

Introduction to the Temple Project at Deer Park

by Geshe L. Sopa , Director and Abbot

Dear Friends,

After Buddhism declined in India, the Buddha's teachings were carefully guarded and maintained in Tibet. In the quiet isolation of our mountainous country, great scholars and yogis kept Buddha's teachings alive through their study, meditation and practice—for over ten centuries, right up until the communist Chinese invasion in 1959. After many Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns, including myself, were forced to flee our homeland, we found that many Westerners welcomed our message of peace, compassion and loving kindness. Today, Buddhism has lost its stable home in Tibet, where the very Tibetan way of life is also facing extinction. To ensure that this valuable element of our common human heritage can continue to offer its unique contribution to human culture and wisdom, we at Deer Park are now undertaking a major initiative to secure a firm and lasting spiritual home for Tibetan culture and Buddhist teachings on American soil.

Since Deer Park began offering Buddhist teachings and hosting Tibetan cultural events in 1975, our principal aim has been to make the pure teachings of the Buddha available to anyone who might be interested. We have been doing so by offering instruction in Buddhist philosophy and meditation to the public, faithfully reproducing the traditions of study and practice preserved in Tibet. All are most welcome to visit and observe or share in our spiritual activities. Over the years, we have invited great spiritual masters, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to teach at our facilities, and we have also hosted interreligious conferences and retreats. Thousands of schoolchildren have visited our grounds and have met our monks and nuns through our community outreach program. At the same time, our small community of resident monks has quietly preserved the ancient monastic lifestyle that has been followed since the time of the Buddha over 2,500 years ago.

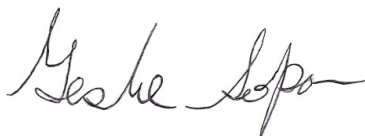
Our current facilities have tremendous historic significance as the site of the first Kalachakra ceremony for world peace ever performed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the West. However, our main temple was built in 1981 as a temporary open-air pavilion, and is now well past its prime. It is also far too small to serve either the expanding base of interested students or the growing Tibetan refugee community in the Midwest. A much larger facility is needed as well to display the rare collection of Tibetan art and cultural artifacts that has been bequeathed to Deer Park over the years. Our new building will also be adequate to house the extensive archive of rare teachings that have been transmitted at Deer Park by living masters as well as by others now passed away, such as Lama Yeshe and Zong Rinpoche.

But merely creating a storage facility for the material remnants of Tibetan and Buddhist culture is not our goal. Most importantly, we consider the Buddha's teachings to be a form of medicine that can ease suffering and transform ordinary human beings into perfectly compassionate and wise beings. For that, what is required is a place where people can gather to receive spiritual instruction and guidance from qualified teachers, and where those interested can actively practice, continuing the Buddhist contemplative tradition and lifestyle. This is what our new project will create – an enduring home for the preservation and transmission of the Buddha's teachings, and a landmark of Tibetan culture in the middle of America.

In Tibet, the very architecture of our buildings is designed to embody the Buddhist teachings. From the doors to the rooftops, each aspect of Tibetan Buddhist buildings has a symbolic significance, allowing visitors to encounter the Buddha's teachings in a powerful visual form. In keeping with our vision of creating a home where Tibetan Buddhism lives in harmony with American culture, our new temple will blend Tibetan architectural principles with modern, sustainable design. Our design principles reflect our commitment to maintaining a respectful balance with our natural environment.

When a community in Tibet needed a center for its spiritual and cultural activities, people came and offered their labor, and constructed the building together with the monks, using ancient methods familiar to all involved. In that context, active fundraising was not necessary. Support from the community was offered voluntarily and spontaneously, out of a deep appreciation for the value of the Buddha's teachings and a firm faith in the principles of karma, which teaches that those who give, also receive. For that reason, I was initially very hesitant to actively seek outside funding, but it is now clear that we cannot secure a future for Buddhism and Tibetan culture on our own using our old methods. I hope that you will recognize some value in supporting our efforts to ensure that Buddha's contribution to global human culture and wisdom remains part of the inheritance we leave to future generations of our shared human family.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Geshe Sopa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Geshe Lhundub Sopa
Director and Abbot of Deer Park Buddhist Center and Monastery
Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin - Madison

Operating Principles

Deer Park's programs are widely offered to the public free of charge, reflecting our commitment to universal access. Since its inception, Deer Park has been committed to supporting its programs by donation only, without depending on business enterprise. This is in keeping with the Buddhist principle that spiritual activities should be conducted in a manner free of commercial interests. Honoring this principle means we rely entirely on the generosity of benefactors.

Audience

The audience for Deer Park's activities and services are both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Our educational activities and group practices attract local, regional and international Buddhist students and practitioners. Our community outreach, interreligious dialogue and Tibetan cultural events serve the interests and needs of the general public, including religious groups, local educational organizations and curious visitors. Visitors are welcome to attend virtually all Deer Park's activities and programs.

The estimated number of visitors to Deer Park is presently between 4,000 and 5,000 annually. Our projections suggest that the number of visitors could grow to between 8,000 and 10,000 once construction of our new facility is complete.

Site

Deer Park's location combines accessibility with a quiet pastoral setting in the American Midwest, ten miles south of Madison, Wisconsin. The monastery and teaching center are nestled in thirteen acres of gentle hills, woodland gardens and a grove of century-old oak trees. Situated on the highest point in the surrounding area, the site is eminently conducive to contemplative practice. Yet its grounds are an easy 15-minute drive from downtown Madison and twenty minutes from the Madison airport, and are thus easily reached by visitors from around the region. Madison itself is centrally accessible to Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana and Illinois, and only a two and a half hour drive from Chicago.

Thus far, Deer Park's facilities comprise four structures: one ranch-style house used both as a residence for Geshe Sopa and a community gathering center, one duplex residential building with an upper apartment for use by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a small temple originally constructed as an open-air pavilion, and a stupa (a Buddhist monumental structure that serves as a focus for contemplative and devotional practices). The addition of the new facility will transform our grounds into a major complex for the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism and its monastic tradition.

Project Requirements and Purpose

Actualizing our vision requires:

1. **Constructing a New Temple**
2. **Renovating and Restoring the Old Temple and Stupa Monument**
3. **Building an Endowment Base**

All three components are essential to the development and sustained success of Deer Park.

I. **Constructing a New Temple**

- ⌘ This new structure will provide a much-needed resource for our expanding student base, by complementing the existing temple and residential buildings on Deer Park's thirteen acres of woodland grounds.
 - These will form an entire complex for the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism and the preservation of its monastic tradition.
- ⌘ The new temple will better serve as a gathering place for Buddhist education, outreach and interreligious programs.
 - It will enable us to accommodate the special guests who grace us with their visits and teachings, such as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Lobsang Tenzin (Abbot Emeritus of Gyume Monastery) and Geshe Lobsang Donyo (Abbot Emeritus of Sera Je Monastery).
- ⌘ The centerpiece of the new facility will be a main assembly hall with overflow seating, large enough to accommodate our wider community, including the large number of locally resident Tibetan refugees.
 - At present, our existing temple is all too often stretched to capacity, during special events such as summer teachings, major Buddhist holidays and the Tibetan New Year celebration.
- ⌘ Our temple will stand as a unique landmark of Tibetan Buddhist culture in the heartland of America.
 - The new temple will closely follow models of traditional Tibetan architecture, while incorporating modern methods of sustainable design.
- ⌘ The new temple's rich symbolism is configured as an outward expression of the inner qualities that students of Buddhism seek to develop.
 - The new temple is designed to be spiritually inspiring and visually striking.
- ⌘ The new facility will provide ample room for the public to view our extensive collection of Tibetan art, ritual implements and other artifacts, in a setting that can reflect and honor its purpose and intended use.
 - At present, we lack an adequate place to display most of these works of art that are of great cultural interest.

- ⌘ The new library will house Deer Park's extensive library of sacred literature, including the Tibetan Buddhist canon, and our archive of rare teachings and initiations given by some of Tibetan Buddhism's most revered spiritual masters, both living and now passed away.
 - Our archive will provide a valuable resource to researchers and scholars.
- ⌘ Classroom space can provide Tibetan children the opportunity to:
 - Receive training in their native language
 - Learn the Buddhist cultural traditions that are essential to the continuation of their Tibetan heritage.
 - These same classrooms can be used to offer language training, and other specialized instruction to members of the Deer Park Buddhist community.
- ⌘ A kitchen will have the capacity to cook for at least 200 guests at a time, allowing us to host extended activities on-site. Major interreligious gatherings, retreats and large-scale teaching events were previously beyond our capacity.
- ⌘ The temple will be visually and spiritually fulfilling for people of all faiths.

II. Restoring the Old Temple and Stupa Monument

- ⌘ As the site of the first Kalachakra ceremony ever performed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in the West, the old temple and stupa monument have profound historic and sacred significance. (The Kalachakra is a major Buddhist tantric ceremony dedicated to creating world peace.)
- ⌘ The stupa, a monument representing the state of enlightenment, was erected in 1988, and blessed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It serves as a meditative focal point for visitors and residents alike.
- ⌘ Renovating the old temple will create additional space for multiple uses, such as holding smaller, more intimate community activities, retreats and workshops.

III. Building an Endowment Base

- ⌘ By becoming self-sustaining, Deer Park will be able to maintain its commitment to remaining free of business enterprise for acquiring resources.
- ⌘ As the services we offer grow, so too will our operating costs. The new complex will draw an increasing number of students, visitors and resident monastics.
- ⌘ A sufficient endowment is needed to ensure financial health and stability, and underwrite our high-quality programs and services.
- ⌘ In this way, we may sustain the pure tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, while making it accessible to all.

Statements of Support

“Buddhism, of course, is not its buildings or its statues, and yet these things are called the basis or support for the teachings. This is because these are indispensable conditions for the flourishing of Buddha’s teachings. Buddhism only really started to flourish in Tibet after the building of Tibet’s first temple, at Samye. This is what the Deer Park temple means to me.

The temple at Deer Park provides a base for Buddhism in America. It is a home for the authentic teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. Above all, it is a place where American Buddhism is taking root, and will flourish.”

José Cabezón, Ph.D. (Professor of Tibetan Religions, Culture and Language, University of California- Santa Barbara)

“The diversity and religious freedom of the United States is embodied in the Deer Park temple and teachings. We are proud to have such an important and culturally vibrant community in our town. We are all enriched by Deer Park. Because of our town’s distinctive land-use policies and land-preservation program, I have frequently hosted high-level governmental contingents from countries across the globe. When told that among the many churches in our town, there is also a Tibetan Buddhist temple, many government delegations have asked to visit. Recently a contingent from the former soviet of Georgia visited, and was warmly greeted by Deer Park monks and nuns. The senior leader of the government of Georgia was very impressed, and asked whether there have been any problems in having such a temple in our midst. When Geshe Sopa and I explained that there had been relatively few objections from the public, he commented, “What a freedom, what a freedom!”

Ed Minihan, Chairman (Town of Dunn, Dane County, Wisconsin)

“Geshe Sopa was invited to the University of Wisconsin as a teaching assistant in Tibetan. The analogue, I would say, would be if the Classics Department had invited the Pope to come and be a teaching assistant in the first-year Latin course.” (From an interview for a public television retrospective of Geshe Sopa’s life)

Joseph Elder, Ph.D. (Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison)

“If we are lucky, we meet people in life with whom we develop an instant spiritual bond. Geshe Sopa is one of those people. He is a master of compassion, a true Bodhisattva, a universal soul, a spiritual leader of both intellect and heart. Anything this man does will bear spiritual fruit for many. Just to be in his presence is to learn something about how to live.

Sister Joan Chittister, OSB Peace Council, International Lecturer, Author, Peace Councilor

From the Architects

“The new temple will combine traditional Tibetan design and ornamentation with western sustainable building techniques, to offer an environment that is both tranquil for the mind and healthy for the body. Tibetan carpenters and artisans will work along side the geothermal contractors, daylighting experts, local stone masons, and green material suppliers. The building process will truly be collaborative and is likely to challenge everyone to think from multiple perspectives. Our objective is to design a building that directly conveys the Buddha’s teaching, whether that refers to our building process, the Tibetan details, the local community’s involvement, or our concern for the environment. We hope the new temple will provide a place for people to experience firsthand the integrity of Geshe Sopa’s tradition in a unique environment that preserves and perhaps in a small way enhances the thousand year history of Tibetan Buddhist culture.”

Eric Vogel, VAST Design Collaborative

“Architecturally, Tibetan culture has had a tremendous influence in Wisconsin over the years. It’s a little known fact that, Tibetan masonry traditions, sloping pedestal forms, and rough cut textures were as much an influence on Frank Lloyd Wright as better known Japanese precedents. The only architectural masterpiece that Wright ever openly acknowledged was a photograph of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet which hung on the wall of his office directly behind his desk. It is an image of architecture achieving a remarkable harmony with the surrounding landscape- an important source for Wright’s organic design philosophy.”

Eric Vogel, VAST Design Collaborative

“The approach to the design was to look at historical precedence and work to discover appropriate solutions to present day design, detailing and constructions methods. The design team has worked diligently together with the building committee, Tibetan Art Projects team and general contractor to respond to this idea and has designed a sacred building worthy of this community. The success of this project has been to include the building committee from concept to final design to completed project. I am privileged to be part of this project team and in helping it become a reality.”

Sean M. Maher, SL Maher Architectural Group

Program Offerings

The ultimate aim of our programs is to offer participants conducive conditions to develop their own personal insight, while opening their hearts to others. The monastery and center encompass a wide range of activities, reflecting the many interests of all those who make use of Deer Park's facilities, and in keeping with the spirit of the Buddhist idea that a diversity of methods can be used to promote the welfare, mutual understanding and happiness of living beings.

This wide range of activities falls into seven broad categories:

- ⌘ Education and monastic training
- ⌘ Community Outreach
- ⌘ Interreligious Dialogue
- ⌘ Group Spiritual Practice
- ⌘ Service
- ⌘ Publication
- ⌘ Tibetan Art, Architecture, and Cultural Preservation

Education

Drawn by Geshe Sopa's renowned ability to clarify Buddhist concepts and to inspire students to live by those principles, students come from around the world to attend Deer Park's annual summer programs—including from Mexico, United Kingdom, France, Puerto Rico, Australia, Taiwan, China, and Vietnam.

Our education programs include:

- ⌘ Twice Weekly Classes (Thursdays and Sundays)
- ⌘ Five Week Intensive Summer Course (Monday through Friday)
- ⌘ Advanced Study and Tutorials
- ⌘ Colloquial and Literary Tibetan Language Instruction
- ⌘ Additional Courses Led by Eminent Visiting Teachers

Community Outreach

For thousands of schoolchildren across Wisconsin, their class field trip to Deer Park offers a rare opportunity to have a personal encounter with the Buddhist religion, monastic lifestyle, and Tibetan culture.

- ⌘ Each year, Deer Park hosts scores of elementary, high school and college classes from around the state.
- ⌘ Guided tours and customized presentations are given by one of Deer Park's resident monks or nuns. Many classes also attend Deer Park's regularly scheduled activities.
- ⌘ Deer Park monastics also visit a number of area classrooms on an annual basis, often as part of schools' World History curricula.

Interreligious Dialogue

It is Deer Park's conviction that interreligious dialogue promotes harmony and understanding among different communities, and lays an important groundwork for world peace.

- ⌘ We reach out to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and members of other faith communities, to help us recognize areas of common concern, as well as to understand areas of difference.
- ⌘ Deer Park representatives are actively involved in local and international religious councils, including the Greater Madison Interreligious Association, Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, and the International Committee for the Peace Council.
- ⌘ Clergy from other faiths have participated in our celebrations and discussions.
- ⌘ We organize and host interreligious meetings and retreats—an activity that our expanded facilities will allow us to greatly increase.

Group Spiritual Practice

Deer Park provides community experiences to support individual development. These group practices involve:

- ⌘ Regular prayers and rituals
- ⌘ Vows and initiations
- ⌘ Weekend retreats

Service

As a means to promote Tibetan Buddhist values and teachings, Deer Park provides guidance and services, such as:

- ⌘ Buddhist counseling to the lay community
- ⌘ Prayer and ritual services for the ill, dying and deceased
- ⌘ Bereavement services

Publication

To further its aim of providing public access to information about the Buddhist religion, the center engages in the following enterprises:

- ⌘ Continuing the vigorous production of specialized books, as well as books for the general public. Published titles include:
 - *Cutting through Appearances*
 - *The Wheel of Time: The Kalachakra in Context*
 - *The Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism, Introduction by the Dalai Lama*
 - *Lectures on Tibetan Religious Culture*
 - *Peacock in the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind*
 - *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volumes 1 and 2*
 - *The Three Principles of the Path (in Chinese only)*
 - *Developing Patience: A Commentary on Shantideva's Guide to a Bodhisattvas' Way of life, Chapter Six (in Chinese only)*
- ⌘ Books have been translated into Chinese, Spanish, French, and German
- ⌘ Preparation of textual materials for classes and ritual ceremonies
- ⌘ Recording and editing transcripts of courses

Tibetan Cultural Preservation

We support the preservation of the rich and ancient Tibetan artistic and cultural heritage, the cause of Tibetan autonomy and the needs of the Tibetan diaspora.

- ⌘ Maintain an extensive collection of Tibetan art that is not currently on display, due to space limitation.
- ⌘ Sponsor educational and cultural programs, including Tibetan dance, drama, and musical performances.
- ⌘ Work to raise awareness of the Tibetan situation in the Midwest.
- ⌘ Cooperate closely with the growing local Tibetan community to coordinate cultural events, and support the activities of the Wisconsin Tibetan Association.
- ⌘ Offer instruction in Tibetan language and culture to refugee children.
- ⌘ Host Tibetan holiday celebrations in the existing temple, which is now stretched beyond capacity by the attendance of the over 400 Tibetans now living in Madison.