



Buddhism's deep roots

While in Dane County this week, the Dalai Lama will be visiting one of the spiritual centers for Buddhism in North America.



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Ven. Jampa, left, a Buddhist nun, and Ven. Sonam, a monk visiting from India, help install a large Dharma wheel on Monday atop the Deer Park Buddhist Center. Staff and volunteers at the temple have been busily preparing for the Dalai Lama's visit this week.

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Geshe Lhundub Sopa, the abbot at the Deer Park Buddhist Center outside Oregon, remembers when Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, first visited Madison in the late 1970s.

Some who saw him, Sopa recalls, mistakenly thought he was a devotee of the Hare Krishna movement, whose members were much in evidence then in airports and on city streets.

But today, when the Dalai Lama arrives in the city for his fifth visit in three decades, he is known not only as a revered spiritual leader of the world's Tibetan Buddhists but



Dalai Lama teachings

The Dalai Lama will arrive in Madison today and will conduct three teachings at the Dane County Coliseum at the Alliant Energy Center beginning this afternoon. The teachings are scheduled for 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. today; 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. on Thursday; and 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. on Friday. Day-of-event tickets will be available through Ticketmaster for the teachings and tickets are also expected to be available at the box office, according to organizers.

also as a political figure and the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

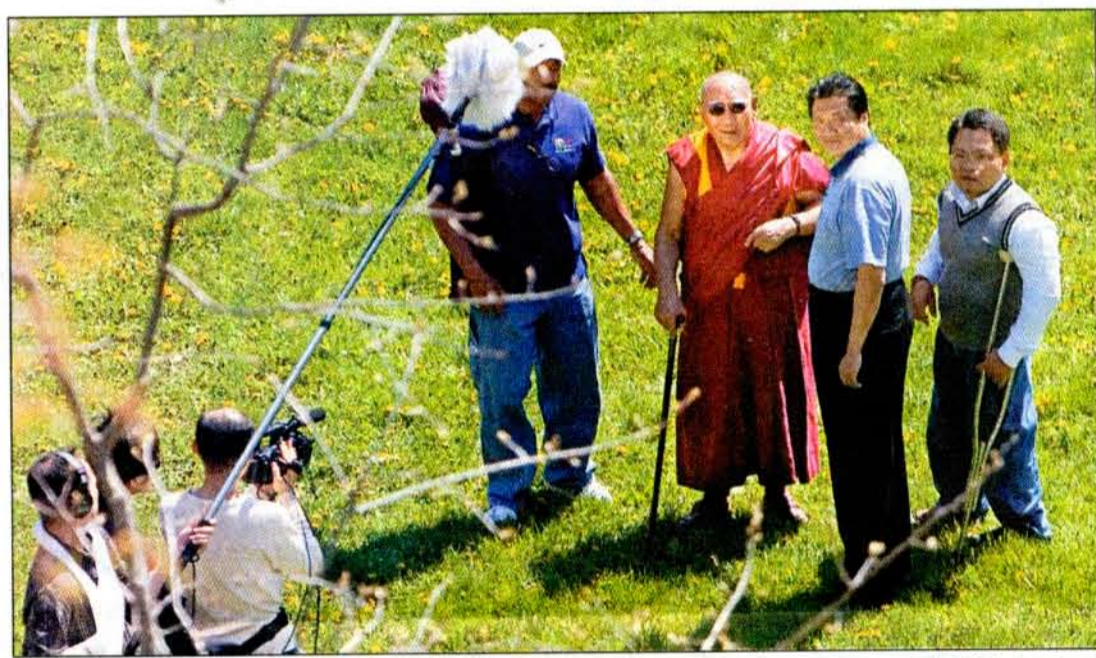
Tibetan Buddhists believe Gyatso, 71, to be the reincarnation of his predecessor, the 13th Dalai Lama, and an incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion.

In Madison, the Dalai Lama will speak and teach over the next four days.

And he will visit Deer Park near Oregon, one of several significant Buddhist centers in the nation, which was founded by Sopa in 1975. There, the Dalai Lama will see for the first time the center's

new temple, a sturdy stone and steel testament to the long years of hard work in Madison by his old friend, Sopa, and the result of a long-ago request from Gyatso that the ancient teachings of Tibetan Buddhism be brought to North America.

Please see **BUDDHISM**, Page A10



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Geshe Sopa, in robe, the founder and abbot of Deer Park, has guided construction of the new temple.

Buddhism

Continued from Page A1

It may seem unusual to some that such a world leader would take the time to come to a modest Midwestern city. But he has close ties to the city. Those connections begin with Sopa, whose friendship with the Dalai Lama goes back to Tibet and the late 1950s when both were young and Sopa, now one of the country's most respected Buddhist scholars, was among the debate examiners who tested Gyatso during his final examinations to become a monk in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital.

Since then, much has happened. Both Gyatso and Sopa escaped Tibet in 1959, fleeing over high mountain passes to India when the Communist Chinese invaded their homeland. The Dalai Lama became a leader in exile and settled with other Tibetans in Dharamsala in northern India.

Introducing the teachings

In 1962, the Dalai Lama asked Sopa to travel to the U.S. to help introduce Tibetan culture, religion and philosophy.

Sopa made his way to Madison, where he had been invited by UW-Madison professor Richard Robinson to join the faculty of the newly formed program in Buddhist studies. Sopa would spend 30 years teaching at UW-Madison and became the first Tibetan tenured at an American university.

But Sopa did not come to Madison alone. With him came a number of students, including several Americans who had studied with him in Dharamsala. They, too, settled in Madison.

In 1975, Sopa founded Deer Park in the town of Dunn about 10 miles south of Madison as a home and a place for study and meditation for the area's growing Buddhist community.

Since then, Deer Park has come to embody the Dalai Lama's request. In a historic visit in 1981, Gyatso came to Deer Park and performed the first Kalachakra ceremony for world peace ever performed in the West. That ceremony, one of Buddhism's most significant rituals of initiation, was performed in a wooden, open-air pavilion that became the monastery's temple.

Now, however, that temporary structure has been replaced by a stone temple that, in design and appearance, is

similar to the traditional temples in which Sopa studied and worshiped in Tibet. The Dalai Lama's visit to the temple, rising now from an oak-covered hillside after two years of construction, is an important moment in Sopa's life.

On Saturday, Deer Park was alive with activity as monks and staff members painted and raked and cleaned in preparation for the Dalai Lama's visit. Several worked in the new temple. Sopa, seated in his residence not far from the temple, spoke of the importance of the building and of how he is looking forward to walking with the Dalai Lama through the impressive structure. The Dalai Lama, who stays in an apartment at Deer Park during his visits, will return to Madison in July to inaugurate and bless the temple.

Built to last

On the outside, the temple is nearly identical to the traditional Tibetan temples with their massive, sloping stone walls and deeply inset windows. But, as was Sopa's wish, the temple was built with the most modern and long-lasting of materials and so has a skeleton of steel. It also features a geothermal heating and cooling system and numerous other energy-saving features.

Traditional Tibetan decoration, much of it created in India and shipped to Madison, adorns the temple and is painted in bright hues of blue and red and yellow. Inside is a two-story assembly hall and high windows that flood the hall with light.

The towering front wall of the hall, painted sky blue, will be the backdrop for a 15-foot tall Buddha, which now rests in several wooden boxes on the lower floor of the temple, awaiting assembly and the move upstairs.

For Sopa, the temple is much more than a building. It is as much a symbol, he said, of a permanent home for the teaching of Tibetan Buddhism. He looks forward, he said, to safely housing Deer Park's extensive collection of Buddhist texts in the temple's library.

But mostly, Sopa said, he sees the temple as assuring a future here for Tibetan Buddhism, for the study of the old, old teachings, in the heart of North America.

It is in that spirit that he will walk with his friend, the Dalai Lama, through the building this week.

"Now," Sopa said, "even if I'm gone, it doesn't matter."

About Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism is a form of Buddhism that developed in Tibet and in the surrounding Himalayan region beginning in the seventh century.

This form of Buddhism spread to the West in the second half of the 20th century as many Tibetan leaders were exiled from their homeland due to the Chinese occupation.

Today, Tibetan religious communities in the West, such as that in the Madison area, consist of both refugees from Tibet and locals drawn to the Tibetan religious tradition.

As in other forms of Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhists follow the teachings of Gautama Buddha, especially that suffering is inherent in life and that one can be liberated from suffering by abandoning self-identity or ego. Tibetan Buddhism is unique for its emphasis on specific tantric and meditative practices and rituals.

Kohl Center visit

A public talk by the Dalai Lama on Friday at 2:30 p.m. at the Kohl Center is sold out. Wisconsin Public Television will stream the Dalai Lama's address live on its Web site at www.wpt.org starting at 2:30 p.m. There will also be a link to the live stream at www.wisc.edu. The Web-based stream will be archived and available for download from Public Television's Web site. Also, Wisconsin Public Television will broadcast the Dalai Lama's speech at 10:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 8.

If you're going For those with tickets to the Friday afternoon talk, UW-Madison asks that you observe the following guidelines:

- The Office of Tibet asks that cameras, video equipment and other recording devices and cell phones be left outside and that pagers be turned off.
- Storage facilities are not available for checking items, so they should be left at home or in a car.
- Other items prohibited inside the Kohl Center include food or beverage items, cans, bottles, backpacks, large bags, strollers, flags and signs.
- Limited parking will be available in the following university lots: 7, Grainger Hall garage; 29, 21 N. Park St.; 46, 301 N. Lake St.; 91, North Bedford Street; 83, Fluno Center garage; and 88, North Murray Street. Parking at all locations will cost \$5 per vehicle.
- Gates will open at 1:30 p.m., and all patrons entering the building are subject to search. It is recommended that attendees arrive early.