## POSTCARD 17 FROM ROBINA: BOSTON, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 21, 2011

My stay at Tushita ended with the 10+-hour drive down the mountain throughout the night of November 25 – more leisurely than the drive up two weeks before – through the Punjab and into Delhi airport in time for my six o'clock flight to Amman in Jordan. I start and end my round-the-world tickets here. Seeing that I don't have a home at the moment – I gave away all my things from San Francisco and Sydney so am literally homeless – my "base" can be anywhere, so why not Jordan? It happens to be that the price of the tickets is a lot less here, so that's good enough reason.

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche during the long-life puja offered to Rinpoche at Tushita on December 16.*

It was so nice knowing that Rinpoche was in residence at Tushita. In retreat and being taken good care of by Venerables Roger, Holly, Sangpo et al., nevertheless Rinpoche would be seen here and there, always taking the opportunity to talk to someone, Indians especially. One young man from Mumbai at the Introduction to Buddhism course was completely seduced! And an Indian woman at the Tara retreat somehow had Rinpoche grab her every day, ending up with her life practice all sorted out.

*Rinpoche with Khandro-la and Tsen-la making a tsog offering to Vajrayogini at a sacred Heruka sight in Kangra, just a few miles below Dharamsala.*

I noticed during my year here in 2009, and during the courses this time, that more and more Indians are committing to the Buddhist path. I remember in the late 1970s, at Tushita in Delhi, many of the locals would come to teachings, but they came as Hindus who loved Lord Buddha, whom they considered one of theirs. Now it's different: Buddhism seems to be the lineage of some of them.

Rinpoche, as always, was in good form: always kind, always laughing with delight. I'll never forget those peals of laughter, mixed with Lama Yeshe's, during my first retreat at Tushita, Tara in March 1978. The month was full of them! During retreat you tend to get annoyed with distracting sounds, but never that one. It was joyful to behold!

One of Rinpoche's Tibetan students, the nun Tsen-la, was at Tushita this time. In 1979 Lama asked her to establish Kopan's sister nunnery in Kathmandu – now an amazing place, full of hundreds of nuns – Lama made her attend philosophy classes with the monks at Kopan. Unheard of! But she's a strong nun. She was educated by the Catholic nuns at boarding school in India, just like so many of the rich Indian girls, so ended up very posh, with a natural self-confidence and a sense of authority, most unlike your usual Tibetan nun. She's the sister of Yangsi Rinpoche, who runs Maitripa College in Portland.

She went here and there with Rinpoche: to the spring with Khandro-la, who is healing Rinpoche, and to a meeting with His Holiness (we can read about both

events in Ven. Roger's blog). Tsen-la said that His Holiness was so sweet, lovingly massaging Rinpoche's paralyzed right arm and shoulder. His Holiness asked Rinpoche, Tsen-la said, when he first noticed that something was wrong. "When Sangpo laughed at me," Rinpoche answered. "So you laughed at your guru!" His Holiness joked. It seems that after the initial stroke had done its damage, Sangpo laughed when Rinpoche's words came out strangely. Tsen-la said that His Holiness indicated that, actually, it's a good sign, showing the closeness of the disciple to the guru. A young monk from Kopan, Sangpo is like an angel, very natural and clear and humble, who basically serves as Rinpoche's butler.

*Rinpoche meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, with (from left back) Khedrup, Roger and Sangpo; (front left) Tsenla, two monks from Tushita, a young tulku from Tibet in the arms of his nun attendant, and Holly.*

Tsen-la said that Khandro-la told Rinpoche about her first time in Dharamsala. She came across the mountains from Tibet as a young girl, with the sole wish to offer a full long-life puja to His Holiness. It's a complicated affair, apparently, and needs all sorts of special things to be offered. She had organized them all. But who was she? Even though she's said to be a highly realized being in human form, to anyone who didn't know her she was just a young girl. How could she possibly get to His Holiness? Eventually she had a meeting with Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, who, clearly seeing her qualities, promised her, "I will build a golden bridge between you and His Holiness." She was so happy. She met the appropriate people and His Holiness agreed to accept the puja. But dearly wanting to make a personal offering, she first

visited a local cave (of Tilopa, Naropa? I can't remember). She asked the monks for a vase, picked up a rock and squeezed it – and from it dripped clear yellow nectar, filling her vase to the brim. At the puja His Holiness accepted it and drank every drop. Wow.

*Rinpoche and Khandro-la in France in October.*

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Now I'm in Boston – but before starting my job here on December 1 I spent a few days with friends in New York, where I flew to from Amman. Nothing special: just relaxing, walking, enjoying the vibes. But the night I arrived at the airport I took another flight first, to Syracuse, where I stayed the night with my dear friend Joyce Smith. The next day we spent a few hours with her dear husband, and my friend, James Moore, who has spent something like 54 years in prison. He is the dearest man who has spent his life studying and working for others. The obstacles to his release seem as immense as they are incomprehensible. In January Joyce has another hearing in her years-long efforts to have him released, as he should be. Many prayers for their success!

*With Joyce Smith and James Moore at Cayuga Correctional Facility in Moravia, New York, November 27.*

Then I took the train to Boston. I stay at Kurukulla Center in Medford – in the bush as far as I'm concerned! I'm joking. Actually, it's lovely here: very quiet, with nice light coming through my southwest window. Their geshe has gone to India for the winter so I'm doing a few classes a week. I'm here till mid-January.

We've just heard that His Holiness has accepted Kurukulla's invitation to come, a second visit. Everyone's over the moon. It'll be October this year, it seems.

The local Tibetan community spend time at Kurukulla. They've bought their own big statue of Guru Rinpoche, which sits in the gompa, and some of them come almost every day, to make offerings, relax and chat. I was sitting in my room at the front of the house on my first day and in came an old Tibetan man. He prostrated to the altar three times and proceeded to make his water bowl offerings. The room looks like a lounge room – I took out the bed; I don't like beds! – and I use the couch as my bed. He stopped coming because he heard it was my room, but I asked him back again, so we have a deal: I offer the water in the bowls every morning, leaving a bit of space for Pa-la, as he's called, to add his saffron water. And he makes three butter lamp offerings on the altar as well.

*Pa-la and me in front of our shared daily offerings; (below) Damchoe and friend building the light-offering house.*

There's a gorgeous stupa outside in the back yard and a big Tara statue. And Damchoe, former Kopan monk who's now married to his Nepalese sweetheart and serves as the translator here, is building a light-offering house. Pa-la likes that! These days, of course, everyone uses the Western tea lights, but according to Damchoe Pa-la likes the old-fashioned style so he melts the wax and pours it into the little light containers, just like he would have brought his liquid yak butter in his kettle to the Jhokhang and made his offerings there.

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I had a weekend at Shantideva Meditation Group in New York December 9-11 – any excuse to visit my favorite city! And I might go again for Christmas – coordinator Mary Esbjornson says she's going away and her apartment might be free. Otherwise I'll spend Christmas here with Ven. Chodron (we lived at Tse Chen Ling in San Francisco together), who'll be moving into Kurukulla very soon.

*Our course at Shantideva in New York City, December.*