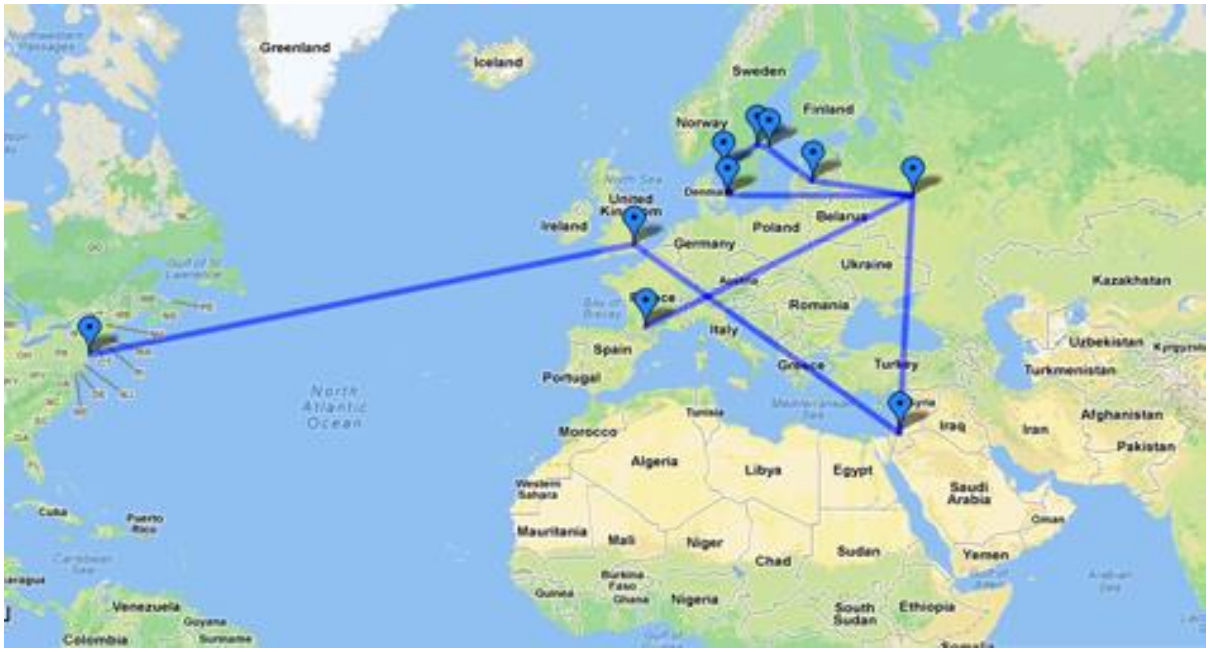
POSTCARD 29 FROM ROBINA: MOSCOW, THURSDAY, AUGUST 30, 2012



Since my last postcard, from Institut Vajra Yogini in the south of France, I flew to Moscow for 10 days of teachings at Lama Zopa Rinpoche's center there; followed by three weeks in Denmark and Sweden; then a week at our center in Latvia. Then back to Amman, in Jordan, via Moscow, where my next round-the-world ticket began. From there I flew to London and on to the US to begin six months of teaching in North America: the US, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Canada, and Colombia.

Moscow. So much energy, so much hunger for the Dharma, you can't help but respond. As usual my 10 days were packed full, with evening teachings in the city and a weekend retreat at a lovely Kagyu place a couple of hours out of Moscow. And Big Andrey was my driver again, in his big black Land Rover jeep. The traffic is as lawless as ever.

[SEP]

(Top) The Moskva River winding into the heart of this intense city of more than 11 million; photo Dmitry-Mordolff. (Middle) Busy Moscow shoppers; photo Chris Mellor. (Bottom) The city's wild, make-your-own-rules traffic; photo Dolboeb Anton Nossik.

(Above) Ganden Tendar Ling's director Sergey (right) and spiritual program coordinator and translator Mikhail (left) with Geshe Ngawang Thugje, who will be their resident lama starting next summer. Photo Ganden Tendar Ling. (Below) Mikhail translating Lord Buddha's teachings into Russian for hungry Dharma students. Photos Grigoriy Smirnov

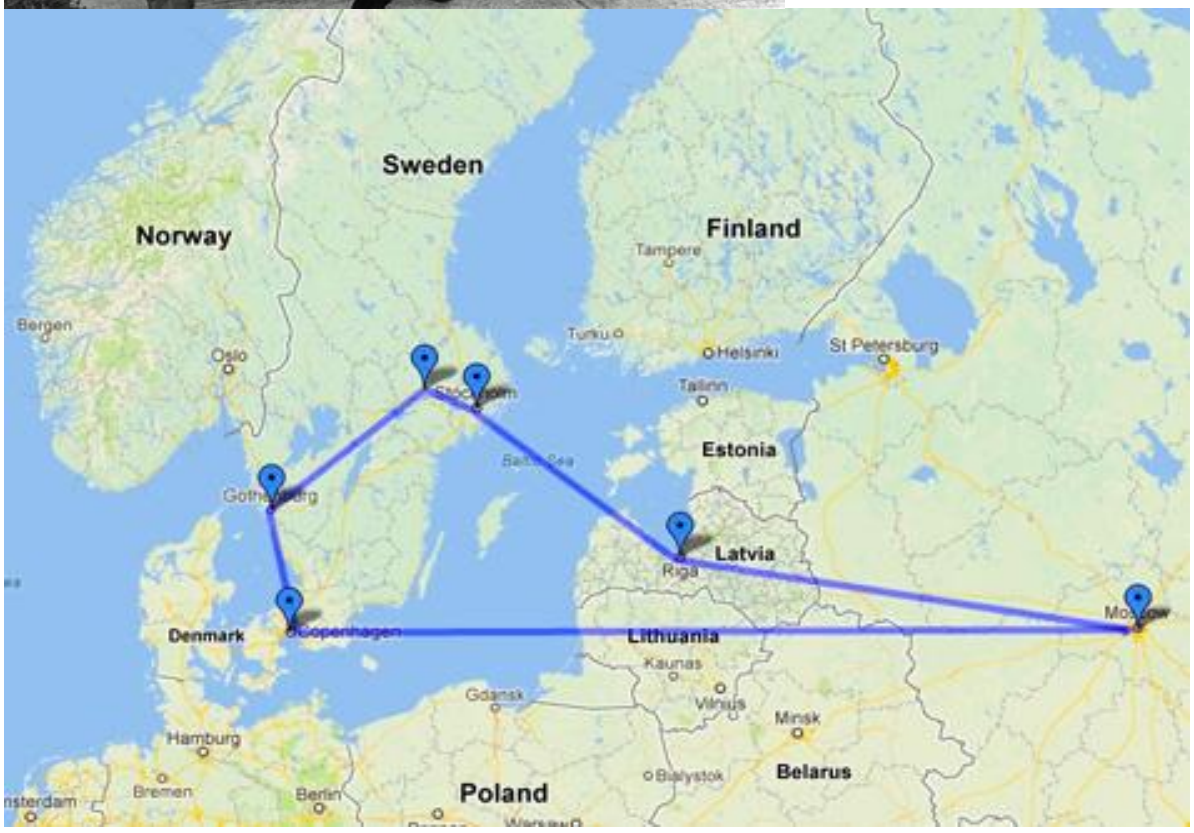
Sergei continues to run Ganden Tendar Ling. He showed me their latest publishing activities – last year we talked about it and now it has manifested. It is marvelous to see how they have taken on this job to provide the Dharma in Russian. Without books, what good can a Dharma center do? The teachings are the lifeblood of a center. And they need to be authentically translated. Before Buddhism began being practiced by us contemporary modern people, the language used in translations – in English, Spanish, whatever – was intellectual and arcane, not coming from the hearts and experience of practitioners. The difference is immense, and crucial.

One of the books I worked on when I was with Wisdom Publications in the 1970s and '80s was Jeffrey Hopkins's *Meditation on Emptiness.* I remember we talked about how he started the Buddhist department at the University of Virginia, in 1976. He was the first person to head such a department who was also a practitioner, not just a scholar. He was considered inferior by his fellow professors, he said – because how could you be a scholar and also be a practitioner? To be subjective was the sin. But how else can a discipline be authentic if it's not taught by a "knowledge-holder" – this lovely term "tenzin" in Tibetan. If there are not actual practitioners of music or cooking or mathematics, these disciplines would be dead. Same, of course, with something as vital as a philosophy that describes the world and how it functions. To think that a philosopher who actually practices the philosophy lessens its authenticity

is as mad as thinking that a person who knows recipes who actually cooks lessens its authenticity.

His Holiness at the University of Virginia with Jeffrey Hopkins (front, left) in 1979. Photo Ed Roseberry.

Sergei and his team, their spiritual program coordinator and translator Misha and the rest, plan to translate the texts used in the FPMT courses, such as Discovering Buddhism, and the teachings of our lamas, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.



A closer look at my route from Moscow to Copenhagen to Göteborg to Västerås to Stockhom to Riga and back to Mosow.

July 30, my flight from Moscow to Copenhagen. Such a different feeling from Moscow: mellow, easy going – even the traffic seems easy-going. But the demand for the Dharma here is the same: the center flourishes. Karen, an American architect married to a Dane, works full-time running the place under the guidance of the director Rasmus.

Enjoying a summers day in Rosenborg Castle Gardens; photo Jonathan Smith. The city's colorful Nyhavn, or "New Harbor" neighborhood; photo Nomadic Matt.

Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling's director Rasmus (left) and Karen, who helps run the busy Copenhagen center; and my dear friend Maria Damsholt, a long-time student of the lamas in Copenhage. Photos Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling.

With a group of students from Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling after taking Refuge (above). Photo Tong-nyi Nying-je Ling.

Rasmus is busy with his Potential Project, which is growing hugely. He runs mindfulness courses for corporations and has teams that he effectively franchises to around the world.

I stayed, as usual, with old friend Maria Damsholt (photo above). One day we drove into the country to visit Lise Lotte, whom I knew back in the 1970s, in England, when we lived at Manjushri Institute. She runs a guest house now, Lotusgård (Lotus Farm in English) with her new husband Glenn, who keeps bees. I was fascinated. Apparently when a new queen is born, the old queen takes off with her workers to start a new hive. Fine for the queen and her subjects but if you're the owner who is farming their honey, not so cool! Lise Lotte told about these elaborate ploys you need to use to seduce the queen back. Anyway, the honey of these kind beings was delicious.

Lise Lotte and me, below. We both lived at Manjushri Institute, the first FPMT center in the UK, in the late '70s, where we studied the Geshe Studies Programme under Geshe Jampa Tekchok.

Lise Lotte's husband Glenn tending to their honeybees. There can only be one queen per beehive so when new queen eggs are laid, the old queen and part of the colony will leave in a swarm looking for a new home. Glenn carefully cuts the branch of swarming bees down to place those bees in a new beehive. (Below): A summers day in Göteborg, on Sweden's west coast, where I taught at Foreningen For Tibetansk Buddhism.

August 10 it was goodbye to the Danes. I took a train ride to Göteborg, four hours from Copenhagen. It was my first time in this, the second biggest Swedish city. There isn't an FPMT center there but there are several students of Rinpoche's, so it felt like home.

Then on to Västerås, a little city where Gun Cissé lives and runs Tsog Nyi Ling for Rinpoche. Remember, we were security guards for His Holiness together back in 1982. She took me to Stockholm for the remaining few days at the invitation of Dromtonpa Center and the FPMT study group there, Yeshe Norbu, which Martin Ström runs.

Stockholm, the Swedish capital, on the eastern coast of the country.

Then to Rīga in Latvia to Rinpoche's center there. I was here 10 years ago: a new director, Agnese, new students. Everyone in Rīga, it seemed, was getting ready for Lady Gaga's Saturday night concert; we couldn't compete with that - who would try? It was to be held out in the open in the Mezaparks, a huge park on the outskirts of the city. We went that afternoon for lunch by the lake and you could hear from a mile away the sound people getting ready. The ground practically shook!

Rīga's Mezaparks, where 20,000 people attended Lady Gaga's concert the Saturday I was there. She apparently arrived on stage riding a horse!

The Vanšu Bridge stretches across Rīga's River Daugava. Photo Shutterstock.

Offering Lama Chöpa Tsog with the students of Ganden Buddhist Meditation Centre in Rīga, one of two FPMT groups in Latvia. Photo Ganden Buddhist Meditation Centre.

Monday August 27 was the end of my round-the-world ticket, which takes me three continents. I'd begun it nine months before in Amman, in Jordan, and needed to finish there. But first I had to get back to Moscow. I had forgotten that I needed a visa to even stay overnight there, which I needed to do. And because I also hadn't booked myself a flight I spent a fortune for the two-hour flight from Rīga, landing in Moscow at midnight and needing to stay in the airport til four o'clock the following afternoon. I imagined the worst: sitting upright in ugly chairs but, no, they had a very nice lounge for people like me; they even had little couches you could put together to form a bed, free hot food available all night, and Internet connection. Better than a hotel.

I flew from Moscow to Amman, stayed overnight there, then flew to London, then flew to New York, altogether on the road for 40 hours. But I enjoy my travels, for some reason. . .

Now I'm in the States again – as well as Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Colombia – for the next six months.