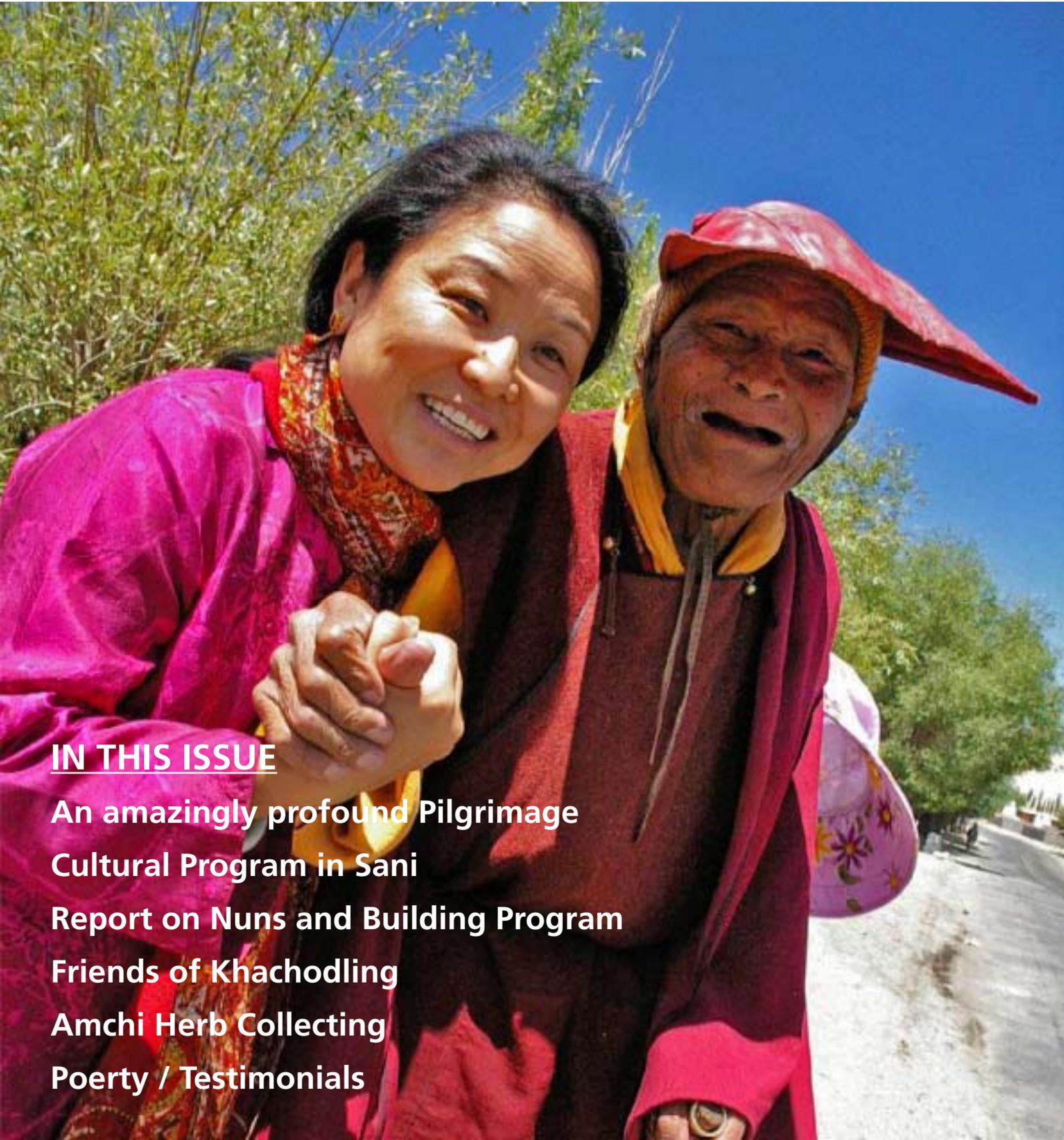


# A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH ZANSKAR

LED BY KHANDRO THRINLAY CHODON

September 2007



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## *An amazingly profound Pilgrimage*

### *Dear Friends of Khachodling,*

I have just returned home after an amazingly profound pilgrimage. It has been a true pilgrimage with a combination of Easterners and Westerners, monks, nuns and lay community, all engaging with true motivation to bring depth and transformation into life. Personally it was very touching to see the vision of Khachodling being rooted in the right direction.

When we started our journey from Manali, Jane Miknius my personal assistant, was terribly sick with high blood pressure and allergic reaction. I thought that she would not be able to make it. Jigme hadn't returned to drive us to Ladakh and everything felt very chaotic and uncertain. I was also very tired from the long teaching tour. At the last moment everything started to unfold. One of my neighbours and student of my husband, Satish and his sister, Guddi offered to join us and drive us to Leh. Miraculously Jane started to get better as we went higher in altitude. Our car got stuck in sand and the more we tried to get it out the more we got covered in sand. Some truck drivers tried to help but they had no rope to pull us out. Finally we found some nomads who came with shovels and dug us out and also offered us tasty curd. It was just a small obstacle and we made it to Leh safely late at night.

The western pilgrims had all arrived safely looking a little perplexed in a new culture so we gathered in Stagna Rinpoche's house to ground. He is a wonderful living master who is 88 years old and one of my precious Gurus. It was wonderful to begin the pilgrimage in the presence of this mas-

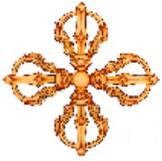
ter and we all meditated and began our journey with a true intention. We started by acclimatizing and visiting the surrounding monasteries. Everyone seemed to feel very comfortable with each other and a real love and joy seemed to manifest. We had a beautiful team of cooks, drivers and helpers. Soon we moved out of Leh on my birthday and the anniversary of my father's death. It was a perfect synchronicity. We camped at Hemis and walked up to Gotsang, my father's retreat centre, where we did a Puja for the anniversary of his death. We also celebrated my birthday with singing and a cake. One of the pilgrims, Nicole shaved her head and offered her beautiful hair in the lap of Gyalwa Gotsangpa, a great yogi and many masters of our lineage who meditated and attained enlightenment here. It was cut by one of my father's students, Ngawang Dorje in a ceremony. It all felt very auspicious and profound. The western pilgrims were so touched with the purity of love and devotion of the yogis.

Another two nights we camped in Ladakh visiting local monasteries. We were offered early morning black tea and white tea and served beautiful



food. Steen, who was with us taking films for a documentary, began to get sick from the altitude. We called a local Amchi who drove 5 hours to see us. All of the pilgrims were impressed with his knowledge and accurate diagnosis; even Steen who was a little sceptical at first was surprised. The next day we left to visit the Amchi's place in Mulbek while Steen went to a lower altitude to get medical treatment.

In Mulbek we were welcomed with hospitality and warmth from the Amchi and the nuns. From Mulbek we walked up to the sacred Guru Rinpoche caves. Jigme's new wife, Jasmine then joined us. We had to walk for many hours up a steep valley, collecting herbs with the Amchi and passing sacred sites of Tara and Milarepa on the way. When we arrived at the Guru Rinpoche site we began to explore the caves. We had to climb up steep rocks, crawl and squeeze in and out of tiny caves to get to the main cave. It was like being in the womb and birthing as I came through the tight holes. Many of the pilgrims were watching from below in amazement as I climbed on the steep rocks and crawled through the caves with a steep drop below. As we crawled in search of the main cave we had to lie flat and crawl for half an hour through the dark and wet caves. Sometimes the caves opened into larger areas with dripping water that was sweet like nectar. They say it is blessed water. Finally we reached the main cave where you could see the clear back print of Guru Rinpoche engraved into the cave. Even the spine was clearly visible. This whole journey through the caves felt very profound and deeply awakening in the truth of oneself that is beyond words. When I finally



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came out with Jasmine and a few nuns, I could see everybody below waiting and many of the pilgrims said that they saw the true manifestation of a dakinis in that moment. I have no idea where I got all the energy from, as I was truly tired from the journey.

The donkeys that were bringing up the luggage to the Guru Rinpoche site were too weak to carry the bags. One donkey fell over and the rest refused to continue. The cooks, drivers and helpers had to carry a few of the bags up. We had the bare essentials to camp for two days. All the pilgrims were very co-operative and patient with the situation. Jasmine had brought up special creams so we had a beauty session, which helped to get us through. We had a lot of fun and laughter. The next day was Guru Rinpoche day and I had already prepared western students with transmission and teachings on the Jo Mipham Rinpoche's seven line prayer with a short tsog from Shakya Shiri. At the entrance to the cave there was a hand written sign that read, 'no women allowed'. This did not sound right as Guru Rinpoche was always surrounded by dakinis. Of course there are some native and Buddhist places where it is respectful for women not to go but here I felt that some people with perverted view and hatred for women had written. Amchi-la confirmed this by saying that when he lived there the writing was not there.

So it was time to break this useless rule. The local women were looking scared but I entered the cave and the western girls followed with the monks and nuns. We had a great time chanting mantras and offering tsog. We raised prayer flags and made auspicious prayers by throwing barley flour high in the air and on each other's faces. There was

a lot of laughter and fun that was had. Soon after we finished the blessing rain came so the monks and nuns rejoiced, as it is an auspicious sign. The whole day was blissful and felt soaked with blessings and depth. In the evening the monks, nuns and myself offered chod practice in the main gumpa. The depth and the melody of the practice brought tears and deep emotion into the eyes and hearts of the pilgrims.

The next day we walked back down to the base camp where we had two nights rest. We camped beside a beautiful stream flowing on green pastures and surrounded by mountains touching the



sky. Here we did some cleaning of the environment and spent time processing the many blessings. At this time Steen and Elana returned and Jigme joined us and it was like a big family coming together. Steen looked fresh and alive and had even lost some weight, looking handsome. Jane also lost 8kg and looks like a model. So maybe from now onwards I will call my pilgrimage "Rapid Weight Loss in India!"

Ha Ha Ha.....

We had already done the Medicine

Buddha transmission so we were now ready to go to Sapi for more medicinal herb collection. Amchi-la was very excited to venture into his area of expertise as he recognized every plant, telling stories about its properties. Our poor brains were not ready to receive so much information. Sari and Julie tried their best by taking notes, pressing the herbs and sketching the flowers. The campsite was awesomely beautiful with high mountains and valleys opening up. There were snow peaks and glaciers and it was heavenly to be in the lap of nature. Everything else seemed to stop. There was just nature, love, compassion and "me" vanished. Maybe that is Mahamudra!!

Some rare medicinal herbs only grow in high altitude. They are endangered of becoming extinct because of grazing, over harvesting and uprooting from the roots. This made me sad. There were only two horses available so some people had to walk. As we walked up the valley we saw the most amazing high snow covered peaks. The perfume of the herbs smelled beautiful and the flowing streams looked gorgeous. There were marmots and vultures dancing in the expanse of the sky. As we were going higher we were panting and I was getting a headache. So we stopped for lunch to rest. The Amchi and nuns kept walking until they were specks in the distance. Some pilgrims could not stand the height and had to descend. We all soon followed and went back down the mountain after resting in a dreamlike state. When we got down tired and exhausted we realised we did not even have a single herb, which shows how impressive we all are at herb collecting... Later the tireless Amchi and the nuns returned



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with overflowing bags of herbs in all different colours and smells. We all sat around him as he introduced us to each of the herbs and their healing effects. This was something so special to witness his knowledge and compassion.

That night we had a beautiful party where everyone danced and sang local and western songs. When we returned to Mulbek we saw how the Amchi and nuns crushed the herbs with mortar and pestle. All the herbs were kept in the leather pouches. It was beautiful to see the ancient traditions preserved to this



day. I felt inspired to support the local Amchis and to bring western doctors to these remote areas because there is very little medical care. This part of the trip encouraged me to work more on the Khachodling Medical Services for the Himalayas. It is such important work and greatly inspired me to urgently develop this project.

Soon it was time to say goodbye to some of the pilgrims. By now we had bonded so closely it was hard to say goodbye. We continued our long journey to Zanskar on bumpy roads for hours and as the beautiful scenery unveiled we forgot all the pain. It was amazing the whole journey and the beauty of nature with huge glaciers and rivers. By the time we arrived it was quite late but the local people were

patiently waiting with khataks in their traditional costumes. They had tea, cakes, smiles, genuine love and devotion. There were children laughing and playing, it was very touching for my



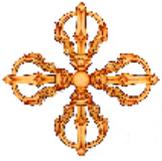
fellow pilgrims and me. The nuns were waiting in line with khataks and flowers for us in the Phodrang where we spent the night. They were so happy to see me back alive and healthy.

I had only 6 days in Sani and I wanted to focus on Khachodling and the nuns. They were very excited to show me all the work that had been completed during the past year; the road, the gompa, and the planting of 500 trees. The

trees currently look like sticks on barren land but soon I envision this whole land becoming transformed into a lush and pure abode of the dakinis. For this in the coming year we need to bring water from the mountain by pipe directly onto the site. We plan to develop a greenhouse and hopefully attract permaculture to grow medicinal herbs and vegetables together.

The gompa is coming along beautifully with local construction. It is made from stones from the land itself. The nuns have worked very hard together with the builders to create a compact and beautiful building for the site, which overlooks the Sani valley. I am very happy that the road, which had to be built to help with the construction, is now completed. Unfortunately this has eaten up much of the funds because the majority Muslim government was not forth coming towards Buddhist monasteries. We were very fortunate that we had a very devoted Buddhist officer who really supported the nuns. He also helped in legalizing the land and organizing a bulldozer to build the 5km rough road, without which the gompa construction could never have begun this year. The construction in Zanskar is double the average cost, as





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many of the materials have to come from at least 20 hours of rugged drive away. There is no wood available to purchase in the Zanskar valley and the carpenters are very expensive because there are so few in the area. In spite of all of this we didn't give up and we persisted and this year the ground floor of



our simple gompa will be completed. So all of this makes us very happy and all the nuns feel very proud of what has been achieved.

It was so much fun to watch the nuns unwrap my offerings for this year. We had pots, pans, knives, spoons, bed sheets, curtains and cooking utensils and they wore them like hats. They were celebrating each of the pieces and



making comments and totally enjoying everything offered, especially when I opened the ritual instruments. Dung is a long ornamental trumpet with a deep tone. Gyaling is a beautiful golden trumpet like instrument with higher pitched tone. I had ordered these for my nuns from Darjeeling in the best quality so that they too are able to perform all the ceremonies and prac-

tices like the monks. The nuns were so happy and they began to blow in funny tunes, but I'm sure by next year they will be perfected in using all these wonderful instruments. Last year we had bought cymbals and drums so our beautiful collection of dharma instruments is coming together in our nunnery and they are all working hard each year to train in the rituals. This makes me so happy to see their confidence building in a profound and beautiful way. As an auspicious ceremony, Lama Wangdu led a special procession for me into the monastery with all of the instruments, which was very moving.

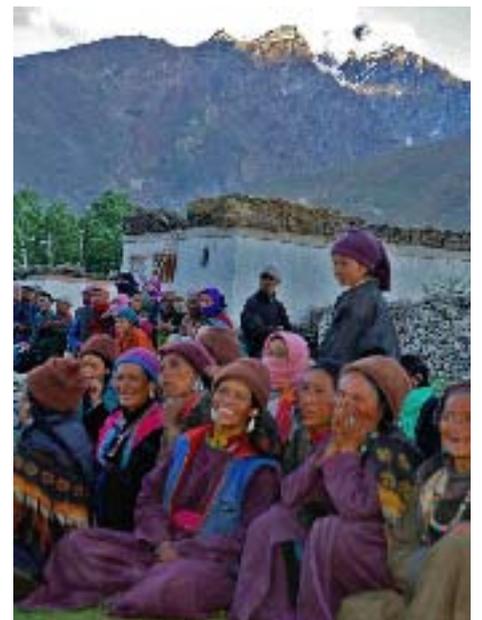
In Byron Bay an environmentally friendly builder offered his services to Khachodling. Just before we reached Zanskar, Sam the Aussie builder, joined the group. He was quite a character and seemed ideally suited to the remote mountainous environment. He is a rugged man and just ran across mountaintops at 13,000 feet and jumping in cold mountain streams. He is now helping us develop a site plan, advise on solar heating and assisting with building a greenhouse. There have also been 5 voluntary workers from Czech Republic who have been helping with construction. Sam is still in Zanskar and seems to be working very hard to make my vision come true. So this feels like another vision of mine to have east and west working together.

The six days went by so fast and it was time to leave. This event was very sad with all the nuns and local people lined up with khataks. As the car left all the nuns were crying and gripping my arms as if they didn't want me to leave. I also didn't want to leave but in order to make this important vi-

sion come to fruition, I need to travel, teach, fundraise and work hard once again.....Maybe someday I can rest and retreat in Zanskar, the abode of my heart. Some of the local men lead our car with Buddhist flags and a gathering of people were waiting in the village for an auspicious goodbye ceremony. They then lead our cars out of town and we continued the bumpy journey back to Mulbek and Leh.

The rest of the pilgrimage group left to return home happy, renewed and deeply touched. Courtney, Jane, a monk and a nun continued to stay with me at Stagna Rinpoche's house for a few days. Katrina who is a student from Australia also joined us. She came to Leh especially to spend time with me for a week.

While in Leh, the village head from Tsomoriri came to invite me to visit their village on my way to Manali. An



eye doctor from Australia will visit that area later this month to diagnose and treat the local people. It was important for me to visit the people prior to



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the doctor arriving, as the locals do not often trust westerners because many NGO's have sent untrained doctors in the past. They have also collected blood for experiments. My family has a long history in this area and people really trust me for spiritual and mate-



rial help. While in the stunningly picturesque Tsomoriri many locals came for blessings, including many nomads, showing their deep devotion. They asked me to blow mantras on their cataract eyes and they often said it made them feel better. I also informed them of the doctor coming this month. The westerners were deeply moved by the devotion displayed by the locals as many queued up for blessings. The combination of their deep devotion for the dharma as well as some physical help from the western doctor gives them the ideal east/west blend. We had lots of fun and laughter in Tsomoriri. The locals put on a cultural performance at the gompa with dancing and singing in traditional dress. We also had a little party that night back when at the phodrang with momos, music, easterners and westerners all dancing together.

It was then time to make our way back to Manali to my home via the land of Dakinis, Lahual, my birthplace. We were invited by the nuns at Chukta (Peukar) Gompa in Lahual where I am supporting four nuns to go into three-year retreat. While there the nuns offered me the retreat house of an old man who was a direct disciple of my father Apha Rinpoche and passed away just this year. I hope to rebuild this place so I can recharge there

in the future.

Now Jane, Courtney, Ani-la and I are at my home in Manali, resting and attending to all the tasks to keep us in contact with everybody. I am now extremely tired and have some small health problems so we are eating nourishing food, doing yoga, practice and massages. My Manali home looks beautiful; it is raining so the mountains are lush and the trees are full of apples. We have been to visiting Imi-la and family gompa.

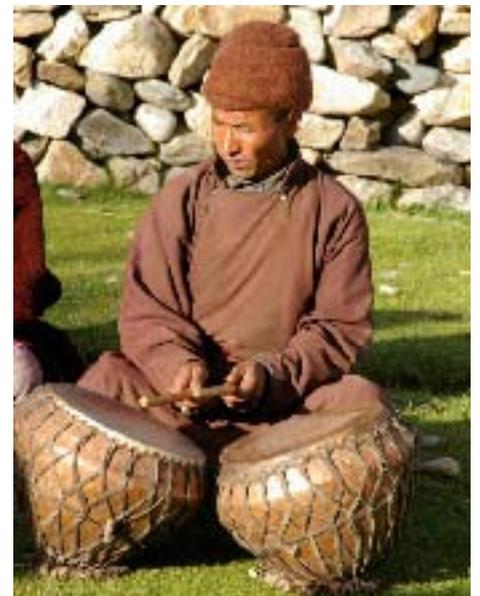
The next months I will take some rest and recuperation here and at the end of the year I will meet some of you in South India! In February – June 2008 I will visit again to teach and raise funds for Khachodling in Australia and New Zealand. Please feel free to write to me and keep in contact. This life is a beautiful journey.

*Khandro Thrinlay Chodon*

### **Cultural programme in Sani (Khachodling)**

On Tuesday the 24th July the local Sani community association offered an afternoon cultural programme of song and dance to celebrate Khandro Rinpoche's presence in the valley. The sides of the road filled with people to greet her arrival. They waited with flowers, gifts and kataks, most dressed in national costume. The excitement level was high and many peered down the road just to catch a glimpse of her.

When Khandro Rinpoche arrived they beat drums in a fanfare as she and her entourage was ushered into a grassed



open walled area. Banners of yellow and red donned the stonewalls and blue Tibetan carpets were for sitting. Tea and biscuits followed along with opening speeches. It was a lovely mix of tradition and modern technology. Microphones that sometimes worked and the squealing excitement of the throngs of children all set in the most amazing mountain backdrop. Elana, one of our photographers, seemed to



## Cultural Program in Sani

disappear under flaying arms and eager moving heads as children scampered for a view of themselves on the modern digital camera. Soon all photographers were similarly engulfed.

A timeless event and it all began with an archery competition set to fast drumming, hooting and clapping. We had been taken to beside the fast flowing river where we all had a turn and Khandro-la was almost the winner!

Next we moved back to our seats and the men danced and sang to local tunes followed by the women in their magnificent and heavy turquoise head-dresses. Their movements were very dignified...slow and meaningful....almost trancelike.....perhaps not sur-



prising at 12, 500 feet!

One of the funny highlights, particularly for the villagers was when the young American girl who had been living here the past year teaching English to the Khachodling nuns, donned the local dress and joined in the dance as her offering to Khandro-la! They say now she is likely to be the next to be married here!

For us as westerners it was lovely to be invited to participate in the programme to dance and sing with them. It seemed to give them immense pleasure when we hauled our bodies into the ring and contributed with our own gyrating.

In conclusion Khandro-la presented gifts and made a very beautiful speech for the local community stressing the non-division between nunnery and lay people and how we will work together in the future. The locals gave her their devoted attention and were clearly deeply moved. Khachodling and the western gathering made offering to support the local cultural association who are renovating stupas and mane stones, particularly at the important Sani stupa.

*Jane Miknius, Julie St Aubyn and Marie Greeks*

### **The Journey to and Presentation at Khachodling**

Our walk to the Khachodling nunnery was memorable. We began after breakfast with a visit to the retreat cell of Lama Wangdu and the Sani Stupa. As we continued we found we were taken also via the famous charnel grounds of Guru Padmasambhava. So profound we found these sites and still ahead in the distance high in the gorge above we could see our destination – Khachodling. Our dakini Khandro-la provided welcome cloud cover from the relentless sun even though the day was still very hot and dry.

As we continued the meaning of this journey began welling up in many of us - for some it was the culmination of a lot of hard work and vision and had much anticipation as well as the viewing of a vision- a finally arriving at the site. For others it was the conclusion of their travels and still for others it was a time of rest and contemplation.

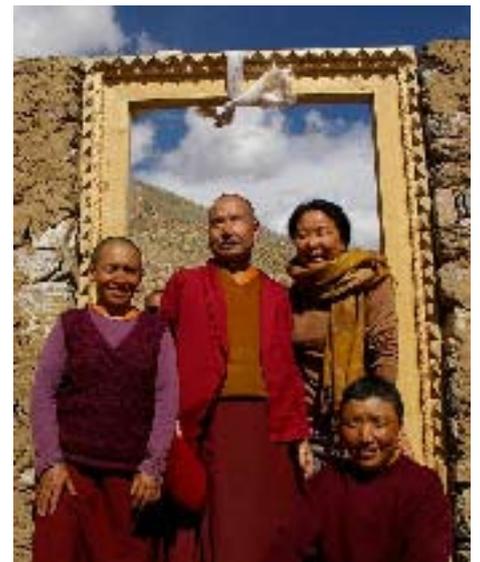
As the sheer climb stretched out before us we were heartened to find that local families were so devoted to our fearless

leader Khandro-la that they had made a special rest stops for her where they offered tea, yoghurt and fresh warm milk. We all happily partook.

We climbed the last part of the mountain in our own time, grateful to finally catch a glimpse of the happy smiling faces of the nuns as we collapsed, panting under the shade of the one lone tree, luckily it was next to a rushing glacial water course!

Khandro-la arrived to the greeting of smiling joyous nuns with fresh flowers and kataks - for all the work they have been doing in her absence there is now the opportunity for them to show her the fruits of their very hard work over this past year - so excitement was abounding.

After recovering from our steep ascent Khandro-la and others walked leisurely around the beautiful Khachodling site. In the early evening we had



a small presentation set on the grassy plateau overlooking the entire Sani valley- a better view cannot be found in this world.



## Report regarding Nuns and Building

Khandro Rinpoche was surrounded by the east and west, her dream of Khachodling is manifesting beautifully with such love and care among all in this community. This presentation showed the ripening and blessing.

Khandro-la presented the musical instruments of dung and gyaling, the utensils and bedding that had been purchased. In addition she presented the funds for the next year for the building and nun care. And some special contributions for example from Izzy the 19 year old who visited last year who gave a special greeting and donation.

Lama Wangdu, the head teacher, gave a very inspiring talk of his life and connection to Khandro Rinpoche and her family. He expressed so caringly and with utmost conviction of his complete and utter trust in Khandro and her manifestation of Khachodling. He is a warm and simple man with great depth and heart and it is clear to see the stability of his undivided devotion to the Shakya Shri lineage. We were amused to hear of his life's travels especially through India on 300 rupees still carefully itemised after all these years! He is a great storyteller.

Jane spoke to the nuns on behalf of the westerners, giving them encouragement and thanks for their undertaking. She talked how it is for us in the west not having so much dharma and how important it is for us that they, the nuns, hold the lineage well. Also that we need to support each other, east and west and that we hold each other in our hearts on different sides of the world and that we can encourage each other in this way. She stressed that they value what they are doing with simplic-



ity and heart and encouraged them not to underrate that. Photos were shown of the hard work that Khandro-la had been doing on their behalf while she was absent from Zanskar.

Amdist laughter and hilarity a bag of lucky dips was shared amongst the nuns.

As the evening drew close and it got cooler we headed in for warm thukpa (Tibetan style soup).

*Jane Miknius, Julie St Aubyn and Marie Greeks*

### Report regarding the nuns and building

Progress on the site has been rapid this year. A 5km rough road to help get materials to the site has remarkably been completed. This was with the help of a local officer who was able to second a bulldozer to this remote area. The same officer also helped us legalise the land in the name of Khachodling.

500 trees have been planted and though they look like sticks right now, in 5-10 years they will help Khachodling look

and feel truly lush. Our next priority is to get water to the site so that we can keep planting and have easy access.

The nuns, together with an Australian advisor named Sam and some volunteer workers from Czech Republic are presently building a greenhouse. With the local female Amchi there are plans for a herb garden.

The first floor of our small gumpa should be completed by the end of summer. It is a simple plan and is made of stone, mud brick and wood. We hope to use solar power in the future.

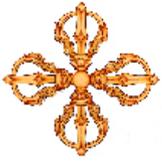
So all is going well. The area generally has problems with materials and so it is very very expensive to build here but given everything the Buddhas have blessed us and we are happily going to have our gumpa ground floor done this year!

The nuns and the head teacher Lama Wangdu are so very very happy to again have people practicing dharma on the very land that Drubchen Ngawang Tsering and his many nuns got enlightened on. The nuns work manually very hard in the summer and in the winter do only practice and retreat.

### Khachodling Medical Services for the Himalayas

During my surprise visit to Tsomoriri last year in the Amitabha retreat I was invited to stay in the monastery of Langpo Rinpoche who was a student of my late father His Eminence Apho Rinpoche.

During that visit many lay people came for audience and blessings and at that time I came to notice that many local people had eye problems, in particular



## Friends of Khachodling

cataracts. I was requested many times to blow mantras on people's eyes to bless and heal them. Even though I advised people that this was a medical problem that needed treatment these devoted lay people returned even the next day saying that they felt better with less itching and difficulty. It was the purity of their unchanging devotion and the power of the dharma that seemed to heal them in some way.

I was so deeply moved and touched by their authentic devotion that I made a fervent prayer to bring some good Western doctors as soon as possible to the area.

During my lecture tour of Australia in early 2007 I made known my interest to help the people of Tsomoriri through showing slides and giving talks and soon I found my prayers were answered. An Australian eye doctor experienced in diagnosing, treating and training people in developing countries and remote locations came to me on the last days on my Australian tour and he kindly offered his assistance immediately.

The Buddhas have acted quickly and this doctor is coming to Tsomoriri soon – on August 17th 2007 he arrives in Leh - and will be assisting Khachodling Medical Services for the Himalayas (a specialist part of my Khachodling Trust) to both initially diagnose and treat some eye problems and more long term to set up an eye diagnosis and treatment service for the Himalayas.

My vision for Khachodling Medical Services for the Himalayas is now manifesting very strongly. During my

Amchi pilgrimage of this year to Ladakh and Zanskar many Westerners and Easterners as well as monks and nuns, lay people and monastics, men and women all spent one month together learning from each other and appreciating what each culture has to offer.



During this pilgrimage the experienced and devoted Amchi Ngawang Sherab from Mulbeck who has three nuns working with him has offered me his services. We have decided that Mulbeck will be the central base of Khachodling Medical Services for the Himalayas.

The focus of these medical services will be a combination of the purest Amchi services and the best we can offer of the Western medicine.

My vision in the long run is to have a hospital, specialist clinics and a training and treatment base for many outreach services such as eye, dental, generalist medical and so on.

### **“Friends of Khachodling” Opportunity to Support**

I have always felt that the word sponsor doesn't really reflect the correct relationship between someone who offers money toward my projects, in particular the nunnery and those who receive.

One reason that I don't like this term is that it seems too individualistic. I make a point of not giving to individual nuns

as this works against the principle of sharing and non attachment. Individual giving has led to jealousies and greed. This is not dharma practice and at all times must be guarded against. I want my Khachodling to bring true dharma into the hearts of both those giving and receiving.

Another reason I don't like the term sponsor is that often it is thought of as a one-way relationship of giving. Giving is as I often say, a reciprocal act. My spiritual and cultural heritage is rich in what it offers to others and I am not begging for finance of the nuns or projects. Those who offer finance,



skills or whatever, are practising the paramita of generosity. This is one of the most important practices of a bodhisattva for it develops the bodhicitta mind. One should give without expectation just as one should practice receiving without expectation. The result is that everything you receive is in abundance. If this is the pure mind that offerings to Khachodling are made and accepted then the dharma work of Khachodling will be successful.

So I have decided that for Khachodling we will use the term **“Friends of Khachodling”** for all those who are making offerings.

With this newsletter we are sending a letter about the new terms we are using and offering all the opportunity to become a “Friend of Khachodling”



## *Amchi Herb Collecting and some poetry*

### **Amchi and Herb Collections**

A focus of this pilgrimage was to learn of the traditional medical practices. Their practitioners are called Amchis and though Khandro-la gave us the opportunity to meet at least three, the one who travelled with us was Amchi Ngawang from Mulbeck. We first met him at our camp a day earlier than expected. One person in our group had become quite ill with altitude sickness - we already had oxygen brought in. This kind and humble Amchi travelled 6 hours one way to assist us, which we only appreciated the next day when we



did the long drive ourselves.

Amchi-la is a very calm, quiet, unassuming man. He has a big smile that reveals a warm warm heart. He sat under the shade an apricot tree, sipped tea and met with each of our group individually, taking our pulse and checking our urine samples we had supplied. Many were surprised with the accuracy of his diagnosis. He then took out his deerskin pouches, which were filled with dried plant medicines and dispensed them in paper wraps, each with a little paper spoon.

The next day after the long drive to Mulbek we were welcomed by Amchi and three nuns. They offered tea, dried fruits and nuts. His house in Mulbeck

is opposite the Maitreya statue and Gompa. It is up on the rocky hill overlooking the beautiful valley.



herbs was vast. At times Amchi looked like he was holding a wedding bouquet of spectacular colour and variety. He stayed with us and assisted with various ceremonies and events over the next few days including Chod, Guru RinpocheT-sog and the blessing and raising of prayer flags.

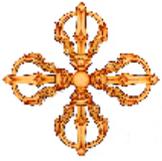
In Sapi we spent three days camped in the beautiful valley beside a clear running stream. Together we hiked to a higher mountain plateau to collect more plants for cataloguing and use. By the end of the day we westerners had been down the mountain many hours before Amchis group arrived back late in the afternoon fully laden with plants. We quickly gathered around him and listened as he went through the pile of herbs, explaining their names and uses. We kept good examples of each for pressings and wrote out their descriptions. We recorded 56 plants.

On return to Mulbek we stayed at his home for two more days, which saw the conclusion of the pilgrimage. I felt honoured to spend time with such a humble and learned man. Wherever he was people would arrive to seek his help and he always gave them treatment. His desire to record the plants for the future was very strong and it was a wonderful opportunity to assist in this valuable project.

Amchi has offered his home and his help to Khandro-la to realize her vision for supporting her nuns and the local community.

### **Dakini Manifesting**

She emerges from the rocks as if one with them  
She crawls, stretches, bends and releases through each cavern  
They are not easy  
They are like birthing canals of our mother earth!  
She squeals, laughs and plays as she goes  
It is as if this solid ground has transformed into a magical playing field  
Of joy and laughter  
A sense of flying through space  
Of everything opening into play



## Poems and Testimonials

I have not seen her so like this before  
But it has revealed to me the dakini  
Before I have not really understood this word  
Now, today, I have seen.

She is of no fixed abode  
Free, light and playful  
Moving this way and that, fearless and joyful  
Rely on nothing and fearlessly have everything

*Written by Jane Miknius on the revelation of the Dakini Khandro Thrinlay Chodon at Phokar Zong on Guru Rinpoche Day 2007*

### **Dancing Dakini – Poem from Pilgrimage - Courtney Prosser**

What does it mean to be a dakini?  
In the west it's a pretty girl in bikini!  
But of course it's not just a shining face,  
A true dakini is filled with profound wisdom and grace.

A dakini holds the whole world in her heart,  
And her love pierces all fear like a speeding dart.  
In her presence all you can do is melt,  
For her compassion is a pure gift to be felt.

When a dakini smiles she radiates light,  
Her joy helps you realize theirs nothing to fight.  
Rainbows and soft clouds dance where she walks,  
Heavenly music is heard as she talks.

Clarity and spaciousness fills her mind,  
You'll know when you meet one, as they're a rare find.  
I've been blessed to meet the dakini, Khandro-la,  
On a journey through high mountains travelling wide and far.

We have pilgrimaged together through her sacred land,  
So with gratitude and humility, here I stand.  
I pray that all women find the dakini inside,  
So they can stand in their power and no longer hide.  
As the pilgrimage now ends I must say,  
I'm inspired to walk my path the dakini way.  
Work that helps all beings is a precious thing,  
So I wish eternal abundance and blessings to Khachodling!!

### **Pilgrimage Poem**

A land of mystics, A land of snow,  
The sun is warm the rivers flow.  
Magical mountains, secrets whispered in the wind.  
Mystery unravels slowly, profoundly.  
Cleansed, purified and healed,  
The journey inward just beginning,  
The journey inward never ending.  
Dakini blessings fill the air, moving you,  
Energy sublime. This is Nirvana.

*Changchub Choedron (Nicole)*

### **Pilgrim Testimonial**

The process of adjusting to high altitude seemed to be the preliminary stage transformation, an intense internal acclimatization preparing me for the higher energies. I connected instantly with the group, in no time we were one organism. Khandro-la and Jane were a great team providing nurturing on many levels, containing and loving. To be chanted to and hugged by a live dakini was a precious treasure, with Jane providing follow-on practical loving care. Two big experiences for me were walking up Tara's Gorge and sitting by the place she manifested, waves of internal energy undulated through my body and I wept, I felt so strongly. The other was sitting in Padmasambhava's cave,



echoes of ancient power suffused the cave. I sat and felt deep peace. There are more words yet to energise and the joy of that is knowing those energies will stay with me and sustain me when I land back to my life in Oz. I take away a bigger heart with less room for judgement of myself and others.

*Eileen*

### **Pilgrim Testimonial**

Being part of the group on the Amchi Tour through Ladakh with Khandro-la has been an experience of a lifetime. I was drawn to Khandro-la's vision and passion to empower her people especially her nuns and women and I have been privileged and honoured to witness the unfolding of her dream. Khandro-la is a remarkable woman committed to building bridges between



## Testimonials

east and west. Travelling in this most stunning and awesome landscape, being in Khandro-la's presence with her devoted nuns, monks, traditional healers, yogis, family and extended family has been an enriching and soul filling journey. The Riwo Sangchod practice we shared at Fokar Zong was for me so very very powerful, reminding me yet again of the universality of humankind to find meaning and ritual to lessen and ameliorate the suffering of all sentient beings. Blessings and Thanks.

*Jane Barnes*

### **Pilgrim Testimonial**

#### **What has had the most impact?**

Gotsang monastery and cave. It was such a full day starting out with a walk through history and opening the heart with the presence of many deity and images. Prostrating on well worn floors polished by time and countless devotees. The walk up to the top of the mountain was physically challenging, it felt like a quest to reach our goal. The sense of relief when we reached the monastery was huge and the wonderful welcome made it all the more special. The ceremony for Nicole along with the Tsog was very powerful. As the daylight fled we almost raced into the meditation cave. I felt like I was in a most holy sanctuary, snatching a moment out of time, so my short time in the cave was packed full of prayer and focused intent. I was empowered with purpose, my requests were strong and my heart pouring forth devotion. It was like I carried my friends and loved ones in with me and I had only that moment to represent their needs and my desire to serve. We left as darkness descended and the walk down the moun-



tain by torchlight gave the experience a mysterious mystical quality.

*Julie St Albyn*

#### **How I am transformed?**

I have travelled far and seen and done much since leaving my home two weeks ago. I have seen snow for the first time and sat in the caves of the masters. The group is a strong and lovely mix of people and our lives have become interdependent. There is a sense of trust and family amongst us and even though pilgrimage has had obstacles, it is how we have dealt with them that is important. My sense of purpose has strengthened and my joy of living has increased. I also feel great love for my family and friends at home, the compassion and bodichitta mind has grown within me.

#### **The mountains. The rocks.**

#### **The stones. The sand. Me.**

In the quiet confines of the cave, enveloped in rock and timeless moments of creation and being overwhelmed by history and learning- all wiped away in the clear longing of my heart. May I benefit beings.

*Julie St Albyn*

### **Pilgrim Testimonial - Thoughts on a Journey**

Returning home to a country of ancient soaring peaks, which lift the spirit, and deep valley floors, which connect me to the earth. The generosity and love of the people who opened up their arms and hearts to strangers. The journey itself- watching ideas of comfort and familiarity fall away into acceptance with each new experience. Watching mind and body struggle with less oxygen-feelings of not coping and panic even as the darkness of night presses in, until the ever more present stillness is remembered and calm returns once more. Groups forming, dissolving and reforming – finding different ways of connecting and discovering depths in my fellow travellers which take me into resistances and out again. Feelings of trust and delight developing as I sleep, eat, walk with and share stories with a wide range of personalities - turning inner criticism into teaching and learning and feeling blessed to be a part of it all. Treading the sacred paths and sites of the great masters gone before, listening to their legacies left in the silence. Watching the energies of the surrounding peaks, twist and turn to their own inner dance and feeling the aliveness in that moment. Prayer flags twisting and turning on the breeze releasing their messages for the sake of all beings. Hearing drums, bells and voices rising and falling resonating deeply within me releasing old buried grief. Time hangs suspended as day becomes night and day again like the inner and outer movement of breathe and sometimes the moment in between offers a gap into another realm. Heartfelt thanks to all these teachers who turn me away from a material word.

*Marie Greeks*