



# GADEN NOTES

## NEWSLETTER OF THE GADEN RELIEF PROJECTS

APRIL 2008



### GREETINGS FROM THE ZANGSKAR PROJECT

BY KIM GUTSCHOW

The Zangskar Project has undergone some major developments in recent years, including the formation of a new umbrella organization, the Zangskar Nuns Association (ZNA). This organization brings together member nuns from each of Zangskar's ten nunneries for the first time in history. After talking about collaboration for many years, the nuns met several times in the fall of 2006 to form their new association. These meetings, which were held at Karsha's Chuchikjall Nunnery, established key needs and aims for the association.

The nuns stressed that the most critical needs they wished addressed were the desire for better educational facilities, as well as electricity, water delivery and storage systems at each nunnery. They also wanted to develop further long terms goals that would span all nunneries and to this end hoped to establish a central meeting place where the ZNA members could meet on a more regular basis. A few nuns formed a subcommittee to look into acquiring land or a building near Zangskar's administrative headquarters in Padum as this would be a central location most accessible to all nuns from Zangskar's ten nunneries. The other major accomplishment was the election of delegates from each nunnery who would report the results back to their nunneries as well as accomplish the day-to-day tasks of the organization. Last but not least, the nuns helped me draft a constitution and appointed the first governing board of the ZNA.

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**In the summer of 2007, the ZNA president, Skalzang Lhamo, and two US volunteers, Jennifer O'Boyle and Lauren Galvin, undertook a preliminary needs assessment at nine of the ten nunneries in Zangskar. This assessment identified the key resources- in terms of education, ritual, membership, and physical infrastructure- present in each nunnery, as well as identifying the key needs that each nunnery faces. At present the needs and the resources at each nunnery vary considerably- as some nunneries have electricity or solar panels, as well as an array of assembly halls, classrooms and residential cells, while other nunneries may have the bare minimum of cells with no communal kitchen or educational facilities.**

**A summary of the conditions prevailing at each of the ten nunneries as well as the minutes of a ZNA meeting held to discuss the future of the organization can be found at the Gaden Relief website at: [http://www.gadenrelief.org/staff/zangskar\\_survey-20071030.html](http://www.gadenrelief.org/staff/zangskar_survey-20071030.html) and [http://www.gadenrelief.org/staff/zangskar\\_nuns\\_association-20070803.html](http://www.gadenrelief.org/staff/zangskar_nuns_association-20070803.html). After much searching, by late 2007, the nuns were able to establish a temporary headquarters in a building donated to the nuns by the Zangskari Gonpa Association (this is the monastic association which includes all of Zangskar's monasteries, but not nunneries).**

**With the formation of a local NGO that spans all ten nunneries, the nuns hope to establish more concrete development goals for all nunneries. The goals can be found at the Gaden website at <http://www.gadenrelief.org/zangskar.html>. They include the construction of passive solar buildings, water delivery and storage systems, greenhouses, compost toilets, and orchards at all nunneries in order to improve basic needs like heat, water, food, and light at all the nuns' residential facilities. These will improve the nuns' livelihood, health, and ability to continue their ritual and meditation studies throughout the long, dark, and cold Zangskari winter when there is little work in the field, and so maximum time for study and training.**

**The nuns also hope to install smokeless stoves and solar panels and charge controllers to support lighting and heating needs at all of the nunneries, most of which have little or no regular electricity and highly inefficient heating sources at present. Last but not least, the nuns hope to establish a new initiative in women's health, where nuns would help sponsor simple maternal awareness clinics around issues like blood pressure, vaccination, antenatal care, or safe delivery in the villages from which member nuns come.**

**Your continued support of the Zangskar Nuns is deeply appreciated as this project continues to evolve.**

## MESSAGE FROM RINPOCHE

Dear friends and kind supporters of Gaden Relief Projects,

Greetings. I am updating you on the situation at my monastery and with the nomadic people in the upper Mekong in Eastern Tibet. Tashi Lhapug monastery is located west of Zadoh City in the Yushu Prefecture of the Chinghai Province of China. The monastery is in a remote mountainous region, eight hours from Zadoh City. The altitude is 13,000 feet above sea level, one of the highest monasteries in Kham, Eastern Tibet.

Tashi Lhapug is rich spiritually, and the monks are great practitioners and they are studying Dharma hard- but materially they are poor, because the location is hard to reach and they don't have many supporters. Tashi Lhapug monastery has 100 monks, including 32 young monks who are studying at the newly built school for Buddhist philosophy and debate. I am their only Lama who tries to raise funds for them outside Tibet.



I would like to build a small clinic at the monastery for the people in this region, because there is no hospital in this area. It is so hard for people to travel all the way to Zadoh City, and most people don't have the funds to travel all the way there, so they come to the monastery to get some help and medicine from the Lama doctor Venerable Lochok. This year there was so much snowfall, it was a long and hard winter and many people suffered losing their yaks. I know many people will come to the monastery to get medicine and help.

I am travelling to my monastery in July 2008 with some Dharma friends to do health care work. We are taking some Tibetan and Chinese herbs and Western medicine. We are also setting up solar electricity and planning to build a small clinic at my monastery. We need your support and help. If you could send your contribution to Gaden Relief for these projects, that will be so wonderful. Myself and Gaden Relief workers are doing our best to serve the monastery and nomadic people of Tibet.

“Just one drop of water makes the ocean bigger”. Your support will benefit so many people.

Thank You and Tashi Delek

Zasep Rinpoche

**Reflections on a Trip to Mongolia**  
by John Huizinga  
Queen's Bay, British Columbia

The purpose of my trip to Mongolia was to put together a solar electric system for a monastery. The journey turned out to be about much more than just this task. It was about the experience of living at a remote Buddhist monastery in a community of monks where the rhythm of day-to-day life centres on the commitment to learn and live the Dharma.



In particular I was to get to know and develop a real affinity for the two young monks who were chosen to be my helpers. Erij and Tandzer (nicknames or diminutives), aged 16 and 17, both came from nomadic families living in the Gobi, and reminded me in some ways of the farm kids I grew up with in Canada. They were unfazed by whatever came their way and immediately prepared to do whatever was needed. Ergedel and Dandar were both eager to learn and quick to figure things out.

I first put them to work digging a 600 ft. trench in the dry rocky ground, laying the heavy underground cable (the grid), digging holes and pouring cement to anchor the solar panel mounting and weatherproofing the powerhouse. Later they learned to connect up the electrical hardware, wall plugs, light fixtures and switches etc... and laid wires in hard to get to places for a less agile adult, such as in the ceilings of the temple.

Their approach to the work was patient and methodical, especially for 16 year olds, with often finicky and repetitive tasks. My helpers would persist with an intricate task until they had it exactly right-until they felt they had achieved perfection. Because of the language barrier, very few words were ever exchanged between us, but they would beam with satisfaction when showing me a perfectly completed task. The smiles on their faces spoke louder than anything they could ever say. I am left with memories of these two diligent, always cheerful young monks that I simply cherish.

It was also about travelling in the company of two Lamas, Zawa Rinpoche and Zasep Rinpoche. We drove in a four-wheel drive vehicle all the way to Karakorum with Bilgoon, a hearty monkish driver. The road is a mere jeep trail that winds and braids its way across a vast unfenced open range country. During the entire drive we did not see a single road sign or as much as one tree. The land is vast and unbroken and dwarfed only by the immense blue Mongolian sky. One can see forever. The horizon is so far and distant that at one point Zasep Rinpoche remarked that, "here you can see the earth is round".

When encountering the occasional nomad ger (yurt) we stopped to ask directions. Almost always we are invited to come in. The interiors of the gers are all quite similar with a stove in the middle and with brightly painted roof poles and door. There is painted furniture around the perimeter of the ger and a shrine with incense burners, candles, miniature prayer wheels, statues, photos, blue khatas, and perhaps a thangka against the far wall, opposite the door.

The first thing to take place once we are seated is the performance of a Mongolian ritual, the exchanging of snuff bottles. Snuff bottles are small rounded vessels made from a wide variety of natural stone, with a capstone of red coral.



These are highly prized and handed down for generations. Zawa Rinpoche has an ancient and much admired jade snuff bottle. There is a well understood protocol of how to present and receive a snuff bottle. The exchange is a welcoming ceremony that can also signal one's intentions, be they friendly, strictly social, about business, or not friendly. Needless to say, our visits were only friendly.

We were invariably offered a bowl of Arik, filled to the brim. This, the traditional drink of fermented mare's milk, is most definitely an acquired taste. Fortunately for queasy

for Canadian stomachs, it is acceptable to take only one small sip and then put the bowl down. As well, we were always offered food like mutton broth, cheese, deep fried bread, Mongolian dumplings and more mutton.

Before leaving, the Rinpoches would attend the shrine with Tibetan chants and lay their hand on people's heads to confer their blessings. We were often presented with bright blue khatas, the colour of the Eternal Blue Sky. It was probably hard to figure out how I, obviously not a monk, fit into the scheme of things, so sometimes I was presented with a khata as well. I was touched by the deference and the devotion shown to the two Lamas wherever we went. I experienced levels of genuine hospitality and devotion that I rarely have encountered in our own affluent society.

Once back in Ulaanbaatar, Zasep Rinpoche and myself went to an antique store where we each bought a snuff bottle with attractive grains and colours embedded in the stone and the requisite embroidered pouch to keep our new treasure. Next time we travel in the Gobi we too can participate in this ritual greeting. In the end I glimpsed another way of life, where the Mongolian nomads live a traditional, free, direct and self-sufficient life and where the new monastic communities are bravely struggling to revive another ancient way of life. These small monastic communities have a historical and spiritual tradition that was pushed to the brink of extinction but now has a new lease on life.

I feel that these monastic institutions and the people living there deserve all the help they can get. The support and help we were able to bring directly improved the spartan lives of the monks living at Delgeruun Choira. Mongolia, now free of a repressive Soviet ideology, is seeking to retrieve its own traditions and revive its Buddhist past. This is a long and difficult road with few resources to make it happen, other than the will and determination of the people involved. Our support and our help can make a huge difference in the revival of a people's heritage, and the advancement of the Buddhadharma.

I am grateful to Zasep Rinpoche and to Gaden Relief for giving me the opportunity to see and experience Mongolia in a truly unique way and to make my small contribution to this one community of monks.

Editor's note: We thank John very much for sharing his personal reflections here. For his related 2007 "Update on the Solar Electric System at Delgeruun Choira Monastery", with lots of pictures, see [www.gadenrelief.org/staff/delgeruun-20071023.html](http://www.gadenrelief.org/staff/delgeruun-20071023.html)

**ZADOH EXPEDITION 2006**  
**BY EVAN ZALESCHUK**

How fortunate we are to have our Lama here with us, living within such close proximity and so accessible. Spending five weeks travelling and rooming with him in his homeland, and seeing how devoted and respectful the Tibetans are to him back in Tibet, was a blessing in itself. This started when we went to Kum Bum monastery in Xinnig. Seeing the pilgrims there, complete strangers to him, come up for blessings was very moving. He would listen to them and watch while they prostrated, and then bless them as they knelt before him. The warmth and intimacy was palpable.

We left Xinnig by car and drove sixteen hours to Yushu, going over two passes at elevations of over 16,000 ft. All the while Rinpoche would be checking in with us to see if anyone was having any of the typical signs of altitude sickness: headaches, nausea or edema. We were doing fine as far as we knew. We arrived in Yushu and were greeted by Rinpoche's brother, nephew and nephew-in-law, a typical Tibetan greeting with khatas and tongues protruding. They would be with us as our guides and occasional bodyguards against dogs for the duration of our stay.

The day after our arrival in Yushu, Rinpoche and I were having a conversation about the time difference between there and Vancouver. I couldn't quite understand him or hear him properly, thinking to myself, "now that he is back home, he is speaking Tibetan without even knowing it". At the same time he was looking at me, thinking, "who is this idiot I brought and what did I get myself into". A couple of days later, we laughed about it, realizing that due to the dramatic altitude change, our brain functions weren't quite up to snuff and we weren't understanding things too clearly.

Driving into Yushu was like driving into the gateway to Tibet. The road leading up to it had a flowing river on one side leading us there with rows of trees and a monastery overlooking the vista. I was already impressed. Driving into the city of 80,000 mostly Tibetans was equally impressive. The facades on the building were decorated with colourful Tibetan painting and the doors all had the eight auspicious symbols in metalwork overlaying them. The locals themselves were beautifully clad in traditional garb with amber, coral and dzi beads. Here we picked up our translator, Drolma, who was to be a big part of the trip.



photo credits



From Yushu we were off to Zadoh with Rinpoche pointing out his sacred mountains and his family's ancestral camps. Here we met and stayed with his niece and Neeten, her husband, whom we had picked up in Yushu.

The word was given out that Diane, a midwife, was with us, and any expectant mothers could come for a consultation. We heard of one woman who lived just outside the city. She had been to the local Chinese hospital where they had told her it was unclear whether she had twins or just one baby and a large cyst. Her brother went out to bring her in and she arrived six hours later (we were to learn that nothing happens quickly there). Diane did an assessment of the expectant woman and discovered two heartbeats. We were all very excited for her. These would be her ninth and tenth children!

The doctors at the hospital, after performing an ultrasound, had said that she was around 30 weeks pregnant, but Diane thought it was very much closer to 40 (according to the timing of her last menses). We left a couple of days later for Tashi Lhapug with the thought that when we came back she might have delivered them.

It was a 10-hour drive up to Tashi Lhapug with a couple of stops along the way to eat and rest in some nomadic camps. Of course, there were also the spontaneous stops for locals who would come up to the truck Rinpoche was in for blessings. It was uncanny how they knew he was there. We would see them

walking across a big open field with family in-tow to come and make an offering to Rinpoche and receive his blessing, a deity card, and blessing pill or cord.

When we finally came up to the last pass where we could see Tashi Lhapug down below in the valley, it was awe-inspiring- like arriving upon Shangri-la. Here, in the middle of nowhere, (I kept looking for a sign that said "Nowhere") was this magnificent monastery rebuilt from rubble. There are 100 monks, including four yogis from the old days and many young boys now living at the monastery. Some mature monks have come back after spending many years in Tibetan monasteries in Lhasa and India, and this has been very inspiring for the younger monks.

Rinpoche gave teaching and initiations which the monks accepted enthusiastically and gratefully. He opened the Debate and Logic School where 32 monks will study. There was plenty of time for meetings with the monks, so much was accomplished administratively. The goals set out in these meetings are to raise \$10,000 annually to support the monks of the Debate and Logic School. These funds will be used for food and living expenses, and the building of a kitchen, storage area and dung house. There are no washrooms and no wells, so plans are underway to build these and to construct a fence around the areas that contain underground springs so that they can be kept sanitary.

Five days later we were on the road again up to Rinpoche's brother's camp. We got off the road at





one point and drove over hill and dale using valleys and mountain tops as our signposts until we arrived at his camp. We were greeted by Jamda's wife, two daughters, son and his wife, and many barking Tibetan mastiffs. We felt as if we were back in time 300 years, living in the yurts, eating yak yogurt and tsampa for breakfast and boiled mutton for supper. It was spartan but offered graciously. The only electricity came from a solar panel that lit a single bulb in the main tent, used in the evening for cooking and eating. Like Jamda, his family was very giving and helpful with anything they could.

A few days later it was decided that we should go on a pilgrimmage to Lama Norlha. "Who was Lama Norlha?" I asked. "Not who, but what?" was the response. Lama Norlha is a sister mountain to Mount Kailash, where a terton discovered that it is a holy seat for Padmasambava. Rinpoche hadn't been there before and was excited to go. Jamda arranged the horses and gear and we were off, a small expedition of seven, with three pack horses in tow. It took two days of nine hours each of horseback travel, during which we went over a mountain pass of 17,000 ft., to get there; and it was worth every step.

En route we stopped at hot springs that Rinpoche and I had envisioned as a glacial outpouring into a snow-lined pool, with steam coming off the water, and were eagerly anticipating. We were sadly disappointed by what we saw. It was a swamp with a sulphur smell that was heated by the sun. We went in anyway not having bathed for a week and feeling the need to be clean. One older fellow in the pool recognized Rinpoche and had heard all the wonderful things he had done for the locals. He did darshan at Rinpoche's feet and received his blessing. We passed Lama Norlha and many stupas that day and camped up at a glacial lake. There were no westerners here, just pilgrims to Lama Norlha and the lake- an amazing site.

After spending a few days circumambulating this holy site, we set out by horseback back to Zadoh. We checked in to find out if the woman pregnant with twins had delivered, but it hadn't happened yet. Diane suggested she go back to the hospital to get some more tests done and possibly stay since she was now getting very large and was not able to move around well.

We left Zadoh and carried on by jeep to Jamseng Health Care Centre. There we met Dr. Shamar who told us he was resigning. Dr. Leder and Jamda quickly found another local doctor to replace him. We bought some pill-making machines (grinder, oven and pill roller) so the doctors could make their own traditional pills from the herbs that they had collected.

Diane and I saw many patients there and, along with Rinpoche, dispensed many of the Tylenols and arthritis and stomach medicine. We also erected a prayer flag stupa for the locals to circumambulate and made plans to erect a concrete one next summer. It will be a 24-foot stupa of Namgyalma Buddha for long life and of Medicine Buddha for good health. The stupa will cost 2,800 yuan.

We then went back to Zadoh again and discovered that the woman still hadn't delivered. Her husband asked Rinpoche to do a "mo" (divination) about the delivery: would it be safer with a natural birth or a caesarian? The answer came back equally good either way.

Later that night Diane went to see the woman and taught her husband how to induce labour through reflexology techniques. We left for two nights to go visit some of Rinpoche's relatives, and when we got back we got a call that two little boys had been born just 12 hours prior, at home with no medical support and both breech, feet first! We went over right away and Rinpoche blessed them and Diane checked them out as well as the mother. They were all fine and healthy. What a blessing.

Our journey to Tibet was filled with many more amazing experiences too numerous to be recounted in a single short essay. It was wonderful to see first-hand how everyone's contributions here are used so efficiently and effectively. Many thanks to all who have contributed time, money, articles of clothing, sunglasses, medicines and so forth over the past few years. Your generosity has made, and will continue to make, a profound difference in the lives of the people living in this area of Tibet.

Thank you Rinpoche.

# YOU CAN HELP



Gaden Relief is a non-profit organisation that is run by a dedicated team of volunteers. Over 95% of all donations directly benefit people in need.

Gaden Relief is currently asking for your generous contribution to support our ongoing projects in Tibet and Mongolia.

Projects include; the Jamseng Health Care Centre in Tibet and the various monasterys supported by Zasep Tulku Rinpoche in Mongolia.

All donations are graciously accepted and tax deductible.

Personal Cheques can be mailed to -  
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Toronto, Ontario  
M6G 3E6

**MAKE A DONATION ON-LINE  
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