



The Karmapa's Healthcare Project

By Pia und Peter Cerveny

The authors of this essay, as well as the photographers for the pictures here, started the Karmapa's Healthcare Project in 2005. The goal of this work is to improve the healthcare for his monks and nuns in northern India and Nepal. All the work done is voluntary.

The beginnings of the Karmapa's healthcare project

In December of 2004 we took Buddhist refugee with Lama Ole Nydahl. At that time it was our wish to do something for the 17th Karmapa and his work. We had not yet met the Karmapa and knew him only from photos.

Pia's job at the time was naturopathic medicine, and Peter was working in photography and technology. Given

this background and that both of us are pretty good organizers, we decided to put our wish into practice by doing something for Karmapa's people in Asia.

The next step was to meet Hannah Nydahl, who knew so much about the Karmapa and the situation in Asia. When we met with her and explained our wishes, she approved of our plan. As she sent us to meet the Karmapa in Kalimpong¹, India, she asked with a chuckle if we had a sense of humor!

We met H.H. the 17th Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje early in 2005, when he invited us to a working session about the proposed project. This led to the establishment of the Karmapa Healthcare Project—the K HCP. Karmapa decided that we should spend some time in his shedra², where

¹ Kalimpong is in the northwest of Bengal, in the district of Darjeeling, where the Karmapa lives and has his main monastery.

² Buddhist university

we would have contact with everyone and be able to discuss our ideas. We regularly reported to the Karmapa. Thus there emerged a rough framework of what needed to be done. The name "Karmapa's Healthcare Project" was made official in a letter from the Karmapa. In this letter he authorized us to do all that was needed to bring healthcare to his monks and nuns—specifically to find sources of funding in Europe, to acquire and bring medical equipment and supplies to India, to find and engage medical professionals to volunteer for the project, and to generally be responsible for coordinating this project.

Karmapa has several institutes in the Himalayas. These are partly also under the supervision of H.H. the 14th Kunzig Shamar Rinpoche. An example is the shedra in Kalimpong. When they are finished with their studies there, the students become khenpos³. Then there are schools in Darjeeling and in Rumtek, Karmapa's school for nuns, a monastery in Ladakh, and the Mahavihar in Swayambhu in Kathmandu, Nepal.

All of these institutes were without any organized health care. Founding this project was intended to change this situation. Over the past three years we have succeeded in bringing about this improvement. Now in all of the institutes there are regular checkups and vaccinations by doctors and dentists. In some places the water quality has been improved or the supply of electricity has been guaranteed, by purchasing a large generator. Then in 2008 we established a health camp in Bodhgaya, during the Kagyu-Moniama. The medical volunteers from Europe make this happen, and this camp will take place every year from now on.

Since it is important that our work aim toward self-reliance, our monks in Kalimpong organize their annual checkups on their own. The nuns in Rumtek use the funds that we provide for visits to the doctor and for their medications. All in all, our friends in Asia are learning to pay more attention to their health.

How we do our work

We live a little bit like nomads. From spring to October we are in Europe, where we try to attend many of Lama Ole Nydahl's courses. People can contact us at these courses. They can experience what it is that we do—and even participate, including making contributions. Whoever has medical training is most welcome. We are also looking for English teachers. Whoever works with us or travels with us has to pay their own way. This includes us. Pharmacists and medical people, who quickly created a network of very qualified people.

³ The chief instructor or spiritual authority in a monastery.

Then during the winter we go to the sites. We try to visit all of the projects, in order to find out what is needed and then to organize together how to deliver them. For the large Monlam camp much planning is necessary. Friends from Europe that we meet along the way are often so excited that they spontaneously join our work. It was in this way that we found an English teacher from Hungary for the Mahavihar, mentioned earlier. Those who have joined us and provide their services include students of Lama Ole, as well as others from France and from Southeast Asia.



