness in my mind, they created an amazing strength that I never would have known, had I never met Lama. I had to discover for myself that obstacles are lessons and not something that you run away from.

Without the guidance of the guru, in whatever form he or she takes, and whatever religion reveres him or her, there would be no understanding of what causes obstacles in the first place and there would be no known method to be able to turn them into life lessons. Without lessons, we cannot learn anything. Once we learn how to do this, it is possible to obliterate suffering from our mind stream altogether. We are told that once we have the wisdom and the methods to be able to understand what causes our suffering – and then we put it into practise - we have then mastered the first step to gaining enlightenment.

And the true causes of all sufferings are caused by our own deluded mind – not the deluded mind of someone else! The Buddha said this – not I! I am still coming to grips with it. And this is the legacy that all gurus leave.

This is the legacy that one Great Master, Mahasiddha, Yogi, Enlightened Being left for all of us who knew him to see and experience, each on their own level of understanding. This is the legacy of the miracles performed by one such Great Master, Geshe Lama Konchog – *The Guru*: and they are the miracles of *A Living Buddha*.

The last editing I did of this book was completed at noon, on the 15th October 2007. Lama passed away on the 16th October 2001 and he was reborn on the 28th October 2002.

The ground outside my house is again covered in a carpet of yellow flowers, which are still falling like yellow rain.

A true miracle. A true Miracle of a Living Buddha.

December, 2009

Chapter 15

STUDENTS' STORIES

JOY'S STORY

STORY 1.

I first heard the name of my precious “Guru” when I was at Chenrezig Institute and was talking to Venerable Konchog Jill. She was knitting something to send to Lama Konchog.

When I heard his name it was hearing about an old very dear friend and I had a deep yearning to know this Lama.

Over the years I saw Jill’s devotion to Lama Konchog. I always wished I could find my own special guru. Little did I know then that it was one and the same?

I first contacted Lama Konchog when David and I were trying to sell our house. There seemed to be some obstacle as the price was right, presentation of house good, but it was not selling.

We needed to sell this house so we could put all our effort into helping Chenrezig Institute prepare for the 20th celebration.

I was talking to Kathy Vichta about it and she said she would send an email on our behalf, but that it could take some time to get a reply. Within a week the reply came back, with instructions on what practise to do. So on the Friday night the nuns and I prepared the Gompa and I made a torma cake. We did the prayers and practise as Lama had instructed.

On the Sunday a lady came to our house and within one hour it was sold.

STORY 2

I had been a buddhist for about 10 years when one night I awoke and felt someone was in the room. I looked over the end of my bed near the doorway and saw a monk in robes. It was an old monk with shoulders hunched. It was like a hologram, a bit unreal, but it was not a dream.

In my heart I was always searching for someone I could trust completely on a spiritual level and when I connected with Lama Konchog I was filled with happiness and bliss.

One day Jill, who was now a nun named Thupten Konchog, rang and asked if David and I would like to come to her house as she had a few people who wanted to take refuge and she had arranged a phone link with Lama Konchog.

When I heard Lama's voice it was wonderful. I took refuge vows with him and he said these words which are so precious to me. Lama said - "YOU CAN ASK ME ANYTHING NOW. I TAKE CARE OF YOU."

I hoped to go and see him but he was very sick and not long after he died.

Three times David and I had tried to go to India and Nepal in previous years, but there were always obstacles. Once we had paid our deposit but the tour was cancelled, another time David had to have surgery and his doctor strongly advised against going.

So I accepted that we did not have the karma in this lifetime. Then one year after Lama's death we received an invitation from Lama Lhundrup and Tenzin Zopa to attend the consecration of Lama Konchog's stupa. It was like Lama asking me to come. We knew that it was right for us to go. Everything fell into place.

Planes that were full suddenly had 2 seats due to cancellations.

We arrived at Kopan and Jill Konchog was there to meet us. It all seemed very familiar.

First we went to look at Lama's stupa, which was to be consecrated the next day by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Then Jill Konchog said now I will take you down to Lama's house.

Tenzin Zopa and his brothers greeted us in the courtyard. Then we went into Lama's room. I was totally unprepared for what happened next. I looked around the room with all Lama's relics and all his precious dharma paintings, deities and then at his throne (bed) which had a large photo of Lama on it and my body was filled with great sobs and tears running down my face. I felt this force with compelled me to prostrate many times.

I wanted to stay in that room forever.

We had a wonderful week at Kopan. Everyday we would circumambulate around this wonderful stupa. We could look across to the Himalayan mountains which were covered in mist even on a beautiful sunny day, but there was always one mountain that was always clear for the four days of the consecration. After the consecration the mist closed over it. We were told that it was called the Snow Mountain, or Milarepa's mountain. It was where Milarepa's cave is, and where Lama Konchog meditated for 20 years.

Since returning to Queensland I have always felt Lama very near. Lama is my inspiration and part of my everyday life.

I start my day with Guru Yoga and I finish the day with Guru Yoga.

I wait patiently for the swift return of the unmistakable reincarnation of definite, true, Geshe Lama Konchog.

For us disciples born from your holy teachings, there is no other refuge than my kind, holy spiritual master.

From Joy Kakoschki

VENERABLE NAMDAG'S STORY

My life saving experience with the precious Geshe Lama Konchog.

This experience occurred at the Kopan Course in November 1997. I was a newly ordained nun and was attending the course. I developed an obstruction to my breathing. There were no other physical symptoms but when I swallowed I would stop breathing and had difficulty starting again. This happened a few times and seemed to be getting worse so I went to the medical team.

They decided that I needed a tracheotomy and went to the office to see Fran Mahout about getting an ambulance to take me to hospital. I went back to the dormitory that I was sharing with three other nuns and I sat on my bed and began doing Medicine Buddha Mantras. The other nuns were looking quite anxious but I felt quite calm.

Fran told me later that the people from the medical team were very anxious when they went to the office and she eventually advised them to go back to the medical room and she would deal with the situation.

Geshe lama Konchog, as was his custom was sitting of the seat near the door being a point of stillness and calm.

When the others had left Fran said to Geshe La, "What to do?"

She said Geshe La meditated for a few minutes and said "Got to have faith."

He then got up and asked Fran to follow him to his house. When they got there Geshe La gave Fran a precious pill and a white cloth and she was to find a stone and grind the pill to a fine dust. He also gave her two Bumpa Vases full of blessed water and two different kinds of incense.

He told Fran to take two of the Rinpoches and Cherek Lama down to my dormitory.

She was to pour the blessed water onto the crushed pill and I was to drink a cup full of this. The rest of the blessed water was sprinkled over me while mantras were being said by the Rinpoches.

The incense was then lit and the smoke wafted over my body from head to toe.

Cherek Lama was asked to go to his room and do prayers and mantras for Namdag. My breathing began to improve immediately. This was mid afternoon. By supper time I felt well enough to go to the dining room to have some soup.

Next day someone asked how I felt and I said, " I felt as if my body had been shaken up."

Their comment was well you would after have three Lamas running around your body. I was told that both Geshe La and Lama Lhundrop Rinpoche as well as Cherek Lama did prayers while the ceremony was happening.

The problem has never re-occurred. GLK said it was extremely negative karma ripening quickly. How blessed was I to be in that place when the causes and conditions came together for that karma to ripen.

I went to thank Geshe Lama Khonchog a couple of days later and make an offering. He came to the door in his shemtab and singlet and asked what I wanted. I said that I was there to express my gratitude and he said: "Is that all, go now."

What a truly amazing Lama . May his reincarnation be found quickly.

STUART'S STORY

Dear Venerable,

Best wishes for your project. The incident concerning Geshe Lama Konchog and the prayer wheel is very simple to relate but is perhaps more difficult to show why it had such an impact on me.

This prayer wheel construction was a project of obvious importance to Geshe-la. A fact amply demonstrated by his daily morning visits to the workshop at C.I. to check on my progress. At the time of the incident I had been working on the prayer wheel project for a couple of weeks and had reached the stage of cutting out the brass letters of the mantra and other shapes that were to be soldered onto a copper undersheet. By dark that day only the double vajra which had to be soldered to the base of the cylinder remained to be cut so I decided to take it home and finish it there. That night as I made the final cut with the tinsnips that freed the vajra from the sheet, it flew up off the table where I was cutting it and stuck in my eye.

Ouch! I pulled it out, much blood, tea towel held to eye, raced to neighbour Ricardo, lengthy trip to Nambour hospital casualty department. Verdict: no problem, it had missed the eye ball by millimetres so after a couple of sterostrips and bit of cleaning up I was off home.

The next day my eye was not a pretty sight so I received much sympathetic attention that was most gratifying. Later that morning when Geshe-la made his morning visit to the workshop to check on my progress it seems neither he nor our translator Dawa had heard of the incident and they asked what had happened to me. As I related the story to Dawa and he passed it on to Geshe-la I watched Geshe-la's face carefully. Geshe-la was usually pretty stern of countenance in his dealings with me and I imagine I was hoping for a bit of sympathy. Well no way! Immediately on understanding what had happened his face became suffused in joy. It was the kind of reaction I would expect to see in someone who had won lotto; an immediate uncontrived expression of pleasure. It was as if all his hopes had come to fruition.

It was the immediate expression that made such an impact on me rather than any subsequent words of explanation such as that it was auspicious for the project and of personal benefit to myself by purifying much negative karma. There was absolutely no sign of any first reaction that I could consider normal, such as “Wow! Lucky you! It could have taken the eye”. No, none of that, just this great joy in someone for whom mere smiling was not something commonly seen. I was shaken but thought then as I do now of how wonderful it would be to have such conviction and that surely here I have seen the result of extensive mind training.

Use whatever of this you wish.

Love Stuart

JAN'S STORY

GIFTS FROM THE GURU

INTRODUCTION

What is Guru Devotion and how do I practice it are two questions that I constantly study, experience and reflect on. Things happen during the busy day and at night I ask myself to search for insight into the way they evolved and when and where did I practice true guru devotion.

MY STORY:

I met Venerable Konchog about six years ago, in 1999 at Chenrezig Institute on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. She was having coffee in the café and my mother in law introduced me. They started talking about Geshe Lama Konchog and I listened then I saw Venerable Konchog communicate mind to mind with Lama and I thought “Wow! I wish I could do that.”

Shortly afterwards, I had a crisis happen in my life and I went to see a wonderful psychologist. As the counselling progressed I had a vision of Geshe Lama Konchog and Venerable Konchog standing in front of me slightly to the right and upward. The psychologist told me I had had a spiritual experience and suggested I speak to a religious person about it. In the vision, Geshe Lama Konchog said to me “is ok, is ok!” and venerable Konchog was standing slightly lower than him with eyes down and in a very humble student pose with hands in prayer position. It was very reassuring. It took me a little while but I managed to track down Venerable Konchog and went to visit her.

When I entered I saw photos of many Buddhist monks in her house. When I saw Geshe Lama Konchog, I said “that is the person in my dreams!” Since then we have had many conversations. I

I acted for awhile as her attendant whilst she was in Three Year Retreat. She is a fully ordained Buddhist nun. As Khen Rimpoche Lama Lhundrup said “she is a great Practitioner, rejoice!” her unpolluted, clear mind breaks things down to the bare bones – Lam Rim, the 4 Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. When I

do dharma work for her, I am doing it for my Guru, my motivation is to be a student that shines the positive light.

I began emailing Geshe Lama Konchog whilst he was still alive and somehow that made our connection real and concrete. Fortunately, my family never doubted me and over the years my husband and our three sons have become practising Buddhists in their own right.

At the time of his death I was crewing with a group of 24 ‘at risk’ students on a 100ft sailing ship. The day before he died we experienced gale force winds, a fierce sky that was grey and black and it rained heavily all day. The students all went below feeling sick so myself and another teacher had to keep watch all day. It was hard work. Finally we anchored in a safe harbour for the night.

The next day, we awoke to the most brilliant blue sky I have ever seen. The sun was yellow and warm. The ocean was every shade of blue and green and there were dolphins all about us. Everyone was happy. We had breakfast, went diving, rolled down the sand dunes and swam in the water. At about 11.00 I had to excuse myself and sit down. We were out of range for communications but I knew something had changed forever. I felt something very solemn and serious in my heart. When we returned I was told of his death and cried and felt an immense loss but funnily enough not sad. I felt a sense of maturity in my being.

CAR ACCIDENT

Ten months ago I had a life threatening car accident. My car was destroyed except for the little cocoon part where I was. This took me to Venerable Konchog’s house who was in Retreat. I cried when I saw her and I knew we would work together for Geshe Lama Konchog doing Dharma work. However, to really be of use to her and rightfully receive the insight of her Retreat I had obstacles to overcome and boy were they whoppers!

I could plainly see that I was in fact suffering and causing others to suffer a great deal and needed to make some changes. I faced up to the fact that I had karmic seeds (laziness and self pity) that needed addressing. My motivation was to clear my mind to further my Guru’s work with Venerable Konchog and every person I met.

I sit with folded hands in his presence which is in the air that surrounds me and I breathe in and out; it gives me strength.

KNOWING THE GURU

I can’t really explain my connection with Geshe Lama Konchog. When I address him, I do so as ‘My dear old friend ...’ I look back at other key times in my life and sense he was there advising me, guiding me or conversing with me about life’s stuff. It always felt good, so to meet him full on in this life did not really surprise me. I just always tried to keep my heart open to him even though at times scary things were happening to me. This seems to have given me the strength to make it to my adult years and able to face many obstacles with dignity.

GESHE LAMA KONCHOG RELICS

Venerable Konchog has given one of his pearls from the relics from his cremation. I happily see it as my job to nurture it and make it grow. As yet it hasn't but I am still working on it. Over the last year one of the relics at Venerable Konchog's house has changed into my favourite photo in her house. It is an exact replica of the mountains that I yearn for in Tibet. It is the cave where Geshe Lama Konchog did Retreat for forty years.

CONCLUSION:

I don't know where my journey will take me with what's left in this life but I do not know I am working hard to meet Geshe Lama Konchog again in the next life. He is my motivation to get up each day and be a beacon of positive energy to others!

With much love to fellow Dharma students, Jan Kakoschki

HILARY'S STORY

MEMORIES OF LAMA KONCHOG

There are so many stories one could tell about Lama Konchog, but here are just a couple of my favourite memories – one funny and one cultural.

When Lama Konchog visited Chenrezig Institute in 1987, he suggested that some of the western monks learn Chum spiritual dancing and wear the proper costumes and do a performance.

I think they were very apprehensive, but Lama got Dechen and others to make the fabulous costumes and soon the monks were transformed.

I am not sure what Lama thought of the final dance performance, but to western eyes it was a very religious experience and one that we had never seen anything like before in the small town Eudlo.

Another time myself and a western monk, Namgyal, were cooking lunch for Lama Konchog and we cooked a huge pot of rice along with other things. I am not sure why, but I could not get the lid off the hot rice pot because somehow it had created a vacuum and it would not budge!

After many attempts, I asked Namgyal to help but we both got a fit of the giggles and became hysterical, laughing like a pair of hyenas around the kitchen. My stomach almost still hurts just thinking of how much we laughed.

Eventually Lama Konchog came to investigate where his lunch was. I think we must have somehow turned the pot upside down to break the vacuum, but eventually we got to eat.

Lama Konchog was laughing almost as much as we were!

Hilary Clarke

(author's note: Hilary was a nun at the time of Lama's visit to Chenrezig Institute. She attended Lama in the story about the fire puja and the 'snake-like thing'!)

PAUL'S STORY

'WILL WONDERS EVER CEASE?'

Over many years I had heard of the marvellous being known as 'Geshe Lama Konchog' from many people returning from the yearly November study course in Kopan monastery in Nepal. As I had not met this Lama and I had no plans to go to Nepal, I just put him into the category of 'yet another kind and amazing Realised One doing devoted service for Lama Zopa Rinpoche.'

This 'ordinary view' of mine changed when he died and was cremated. Out of the cremation fire came hundreds of jewel-like objects that ordinarily should not be there: 'precious relics of his true realisations' - we were told by our experienced teachers.

And what was even more astounding to me was that some of the burnt objects were multiplying! Now, if I had been told this story by other people, I would have probably dismissed it. However when some of the people I respect most in the world began to give statements verifying this phenomena I began to take much more notice.

The possibility of a burning human body producing such extraordinary relics as 'wake-up calls' really opened up my mind to the absolute power and marvels of full enlightenment.

This opening doorway also led me into considering the potential and promise of stupas as part of the virtuous path. I was so inspired by the subsequent work of Lama Konchog's heart-disciple Ven Tenzin Zopa in actualising the jewel-netted 'One Thousand Relic Stupa' in Kopan in such a short time after the cremation.

Many circumstances led me from London England to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland where I was introduced to Venerable Thubten Konchog Jill.

Ven Konchog accepted my offer to assist her as an attendant during the last part of her three year Great Retreat and I have been so privileged to see the birth and launch of 'The Guru' in what seems to be such a short time.

Now, my intention is to preserve the essence of Lama Konchog's precious teachings and realizations and to help establish a conducive place where more aspirants on the path can spend quality retreat time.

May all beings be so liberated.

Paul Seto.

SOME (not-so) FUNNY STORIES

One particular day I remember very clearly: Lama was giving a discourse on something that required not only a high level of concentration but a physical impression that we were doing so. And none of us gave either.

The first part of the teaching in the morning had been particularly hard going, because we were being hit with an intellectual club over the head, over and over. As if this was not bad enough, everything that Lama said had to be translated and often the translator was not clear what Lama meant and sometimes we were not clear what the translator was saying, so we were all quite tense – mentally and physically.

We all sat there during the first session like stunned mullet, totally frustrated. We knew that we had to get a grasp on what was being said, because Lama's teachings were so profound and touched areas that we had not heard before.

I did not remember too many of Lama's teachings as I have already explained, but I did remember this one. I think it may have been a discourse on the Heart Sutra. And it was well beyond our hitherto experiences on that level of understanding. And we knew it. So we really did try to get a relatively clear picture.

When we came out of the Gompa at lunch time, we were all totally exhausted.

So we went down for lunch and filled up our tummies and emptied out our heads. As you do!

When we came in for the next session, we were all totally brain dead. All the blood had gone to our stomachs to digest the meal instead of kick starting our brains, as it should have. All we could do was flop around the floor of the gompa, looking like over-stuffed dead fish.

There is no worse feeling in the world than trying to stay conscious and alert when your brain and whole body wants to curl up like a carpet snake for a week to digest a heavy meal. Maybe there is one thing worse – and that is to try to give the impression that it is not happening to you.

Especially when you are in full view of a living Buddha - who sees all. Especially when he is giving a discourse on the mind. Especially when you *know* you look like a dead fish. Especially when you know there is *nothing* you

can do about it. And most especially when there is nothing to hide behind and nowhere to escape.

And we all know that awful feeling!

Anyway, Lama was not in such dire straits, he was up and firing on all cylinders! He looked around the room and his face turned into a growl, he leaned over his table and said something in Tibetan that we all completely understood - and the translator had absolutely no problem in translating either.

Lama fixed each one of us with a wrathful eye that would have woken up the dead, and shrieked at us: *“Most of you are being paid by the government to be here – so the least you can do, is listen!”*

oooOooo

One time during the rainy season at Chenrezig Institute, some students tried vainly to get Lama to wear gum boots because of the ticks, leaches and the muddy ground after rain.

He said **NO**, he would not wear them! Several people kindly tried to persuade him by insisting the gum boots would protect him. But he repeatedly said **NO**! He did not want these boots, he wanted his sandals that offered no protection and they were also very slippery in the wet.

Eventually he got sick and tired of this insistence, so he kicked the gum boots all around the outside of the Gomba. We got the message, no gum boots for living Buddhas!

I can only guess at the reason for all this but I think it was because he was so in tune with nature that nothing would have harmed him, and also he probably liked the feel of the wet muddy earth. Whatever, he never wore the gum boots.

oooOooo

I did ask Lama if he thought he would ever come back to Australia and his answer was a great hefty laugh, followed by: *“When every snake in Australia has left – I will come back!”*

There were many huge carpet snakes at Chenrezig Institute and they often tried to get in through the windows of the Sangha House.

He did however, leave his big Chod dameru at Chenrezig Institute, which has subsequently been lost. He also left his shoes as a sign that he would return, but I believe these too have been lost.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book in memory to the old form of Geshe Lama Konchog, the true Holy Being, Mahasiddha, Yogi, True Practitioner and Heart Guru.

I bow down and again touch your toes!

May you live forever.

I dedicate this book to the new incarnation of Geshe Lama Konchog – Tulku Tenzin Phuntsok Rinpoche.

I bow down!

May you live forever.

I dedicate this book to the True Disciple, The True Guru, the Absolute Practitioner and My Guru Brother – Geshe Lama Tenzin Zopa.

I bow down with folded hands.

May you live forever.

I dedicate this book to His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, Who leads us, unmistakably and clearly on the Path,

I bow down!

May you live forever.

I dedicate this book to all the Gurus who show the unmistakable Path to liberation and enlightenment,

Who show the Path of non-discrimination and Compassion.

I bow down.

May you live forever.

I dedicate from the bottom of my heart to this effect.

RECOMMENDED READING

Transcriptions from teachings from Geshe Lama Konchog's teachings in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia.

Pabonka Rinpoche. *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Wisdom Publications, Boston. 1993.

Sogyal Rinpoche. *Tibetan book of living and dying*. Harper Collin. London. 1992.

Guru Rinpoche, translated by; Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead. The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. Shambhala. Boston and London. 1987

Glenn H. Mullin. *Death and Dying. The Tibetan Tradition*. Arkana Penguin. L986.

SOME WORDS OF EXPLANATION

BARDO

Tibetan Buddhism believes that after the consciousness and continuum leaves the body at the time of death, it moves to an intermediate, or *bardo* state, where it can stay for up to forty-nine days before it takes a new form in rebirth. An Enlightened being can transcend the bardo.

BODHICITTA

This is the 'wisdom heart' of unconditional love for all beings. A Bodhisattva practices bodhicitta.

BODHISATTVA

A Buddha in the making. An Enlightened being. The ultimate hero. A follower of the Ten Perfections: Generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness and equanimity. A Bodhisattva chooses not to reach Buddhahood for him/herself alone, but delays it until all beings have reached this state. A bodhisattva continues to be reborn in the Samsara state and undergo suffering in order to help others reach the state of Enlightenment for themselves.

CLEAR LIGHT MEDITATION

This is described as being the mind's ultimate brightness and wisdom. At death we naturally experience the clear light as part of the death process, but it lasts only for a short time. It is total clarity of the mind and can be attained through meditation.

DAKAS AND DAKINIS

Buddhas fall into five groups. The Sangha group consists of: Bodhisattvas; Shravakas; Pratyekabuddhas; dakas and dakinies; and dharma protectors.

GREAT RETREAT

Three year isolated retreat completed in silence.

LAM RIM

Literally *the graduated path to enlightenment*.

MALA BEADS

108 beads that are used to count mantras. Not normally worn as a necklace, but can be worn on the left wrist.

MO

A divination technique used for calculating the pros and cons of an event or situation. Lamas often perform mos to ascertain the outcome of situations.

SAMSARA

The suffering state. This world is considered to be Samsara because we are governed by causes and conditions that perpetuate suffering. The study of The Four Nobles Truths gives an understanding of the nature of suffering, what causes suffering, how it can be alleviated from our mind, and the path that leads to its cessation, ie: the Noble

Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths is a study of the Samsaric condition, and how to step aside, and live in Bliss.

SANGHA

Order of ordained monks and nuns. The ordained Sangha are seen as representatives of The Buddha. They are The Buddha's helpers. The Robes and vows of the Sangha members distinguish them from the general lay community thereby engendering respect and trust. The Robes and vows are the objects of respect and trust, not necessarily the person wearing them.

STUPA

The stupa represents the Enlightened Mind of a Buddha. The Buddha represents the Enlightened Body, and the sutras (teachings) represent the Enlightened Speech.

TRIPLE GEM

The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha is the Triple Gem. In some traditions, The Guru is placed above The Buddha, because without The Guru to teach about the Triple Gem, there would be no dharma.

TONG LEN

Literally, *exchanging self for others*. This is the practice of giving and taking. It is a way to build up compassion and loving kindness and for dissolving self-cherishing.