It’s a Yes! Celebrating Our Silver Jubilee with Lama Zopa Rinpoche
Y es! Lama Zopa Rinpoche will be in Singapore for our 25th anniversary! Although it will be a brief visit in the midst of Rinpoche’s busy schedule, we will have the honour of Rinpoche’s presence at the planned dinner celebration on 21st November. We will also be able to offer a long life puja to Rinpoche on 23rd November. Turn to the back page for details.

With the end of 2014 fast approaching, the time has come for the last curtain call on our 25th year milestone. In this final issue of TASHI DELEK for 2014, we highlight our travels to holy places—a bumper spread from page 7 to 12 that traces our passages through historical Buddhist sites across Asia. It might bring back a flood of memories for some, and for others, it may trigger a yearning to follow in the same footsteps.

For the year-end travel season, there are already groups of us on the move. Some 60 students have returned from an eight-day long Medicine Buddha meditation retreat at Kopan Monastery with Khen Rinpoche. There is the upcoming Jangchup Lamrim Teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in late December at Gaden Jangtse Monastery, south India. ABC is coordinating a group tour to this event.

What do these group travels do for us? Besides transporting us to other planes of inspired (and often exotic) existence far removed from our own urban high tech world, and connecting us to our spiritual teachers and very precious teachings, these trips have fostered a friendly camaraderie among us. In fact, we don’t have to go very far to bond. A picnic at East Coast Park accompanied by a lively sea breeze and good food can be just as effective, especially on an occasion like Teacher’s Day. All the right ingredients made for a happy relaxed outing on 6th September.

In closing, I hope you have all found some useful nuggets of knowledge in our 2014 coverage of ABC’s 25 years. How do we really want to remember our past as we move forward into the future, particularly for Dharma practice? Far more benefit to bring out the shine, celebrate the victories and appreciate what everyone at Amitabha Buddhist Centre has helped to achieve. As the song goes, “auld lang syne”?

On the cover: Lama Zopa Rinpoche accepting a long life puja at ABC, 1st February 2009
I’m sure you have heard many times what Ribur Rinpoche always used to tell Ven. Roger Kunsang, my secretary, to remind him of this point. When Lama Atisha was in Tibet, one of his disciples, a Kadampa Gehe called Gompawa, used to do a lot of meditation. Dromtonpa, another disciple of Lama Atisha, didn’t meditate because he was always so busy translating and neither did Lama Atisha’s cook, always being busy cooking. Gompawa thought, “I might have higher realisations than them. They are always busy.” So, when Gompawa thought this, Lama Arishka knew because of his clairvoyant powers, and he called Gompawa along with Dromtonpa and the cook. Lama Arishka had all three of them sit together, and then he compared to see who had the highest realisations. There was no way to compare the meditator Gompawa’s realisations with Dromtonpa’s realisations. Dromtonpa’s were much higher, and even the cook’s realisations were higher than the meditator’s. Ribur Rinpoche always tells Roger that story. I think what Rinpoche meant by using this story was to show an example of a very good and extremely obedient disciple. This is one story, but there are many stories like this, positive and negative stories.

Whatever collects the most extensive merit, whatever becomes the most powerful purification is what brings higher realisations and transforms your mind. Whatever brings enlightenment quickly and brings the greatest benefit to sentient beings is the most powerful practice. It doesn’t necessarily always have to be sitting and closing your eyes for many hours. One shouldn’t get caught up in that label.

Of course, I understand nothing is easy—study, retreat, work for the centre, especially dealing with people at the centre. From the stories, one can also see that when practising sutra, the path of perfections, it takes 600 great eons to create merit. But one can also look at the case of the bodhisattva Tak Tu Ngo, the Always Crying One, who sacrificed himself 600 great eons to create merit. But even bodhicitta generally doesn’t happen. Everything becomes blocked.

On occasions when there are many important things to accomplish at the centre, it’s not possible to expect to find time for everything, unless you can manifest like any bodhisattvas who can perform one hundred different activities, meditate, or go to pure lands to receive teachings with one hundred or one thousand bodies. With only one body, one can’t expect to do everything.

Along with work, one can do one’s commitments. When you are doing your job, if you don’t need to speak, then you can chant or recite prayers while your body is doing the work. When there are important things to do, or when one is travelling, one can make prayers then. Many disciples—not myself—but many other disciples who are good practitioners do that. Life is so busy. If you don’t have time that you can set aside for practice, whenever there’s some time or space, you can do your commitments. Some high lamas meditate whenever there’s a break or space.

It also depends on what’s more important. For example, when somebody is sick or dying, needing help, if you don’t offer help but instead go to your room to meditate or make prayers, that becomes selfish. There is something very important to do for others, but you don’t do it, and instead think of your own benefit.

Even if one misses out on one’s prayers and meditation through working for the guru or for others, there’s no great loss, because making prayers is supposed to be for others, to bring them to enlightenment. If you don’t practise because you’re lazy, then that’s a loss. In the other case, there’s no loss. Also, one can reduce daily practice commitments when there’s something very important to do, because the aim is to do what’s most beneficial for others. Analyse in this way. Think of what is the most important thing in life. That way you won’t have much confusion.

**Whatever collects the most extensive merit, whatever becomes the most powerful purification is what brings higher realisations and transforms your mind.**
His Holiness the Dalai Lama has always emphasised that Buddhists should study the texts in order to engage in proper Dharma practice. Here is a summary from a preliminary teaching given by His Holiness at the 33rd Kalachakra Empowerment in Leh, Ladakh on 7th July.

“Whatever kind of discourse is being given, it’s very important that teacher and students generate a good motivation. We should take refuge in the Three Jewels unencumbered by such emotions as attachment and anger, and unsullied by the eight worldly concerns. For a Dharma to be Mahayana, the person must be Mahayana.”

His Holiness said that the way we are led out of cyclic existence involves the Buddha’s fundamental teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which entail cessation of the causes of suffering. Soon after his enlightenment the Buddha first presented this teaching in Varanasi. He taught the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of its Cause, the Noble Truth of Cessation, and the Noble Truth of the Path. He explained that suffering must be known, its cause must be abandoned, cessation must be actualised and the path cultivated. However, once suffering is known, there is nothing to be known, nothing to be abandoned, nothing to be actualised and nothing to be cultivated.

His Holiness explained that each of the Noble Truths has four attributes: they are impermanent, suffering, empty and selfless. Regarding impermanence he said there is gross and subtle impermanence. When something simply comes to an end, that is gross impermanence, but the momentary change that affects a thing is subtle impermanence, impelled by its own causes. Ignorance is, for example, to hold onto a permanent self although there is no such self.

Entering into the path involves the Three Trainings in morality, concentration and wisdom, which lead to the practice of the Six Perfections and in due course to the practice of the Vajrayana. To start with tantra will not be so effective. To understand what liberation is, we need to understand the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. Meanwhile, as part of the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma the Tathagata-garbha Sutra reveals the subjective mind, the clear light mind, which is the essence of the Highest Yoga Tantra. In his teaching the Buddha first laid the foundations, then raised the walls of the structure, finally topping it with a roof. His Holiness remarked that Tibetans tend to begin with the roof.

He said that when the Three Trainings are developed on the basis of understanding selflessness, this renders them the Three Higher Trainings. The 37 factors of Enlightenment include the Four Foundations of Mindfulness; Four Right Exertions; Four Bases of Power; Five Faculties; Five Powers; Seven Factors of Enlightenment and the Noble Eightfold Path. His Holiness explained that the Four Mindfulnesses included mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind and mindfulness of phenomena.

“Understanding [that] the nature of the mind is clarity and awareness,” he said, “we can see how disturbing emotions can be overcome. Buddhist teaching is not about threatening people with dire consequences if they don’t behave in a certain way. Instead, by understanding the advantages of liberation, they will be inspired to achieve it.”

His Holiness commented that in today’s world people are more interested in their physical comfort and sensory pleasure, and yet love and compassion are developed within and are more durable. Beginning to explain Nagarjuna’s text the “Precious Garland” he spoke of high status or good rebirth and definite goodness or liberation. He reiterated that Dharma, to protect us from suffering, entails not harming others but helping them, often expressed as abandoning the ten unwholesome deeds and fulfilling the ten virtues. In this connection, all faults come from self-cherishing and coming under the sway of the mental factors known as the three poisons. Suffering is not dispelled by reciting prayers, only by overcoming ignorance, the misconception of self.
In July 2005, "42 ABC members and friends embarked on a pilgrimage to Tibet together with our resident teacher Geshe Chonyi and five of our Sangha." That only "official" expedition to Tibet to date was organised by Ven. Paldron and Phuah Soon Ek. I was among the pilgrims on that odyssey, a relative newcomer to ABC then. The journey inspired an essay, which was featured in our newsletter. Here is an excerpt from the issue of Sep/Oct 2005.

"As followers of the Gelug tradition founded by Je Tsong Khapa, visiting the three great monasteries of our lineage was a must. Ganden Monastery, which was founded by Lama Tsong Khapa in 1410, stands high on Drogri (Nomad Mountain) outside Lhasa. In the freshness of morning as our buses wound uphill toward the monastery, its sprawling buildings came into view as a curtain of clouds slowly lifted. Most of Gaden was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in the Sixties. However it was heartening to see that repair work had taken place in recent years, as the ruins were not obvious to us during our visit. Many of us bought bags of incense twigs as offerings, which were fed into a furnace outside the main temple. The main temple had a chamber with a life-sized statue of Lama Tsong Khapa seated on what had been his teaching throne. We got to receive a blessing from his hat and boots wrapped in yellow brocade that an officiating monk placed on top of our heads.

Then we climbed up to another chamber in which stood a gem-encrusted stupa holding Lama Tsong Khapa's relics. There was a row of butter lamps outside the chamber that was soon ablaze with light as our ABC friends were swift and enthusiastic with their offerings.

Sera Monastery, just outside of Lhasa, was founded by Lama Tsong Khapa's disciple, Jamchen Choje. As it was mid-afternoon by the time we reached Sera, we missed visiting the main Sera temple as it had closed by that time. But we were able to spend at least an hour inside the Sera Je temple and to make prayers to the holy objects there, especially at the Hayagriva shrine. We at ABC have a special connection with Sera Je, as it is the monastery where our lamas and our lamas' teachers studied. Hayagriva is significant in being the main tantric deity of Sera Je.
have fallen to just a few hundred. Nowadays, the numbers in these monasteries for hundreds of years. Before His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s exile to India, thousands of great Gelug monasteries, is also situated close to Lhasa on a hill. Drepung, the third of the three great Gelug monasteries, is also situated close to Lhasa on a hill. The purpose was to visit a cave used by Lama Tsong Khapa. In this cave, Lama Tsong Khapa had composed some key texts on emptiness. Close by was a retreat house where he had composed other texts. The monk who was to guide the group said it would take 45 minutes to climb up. For me, it was a case where the spirit was willing but the flesh was pathetically weak as an untimely headache and jelly knees deterred me from joining the trekking party. In the end, half of our group with Geshela made it successfully up the steep rocky path to pay homage and offer guru puja at these shrines of Lama Tsong Khapa.

Drepung, the third of the three great Gelug monasteries, is also situated close to Lhasa on a hill. Before His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s exile to India, thousands of monks had studied the great texts in these monasteries for hundreds of years. Nowadays, the numbers have fallen to just a few hundred. Although the monasteries in Tibet are no longer swelling with ordained scholars and hardly a high lama dwells there, the holy objects and relics still remaining are themselves the source of much inspiration and awe. They are reminders of the faithful, devoted and extensive practice of our teachers and those who came before us. They are tangible symbols encouraging us to believe that the miraculous is entirely possible.

Like Ganden and Sera, Drepung had numerous chambers filled with fantastic statues of Buddhas, deities and lineage lamas. One that left an impression on me was the three-storey high statue of Maitreya in his eight-year old form. Only the head and upper body of Maitreya are visible in a third-floor chamber. After making an offering to Maitreya and taking some pictures, I was preparing to leave when an old monk at the door motioned me over. He held a large conch shell. It took my slow mind some moments to understand that he wanted to pour some blessed water from the conch into my cupped hands. In another hall were smaller yet no less sacred manifestations of a Talking Tara statue, a self-arsenished Manjushri image, and a gold tooth relic of Lama Tsong Khapa. Great faith was surely the key to accepting these objects as described. And if great faith was present, then one was thankful for the karma ripening to apprehend such miracles."

Day 7: A lot of travelling over the sandy and rocky land of Tibet. By late afternoon, we had crossed over the Brahmaputra River and reached the town of Saga. It was eight o’clock. We had our first sighting of Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailash. It was an awesome sight and everyone was busy making prostrations and doing prayers. When we arrived at the base camp it had numerous Chinese and Tibetan shops catering to our modern needs. Ven. Drachom who had been there 17 years ago kept saying that things had changed a lot. The journey that took us three days from Lhasa had previously taken him eight days over very rocky roads!

On arrival at Darchen, we immediately began preparing for our hike the next day. Yaks had to be hired to carry our belongings up the pass. Those who thought they could not walk and carry their own bags into the mountains had to hire horses and porters. There was always the constant reminder to take our high altitude antidote ‘hong jing tian’, a Chinese herbal medicine. Bags had to be repacked to make sure we only carried what was necessary.

Day 9 was the start of our circumambulation and the morning started full of sunshine. No sign of snow! We took a bus early in the morning that brought us to the starting point of our circumambulation of Mount Kailash, at about eight o’clock. We could see the peak of the mountain beckoning to us from afar. Far ahead to the left lay sky burial sites, but we were warned not to venture there.

It was an exciting day walking along beautiful rocky cliffs, waterfalls and rapids with crystal clear water. We arrived at a Tibetan tent where we had a simple lunch before continuing on our journey. For those who had ordered horses, unfortunately the horses did not arrive until late in the day. We arrived at our guesthouse well before sunset.

The next day we woke up very early and caught a good sunrise picture.
of Mount Kailash. We wanted to start early on the most important part of our journey: to conquer the 5,428-metre Drolma-la Pass. It was supposed to be the most difficult of the climb—some people who were not so fit had perished in the past.

The initial climb up was not easy as there was water flowing down some paths and it had turned icy. Not only did we have to climb the steep slippery path, there were throngs of Tibetans rushing past us, people on horseback, and yaks carrying bags. After every 50 metres, we had to stop to catch our breath. After three hours, we reached the top of the pass. The feeling at the top was just exhilarating and we managed to hang our prayer flags and do some prayers.

The way down was not an anti-climax as some would expect, but the terrain was totally different. The peaks of the mountains looked like those seen on other planets and the lakes were turquoise in colour. The steps down were really steep and those on horses had to dismount and walk on foot. Once close to the bottom, we had to walk across a glacier to continue on. After having a quick bite we walked another five kilometres to a guesthouse at Zutrul Phuk where we stayed for the night. The way was beautiful as we walked beside a meandering river with green meadows on its banks.

The next day we left Zutrul Phuk and walked five hours to the end of the circumambulation track before taking a bus to Darchen. When we arrived the first thing we did was to bathe at a public shower in the middle of town. After three days without any proper shower facilities, it was a shower described by many as the best one in their lives.

The following day we made our way to Lake Manasarovar, one of the highest freshwater lakes in the world. There were plenty of red-coloured plants and rocks around the lake. The lake is considered one of the holiest by Buddhists and Hindus alike. To Buddhists, it is considered as a Vajrayogini lake and the water is nectar. We took a walk around the lake after lunch and went to a more secluded part of the lake. Some of us took a quick dip in the icy cold water that was really refreshing. In the afternoon we made our way to a very old monastery up on a hill overlooking the lake. It is said that Guru Rinpoche meditated in the gompa and left his palm print on its wall.

Teacher’s Day at the Beach

Balmy weather, a sea view, cheerful company, food aplenty, just the right things to bring out the smiles in everyone—the teachers, students, family and friends. We celebrated Teacher’s Day on 6th September at East Coast Park with a get-together of about 90 people. Besides students from the Basic Program and Stages of the Path to Enlightenment classes, the Dharma for Seniors and Chinese Lam-rim groups also joined in this relaxed getaway.

The afternoon began with a leisurely stroll on the beach with Khen Rinpoche. As evening approached and dinner appetites sharpened, everyone gladly tucked into the goodies provided. The highlight of the picnic menu was homemade Perankan mee siam prepared from scratch by our president, Tan Hup Cheng.

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- **Golden Light Sutra Recitation at 1.30 pm**
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**Highlight Printing Services**

**Dec 2014**

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ABC Celebrates 25 Years of Giving Dharma to Others
With Our Most Precious Spiritual Director
& Guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche

25th Anniversary Dinner Celebration
Friday, 21 November 2014, 7.30 pm
Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel
Grand Ballroom

An evening to celebrate the accomplishments of Amitabha Buddhist Centre over 25 years and to look forward to our continued success in benefiting all sentient beings in the Dharma—a reunion not to be missed! For enquiries on ticket availability, visit or call our office.

Long Life Puja for Lama Zopa Rinpoche
Sunday, 23 November 2014, 9 am
Amitabha Buddhist Centre

On the special occasion of our Silver Jubilee, let’s come together for the auspicious Long Life Puja and offer our prayers and dedications to our precious spiritual guide and utmost inspiration, Lama Zopa Rinpoche: for his very long and healthy life, for all his holy wishes to be swiftly fulfilled, and that he will remain forever more to guide us in the Dharma.

What Rinpoche said about ABC in his video-recorded message in January 2014:
“My numberless thanks, and ‘big heart’! Numberless ‘big heart’ to ALL my ABC family! It started and developed through 25 years up to now, up to today. Wow, wow, wow, what a development.”