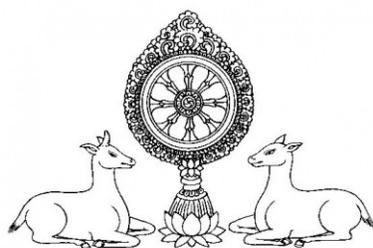


"Just go with the Flow"



Tony's notes from China

Pilgrimage at Mt. Wutaishan
His Holiness Rimay Galten Sogdzin Rinpoche

September 17 to 29 2009

Morning at home, preparing to go, I find myself in a state of almost panic, I cannot relax, so much anxiety for the trip. I have been preparing for almost 7 years, dealing with personal issues and having done so, I knew I wanted to go somewhere, anywhere, to travel to a place of spiritual significance.

Now I must begin this story with some information so you the reader will fully appreciate the events I will share with you.

On August 13 2002, I had an opportunity to address, correct and change the direction my life was headed. I found I was no longer comfortable with my daily routine, activities, acquaintances, and lifestyle. I had just completed a 12 week, court ordered, anger management program. I wanted more, so I scheduled an personal appointment with the Phycologist of this program;

Dr. Stephen Milstien

a nice man. I asked him if he could help with the changes I wished to address.

It took 14 sessions with him before we together, found the real issues, the reasons for my personal need to escape from reality, the reality of the truth of my own life. Now I knew what the reasons and the issues for my depression and anxiety were, and the real work began. Looking back I can remember the discomfort, and the feelings which bubbled up in me as does the bubbles of carbonation in a soda pop when the cap is released. To address these issues took the help of many different people with there own unique styles, practices and methods. Some worked, some maybe worked a little, and some were just wishful thinking.

Today I sit in China at Mt. Wutaishan, it is September 23 2009, day 7of this trip. As I am typing this I am feeling incredible, so complete and comfortable with myself, my past and the path I have allowed to open before me. I must mention it has not been easy, there are many people among us who have never even considered the thought; to venture into a higher consciousness, but then again many in society are not ready to. As I allow my Karma to present itself, I work through it the best I can, so it may be dissolved. To do this there are many uncomfortable memories, filled with unpleasant emotions, fear, shame, regret, etc. Yet, now that I am at this stage of my personal evolution, I can honestly state, with my heart, the greater the

effort, the greater the evolution. The spiritual path.

Day 1 -17th

I leave the apartment I have rented for the last 2 years and 7 months, finally on the road again. My bags I find are much too heavy, I want to move, free and light, but this is not the case on this trip.

I have created my own company, a corporation; **SynergistExplorations Inc.**, a travel documentation service. I will use this trip as my first assignment. I need to learn everything about this, and I feel the best way is through experience, this is a fantastic opportunity. I walk down the street to the public transit bus, #135 Burrard Station. This bus takes me downtown to the bank where I can buy some Chinese currency. It is a hot day, my bags are just a bit too heavy for comfort but I am downtown 2 blocks to the bank, where upon inquiring about the currency I need, I am told to go 2 more blocks to the east along Pender Street to the Vancouver Bullion and Currency Exchange. I leave with \$231.56 cad worth of rmb, \$1400. the lady is pleasant, but the place is awkward due to my bags and the layout, a bit small. Entering the Burrard Station Skytrain station terminal, I believe I can catch the new train to the airport. I am already irritated, hot, sweaty and anxious to move. Hauling my two bags, one with my new laptop, camera and assorted connecting wires and the other is my new 28 liter duffle-bag with enough for the 6 days in the mountains. At the train platform, I wait as two trains pass, something's wrong. There is no mention of the new train, no signs or information, yet when I checked the website yesterday I believed I read it correctly; the train to the airport goes through here. I take the train to the next station, Granville Station because I know there has been work going on there for months relating to this new train. Off the train, I find a map, which happens to be at street level, 2 escalators up. With the map I realize the train I want is boarded at Waterfront Station, only. Back down the escalators and back on the train, past Burrard Station to Waterfront Station and a mighty long walk to my train.

Must travel lighter in the future, or to a warmer climate.

Finally, my train to the airport. Hot and sweaty, I realize I must be flexible and double check my own research, and be patient with events as they unfold or I will have a very uncomfortable adventure. On board the Millennium Skytrain there is wonderful air conditioning, I cool down quickly, relax and smile. Walking into the airport I am content and now it is time to stand in line, check in, check baggage, security

check, check boarding pass and load the plane. Everything happens without issue and we leave the ground.

At this moment I pray to the universe to allow me to leave behind, on the ground all that is no longer necessary in this life and allow this energy, this karma to dissolve, all attachments no longer necessary to be released. I wish this pilgrimage to be one of allowing himself to accept the direction and guidance as it occurs on this journey. The spiritual entities working with me have prepared me well for this, though my mind may not believe it, my heart truly and fully feels the connection and the unconditional love.

Day 2 -18th

Arriving in Beijing, on my first 11 hour flight, I sit next to Raymond, a nice chinese fellow. He tells me of a wonderful travel agent in the Scotiabank Mall north of Lansdown Mall on #3 road in Richmond. She gives good deals, his ticket was \$200.00 cheaper than mine. **Jenny, 604- 278 -7899**

I have called this day 2 and yet it is only still only 4:15 pm, I have seen sunshine for the last 15 hours, I have yet to see the night.

I meet Marina Hubbard, a woman also on this group as we exit the plane in Beijing, I introduce myself. It is nice she is here with me because I forgot in my apartment, the name an address of the hotel we will staying;

Yuanshan Hotel

北京圆山饭店

北京市西城区裕民路2号。

2 Yumin Lu, Beijing - 62010033

This information is needed as you pass through the third of five security check. I am so tired my can not even focus properly on Marinas information and therefore cannot write the information properly, yet the guard does not seem to care and allows me through. We are to meet our contact and driver who is named;

Tim - 13391929666.

He will be waiting for us at the gate. Tim is not there, I purchase a phone card, and use a chinese pay-phone while I try to adjust to jet-lag. William answers for Tim, they are in the parking lot and will be right in. One thing I realized landing in Beijing was the lack of tourists using this wonderful new airport. There was virtually only us on our flight and the many chinese airport staff. Arriving at our hotel was effortless with Tim and William. I was thankful to fall asleep, what a wonderful place Beijing, is so far.

Day 3 -19th

I wake up at 4:00 am and Beijing is quiet around the Hotel. Seems there is not too much that happens in the mornings. I have the windows wide open to allow the air to flow, the humidity is quite high and a bit uncomfortable. I do not even realize there is air conditioning. I try to go out of the room but due to fatigue and the fact I am still in quite a daze, I pull on the door, I find resistance, as if it is locked. Confused, I wonder if this is a rule in China that all hotel rooms are locked until a certain time in the morning? could it be? anyway I have no where to go, I will try later. I go back to bed and try to sleep some more. Once I find myself fully awake, I hang out the window, it is exciting to see how Beijing wakes up, deliveries on bicycles, people heading to work riding bicycles, horns starting to blow. Many people in Canada would not even consider riding or wish to be seen riding these bicycles. Many bicycles, I wonder where these people are headed, where they work, what their thoughts are as they ride along, it is just starting to get light outside. I walk to the door, listen as a person down the hall has to pull hard on their door to open it, this I also try and the door opens, Ok lets go get a coffee.

Not realizing the chinese people do not have the same passion for a morning cup of coffee, I quickly find myself wandering around the city block our hotel is situated on and it seems 6:00 am is to early for any establishment to be open, and yet I feel wonderful to be walking in China. This is cool. I round a corner to find a breakfast cafe catering to backpackers, many backpackers are milling around, their big backpacks with the many straps hanging off. I have found a place, wonderful, trouble is I can not speak mandarin, I can not communicate. These people I do not believe speak english and they have no interest, patience or ability to translate for me. This is a buffet style place, ask for what you want, know what you want, and move along.

I just leave and think to myself, the new Apple iphone I wish to purchase has a english to mandarin application which would be handy in a situation such as this. It even speaks the statement for perfect pronunciation. I walk back to the hotel and ask the ladies at the front desk where to find a coffee, they suggest a spot, and with their limited english give direction and draw a small map. I walk to this place, a nice little adventure, no coffee. I notice as I walk along everyone is doing their thing this morning, going where they usually go, Beijing is waking up, people notice the westerner, but pay no attention.

Back at the hotel, the coffee shop is just opening, I walk in and ask for a coffee, never think to ask the price.

I enjoy a cappuccino size coffee, instant I believe, so I order another believing it will not cost much. The

waitress hesitates, asks if I wish to charge it to the room, sure I respond, she checks with the front desk and returns. Sorry, you can not charge this to your room, I must pay cash, and the price is 44 yuan, which converts to \$7.00 cad. Lesson learned, it was definitely not worth it.

Marina is just getting up and comes into the lobby. I walk with her around Beijing for a while and purchase a 220v to 110v power converter for \$290.00 rmb or \$48.00. We order some lunch, when it arrives it has a smell that is repulsive, Marina can not eat hers, I do my best with mine but still leave some behind. I buy some bananas, we wander through the streets back to the hotel. Every corner the same, everyone basically just hanging out, not much work gets done in China as far as these people are concerned. Once back at the hotel I ask about the internet connection in our rooms, it is free, wonderful, I head to the room go online, check google maps, find a grocery store 2 blocks away. The grocery store is perfect and normal. Seems to have everything, even instant coffee packages \$8 yuan for 20 packages. In my room, I hang out with the chamber maid, LuDai Dai, or Miss Dai she tells me, a young chinese girl who speaks some broken english, she is fun to talk with. I practice taking some pictures with my new camera, check the internet, just have some fun for awhile. I lay down to take a nap. Marina calls, its 7:30, there are a whole bunch of Tibetans in the lobby of our hotel, its time to meet Rinpoche's family.

I realize as Rinpoche arrives outside the hotel the magnitude of this event. I was not completely aware of this, and I am still not at this point in this adventure. I try to take some video, but the moment he arrives in Tim's car, the people swarm and I am unable to get any view, myself being completely nervous to begin with, I have absolutely no idea of what to do to get the next shot or any shot. I just view the action from the sidelines, the best place to be I feel.

His Holiness Rimay Gyalten Sogdzin Rinpoche

is King to these people, a living Buddha, more than a friend, or just a family member. True Royalty. We all get acquainted awkwardly in the lobby, we will all be together for the next 11 days. Remember, some of the people speak Tibetan and nothing else, some Mandarin and nothing else, and a few like me, who only speak english. Rinpoche speaks all three. I meet my new roommate **Henry**, I have lived alone for so long, I wonder what this will be like, many questions. Rinpoche calls a meeting for across the street at the local cafe and there he explains briefly to the group our basic itinerary, we have a snack, I treat it as a meal. As we enjoy eating Rinpoche very politely addresses me as equally and respectfully as any other, I feel very

honored, "So you decided to come, you said maybe, maybe not, and here you are, very good."

We walk into the lobby together, Rinpoche and myself, and his advice to me for this journey;

"Just go with the flow"

This I will realize later is exactly the best way to not only enjoy this experience, but good advice for life.

Day 4 - 20

Beijing, what a wonderful morning, so much to experience. I chat with my roommate Henry, the conversation is of no expectations, of this trip, or in life, very nice discussion to set the mood. Henry seem like a genuine nice guy. He tells stories of himself and of the Lamas, some of them have prepared to experience Mt. Wutaishan their whole lives, nothing can bother these guys, they are as high as anyone can possibly be.

After a wonderful chinese breakfast, no ham and eggs with brown toast here, no coffee. I like this, everything a new fresh experience. We load two tour buses, one big blue bus and one smaller yellow and white bus. We are headed to the mountains, to Mt. Wutaishan. As we drove away from the Hotel, I notice only one more block away from the Hotel than I had walked, there are shops, a grocery store and businesses, so much of everything. I wonder how I can possibly better familiarize myself to the local surroundings quicker, in an environment such Beijing. Is it possible to research a new place so I never miss out on anything, there must be.

The bus ride is comfortable and quiet, I sit in the back of the smaller yellow and white bus. I take it all in, the new friends, the new sights, corn fields, man, they love their corn in China, hours of corn fields. The highways are beautiful, new and free of traffic, then we turn off on to a secondary road, it is here we begin to see the real China, this is a coal mine town that we have driven into and it is a not a pretty place. The air is heavy with dust, exhaust fumes, fumes of all kinds. People, trucks, miles of dump trucks full of coal, an endless ribbon. A traffic jam. We are stationary for 3 hours, only to move few feet at a time. All vehicles jostle for a better spot, trucks, cars, bicycles, mopeds, 3 wheeled vehicles caring every imaginable item, overloaded, and underpowered. People walking, smoking, always smoking, so many smokers in China. The place is covered in coal dust, even with the windows on the bus closed and the air conditioning on, my throat can detect this new environment. Extremely harsh place to live, filthy.

We begin to move, slowly at first, but we are moving, finally. We continue to drive along past this on-coming

ribbon of dump trucks, how many is unknown, always two guys in every truck.

2 of the girls on our bus Marina and Wendy, both friends from Vancouver are having fun waving to the truck drivers as we pass, they are stationary, but going the same direction as us, harmless fun, or so it seems. Farther along the road, we are stopped again in traffic and Stefani notices a truck driver we passed earlier and who the girls waved to, has taken an interest in these two girls. He removed himself from his truck, walked up to and along side the bus. Stefani notices him standing outside looking for a response from Marina or Wendy. He wishes to become acquainted with his two new friends, I do not believe this man has seen many western women, or possibly many women at all for that matter. We are now at a fork in the road, we on the bus go one way, he the goes the other, luckily nothing became of this. I wonder to myself what he was thinking. Stefani and I have a good laugh, realizing the seriousness of the situation..

Snacks, the Tibet woman pack the coolest snacks, always something to munch on, some snacks I am familiar with, most are new, fun to try new things, everything is good and tasty.

As the buses roll along it becomes dark, now night, clear sky, so many stars, there is a toll booth ahead. Here you pay to stay in the Mt. Wutaishan National Park, we must vacate the bus, I am tired and the air is cool, cold, its hard to get warm. We pass through the people counter and return to the bus. The hotel;

LongQuan Villa Hotel

五台山龙泉山庄

China山西省忻州市五台县311省道
0350-6548700

is just a few miles ahead.

Day 5 - 21

Morning at Mt. Wutaishan is simply wonderful, not cold, just a perfect temperature, the sun is up,our breakfast is at 7:00 am. We will practice today at 10:00 am. I enjoy the morning sun and the fantastic opportunity to take photos, my video skills are so basic, I find it difficult to shoot any scenes which are useable due to my inability to remain calm and focused on any one subject. I must remember to always use the tripod, this will help. I use up my entire battery power. I must purchase and carry a second battery. Before we begin practice, the Lamas who are with us, perform a chant which brings this group together. The chant creates a wonderful vibrational frequency which bring unity and oneness to our group. I enjoy.

During practice we all receive a Manjushri empowerment blessing from Rinpoche.

OM A-RA-PA TSA NA-DHI

After lunch in the hotel we travel by transit bus, which is free since it is a part price paid at the toll gate to stay in the Mt. Wutaishan National Park. We exit the bus at the Tayuan Temple bus stop. The area of the Big Stupa, a popular photo in tourist brochures. We circumambulate the outer perimeter counter-clockwise, only to find the entrance area close to the beginning of our walk, near the bus stop.,

Seems the rule is, as we always practice; follow the clockwise circumambulation outside a temple, as we do inside. We arrive at the entrance and try to enter, a money issue, first the Lamas enter with no problem, next the Tibet people, then the rest of us have to pay, Rinpoche takes care of this for all of us. Inside, what wonder, so massive, we begin our investigation, so much to see, the buddhas, we spin the prayer wheels, many prayer wheels, there are 5 pictures created and recessed in the mortar walls of the stupa base, I was not able to hear and record all the names of these, but I was fortunate enough hear which was Milarepa. I

follow the Lamas who place their forehead against the pictures and I do the same. Many of us circumambulate the great stupa, some in our group, I believe actually go 108 times around.

As I am walking along by myself, Rinpoche's sister, the mother of the little Rinpoche, Jima, catches up to me as I am walking and gives to me a wonderful mala of turquoise stones as a gift.

After a short break where we all sit down together for awhile, Rinpoche leads us to another smaller stupa. The small one is believed to have kept a hair of Bodhisattva Manjushri. This is a small area, and we are a big group, we all chant mantras and enjoy this moment. There is a vantage point up some stairs and to the south we all take advantage of, a nice view. As we leave this walled complex, there is a beautiful staircase of stone with perfect lighting for a group photo.

Back to the hotel for dinner.

Day 6 -22

Our breakfast today is followed by a Medicine Buddha practice. I have not been able to attend this practice in Vancouver - tuesday 10:00 am till noon at the Dharma Centre, due to my work schedule, so I find this very emotional, having attended the Medicine Buddha retreat with Rinpoche and the empowerment blessing which followed, I feel a real connection through experience with this practice, complete enjoyment.

TE-YA-THA OM BE-KEN-DZE BE-KEN-DZE MA-HA BE-KEN-DZE RA-DZA SAM-UD-GA-TE SO-HA

After the practice while walking through the hotel hallway, Lama Yeshe, Rinpoche's brother asks me to go to see his brother upstairs. This is only a nice friendly afternoon meeting where I am finally able to submit my cash payment for this trip, plus the payment for the extra day I stayed at the hotel in Beijing. Marina and I arrived in Beijing a day earlier than the rest of the group. Rinpoche is absolutely genuine with his concern for all member of our group and makes clear that he is available should I have any concerns, issues, or problems of any nature during this pilgrimage. I have never in my life, to this point met anyone like

Rinpoche, he is one of limitless compassion and unconditional love.

Today we are to go to a place, one I am not completely informed about, it really does not matter, it will be a good day. We arrive, a short bus ride to the south of the hotel, at Baiyun Temple, which has in its courtyard a wonderful tall Big Buddha statue. We begin our walk on the cement road and pass the temple, the road begins to climb, the crowd finds it own pace, I am not sure what is around the corner, but I have walked long enough through the mountains, 10 years in Banff and 10 in Whistler, to know the pace of a good ascend.

But what is at the top, must be a temple of some significance, but this is not of concern at the moment. I have the good fortune to walk with a Lama, he has a good pace. One nice thing about these Tibet people, they seem to be very accepting, they never seem to see any negativity. I am unable to communicate verbally with these people, yet, they are here, we are going to the same destination, for the same reasons, and without the nonsense of idle chit-chat, I find this only enhances the experience. We arrive at the end of the a concrete road. Inscribed in the solid rock along side the road, in Tibetan;

ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པེ་མུང་།

OM MANI PEME HUNG

Here we find stairs and we are unable to see their end, the Lama motions forward and we begin to climb. There are a few less fortunate chinese people begging along the way, we pass some horses, these you may ride to the top, I wonder how far these stairs climb. A third of the way and we begin to see the top, we share some water and a laugh, lets go. Further along we see that Rinpoche and some others have driven to the top. They are already there, this is good motivation.

We arrive at the top, I am wet with sweat, the cool air is very refreshing, a good day.

We meet the others, some are already there inside the Temple, it is not really a temple, more of a gateway, an entrance to the Fomu Cave. Inside there is a tunnel, which leads to a small Buddha, and behind the small Buddha there is another smaller tunnel you must wiggle up through to get to the last chamber which houses Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and some small items. I was so excited and energized I was vibrating. While I am pulling myself through the tunnel to enter the last chamber, my pants slide off and stay behind, inside the chamber I stand up with my pants around my ankles, I laugh. The Lama is already inside, he is reciting mantras, smiling, he motions for me to stand next to him, I do. Others in our group are coming and going, some are having trouble, getting in and out, I pay no attention, only to the Lama and the mantras he recites, he motions for me to exit, I do easily, slide right out, the cool rock, so slippery. As I walk back into the front area, Rinpoche asks if I was able to enter the chamber, I say yes. "Wonderful" is his reply, "one who is able to enter under their own strength has the capacity to reach enlightenment in just one lifetime". I can only imagine the practice, devotion, dedication and auspicious good fortune it will take for me to reach enlightenment, this is good material for discussion with Rinpoche.

The walk back down the stairs is jovial within our group, the Lamas comment to me; "You are a good walker", which results in laughter all around. Lama, Rinpoche's brother is there to translate. It is my good fortune he is with us as we walk down, through Lama I can communicate a little.

We spend some time at the Baiyun Temple at the bottom of the concrete road and admire the big Big Buddha statue. Then it is time and we head to the bus, Rinpoche walks along with me, we speak of Milarepa, and how lucky we are. The sky is clear, the day is bright, a nice warm afternoon.

We load the bus for a short drive to the next temple;

BRIGHT MOON

This is the Temple of Malakala. There is a place, a small building with a hole in the floor. 4 feet across and 4 feet deep, the size and diameter a short hand dug water well. Inside this hole in the ground, there is a 6 inch diameter vertical pipe 18 inches deep with water at the bottom. The idea is to look into the water and also yourself a vision. Myself, because there were so many people, I listened to one of the Lamas who gestures to only put my forehead on the dirt on the bottom, I do this and say some nice words, then I climb out and move along. I join Rinpoche and the Lamas in the Malakala Shrine for the wonderful mantras they recite, I

can hear how they can layer the chants, they work in complete unison, as if the mantra was a multi dimensional unit, a layered recording, spaced perfectly, and all on cue. Amazing. We then moved outside to join the group, we all recited mantras together. It becomes cool in the evening shadow of the mountain.

Wonderful to be at this place, a great way to end a day.

Hotel for dinner.

Day 7 -23

Our morning today begins with breakfast, then on the bus to the Tayuan Temple monastery shrine for practice. When we vacate the transit bus, we all spread out separately and in little groups, a request from Rinpoche. This is so we do not bring any unwanted attention to our group. This works well, I am unable to record all the names of the temples and places I visit, names are in chinese. The final location is in the center, on top of this whole complex, a very old shrine with wonderful wood timber floors. The 3 Buddhas inside are old, their expressions so welcoming. Sitting in this place I feel a sense of comfort I am unable to describe or compare. As Rinpoche, who sits in the middle area with the Lamas, begins our practice, I can feel the place, it is alive, the mantras sound beautiful, I wonder why I feel such emotion in here. I notice many others feel this way to, there are many tears in peoples eyes as we enjoy the practice, even some people who are not with our group but have joined us have tears. A place of complete comfort. As we practice I notice above, hanging from the ceiling these large colorful round column like decorations which seem to move and turn with our sounds and the gentle breezes one can barely feel coming in through the open window. Wonderful to observe. I will remember this place and this practice for a very long time.

We begin our descent from here down a steep stone staircase, at the bottom of these stairs there is the chinese character for Buddha painted on the wall,

佛

maybe 10 feet tall, and 3 feet from the ground. The idea here is, to stand before the character, close your eyes, hold your hand in front of you and walk forward toward the wall and see if you can land your hand on the worn spot at the bottom of the Buddha character. The Lamas have joyous time with this. Rinpoche leads with the laughter and the comments. Just a fun exercise. We all wander back to the transit bus which takes

us to the hotel for lunch.

Since yesterday's visit to the Malakala shrine it is very important to do a Malakala practice today, so after lunch from 2:00 till 4:00, it will be Malakala practice. Practice with our group is always enjoyable, there are so many individual characters who being themselves, bring so much to the practice. The ladies from Taiwan have the most amazing voices with a beautiful and strong sound, it resonates throughout the hotel.

OM BENZA NA-RA TRING TRING HUNG HUNG PHAY PHAY

OM BENDZA MA-HA-KA-LA CHING CHE-TRA BI-GHA-NEN BI-NA-YA-KA HUNG HUNG PHAY PHAY

GU-RU MA-HA-KA-LA HA RI NI SA SID-DHI DZA

AYU PU-NYE DHAR-MA PU-TANG KU-RU SO-HA

So now it is free time for the remainder of the day, a good time for reflection and a good time to get some of my notes in proper order. Time to play with my laptop, since I am so new to this everything always takes longer than I anticipate it will, if only I could remember all the proper procedures.

After dinner some of us wander down to the little corner store for a snack, I purchase a case of water for myself and Henry. 24 bottles for 36 rmb or \$6.00. As I walk through the hotel, I pass the Lamas rooms and share the case with them too. At practice Rinpoche handed out prayer leaflets we will release into the air on top of the mountain tomorrow. These prayers are for all sentient beings, so I write on all of mine, 2 stacks, "enlightenment", a suggestion of Rinpoche.

Henry is trying to sleep, its 8:30 pm, I go to sleep too. Tomorrow will be another day with many stairs to climb. We will walk to the top of a mountain, to the North Terrace.

Day 8 - 24

There has been a change to the plans for today, no walking, we will be chauffeured to the top, to the North Terrace. Rinpoche treats us so gently, never to much work it seems.

We will take 4 vans, everyone has already prepared their own lunch and it is a beautiful sunny morning, you can smell fall in the air, the fallen leaves have a distinct smell, so nice. The thing about walking to these locations on this pilgrimage is of and for the personal purification we achieve. As you step, you think to purify, to release and to dissolve my karma. The road on top of the mountain is made of stone slabs 18 inches square and for almost a kilometer. All the stone has been quarried somewhere else and transported up here by truck and then installed by human labour. This road will last a very long time, I believe. The van

drivers enjoy the fast pace, they seem to enjoy taking the corners fast and there is not much room for error.

Once at the top, the air is cool, perfect, I love this place. We walk into a court yard, this is a special place where Rinpoche has previously stayed, he tells many stories of his personal retreat here. I must purchase a small recording device, one would be so handy right now, I would love to record these stories. I will ask

Rinpoche to tell these stories again, in Vancouver. Yes, that will be best.

Inside this wonderful white stone temple we all take time and circumnambulate, everyone is respectful and quiet, around we go, many prostrations, the Tibetan people always so respectful. One Lama motions to take and save some blessed rice, I do. Outside we join together in a group for a beautiful practice.

We walk out of the courtyard, I see the police are here, I wonder why they have come all the way up here. I never find out and honestly I never cared.

Around the back of the courtyard we go, it is a nice flat open area, far above the tree line. The ground is uneven, many broken stones and alpine grass. The Tibet people build small piles of the loose rocks, they seem to be always smiling, life must be different in Tibet. I must travel there, to visit this town of Ashuk and experience their way of life.

We all gather in an area to the northwest, the wind blows to the southeast, perfect spot to release our prayers. The Lamas have brought their instruments, conch shells and trumpet type horns, they play them all so wonderfully. We all chant;

KO KO SO SO LAJE LO

and release our prayers leaflets together, this is so cool, every face has a smile, what a sight, bright colours twinkle in the air, the 3x3 squares of paper dance on the wind.

We have stayed half an hour to long, we walk back to the vans. Rinpoche walks with me through the scattered leaflets and shares his thoughts, he comments that I seem to have an ability of not get to caught up in the celebration revelry, a sign of personal enlightenment.

This place, the North Terrace is one which I could stay on for many days, the freshness, the view. In the vans we drive down, share our snacks, and listen to chinese pop tunes on the radio. The little Tibetan girls know the words to all the songs and sing along, they sound really good together.

Once at the bottom, in town, beside the bus loop, near the Tayuan Temple, there is a wonderful grassy area where we sit and have a picnic. Life is good.

After lunch everyone heads in their own direction, we are to meet back here at 5:30pm.

I decide to walk along with a Lama, the same one I walked to the cave with. He is shopping for a Manjushri statue, as are some of the other Lamas. They all find their favorites, each Lama barter with the owner for a better price, they all seem to do well. Everyone is satisfied. As we walk along the street, there are many little stores selling Buddha stuff, I notice these colorful round column like decorations similar to the ones yesterday in the shrine, I must remember to ask the price, these will be a great reminder of the Temple and practice we had yesterday when I am at home in Vancouver. The Lama and I walk back to the picnic area, in my backpack I carry 2 Manjushri statues for the Lamas. The Lama has some places he wishes to go alone. I will stay here and wait for the group, its now 4:00 pm and beginning to rain. Rinpoche suggests we head home to the hotel, the others will follow later. The smell is nice, I always like the smell of the rain especially after a long period of hot sunshine.

Back at the hotel time to hang out, Henry and I chat, I work on my notes. It is nice to relax.

Day 9 -25

Today we will be walking, this will be our last purification climb, up to Dailuo Terrace.

I find myself walking with a Tibetan Lama, the old yogi, Henry and I call him. He has been in retreat for 12 years, I wonder what he thinks about. It would be very cool to visit him at and in his home.

The climb is nice, the day is perfect, the trees along the stairs shade the sun. Some in our group take advantage of the chair lift to the top. It is the same type as used on a ski hill, a double seater. As we climb the stairs, near the top, the yogi stops at a vendor stand and inquires about the price of a mala and matching bracelet, he barter, unsatisfied he turns and walks away. A Lama has now caught up to us. The three of us go inside to the courtyard of this temple area, the monks monitoring the entrance can not decide if they should charge me, I do not hesitate, and go inside for free. A fabulous place, it seems we are early, it is nice without the crowds, no pushing, just the 3 of us, very nice. After some time and after we have seen everything, we head back outside to search for the rest of the group. They are all sitting at the gate enjoying snacks and conversation. I make my way back down to the vendor we passed on the way up, and purchase the mala and bracelet for the yogi, maybe \$3.00. He likes his gift.

With Rinpoche, we go back inside the courtyard as a group, and enjoy a nice practice together, a great

place for sound. Rinpoche requests that I video the proceeding, I am honored and oblige. I wish to set up the tripod, but theres no time, I will have to do my best and steady the camera. I finally find a way to do this and find a good vantage point for filming.

We close this practice with many kind words from Rinpoche, I feel so fortunate to be here.

We all walk back down the many stairs, I think purify at every step, it feels good.

In town again, I remember to inquire about the price of the the colorful hanging decorations. The price is 450 rmb, I offer 225, end up at 300. I pay and get a receipt. At this moment Rinpoche walks in, asks what I have purchased, asks how much, and has some words for the proprietor. I believe his comments are that the man overcharges tourist, but I can not be sure. I am satisfied with my purchase.

A wonderful lunch in the hotel dinning room.

The afternoon will be free time, so a group of 11 of us hire a van and take a trip to the South Terrace.

Rinpoche will not be able to join us on todays adventure.

The van ride last one hour to the top. It is all nice pavement until you reach the ridge of the mountain, then it is a gravel and dirt road, complete with sections of washboard type bumps. The wind blows constantly up here. This place was missed during the cultural revolution. The date on a sign in one doorway is 1680. Inside there are 4 very old Buddhas, we each purchase a candle from the monk who lives there. We light them and place each one in front of a beautiful black buddha, then we join the 3 Lamas who are with us for practice. This place is alive, you can feel it. A place to stay and practice for days not an hour. There are other buildings also, all with stone slate slabs for roofing shingles. The whole court yard is old and wonderful. In one building I put my hand on a Buddha statue in one corner, the feeling I receive is magical, so special, I just keep this quiet. A view that is so wonderful especially today with clear sunny skies. We can see all the way back to town, many valleys, many mountains, a view of almost 360 degrees. We walk back down the hill to our waiting van. On our descent into the valley below, we chant;

OM A-RA-PA TSA NA-DHI

until we unload the van 1 hour later at the hotel. An awesome afternoon.

After dinner in the hotel we are all very fortunate to enjoy a Cho ceremony. Cho is an ancient Buddhist ritual known for its power to heal mental and physical sickness, remove karmic obstacles to spiritual growth, and address human suffering. During the Cho ceremony, there are no teachings to listen to, no instructions to

follow or techniques to learn, just sit and relax. The ceremony is led by Rinpoche and performed with the Lamas. A wonderful experience, and a blessing.

A gift of a 6x4 picture of;

His Holiness the 8th Drubgen Yizhin Norbu

and a knotted string he blessed when he was last at Mt. Wutaishan were given out.

After the ceremony we all head home to our beds, I am relaxed and grateful.

The phone rings, its 11:30 pm and Henry answers it. It is Rinpoche, there seems to be a problem we need to attend to.

Yesterday, Rinpoche's brother had an accident in the shower, the sliding glass door in the shower stall came loose and fell on the floor and smashed. The glass cut his foot in 3 places. He now has stitches and will need to be on crutches for the next 6 weeks to heal. The hotel seems to be stalling with any form of compensation, so the local Police have been called to help resolve this issue tonight because our group checks out of the hotel in the morning. Rinpoche has asked the people from the west to make a presence, to be seen as tourists in China, this we hope will help the cause. For 1 hour we hang around, it works, things move forward smoothly, for China they do.

Day 10 - 26

Drive to Beijing

This day is unlike the mornings we have become accustomed to, today we leave Mt. Wutaishan, the pilgrimage is over.

During this morning's breakfast, Mama, Rinpoche's mother, motions for me from the next breakfast table to come to her, she is sitting beside Lama, her son, and hands me a beautiful, very old 51 bead mala. Lama says "a gift for you". This gift touches my heart, and so from my heart, all I can respond is "Thank you". This wonderful feeling I will be able to experience every-time I hold this mala, wonderful.

The first bus loads and leaves by 8:30 am. There is some unfinished business to attend to before we leave the hotel, the second bus I am on leaves 1 hour later. As we are rolling down the highway out of town, we pass some places we have visited, nice memories. It was night when we arrived and I have never really seen this part of the road, the mountains look really nice in the morning sunshine. It is time to leave, we

have come here, to do our practice, the practice, the pilgrimage now complete, we move on. No sadness, more of being content with the experience. We pass all the places we found so interesting only 11 days ago. We come to the fork in the road, the one where the trucker walked up to see the girls on our bus, but our bus driver goes left, we needed to go right, 20 minutes later, some Police stop the bus and turn the driver around. I wonder what is farther up this road, and why the police presence.

Tibetan people, the native type, normally are not used to traveling on motor vehicle, they don't often get the chance, so a lot of them get car sick easily, in Tibetan this is called;

zhenpa log

there are 3 Tibetan people experiencing this as we travel. A normal case of motion sickness.

Stefani and I talk as we travel along, a good conversation about the wild pot growing in the mountains, my previous adventures, the chinese culture, the corn, and of this coal mine city we are rolling into. We stop here at a truck stop for a washroom break. I have never in my life smelled a urinal, or a washroom as repulsive as the ones at rest stops here in China. There seems to be a reluctance to clean these places, ever. This whole town, and everything in it is covered in coal dust, I touch nothing. The air is full of coal dust particles diesel exhaust and foul odor. A young Tibetan girl tidies up the bus and empties the waste baskets, our blue bus is clean and fresh, ready to roll. On the road there is some truck traffic, it reminds me of sitting here in this place for the 3 hours, but today we keep moving. We come to a major intersection and just as quick as we turn the corner, China changes, everything becomes clean and modern again with nice roads, no major traffic, and no dump truck full of coal. To leave that town is a blessing.

We meet up with the other blue bus a little farther up the road at a new and modern highway facility, in the middle of the corn fields, these rest stops are clean. They even have attendants.

Together as one big group once again, the two blue buses. Rinpoche joins our bus and begins a practice, I always enjoy practice with him, but, today the practice is more quiet than usual. Seems some of this groups spirit was left on the mountain.

Once in Beijing we stop for dinner at a nice restaurant. The trip to Beijing was much quicker than going into the mountains.

Now to a new hotel and new tour guides. One tour guide is Allen he seem like a nice guy, maybe a bit to friendly for my comfort, and the other one is just simply gay. At the hotel;

Longwise Hotel
北京龙强大酒店

China北京市朝阳区安定路安苑里1号

1 Anyuanli, Andingmenwai, Beijing 64917666

there is the usual commotion of the check in with a group this size.

Breakfast at 6:30 am.

Day 11 - 27

The day begins, after we eat we all walk out to the blue bus waiting on the street. On the bus we head north out of Beijing, the drizzle is taking a lot of the energy from the group, its a cloudy overcast day. Last night I was not able to sleep well, the humidity and dead air in the hotel room made it hard to be comfortable. Another reason for my poor sleep is emotional, very hard to control now, I thought it would be easier, but many thoughts in my mind, hard to quiet my mind. I have never been in a group situation such as this before. The people, the kindness and the energy of this group seems to deeply move me emotionally. I wonder how it will be when we all say goodbye. Maybe we will all keep in contact. When a group can touch your heart as this one has with me, it seems best to just accept this and realize how fortunate, how lucky I am and just go with the flow. A great new experience indeed.

To the north of Beijing we find the Great Wall, the light drizzle and foggy clouds dampen the spirits, but with Rinpoche, this only last a few minutes and we begin our ascend up and along the top of the wall. I walk along with Rinpoche, he comments to me, "maybe we were here when this was built, maybe we built this, and now lifetimes later we are back to walk on the same ground again. It could be, you never know".

The stairs are steep, the steps high, I think of the people who built this, it must have been hard to climb these stairs everyday. Our group climbs at a nice pace, it is invigorating to be here, what a cool place. We climb to the second guard tower, we go inside to and up the steep stairs to the top, a nice vantage point. On the top, outside, one of the Lamas performs for us the Lama dance. We all join together for a practice. The walk down the stairs is easy and refreshing, I think to purify myself as I recite;

ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པེ་མུང་།

OM MANI PEME HUNG

Christiane Chan tells me later the actual mantra for purification is;

OM BENZRA SATO HUNG

At the bottom of the stairs I walk back to the bus parking area and I realize last night's restless sleep has begun to affect my energy level. I just remain quiet, relaxed and enjoy this time and the view. As a group we share our snacks, then load the bus and head south to Beijing.

The Forbidden City is next on our itinerary, it is a place of great history, of stories, and culture, but lacks any energy. This seems like a dead place, a place without life, without a soul. I feel tired, and I am not really interested with any of it. After experiencing the Shrines and Temples as we, in this group have, a place like this is just another place, cool to see, but it just seems all the same. I am glad to have walked through and seen the place.

I walk with Christiane, she always has good thoughts and ideas for discussion, this I always enjoy.

Next we walk to Tiananmen Square. It is very nice to be here, the city, and government are preparing for the 60th anniversary celebrations, the place buzzes with people. I wonder what this square is like full of the cheering populous. Within our group a lot of pictures are taken here, we have lots of cameras, my camera battery is dead. Henry is well equipped, he has the best gear, and the knowledge, and the experience to use it. He will make available all his photos, and video to the group. I hope I will be able, one day, to be in his position, to be a photographer of his calibre. He works hard, always ready for the next shot.

We walk through the square to the street, then walk down what seems like a back alley, to a restaurant and enjoy a wonderful dinner. We are now headed for the Bird nest Stadium. Allen, our new tour guide sits with me, we talk of the similarities of our countries, prices, wages and rent.

At the Bird nest Stadium we all seem a bit tired, but everyone is interested in this unique structure, a neat place, lots of new designs and materials used in this area of Beijing, all for the Olympics. As it gets dark I see the lights come alive around us, there are moving LED light in the street light stands, there are even lights in the floor of the wide concrete outdoor mall area that we walking upon and the Bird nest Stadium looks amazing.

Back at the hotel, I will sleep well tonight, this I am sure of.

Day 12 - 28

Ok, this is better, a nice sleep last night and I feel rested and relaxed. I am up and I feel the need to go for a

walk, its 6:45 am. Breakfast is at 7:30 am. After we eat I notice Rinpoche's brother is getting a ride to the local hospital to have his foot assessed. I walk down the street 4 blocks to the supermarket to get some coffee and new socks. It is always such a shame when someone gets hurt, especially on a trip like this, but he's a strong guy, he handles it well. While I am away, the people from Taiwan leave on the blue bus for the airport, I wish I could have known their schedule, always nice to say good-bye, maybe I can go to Taiwan one day, see them all again, that would be good.

We have a procedure to follow at the hotel this morning, we must all check out by 12:00 pm, then check back in again. With the people from Taiwan gone, and the people from Tibet leaving this afternoon our group has become considerably smaller, so only a few hotel rooms are needed now.

We load the bus, the people from Tibet will be dropped off at the airport after lunch. We arrive across from the Lama Temple in the Dongcheng District of Beijing and walk to a vegetarian restaurant for our lunch. Tim, the man who met Marina and myself at the airport when we first arrived greets us all at the door. I wonder if this is his place, the;

XU XIANG ZHAI Vegetarian Restaurant

This is a fantastic establishment, the variety of food is fabulous, everything is so good, the atmosphere seems to cater to the wealthy, but for us in this group today is free. Rinpoche is in a separate room downstairs having a private lunch. Some of us in our group join him downstairs after we eat lunch for photos. The food is delicious.

This area of Beijing seems old, the trees are big and well established, the streets are clean, no smell from the sewer here, many wonderful small shops. These shops seem to cater to buddhist supplies, everyone has statues of all variety and size, thangkas, incense and of course many malas. This the Lamas like, they barter for their favorite malas, they are going home today and need the last few purchases to be just right, I hang out and watch this, it's fun, good humor. I see Rinpoche's sister and notice she has tears in her eyes this afternoon, I shake her hand and feel her emotion. She is sad to say the good-byes to our group, and most of all to her dear brother. We all wander back to the corner by the Lama Temple, we never actually go into the temple, we only walk by outside the walled courtyard. Our group is to meet here at 4:00 pm and we are on time. The group finds a nice spot to sit and hang out, a place of luxurious grass, the kind you find on a golf course, so soft and healthy. We sit here under and around a few pine trees, this is the last time for this

group will sit together, what a wonderful memory this moment will make. A beautiful warm afternoon. Time to load the blue bus and begin our way to the airport. Many sad expressions on this ride, the mood is quiet desolation, not much camaraderie to be found, very somber. Some people are weeping, hard not to it is a sad bus ride. Not really sad, more of everyones emotions from this group experience coming to the time when we all say good-bye. In our bus we roll along the Beijing airport expressway, I do my best to remove myself from the drama unfolding around me, I look out the window and stay grounded. At the airport I stay seated and wait till I am near the last to exit.

This is a time for Rinpoche, and his family. The people who love him so dearly, unconditionally, with the true family connection of their hearts. No one holds back any tears now, all show their true-selves, as we all should. This moment is definitely a new experience, a memory, one I believe will last a very long time.

Pure unconditional love.

On our way to the hotel from the airport there is no conversation, our little group is quiet, no one riding this bus has any reason not to have tears in their eyes, and so it is. Rinpoche, being himself, stands at the front of the bus and makes light humor of the situation. He knows this is a moment and a time for personal reflection, of thoughts, of the uncomfortable emotions we all seem to be experiencing.

At the hotel, I am uncomfortable with sitting around, I need to for a walk, I go my way, Henry goes his and the women, I find out later, go to sleep until dinner at 6:30 pm.

Rinpoche leads us down the street to find somewhere to eat dinner, theres no plan tonight. The local Hot Pot is the place. I have never tried this before, hot is a key word, very spicy, I have little appetite. At our table sits Nima, Cici, Lama, Wendy, and Sue, its fun to be with this little group tonight, its fun, just perfect.

Tomorrow, breakfast at 8:00 am and then the airport at 2:00pm.

Day 13 - 29

A good day to leave China, its 7:00 am. With an overcast sky, heavy drizzle, and dampness, it makes a morning walk, heavy and grueling. I head back to the hotel after 20 minutes.

After breakfast, I walk with Rinpoche, "we will have fun when I get to Vancouver", he comments. We discuss the pictures and video I have taken. I will definitely try my best to create something of value. Rinpoche believes he will be in Vancouver near the end of October or early November. I am very emotional

this morning, seems hard to respond to him, and to him this seems completely understandable. He has witnessed my personal transformation during this time we have spent together, he knows how I feel.

OM TARE TU-TTA-RE TU-RE SO-HA

I hang out in the room and chat with Henry. We speak of the stories Rinpoche told during breakfast; he only speaks with his family maybe once a year, maybe 3 times. This is a sacrifice of the guru he tell us. We talk of Tibet, of the Ashuk Village and the road to get there. We speak of this journey, of our new friends, of many good memories. We, the remainder of our group, are all calm and relaxed today waiting to check out of the hotel. Some people are staying another night or two, but only a few.

No problems or issues to discuss, the conversation is light and friendly.

I definitely will not miss the constant sound of car horns in Beijing. The air is beginning to irritate my throat. We head to the airport, I have my own cab because of baggage. As I ride along alone in the cab I think of yesterday, I can not help but shed a few more tears. It was so sunny and warm yesterday, I believe it was the nicest weather Beijing has offered, I laugh.

Inside the airport Henry hangs out for a little while as Dawa and myself check our baggage and our tickets at the Air China counter.

Then we say good-bye to Henry. I find this a bit difficult, I tear up a little, I am a little embarrassed. It has been a incredible experience to be Henry's roommate, I have learned so much from him, shared some good stories, good times. A real nice guy.

I begin the security procedure, Dawa goes her way, and I go mine. Everything goes smoothly until the third security check area, the one where they screen your bags, and they screen your body with a wand, here things become interesting. I have now emptied and screened my laptop bag twice, I wonder if these people for real, so much confusion. It is just a big mess of backed up personal belongings.

"Excuse me sir, there seems to be a problem with your bag".

It is Rinpoche's bag actually, the one he has asked me to take to the Dharma Center in West Vancouver. "Please come with me". I follow the guard to a back room where they examine luggage. I see Rinpoche's bag, "is this yours sir"?, I respond that it is.

Now, back in the hotel room Henry, Jackie and myself were sitting in our hotel room discussing the bag Rinpoche has asked me to take home for him. The questions; should I open it, whats in it, what should I say

if I am asked, these kind of questions. We concluded to leave the bag closed, if asked, the bag has gifts that were given to me and are of no monetary value.

I follow the guards instructions, a short little fat chinese guy, maybe 35, he speaks poor english, I open the bag, I laugh, thinking to myself, Rinpoche would never put me in a situation I was not able to handle, this comforts me and I relax and comply. When the bag opens, it is packed so full of Khatas, they overflow out of the bag, I smile, "what is this"? I am asked. I explain. "I know what a Khata is, they are usually white, why are these ones of these different colours. I explain the best I can, he does not care to understand.

Questions; where did you get these?, why do you have so many?, who gave you these?, where were you, in Tibet?, why did they give these to you, who are you?

Please empty your computer bag, show me, whats on here?, pictures?, video?, show me. He becomes frantic, I am amused, I have a external backup storage device and have backed up everything, I just plug it in when I am asked to, but I don't turn it on. He brings in his coworker, a beautiful girl, she is amused, and she understands the situation. He holds up one of the Khatas to the camera in the corner of the room, it must be his commander on the other side. He seems to have a real issue with;

May there Always be Peace, Happiness and Joy on Earth

which as is written on each end of each Khata, in english, chinese and Tibetan. He has now gone through everything I am carrying. In Rinpoche's bag there is a beautiful Medicine Buddha statue and a magnificent Mandala set. The guard tells me to unwrap these two items, which were wonderfully wrapped with khatas.

Once unwrapped he pays no attention to these. Finally satisfied, he asks me;

any books, do you have any books

and these, what are these"? he points to the 2 boiled eggs Rinpoche suggested I take from the breakfast table this morning, for my lunch.

"my lunch"

which he translates to his co-worker, she enjoys this and laughs. Things are Ok now and I can repack my stuff, quickly.

Lets go.

"Next time do not take so many Khatas home from our China"

Ok no problem I respond, I then have some fun with him and bow with my hands in the prayer position, this

amuses his beautiful coworker, she likes this, smiles and blushes. He just walks away and leads me out of
this back room to the airport concours, now I can catch my flight;

Air China - CA991 - Beijing to Vancouver - Gate 14E

So when the sun goes down in Vancouver and I sit on the balcony of my apartment watching the long, long
skies over the Pacific Ocean and sense all that water that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over the
western horizon and all that raw land in China, in Tibet and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the
immensity of it, and in the Ashuk Village, I know by now the children must be smiling, in the land where the
children always smile, and tonight the stars will be out, the moon will cast its glow across the mountains
which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks
and folds the shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides growing old, I
think of Mt. Wutaishan, I think of our group, of those from Tibet, of Rinpoche, of Taiwan, I even think of our
blue bus, I think of;

His Holiness Rimay Gyalten Sogdzin Rinpoche,

I think of Rinpoche .

བཀྲ་ཤིས་བདེ་ལེགས།

Tashi Delek