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The International Memo For Today's Spiritual Seeker

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Extraordinary Achievements on an Ordinary Sunday

Remember this date! June 3 2007 spins Kechara House into the biggest successes of our short history with a resounding triple whammy of auspicious highlights.



What on earth is that?! Find out what these two are up to and how it's all a part of Kechara's newest successes on Pages 14 & 15.

Constant, rapid growth over the last year culminated in an especially big burst of energy on a quiet Sunday in June when a triple whammy of events fast-forwarded Kechara's accomplishments and marked a new step forward.

The dawn of the auspicious day brought with it a brilliant start when Kechara members and friends finally reached their 10 million migtsema mantra goal. Read the full story on Page 3.

As a huge pat on the back, and as if celestially arranged by dakinis in the sky, *The Star* newspaper arrived in the gompa just as everyone completed the dedication prayers. Inside it, a huge personality profile on our Lama HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche had made the cover story of *StarMag*, the newspaper's Sunday lifestyle supplement. Making a front page of the nation's most widely-read English newspaper is a great feat and has the

potential of bringing Rinpoche and his teachings out to many in the region.

This would later prove true in a huge way when throngs of people came by our booth at the inaugural Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival in Malaysia as a result of the article. Many were drawn by the message of the article and enquired keenly after the "Model Monk," which was the headline of the article.

To finish off the day, Kechara Media and Publications packed up and rounded off their participation in the 10-day World Book Fair in Singapore. This was their first venture out of KL and though the whole fair saw quite a low turn-out, KMP still managed to make many valuable connections with the publishing industry, introduced Rinpoche and his teachings to new people and made new friends.

And yet, June 3 would be just the beginning of a new, energetic growth

spurt. Only three days later, Kechara outlets and KMP participated at the Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival in KL, where we made a tremendous impact and turned out to be the most popular booth! As this was the first time we had participated in something of this scale, none of us had anticipated such overwhelming response.

The immense crowds and non-stop enquiries of visitors proved valuable training for what is most definitely yet to come in the near future. Even before June 3, Rinpoche's videos on the online video-hosting website, YouTube, had already hit a neat 130,000 visitors in less than six months. As a direct result of these teachings, we've had emails from as far as Portugal and South America expressing ardent interest to visit Kechara House.

Rinpoche always emphasises that all this is never about boosting ourselves alone; it is about "promoting" the preciousness of teachings that could have an indelible, wholly beneficial impact on others. It is about living and doing things just as we are while practising the teachings and bringing it to others. Paradoxically, it seems that just this message alone has made our Lama – and therefore, Kechara House – soar.

Read more about these events inside!

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INer Dharma | From the Editors

Dear readers,

As you would already have seen from our cover story, Kechara gets large and goes big! Developments over the last three months have seen a tremendous push in the direction of Kechara's activities.

Both the Singapore World Book Fair and the Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival have provided an especially valuable experience for the both of us as publisher and writer, proving as ever the importance of preserving Dharma teachings and making them accessible. But it doesn't just stop at conquering bookshelves and DVD players.

Rinpoche often reminds us that he cannot do everything on his own; much of the success of his teachings, activity and centre depend largely on the efforts and practice of the students, and their willingness to bring the teachings

out to others.

Things are getting big and our little happy centre is becoming enormous but that actually isn't near enough! Rinpoche has said, "All Dharma centres must judge growth by the members in it, our individual growth and how we improve with each Dharma talk, each Dharma session."

The teachings should never remain within KMP's beautifully designed books and slick, sleek DVD packages. They should be in our minds and the rainbow-lit lotuses at the central channel of our hearts. It is to engage and expand that jewel in the lotus that we can make every teaching real, visible, possible. And thus we grow.

**Much prayers,
Jamie and Joe**

What's the new news?

Rinpoche makes the headlines

The Neon Lama is causing a stir! And, for the love of all things crazy and controversial, the media are picking up on it. HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's unconventional, contemporary and vastly attractive approach to Dharma and spirituality has won over the hearts of journalists and newspaper editors who have recently given him extensive coverage.

Personality profiles on Rinpoche have been featured in Malaysia's largest Chinese newspaper, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and largest English newspaper, *The Star*.

A journalist from Singapore's largest evening newspaper *Lianhe Wanbao*, was also duly impressed by his work and by Kechara Media and Publications' booth at the Singapore World Book Fair and has also published a story on Rinpoche.

Copies of all these articles are available for perusal at Kechara House or our outlets.



GET ONLINE!

Some of the articles in this issue of nmc are also available online but have been edited here for brevity and style. For the full, unedited versions of the articles, please refer to the websites, as indicated by found at the bottom of all articles which appear online.

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We want to hear from you!

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Care bears share

Feeling a bit lost in Kechara House? The newly established Kechara Care Team is on-hand to help you navigate that tricky spiritual path.

■ Comprising seven of Kechara's most diverse members – ranging from very senior students to young Dharma ducklings – the Kechara Care Team has been set up to help all new visitors and friends of the centre with any queries or problems.

The KCT will help to:

- Show you around the centre and its branches, and introduce you to all its practices and activities.
- Get you started on Dharma by recommending reading or video materials.
- Introduce you to senior students of the centre who you can study or hang out with, and who can help to answer your questions.
- Put you in touch with mailing and SMS updates of our activities and news.
- Look after your friends or family who would like to visit or join the centre.
- Connect foreign students to the

teachings and activities of the centre.

- Arrange for foreign visitors to come to Malaysia and visit Kechara House and its outlets.

KCT comprises Kennie Wong, Jamie Khoo, Pearly Khoo, Joann Tan (JT), Wendy Ho, Shin Tan and JP Thong. We will be

on hand at events of teachings at the centre so please feel free to come speak to any of us if you require any further information about Kechara House.

Alternatively, you can contact any of us on email: kecharacare@yahoo.com or call JP Thong on tel: 012 307 3503



The finish line!

Kechara House reached a new milestone upon completion of the 10 million Migtsema mantra count. Our lead Umze reflects on the two-year experience.

By Krystal Low

■ My Migtsema journey started in February 2005 after returning from Nepal where Kechara House members were instructed by our Dharma protector through the Ladakh Oracle to recite ten million migtsema mantras in KH gompa for HE Tsem Rinpoche's long life. This is to purify our collective karma and create vast amounts of merits in order to receive Lord Tsongkhapa's teachings.

The task seemed very daunting at first. But as the incumbent president of Kechara House, I was determined to face the challenge despite facing many obstacles caused by lack of enthusiasm and effort from members. Initially progress was very slow. After one year we had chanted a paltry 800,000 mantras. Then in early 2006 when Rinpoche's health took a turn for the worse, my heart sank and I entreated others to support me to speed up our progress.

I decided to hold all-night chanting sessions every Saturday from 7pm to 7am. A few compassionate ones - Bonita, Wendy, Peter Hoh, Tat Ming, June Heng, Lillian Lee, Sio Chian – rallied to my clarion call. We called our Saturday sessions Migtsemathons and were

thrilled with a few surprise visits by Tsem Rinpoche who chanted along with us and taught us how to meditate. To inspire more people to come, we plodded on every Saturday for more than a year, even if there were only two "inmates" left in the gompa at the final hour.

Soon, more new people joined in and were inspired by our teamwork, dedication, commitment and our harmonious energy. Initially, some people found difficulty synchronizing with my speed. But with perseverance, they succeeded to become a winning member of our migtsema family because like me, they believed that when the going gets tough, the tough gets going!

Now, I am more sensitive and mindful of others' needs and feelings. Over

2000 hours of sitting meditation and chanting has opened my heart and mind to peel off layers of self-cherishing attitude which is the main cause of my unhappiness. I now put others' first before myself. I realise my time is running out to repay others' kindness. I am gentler and more confident, cheerful and relaxed. My attachments are lessened. I can let go more easily. I feel blessed and rejoice in others' good fortune to meet the Dharma.

Migtsema Milestone

NEWSFLASH! 10 Million Migtsemas Completed!

REJOICE! REJOICE! REJOICE!

Kechara House has completed the ten million migtsema puja decreed by Lord Setrap for our Lama's long life. Thank you for your great meritorious effort and enthusiastic participation. After more than 2000 hours of chanting, over a period of two years and four months, our group effort has culminated in our accumulation of 10 million migtsema mantras for HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's long life and stable health and the growth of our centre.



The finer details

As plans start to firm up, the Kechara House Expansion Committee gets down to the finer details of floor tiles, paint colours and a certain member's vast experience with air conditioners...

By Sharon Saw

New plans

Kechara House was completely packed at HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's Dharma talk on Vesak day. It was at its fullest capacity and it was never more apparent that we needed our extension to be complete as soon as possible.

To expedite and assist the Renovation Team, Liaison Ruby Khong was requested by Rinpoche to oversee this project. Margaret Lee and Chuah Su Ming, who had been working tirelessly on refining the plans again and again, finally received 3D plans from the designer as well as quotes from several contractors.

At our meeting with Rinpoche on the latest plans, the committee grappled with unfamiliar concepts such as different types of flooring, tiling and air-conditioning (except for VPC head, JP Thong, who had personal experience with some of these and was happy to share – much to the amusement of Rinpoche and the committee!).

We had also decided that the flooring

for the entire ground floor would be uniform in case we wish to change the layout of the ground floor at any time in the future. The committee pored over samples of floor tiles and wall tiles and voted for their choice.

Slight technical additions and changes have further been made at our weekly meetings, mostly to prepare as best as we can for the kind of activity and work that we hope to host there.

However, most of the plans have now been firmed up. Renovations start in July so much of the KHEC's focus is now on fundraising to support the current loan repayments of the building and future maintenance of the new centre.

How you can help

We are continuously fundraising for the purchase and renovation of this expansion. Earlier this year, we had a Chinese New Year dinner with an auction of HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's personal



The Dzambala chapel

items. There was also an international food fair in Bangsar, where members donated various food items for sale and contributed by coming over to eat!

Now funds are greatly needed for the renovation of the extension. We continue to offer Tsongkhapa tsa tsas available for sponsorship at RM500 per piece as well as Vajrayogini tsa tsas at RM200 per piece. We also have a "merit list" of items that are being offered for sponsorship. Please contact our head of Renovations, Margaret Lee 012 292 5757, for the most recent copy of the list or for more information.

We welcome donations in any form, be it financial sponsorship or effort and time. **Please contact KHEC chairperson Sharon Saw at khec@kecharahouse.com, 012 489 4891 or KH President Tan Sio Chian on 019 321 3608 if you would like to contribute.**



An exterior view of the new building.

“Being Greedy” for Rinpoche

A fundraising initiative for our new expansion brought Kechara friends together in a hearty Chinese New Year celebration dinner and fantastic auction.

By Sharon Saw

A vibrant evening in Taman Tun in early March saw huge celebrations for the Chinese New Year and an enormously successful auction of our Lama HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's holy and personal items. In support of the Kechara House expansion plan, the evening raised a whopping RM108,000 and raised greater awareness of the centre's expansion.

By 8.30pm, most of the people who had made reservations had turned up in the restaurant which made it rather cosy. Pretty floral decorations and candles adorned the tables, and dishes at the splendid buffet were already being replenished.

There were three MCs for the night – JP Thong and Jamie Khoo in English and Loh Seng Piow in Mandarin. They all performed as if they were professional MCs, with JP and Jamie sounding like they were at the Oscars and Seng Piow like he walked out of Wah Lai Toi! They began by giving a brief introduction about the Kechara Expansion Plan and showed slides to illustrate how the current premises at Kechara House was too small to accommodate the large number of people attending Rinpoche's highly popular Dharma talks. The importance and preciousness of a Lama's holy and personal items were also shared by the MCs.

The auction of Rinpoche's holy and personal items began with a mandala set, offered at a reserve price of RM80 and auspiciously snapped up at RM1380 by Rudy Loo. As Jamie and JP hyped up the crowd and entertained the audience, David Lai helped to explain the background and significance of certain items. Irene Lim organised the details with successful bidders while Wendy Ho kept all funds in order, as chief cashier of the night.

An endless stream of around 50 fabulous items were presented, coveted and “won” including ritual items,

beautiful pendants from Rinpoche's personal collection which fetched several great battles between bidders, a Kadampa stupa from Rinpoche's Vajrayogini altar and some of Rinpoche's personal items.

The auction ended around midnight and, with generous donations from sponsors and bidders, Kechara House had raised a record RM88,000! This included the sale of KMP's books. Also, during the “commercial break”, we had a few sponsored karaoke numbers performed by friends Shirley Tan, GL Ooi, Kim Fong, and our very own celebrity singer James Long,

However, we unanimously agreed that we should aim to raise RM108,000 as this would be an auspicious number, symbolising the number of volumes of Buddha's teachings – the Kangyur.

It was past midnight, and the day of miracles had begun when it is believed that everything positive we do will gain 100 million times the normal merit. The MCs went into overdrive and brought out more things to auction. We finally reached RM108,000 at about 1.30am! The Kechara House party immediately did a dedication and then, in true Kechara style, really celebrated by dancing into the night.

All in all, it had been a fantastic event and the organising committee had worked tirelessly to make this happen in under two weeks. A big thank you to everyone who had contributed in any way.

Our greatest gratitude goes to HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, without whom this would not have been possible. Rinpoche kindly offered these items to us so we would have a precious opportunity to take a part of Rinpoche home with us.



Auctioners JP, Jamie and Margaret in action.



Our Umze gives a high bid



Party guests dance the night away



Liaison Ruby partakes in the auction



Birthday Buddha

Vesak Day 2007 saw the biggest and brightest celebrations since KH first opened three years ago. We take a look at what made it so special.

By Sharon Saw

As usual, preparations for Vesak Day started weeks beforehand. This year, the Vajrayogini Paradise Committee (VPC) joined the Kechara House Committee to create the most vibrant Vesak day at Kechara House.

On Vesak eve, while members and friends took the eight precepts with HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, outside, VPC members were setting up tables under canopies. A few members stayed overnight to secure the canopies, tables and fans, while others stayed until dawn to prepare flowers for offerings.

Kechara House was a hive of activity from 7am when volunteers arrived to set up their stalls. While there was only one canopy for candle offerings and vegetarian food last year, there were three canopies this year, creating a mini-carnival atmosphere.

On centre stage was a platform where Anila gave Dzambala blessings, with a basin of water for passers by and visitors to bathe a statue of Dzambala. KH's larger Dzambala statue was placed on a table for people to make offerings.

Under one of the canopies, a few small but busy tables sold chakras,

khatas, incense and other items, while Kechara Media and Publications (KMP) displayed Rinpoche's books and DVDs. Next to KMP was a table offering beautiful jewellery, kindly crafted by our own member Annette Chan. Flowers and lotus candles were available for offerings, and wishes for RM5 were hung on a Wishfulling Tree, one of this

year's highlights. The Kechara Soup Kitchen (KSK) also had a table where they invited people to join their weekly food distributions to the homeless.

On the other side of Dzambala, a free and delicious vegetarian lunch was provided. It was a real spiritual bazaar!

The active hive of activity in the canopies drew lots of attention from passers by, and many strangers were drawn to offer a candle or flowers to the Buddha images or to get a blessing from Anila.

Upstairs in the gompa, the Kechara House Extension Committee (KHEC) had a table with a laptop presentation on Kechara House's growth, as well as a donation box to raise funds for the renovations of its new building. There was also a special exhibition showcasing rare and holy items from high Lamas of Gaden.

The program included morning and evening prayers, and a presentation on the day's theme, "Be Greedy, Be Spiritual", with the day culminating in a wonderful Dharma talk by HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche and a brief but meaningful Refuge ceremony. KH was completely packed that night, which highlights the urgency for KH's extension plan to be expedited!

Vesak day was a splendid success – all due to the efforts of dedicated volunteers from VPC, KH Committee and others who worked so hard to organise the day, man the stalls and clean up late into the night. Thank you all for making it all so wonderful!



Holy Communion with an “Assassin”

While many feel apprehensive about taking refuge, one of Kechara's newer members finds out what it really means to be Buddhist this Vesak Day.

By JP Thong

Fellow Dharma sister JT informed me one day in March that she was arranging for a group of people to take refuge with HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche on Vesak Day. Then, when she asked if I'd like to join the group, I exclaimed, "YES!" without any hesitation.

This spontaneity didn't happen overnight. I declined when I was first asked this four months ago. I was afraid. I wasn't ready to commit. I really didn't know what it was all about - it just sounded BIG. Like a marriage!

So I continued to pray to Buddha for clarity, wisdom and compassion, something I'd been doing for months in the hopes of attaining full Enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings – it was just one of my, "You're so good!" gestures to appease my ego.

Then, for our next Book Club assignment, Rinpoche assigned us a book called, *Devotion: Following Tibetan Masters* by Sherry Marshall and two DVDs, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher and Cry of the Snow Lion*. The book is a compilation of interviews of senior Buddhist practitioners who recount their precious spiritual journey with their Guru. Most of them shared a common theme of how their Guru would go all out – conventionally and unconventionally – to annihilate their ego.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche sums this up beautifully in the DVD, *The Words of My Perfect Guru*, where he refers to the Guru as the "Assassin of our ego". I found this so profound. This is the path towards liberating my mind. It made sense. I declared to myself that I wanted this "assassin" in my life! And I wanted it NOW.

Vesak Day arrived within a blink of the eye. My committee and I worked alongside the Kechara House committee members all day for the celebrations.

In the evening, before the Lama Chopa puja, JT asked me to personally present a card to Rinpoche, on behalf of 20 other people, requesting for refuge.

I entered Rinpoche's private room full of enthusiasm and excitement, just like my first day of school. Rinpoche went through the list of names and paused. Reading out a particular name, he asked who this person was. I raced through every single brain cell searching for any residue of this person's name. My heart seemed to thump exceptionally louder in the midst of the eternal serenity. Panicked, I must have looked like a deer in front of headlights. Meekly, I replied, "I'm sorry. I don't know".

Rinpoche looked at me and noted that I didn't even know the people I represented. That spoke volumes of my level of awareness! Only much later did I remember that he was one of the volunteers I worked with the entire day!

Rinpoche smiled and announced that he will grant the refuge on that day because it was Vesak Day. Which other day would be more auspicious

than that? Containing myself, even though I felt like a child having received a gift from Santa Claus, I walked out of Rinpoche's room in a blissful trance and blurted the exhilarating news to JT.

Rinpoche's Dharma talk and Tsok puja ended at about 2am. Most people left except for the "refugees" and those who wanted to observe the refuge ceremony. A handful of people requested for refuge on the spot as well. Rinpoche immediately granted their request!

We all sat in front of him as he patiently explained the Refuge Vows. After everybody understood the vows, we proceeded with the ceremony on a bended knee. It felt like a marriage with Rinpoche... just without the exchange of rings and kisses!

We then all received our refuge names from Rinpoche. According to tradition, our names contain a part of our Guru's name which in this case is Rinpoche's. I was given the name, Jamyang Gyatso translated as "Ocean of Wisdom". Definitely something I need more of.

It was almost 5am when it ended. We were extremely exhausted from days of Vesak preparation and activity but thoroughly happy. Finally, I am in holy communion with an "assassin" who will lead and guide me towards full Enlightenment.

I'm now no longer a spiritualist practicing Buddhism but simply, a Buddhist.



JP (front, left) and the "refugees" receiving their refuge vows



Mamie and
Rinpoche share
old memories
with KMP

■ Last April, a very important person, Mamie, was flown in from the United States to Malaysia with Joe, our head honcho of Kechara Media and Publications. Rinpoche had invited her to Malaysia to assist the KMP writers in the research and writing of Rinpoche's biography as she had much to share of his time in Los Angeles. After many an afternoon, the writers

Meeting Mamie

A very special person was invited to KL for three weeks to share her memories of a young Tsem Tulku Rinpoche and her own Dharma experiences. Here, a look at the beautiful, lasting impact she left on Kechara House.

By Kelvin Hong

had come to get a much more colourful picture of Rinpoche's teenage years and a greater, stronger understanding of his incredible Dharma imprints from such a young age.

As a mentor to Rinpoche during his time at Thubten Dhargye Ling, Mamie played a pivotal role in helping him through some very difficult periods of his life.

She was the one who helped secure him a room to stay at the centre, offered him a car and spent long conversations with him giving advice and comfort.

Mamie first met Rinpoche at the Thubten Dhargye Ling Dharma center in Los Angeles. Rinpoche was already very interested in the Dharma at that

point and had come to TDL to look for more Dharma teachings and a place where he could further his practice.

She remembers much of his more outgoing, colourful side – the curly red hair, turquoise contact lenses and his skills as a good disco dancer, among other things! But also, she recalls his strong devotion to serving his Gurus, Kyabje Zong Rinpoche and Geshe Tsultim Gyeltsen. She also noted how impressed everyone at the centre was by Rinpoche's incredible devotion and constant hard work, despite having to work two outside jobs and travel long, tiring distances each day.

Today, Mamie is really impressed with Tsem Rinpoche's skillfulness; the way he connects with people, how much he understands about people and is able to connect with them. Mamie is also very impressed with the Guru devotion of Rinpoche's students.

Motherly advice

During her stay, Mamie also kindly gave us two little talks at Kechara House, during our regular Sunday Manjushri classes. Here, amidst sharing funny stories and memories of Rinpoche, she also gave us many valuable Dharma insights and advice.

Having been in Dharma for a very long time and served her Guru, Geshe Tsultim Gyeltsen for many years, Mamie is an inspiration to all of us. Her humility, softness and kindness is evident from the moment you meet her, and her Dharma sharings come across so warmly that it is clear she herself has developed all the bright, wonderful qualities she describes.

Among the things she talked about, she reminded Rinpoche's students of three main points:

- 1) Listen to your teacher,
- 2) Contemplate and think about what he's saying and 3) Meditate, internalise what he's saying so that you can use it. "Guru devotion gives us courage to do the correct thing," she shared, explaining that the teacher gives you the opportunity to realise and do things that you felt you couldn't before.

A lot of times, she felt students probably wouldn't be able to do a lot of things without the Guru, but she stressed that if we are consistent, then our minds will transform. "It is important to listen to what the Guru says, and to do it, even if it's strange at first. The longer we stay with the Guru, the more trust and devotion we have," she shared.

In addition, Mamie advised that students must show and practise

what they're taught. After all, "If students don't show what they have been taught, the teacher can't talk about what he's done. Students have to show that they did learn something," she pointed out.

What I found most inspiring during the interviews with Mamie was her inner sense of calmness, her clarity of thought and her continual reminders of Guru devotion. I was also very moved by her commitments to support TDL in America, even to the extent of sacrificing her own financial wealth through her property mortgage.

Mamie is a wonderful Dharma sister. Talking to her makes me realise a lot more about the sufferings that our Guru had to go through in order to accomplish what we have today with Kechara House.



Finding Kechara Paradise In Pattaya

Some of Kechara Saraswati Arts Department's most dedicated members make a rewarding trip to Thailand to bring Dharma to a special customer and friend.

By Joy Kam, Justin Ripley and Maliwan Wasukamol

Pattaya (three hours from Bangkok) is a pleasure playground where, if you wish, you can fulfil your every desire. In Pattaya, you can spend your days lazing under beach umbrellas or sunbathing while being served delicious food and drink. Then, after sunset, it's time to party all night, every night!

Not so far away is Kechara Paradise (KP), a simple Dharma supplies outlet whose sole purpose is to spread Dharma and support Gaden monastery with funds raised from its operations. Each day is a new opportunity to share Dharma with those who walk through its doors, or even through its online store, kechara.com.

The connection?

Not long ago kechara.com started getting orders from Thailand. Then came the many phone calls about Dharma items and Dharma practice which Wan graciously handled. After many months of communication, Wan decided it was time to make a special journey to Pattaya, Thailand to meet kechara.com's regular customer, Steve Burke.

The three of us and Fat Monk braved the Chinese New Year traffic to travel first to Bangkok by bus (24hours), then to Pattaya (1 ½ hours) with various



gifts from Rinpoche, statues, and KH Migtsema and Setrap Puja to share with Steve.

Who would have thought that you could find the most beautiful personal altars in Pattaya's busiest street. We were both overwhelmed with its elaborate detail and intricateness but also ashamed that our personal altars didn't even come close. Each Buddha had their own set of water offerings, flower offerings and even eight sensory offerings.

These offerings are made everyday, and Yamantaka even gets a special polishing every day too. Amazing!

"Wow" was a word we found ourselves saying a little too much.

We were amazed at the quality of statues that he had found, both at an antique store very close to his apartment and on the Internet.

Steve Burke, a 57-year-old American who is now a Thai Resident, has spent most of his life in South East Asia and has stayed in Thailand for the past 16 years. His first taste of Buddhism was when he saw a Kuan Yin statue for sale in an antique store. He felt some connection so he invited her home; this is where his first altar sprouted roots. It didn't take long for him to begin inviting more Kuan Yin statues, so they could keep each other company!

He was very happy to receive all the books, CDs, DVDs, mantra cards, prayer flags and prayer wheels and detailed explanations from our very own Sifu Fat Monk.

We shared Lama Tsongkhapa's holy Migtsema Mantra with him as is done in our own Kechara House prayer book, and he was happy to listen and absorb

our way of reciting prayers. At first, he said, "You recite your prayers in singsong fashion, I'm more of a speaking fashion, not much of a singer!"

After a great night's rest at the penthouse, we arose to wander around Pattaya beach and to find some local Thai food. We then shared the holy Setrap puja with Steve, the same one that is conducted at Kechara House every Monday night. Lawyers are most famous for asking lots of questions and Steve was

no different! Careful explanations were given on pronunciation (of Migtsemas), when to ring the bell (Steve has a very loud bell), when to light incense and how to mix protector incense. Steve carefully annotated every detail on small post-it notes which he attached to the pages of his copy of *Shartse's Jewel*.

Time flies when you're having fun and it wasn't surprising that we missed our bus. However, our beautiful host sponsored a taxi for our return to Bangkok. So with full bellies and a sense of having made new, strong connections, we sadly said our goodbyes.

The Bangkok Buddhas

A trip to Bangkok marked the sad occasion of HE Dagom Rinpoche's passing away but brought with it deeper, brighter, lighter insights inspired by the Buddhas.

By Jamie Khoo

On a recent trip to Bangkok with Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, some of Kechara's writers and Rinpoche's assistants were given a peek into an entirely different side of what is usually a touristy, shopping, party place.

This isn't surprising, considering how Thailand is always so full of bliss and simple joy. Farangs (foreigners) find their little corner of blissed out peace in this gorgeous centre of Southeast Asia and stay there. For years. For us, four days was enough to rejuvenate (in spite of surviving on very little sleep throughout the trip).

We were there to attend the funeral of Rinpoche's Guru, HE Dagom Rinpoche, who some of us even had the great fortune to meet in Nepal, two years ago. His passing away had come suddenly and unexpectedly; he was only 53 years old and had no one with him at the time except his sponsor. Bangkok was a far cry away from the country and people that loved



him so dearly and it seemed strange that it had all happened so quickly in Thailand.

Still, the funeral was being hosted at a monastery in Bangkok, very kindly arranged by the abbot there. We

flew up to pay our last respects and though the occasion was a sad one, we were to learn plenty of bewildering yet happy lessons that can be gained only by travelling with the light of the Buddhas around you.



The funeral itself was surprisingly simple for a Lama as high as Dagom Rinpoche – the simplicity itself was a teaching, a wonderful example of Dagom Rinpoche's deep humility, right up until the very end.

What was most remarkable, however, was the joyous harmony that brought monks from both Thai and Tibetan traditions together; though it was supposed to be a sad occasion, the deep serenity that came from seeing the two beautiful traditions merge

Saying goodbye...

together in prayer made it almost a happy one. It was a timely reminder that in spite of continued, endless, tiresome debate over the differences in Buddhist traditions, they are all of the same heart.

Tsem Rinpoche did his own personal prayers in front of the pyre as they put Dagom Rinpoche's body in for cremation and he later shared what he saw and felt with us.

A kind monk even opened the door so that Rinpoche could see his Guru's body actually burning. "Even enlightened beings have to burn," remarked Rinpoche as he talked of the importance of learning to let go, and for us to really do something of benefit in our lives, right here, right now.

The shock of his sudden passing away, and understanding the rawness of death was a jolt, and huge push for us to reconsider just what we were doing with our lives. Far from being something pessimistic and dreary, facing something as austere as death head on inspired us onwards to bigger things and a better mind.



The lighter side...

Am I shallow for enjoying all those moments of just hanging out with the Buddhas? The trip to Bangkok brought us into the presence of what I call "A-List Lamas." High Lamas had flown in from all over the world to attend the funeral and for many of us, the sadness of losing one great master was slightly tempered by the great opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the world's most enlightened minds.

One of Tsem Rinpoche's Gurus, HE Gangchen Rinpoche had flown in from Italy, and Gaden Shartse's official oracle, who is now based in America, was also there.

We had the great fortune of having two audiences with Gangchen Rinpoche where he imparted plenty of advice to us about practice:

"You're very busy and lead very busy lives; on top of that, you take time out to do work, do service, to upkeep, to maintain and to help the centre to grow. Actually, that is more important than your normal work.

The reason is that when you do Dharma work, then you make yourself happy in this life and you also lead yourself to become an all-knowing one – a Buddha.

When one does Dharma work, you shouldn't think that you've taken time out from a busy schedule, a busy life to do this. You should think you're doing something much more important than what you would ordinarily do, which is to create happiness in this life and to create the causes for yourself to become a fully enlightened

omniscient Buddha."

Gangchen Rinpoche also spoke at length about the significance of Tsem Rinpoche being in layclothes, and the benefit that this has in imparting the Dharma to people of this day and age.

He explained, "Even if the great Shakyamuni appeared today, he wouldn't appear in his normal guise. He would appear according to the people, the time and their appearance and the look that pleases people today. The outer appearance is not a big deal; it is to make people become closer."

There was also repeated emphasis on the need to engage in methods that would appeal to people of today. Gangchen Rinpoche was especially keen for us to produce comic books that would present a lighter side to Dharma and appeal to a younger generation.

And though we were there to say our goodbyes to Dagom Rinpoche, Gangchen Rinpoche's advise to engage, do and support our Lama's Dharma work seemed especially apt – it marked a new step forward, as if Dagom Rinpoche himself and all the Buddhas of Bangkok were pointing us in a new-generation direction of Dharma.

Bangkok, as a touristy, shopping, party place, isn't quite as far away as we'd thought – we were a big part of that lifestyle, we loved it and thrived in it and the trip anchored in our minds the complete possibility of bringing that world into Dharma; and vice versa.

More stories about our Bangkok trip can be read on dollygirlblog.blogspot.com/2007/05/dolly-does-bangkok.html and www.notesfromvenus.com/blog/?p=645



Braving the book storm

From answering crazy questions to calming down agitated customers, Kechara Media and Publications took their first big step into the world at the recent World Book Fair in Singapore.

By Sharon Saw

Having produced an impressive collection of seven book titles and eight newly-packaged DVDs, Kechara Media and Publications (KMP) were ready to take their next big step beyond Malaysia. And so, with KMP's director Joseph Chan's strong foresight and eternal optimism, KMP decided to participate in Singapore's World Book Fair for the first time at the end of May.

Two carloads, filled with KMP staff, bunting, postcards, bookmarks and other paraphernalia, headed south on Wednesday, 23 May. The next day was spent setting up the booth and sticking Singapore Censorship Board labels onto DVDs in the hot, muggy exhibition hall at Suntec Convention Centre. They rated our DVDs as PG (Parental Guidance) – I wonder why!

On Friday, 25 May, the World Book Fair was officially opened. Our booth looked great, framed with bunting, Ben's fabulously designed backdrop and the DVDs and books all beautifully displayed. Many people over the week would stop just to look at our display! The first weekend was very successful and saw a lot of sales – especially with support from our Kechara members and friends, some of whom drove down from Kuala Lumpur and Melaka. Liaisons Maple Keh and Ruby Khong visited us, and also our ever-energetic KH President, Tan Sio Chian.

Later in the week, during weekdays, the stream of visitors and sales slowed down so for Vesak Day, which fell on 31 May, Paris decided to spice things up a bit and also fulfilled her long time fantasy of dressing up as Green Tara! She looked utterly fabulous and drew a lot of attention. She even walked round outside



the exhibition hall, and up and down other floors of the convention centre. Children dragged their parents to our booth and our Tara was a celebrity for a day as many people came and took photographs of her.

Another highlight of the week was that we were featured in an article in the Singapore daily, *Lianhe Wanbao*, which had colour photos of HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche and our KMP booth at the fair. Some visitors came as a direct result of that article and showed great interest in our Chinese book, *Be Greedy*, so the media definitely can be a good friend.

It was a very long, busy and tiring 10 days for all of us but one of the best experiences throughout the book fair was the great team spirit that was so evident amongst us. KMP director and Liaison Joseph Chan, Shin Tan, JJ Chong, David Lai and Ben Thain had



spent the past few weeks planning and preparing for the Book Fair. For the rest of us volunteers, it was a great learning experience – to be constantly promoting Dharma and even talking about Dharma when we had closed up for the day.

The Book Fair also highlighted to us how generous people could be, such as Rosalind Hong, KMP fellow writer Kelvin's sister. She kindly hosted four of the KMP women writers at her apartment for the whole duration of the fair. She didn't know us at all, or Rinpoche or much



about Buddhism. Roland Tan also kindly hosted some other members of KMP and came to the Book Fair to help. We are very grateful for Teo Lai Seng's tireless contributions, from helping to arrange for our participation at the fair, storing our products, smoothening out logistics, visiting us every day, introducing us to Singapore media and even bringing home cooked food. These generous souls were well rewarded as Rinpoche sent stunning gifts to them, which we tried hard not to covet!

To put the icing on an already elaborate cake, Rinpoche sent KMP volunteers and staff a wonderful SMS which was encouraging and very touching: "I am excited and happy for all of you. All of you are like in a retreat during this period like a 10-day retreat. Your body moving, packing, unpacking, showing, sleeping, eating, travelling for Dharma. Your speech, nearly all words direct and indirect is increasing Dharma. And your mind single-pointedly focused on talented, skilful ways to bring Dharma to others! I am truly happy from my



heart. Beautiful."

All in all, it was a successful adventure – our sales were good for a Dharma publishing house in a generic book fair. We drew in quite a lot of people from all walks of life, and also had the opportunity to introduce Rinpoche's teachings to our personal friends in Singapore.

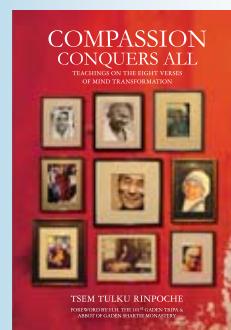
So many people streamed through our booth, some weird and some wonderful, but we hope that each of them – whether they bought anything or not – would have their lives touched by what we shared with them and perhaps be inspired onto their own Dharma paths. Even those who came deliberately to criticise us, we wish that they would have been blessed by merely seeing the statue of Lama Tsongkhapa and pictures or video of our beloved Guru, HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche.

i Read detailed daily reports of KMP's participation at the Singapore World Book Fair on KMP's website www.kecharapub.com



Hot off the press!

Kechara Media and Publication's hottest new offering.



Compassion Conquers All

By HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, with forewords by HH Gaden Tri Rinpoche and Gaden Shartse Monastery Abbot HE Ken Rinpoche

RM 40

Much in the spirit of all of Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's publications, this newest book presents The Eight Verses of Thought Transformation in a wonderfully light and contemporary way. This prayer embodies the wholehearted spirit of compassion, kindness, patience and love that is demonstrated in all spiritual leaders (such as those featured on the front cover) and transcends the labels of religion, focusing instead of the core of humanistic values.

This teaching contains the essence of all of Buddha's teachings within just eight simple verses – it is said that we can attain Enlightenment just by practising these eight verses. Sounds simple enough but the practice can often prove more tricky! Rinpoche shows us, through his very down-to-earth approach, how we can really apply the eight verses on a daily basis and how it isn't really that difficult, after all.

Extracted from over 12 hours of Dharma teachings, *Compassion Conquers All* has been carefully edited by Andreas Uetz, one of Rinpoche's students, to bring out Rinpoche's unique commentary of the eight verses. The book outlines, in tremendous detail, the meaning of each individual verse, and includes a simple yet effective meditation that can be done to help us in every day situations.



Going for gold

Kechara strikes Dharma gold at Malaysia's first Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival and makes a huge impression with their outstanding (controversial!) approach.

By Andreas Uetz

HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's joyful message accompanying the above picture celebrates the divine golden green tip of an iceberg that is amply represented by the blurred figure behind Tara's lotus.

Shin is spotted in constant motion in the background – an apt metaphor of the two-month marathon of logistics and organisation that took Kechara Media and Publications (KMP) all the way to the Singapore World Book Fair and seamlessly to the Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival here in Kuala Lumpur. KMP and Kechara House outlets began digging deep at the MINES (exhibition centre) and the outcome was pure gold...

To start at the beginning – the Buddhist Culture and Arts Festival 2007 had been inspired, initiated, organised and graced with many beautiful installations and activities by the Nalanda Buddhist Society. Over 50 Buddhist organisations participated in the five-day event in early June and thousands of visitors/pilgrims flooded the premises each day, to leave with their metaphoric alms bowls brimming with inspiration, information, gifts, books, CDs, candles,

T-shirts, coconut fiber meditation cushions...

Embalmed by the fragrances of a myriad lotus flowers and the drone of ancient Pali chants, saffron and maroon robes floated amongst the tides of us ordinary beings as if in an ancient Dharma kingdom. Among the flurry of stalls offering their goods, a tea ceremony was held, relics were revered, a sand mandala was created, a stupa could be circumambulated, pujas were performed.

Bodhidharma's journey to China could be traced on a wall-sized map, and many Buddhist remnants along the Silk Road he traveled could be admired on the photographs displayed. Reverend Cheng Yen's and Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda's activities were documented in

**Dear everyone...
Kechara House does it again!!!
Does what again?**

- Steal the crowd
- Draw all the attention to our booth
- Tourists, spiritual aspirants, curiosity seekers, etc have to stop by our booth to take pics
- Even the other booth volunteers are drawn to us.

WHY, YOU ASK???

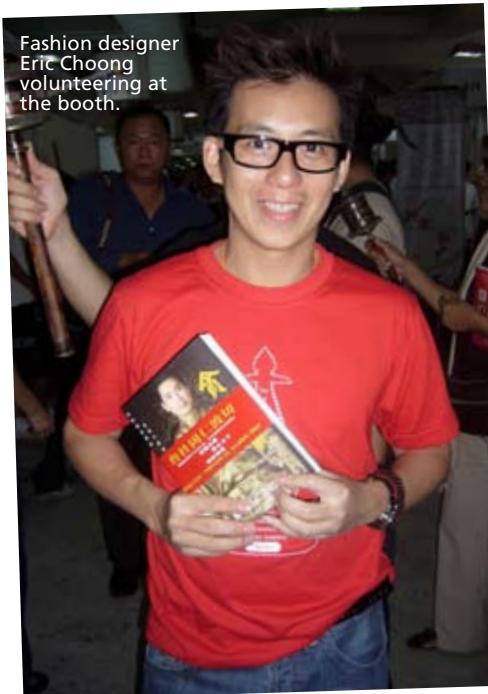
Because we have our own, very own Tara and Dzambala... aka Paris and Sean. They transformed into deities and manifested in front of our outlet and KMP booths. Needless to say... they wowed the crowds!!!

spacious exhibitions.

Far more humble in size but not in spirit, KMP and Kechara Paradise's two adjoining booths attracted throngs of visitors, in Henry's words, like bees to the beehive. It's true: as if pulled by a magnetic force, a never-ending stream of seekers found their way to us, gathered around the TV screen to take in a few minutes of Rinpoche's discourses and intermingled with our volunteers for brief conversations about our Lama and his teachings, Kechara House, its activities and location, Gaden monastery and our lineage.

They browsed amongst Himalayan ancient arts and Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's contemporary wisdom, and left with KMP's books and DVDs, and KP's statues, incense, protection chakras... or at





least with a free newsletter, brochure, bookmark and website address.

Just like Herbert, who drove 500km upon hearing of the festival, hoping to find a Dharma connection. He drove back with a book and DVD and my phone number.

I know all of our many volunteers – which reached a stunning total of 35 KH members and friends assisting at the booth all at the same time – have similar stories to tell.

There were so many people out there with affinity, discovering it through the exposure derived in ways such as participating here! There were many asking directions to KH; so many more wanting to learn more about Rinpoche and his teachings, having seen him on YouTube, read Jamie Khoo's article in *The Star* (having appeared as if by divine intervention just a few days ago), come across his website or found his books in KL's biggest bookstores.

Time and again, through all these inspiring encounters and stories, we realised that Tsem Rinpoche's potential of reaching out to our contemporary society is virtually limitless. The dawning of joyful realisation in young people that there is a form of Dharma to suit them perfectly could be often observed, and this was especially heart-warming.

We carried the special charm of extraordinary VIPs – a blissful Tara, sleepy

Dzambala (banned for blessing in public), Malaysia's most charming supermodel Amber Chia coming especially to visit and support us (accompanied by frenetic hooray chanting and cameras a-flashing as she posed next to Rinpoche's bunting, KMP books in hand), KH's fashionably fashionable mascots Bill Keith and Eric Choong.

Each of them underlined what was evident and attested to by organisers and even a Tibetan Lama: our booths attracted the most people and our volunteers charmed everyone with their dynamic enthusiasm, friendly approach and originality.

This was all a taste of what's to come... and what's to come is BIG BIG BIG. More BIG wisdom and love from Tsem Rinpoche, more BIG support from the dakinis and protectors, more BIG dedicated work from KMP who have produced no less than six books and over a dozen DVDs of Rinpoche's teachings in merely two years. And more BIG response and enthusiastic feedback from everywhere...

Joseph and his team were tirelessly involved in both this and the Singapore book fair. From designing our booth, to creating posters, bunting, T-shirts, postcards, bookmarks, organising licenses, meeting distributors and bookstore managers, arranging transport and duty rosters, the dynamic little team achieved all this in-house, with faith in their Lama, determination to promote him and sheer blood, sweat and tears.

Their thousands of hours of labour have brought Rinpoche's teachings into the major bookstores of Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, to the Singapore bookfair and now to this wonderful Buddhist festival. We were the only booth offering books of the Vajrayana tradition and promoting exclusively the works of our Lama.

The fair made us realise deep in our bones that we can get our Lama to where he belongs: the world.

The overwhelming response showed that we're on the right track, and has been an enormous boost for all involved. Harmony and hard work make everything good possible and this huge success story has been a visible quantum leap demonstration for all of us, that has left a powerful imprint in our collective consciousness.

After the booth had been dismantled and packed up, and while we recited dedication prayers, we realised deep in our bones that we can get our Lama to where he belongs: the world.

Rinpoche, who had been watching us on webcam during the entire event and sending hundreds of SMS with encouragement and ideas, doing pujas and orchestrating everything, must have smiled.



From the roofs of the world, into our homes and hearts

A look into our Dharma outlets, the four gates of the Kechara Mandala.

By Andreas Uetz



We all see proof of HE Tsem Tulku Rinpoche's foresight and spiritual creativity when we look at the many new friends, volunteers and staff that have found Kechara House's big entrance via the smaller gates of the temples we call our Dharma outlets.

You may have just strolled by to find yourself suddenly enchanted by the serene aura of a Buddha statue, a scripture or a stupa, displayed in a shopping window in the middle of everywhere.

Entering, you may have been surprised by the spiritually-charged energy of the store. Talking to the enthusiastic sales person, you found that every item tells an interesting story, having traveled a long way from the high Himalayas, where the arts are inexorably interwoven with spirituality.

You were impressed by the knowledge of your conversation partner, and even more so when you learned that she wasn't paid for being there, but worked for the pure joy of sharing what had transformed her life in such a fundamental way.

That's when you consciously noticed the voice and images on the TV player. Paris (that was her name...) proudly informed you that the brilliant speaker was Tsem Tulku Rinpoche, spiritual

advisor of a fabulous Dharma Centre and her very own personal Guru and best friend. Now you were really intrigued! Why would a funky, happy, hard-partying young lady run after an (admittedly very handsome) monk? But as you leaned back in the cool cushion and watched for a while, you realised that you had come across something special.

You left with a free newsletter, incense and a sense of elation. And you soon came back. In fact, the store became your regular hang-out. During your second visit you learned more about the blessing

power of holy objects. Amazingly, you found just the right amount of little papers in your purse that would let you invite your very first Buddha home, along with one of Rinpoche's DVDs, because listening to him inspired you more...

Soon, you learned about offerings (you couldn't resist that lovely set of bowls), prayer and meditation and soon, to your surprise, you sat in a beautiful hall on a marble floor and let yourself be transported all the way to your true selfless self by your first real-life Dharma session with Tsem Rinpoche.

The rest is history... very soon, you started donating your free afternoon and enthusiasm to Kechara House by volunteering in the very Dharma store you had discovered. Sharing about the Dharma, Rinpoche, Kechara House and Gaden Monastery became a treasured activity, a gift you give to others and yourself.

You realised how blessed we are to be part of a holy lineage, and students of an authentic lineage holder, because we can become a factor in changing someone's life forever by simply introducing them to Rinpoche's Dharma teachings. Just like our outlets are the branches of Kechara House, we can become Rinpoche's many helping hands.

The many benefits of volunteering at our outlets

Kechara House members travel with great hardship and expenses to India, Tibet, Nepal, China and Indonesia to find the best statues, thangkas, artifacts and holy items. They are thoroughly trained and often accompanied by Rinpoche, who has hand-picked and even sponsored many of the items himself. It is clear that the motive behind it all is not profit but benefit, and if there were a surplus, it would be used for the upkeep of Kechara House and Gaden Monastery. Then, KH members arrange for the goods' packaging, shipment, collection, pricing, painting etc. etc. before they're put on outlet shelves.

Kechara House members get it all done from A-Y... wouldn't it be wonderful if the Z of this alphabet, the person working at the store, could be a Kechara House member as well? The little true story told above shows the many benefits of not only working for wages, but also a cause.

As students of Tsem Rinpoche, we have the great combined advantages of a supreme motivation, knowledge and enthusiasm, the combined blessings of the Gaden lineage and Rinpoche, which makes customers feel that they have been given so much more than money can buy – a new direction (Kechara House), a new perspective (Rinpoche's teachings), and indeed often a new life (practising according to Rinpoche's teachings).