

Impermanence!



A Flash of Lightning - From the Himalayan Kingdom of Ladakh

Dear Ones,

Life is impermanent! Who would have known that when I left for Ladakh this year, it was soon to experience the worst disaster in its history and my pilgrimage group would be caught in it!

How amazing is this life – so full of twists and turns and unexpected phenomenon. How easily we forget the truth of life's impermanence and take everything for granted! Remaining stable, happy, clear and spacious in all situations is really the test of our practice says the great masters. What a wonderful opportunity!

The ferocious display of Mother Nature's water element in the Himalayan belt was in full swing this year- it was something to witness!

There were huge cloud bursts over the high ranges - so wild that houses were swept away with families in it, roads cut for days, floods everywhere with dead bodies floating, chaos and fear pervading in the atmosphere.

In the midst of all that I deeply felt the protection and the blessings of the unfathomable masters of the past. Our group was snuggled in the ancient gumpa of the Nomads at lake Tsomoriri, south east of Leh - this gumpa holds in the heart of the statue of Buddha Shakyamuni, its most valued relic - a tooth of the previous Buddha Kashyapa. On this is a miraculous self-arising figure of the syllable  (AH).



In this timeless space, we held everyone in prayers and candlelight - beyond time and space.



The unshakable devotion of the nomadic people touched my heart to the core. Between the blessings of the ancient masters and the devotion of the people, there was a deep haven.

Our pilgrimage group were at the end of the one-week sojourn with the nomads of Lake Tsomoriri. The eye-camp had been successfully completed with more than 500 nomadic people treated and six eye cataract operations planned. Venerable Ajan Achalo, a very dedicated Teravadin teacher, his student Francois and very learned yogi Lama Chimi from Bhutan also joined us and added special flavour to my pilgrimage.

In gratitude and festive mood, the community organized both a dharma feast after days of Amitabha Buddha prayer gathering and a completion festival for the eye camp. We celebrated the dakini day (a

dharma day every month dedicated to the feminine principle) with a feast offering and prayers along with the monks and lay community in the ancient gompa.



The next day we held a beautiful picnic in the open space of the high plateau, where yaks, cows and sheep graze freely and everyone dressed in the beautiful costumes, offering their best food and coming for blessings. All our western pilgrims and helpers were treated with much respect. Horses were offered for them to travel on as locals walked beside them. Such generosity and care was so genuine and from the heart. Later in the afternoon we held the horse race, with horses galloping in the speed of the wind. There was lots of cheering, laughter and fun.

Then, in an instant everything transformed into moaning and tears, the flash flood in Leh happened. What impermanence!!

There was much chaos and uncertainty that I had to hold. Western pilgrims were anxious to get back to Leh as their flights were due, Eastern drivers and volunteers were deeply concerned about their families' safety in Leh, while the nomads were coming to me in droves with white scarf requesting prayers and divination for the lives of their loved ones in Leh. Rain, thunder and lightening were continuing, the one phone in town had huge queues and the one small TV in a tiny tent kept showing only death and mud and more cloudbursts expected. All roads were blocked and everything was uncertain. It was hard to hold the anxiety, fear and anger but the teachings help to understand that one must skilfully surrender to the bigger picture. Being the spiritual teacher, in order to hold this chaotic energy, I had to be both skilful and wrathful so that things did not go astray and it be beneficial and safe for everyone. It was a great responsibility. There is teaching and blessing in every situation!! This was a spiritual pilgrimage after all.

First the dying people needed help, so we all assembled in the ancient temple and held everyone in prayer and candlelight chanting. It was a deep moment!! At this time my prayers were also extending to the general practitioner doctors who had not arrived in Lake Tsomoriri from Manali (Dr P.D Lal and two other Indian army doctors he was bringing were coming to offer a two day general medicine camp, but they did not arrive at all and we had no way of contacting them). Also I was thinking of Jen Fox, my dear student who was to arrive in Leh

the morning of the disaster. So much was unknown and amidst this the candlelight ceremony calmed everyone to some extent and held the stability.



In the next days, we finally travelled in convey of one truck, filled with local nomads, 4 cars and a bike, building roads again and again at 15000feet. My car was bogged badly two times, as were other cars. Together we became a team - about 30 people - many of whom did not know each other's names. We worked together, driving each other on, moving rocks, clearing mud, sharing water, laughing, gulping maggi soup or dhal and hearing each other's stories as we huddled together at nights! There was a spirit of care, compassion and community. East and West didn't matter - now we were beyond that. One night 6 of us slept seated in the car. Every turn the road was blocked and finally at Rumse we discovered that despite our efforts there was absolutely no way through back to Leh- not even by walking - the road that was there before was now only a huge river with mountainous chasms on either side! Slowly, through the worst and most dangerous roads I have ever seen, we made our way back to Manali-our only way out!



Our pilgrimage group was snuggled into two cars and each car had its own karma. Whatever we planned was never happening. I was still coming down the muddy Rohtang pass when Bob and Andreas headed off to Delhi to urgently catch flights. Over the next days others headed home. The rain continued and landslides occurred in Manali around us, my small sangha (monks, nuns and two Janes later joined by Jen Fox whose holiday was completely altered from Zanskar to Manali -all began on homemaking projects! We painted, scrubbed and ate soups. From adventure to making home in the high mountains – yet the rain has continued so much that a disease has got me in its grips and I now write to you while being a victim of TYPHOID! A homecoming present! I don't know what to make of it but I am rolling on the floor laughing.

There have been some really funny moments these last months – Jen Fox who was due to fly into Leh the very day of the cloudbust, finally

flew in only to find that I, whom she was coming to greet, was not able to come back to Leh, then after another week she got a flight back to Delhi and the next flight to Kullu took off but was unable to land- she could see my home but not reach me. The next day she caught the bus to Manali and there was a landslide and the trip took 21 hrs instead of 17 hrs. Then there was Jane Barnes who came to Manali after the pilgrimage, stayed for weeks and then went back to Leh eventually on a horrendous ride of about 30hrs, tried to help in the relief effort only to find herself on the plane back to Australia days later! Now there was Bob - whom was so happy when I offered him my royal front car seat, only to find himself desperate and stuck in the middle of the night, on the other side of the river from our other car (which he was meant to be in) that was galloping forward at full speed to reach Delhi and HIS flight home. But all the blessings are unceasing and we did meet the other car the next morning, as they had stayed huddled in a tent overnight on a high pass. We had been 9 people sitting cramped and cuddled all night in my car. My monks made it into so much fun because they were buried under our luggage, which they called blankets keeping them warm. All situations can be transformed to fun if we have the right view!

Dr PD Lal and his doctor friends came within 3 kms of Tsomoriri but because of a landslide we didn't know about, they were unable to reach us. They went instead to Leh before the cloudburst and were there, on hand, when it happened - they tended the sick dying and dead, and also delivered babies. Because of his position Dr Lal was immediately able organise tents and emergency blankets and supplies to the victims. He is now one of the key people in coordinating relief efforts. Khachodling has also been represented on the ground in the

relief efforts with Michael and Melanie from the pilgrimage. They went back and worked to clear the mud and debris from the hospital. Now they are in Singapore, their home training trekkers who are about to go to assist. Jen Fox was able to teach locals about trauma counselling at the local handicapped centre. And of course my local friends all who have been affected in one way or another are directly helping not just themselves but others. Many thanks go to Gyurmed, Tsomoriri councillor, who himself lost relatives in the flood but who with tremendous strength and courage led our group out.

Now I have begun a collection for the **Ladakh disaster relief** so if any of you reading this feel so moved please go www.khachodling.org and donate. The funds will be channelled with care and accuracy to greatest need, especially during the severe winter.



On this trip we were able to make a **small film “Nomadic Eyes”** of the nomads, their life and our eye restoration work with them, this

project came about because the Compassionate Buddhas send with us, a wonderful young gentleman Justin, camera man/film maker. My Australian students will be soon organising to show this film and along with some wonderful photos - in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Harvey Bay so please do lend your support.

One of the wonderful outcomes of needing to come home to Manali, as I could not get through to Leh, Mulbeck or Zanskar this year - was to have His Holiness Dalai Lama visit and bless my family home and gompa on 10th August. My brother Sey Rinpoche and our monks gave him a hearty welcome and he spent an hour in our home and in our gompa. I was once again so fortunate to be so close to his unfathomable presence.



Drukpa Gompa (my home) in Manali is becoming again a beautiful spiritual home for many. Every Sunday now the children, whom

Khachodling is sponsoring their education, come to a dharma class. Our monks and nuns are teaching them to integrate dharma in their life from a young age. It is beautiful to watch them seeping this nectar of dharma to nourish their spirit and to bring joy and love in their lives and to all they touch in the years to come.

Another good news is that since I could not go to Zanskar and to my nunnery this year due to the disaster and road slides. Recently, one of our elder monks Lama Rigzin from Ladakh represented me and travelled to Zanskar and Mulbek with the most amazing statues of 21 Goddess Taras, clothes and one year provision for the nuns living costs and other expenses. They were sad that I haven't been able to visit them for two years in a row but the whole community welcomed the statues with pomp and show from village to the nunnery- singing, dancing and drumming. These beautiful statues that came from Nepal were crafted by one of Nepal's most talented artist and the relics were filled by our most precious yogi Emi-la and in the relics were also added the ancient soil and water that aboriginal people of Australia offered to me on my pilgrimage to central Australia. I feel so happy to have these wonderful energies from the Eastern and Western world in our precious statues to bring peace and joy to our planet and our 21 nuns will constantly make prayers for all beings!!

Yesterday Lama Rigzin called from the nunnery and said- "Congratulations! Khandro Rinpoche, your twenty-one nuns and twenty-one Tara statues are becoming the crown Jewel of Zanskar Valley." I felt so touched especially these words coming from such an established yogi.

Now I am looking forward to my brother Jigme, his 2year old daughter Yeshe and his wife Jasmine coming home after a decade. My brother

Jampal is busy preparing for Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo's visit to her cave with her students and friends. This tour is being organised by our travel Agency Druk Expeditions. My eldest brother Sey Rinpoche is in Manali after teaching in Europe, and it is going to be so wonderful for all of our family to be together home after such a long time. It will be a heart warming family reunion before I leave for my next tour to Bhutan. This is all the news for now. I will give you more news after Bhutan tour- this will be the first time I am going to my late husband's village and to the remote areas of Bhutan.

Be well till we meet again!

Khandro Thrinlay Chodon