

Gaden Relief Projects Conference Call
02/06/12
Minutes

Subject:

Vision statement & future directions for Gaden Relief

In attendance:

Ven. Zasep Rinpoche, Bill Wells, Evan Zaleschuk, Conrad Richter, Candace Cole, Matthew Richards

TOPIC 1 - VISIONING

The GRP Conference Call started with an acknowledgement of both our successful past work and the present need to take stock and have an honest discussion about our shared vision, values and future plans. Conrad informed those in attendance that donations to GRP are now slowing down and may not even reach the amount of \$10,000. this year. As such, GRP should consider how best to proceed with future endeavors, whether it be by narrowing our focus or expanding our organization and its projects.

Ven. Zasep Rinpoche stated that he felt an important reason why donations to GRP had dropped off was due in large part both to the present global economic climate (and the atmosphere of anxiety this produces) and that fact that GRP now lacks a clear vision and fresh project to interest potential donors. Rinpoche stated that GRP presently needs these both as to convey what we are trying to accomplish so that donors feel that their contributions are well spent and put towards a relevant, laudable goal. Rinpoche said that it would probably be best to focus on one project on which we could focus all our efforts.

Evan thought that putting our efforts into a given project in Mongolia would be the wisest course of action, given the current politico-economic conditions and even for practical reasons.

Candace thought that a small, specific finite project with which GRP could get timely, tangible results that it could promptly publicize would probably help our organization a lot. She said that this would also serve to interest and target traditional donors.

Conrad said that whatever the Board decides regarding future goals or projects, GRP must honour its current commitments. He mentioned that GRP has pledged to make yearly donations to the Zangskar Nuns Project. However, due to a drop in donations this past year, it has raised only \$1000. for this Project – that Kim and Lauren will bring with them to Ladakh this year. Everyone felt that GRP should

give at least \$1500. so the money can be put towards both a proper building for the Zangskar Nuns Association and a home for elderly nuns. The GRP website must reflect this updated project with both articles and photos from Kim and Lauren. If GRP decided to donate \$1000. for the mobile hospital truck in Mongolia as well, there would then a need to do more fundraising for these respective Projects. Conrad mentioned that perhaps since money is currently earmarked for Tashi Lapug Monastery in Tibet, it could be redirected to these other Projects. However, Rinpoche said that currently the Chinese Government has refused Tashi Lapug's request to relocate to Zadoh city and so the community has decided to try to revitalize the Monastery. Matt King plans to visit Tibet this Fall. Rinpoche recommended that GRP request Matt to take the earmarked money to Tashi Lapug.

Returning to the Conference Call's question at hand, Bill made the point that an important concern that needed addressing during the meeting, perhaps foremost, was the whether GRP make "relief" or "development" it's main mission. He said that although GRP has "relief" in it's name, it work mostly centers on "development". Bill and Evan wondered whether GRP's possessing a "Buddhist" character would detract from our work or prejudice a general public image regarding donations. Conrad remarked that our best fundraiser, traditionally and at present - is Rinpoche - a Tibetan Buddhist Lama. Conrad said that our website does reach people but the attempt to reach a wider, more general audience or donor group, has not really worked as well as expected. As with any charity bearing some relationship to a given religion, there is always the fair question as to how much work is given over to aid and how much is given to proselytizing. The participants agreed that charities such as those run by the Mennonites, for example, offer a good example of how to offer aid that, while it may be offered with a spiritual intention, is not mixed up with a given religion or ideology. Rinpoche reminded people that GRP is not strictly Buddhist and some of its most successful projects, such as the Zadoh Health Care Clinic, have not involved Buddhist institutions or religious goals. He said that a major motivation for both GRP's work and the chosen locales of such work has been that the fact that he, through his teaching and spiritual career, is already connected with these projects and places. Possessing such a network and knowledge assures low costs for GRP as well as guarantees a level of organization and even success for the given projects. Conrad added to this in saying although we can consider future work on other countries, areas and cultures, GRP's official constitution legally limits our scope to that of Asia.

Matthew gave his opinion that current trends in geo-politics may make any real work in Tibet unfeasible and that it may be wiser and more productive to concentrate our efforts on our current Projects in

Mongolia. Rinpoche agreed with this assessment, citing current political-economic chaos in Tibet and signs that this may indeed worsen over time. Nevertheless, Rinpoche said he felt it was important to keep our GRP Projects in Tibet open for the time being as things may perhaps change for the better soon and we would then have the infrastructure to continue our work.

The conversation then turned to our current work on Mongolia. Everyone present agreed to GRP's need to complete both an assessment and official contract for the use of Bold's Russian army truck as a mobile medical clinic. Some wondered whether it be best used be our agent Gerlee's charity, Manlas Tus. Rinpoche said that GRP can both lease the truck and use it to help other NGO's as well, such as in the delivery of aid. He also mentioned that presently it is hard for local Mongolian charities and NGO's to vision, plan and organize as most are in "survival mode" due to current politico-economical trends. Candace felt it important that GRP really ask our Mongolian contacts what they really need in regard to these projects and offered her services in this regard when she travels there this Fall. Conrad reminded everyone that GRP's Mongolia Project was originally founded to support the rebirth of Buddhism in this country after decades of Stalinist political repression. Now it has branched out with different ideas and projects, like the Je Tsongkhapa Institute in UB and due to the Bodhi organization's demands that its aid be used in a secular manner, Manla Tus charity, that provides aid to poor single mothers. Conrad reminded us that there is a lot of potential for this kind of interesting charity work. Candace is in contact with an ethno-botanist who has worked with the Reindeer people for several years; she may be able to provide us with both some contacts of other health related projects. Rinpoche said that there's a need to organize and expand the activities of the Je Tsongkhapa Center in UB. Rinpoche teaches there when he visits Mongolia and says the community there would like to see more activities and services offered there, like yoga classes taught by a committed paid teacher. He says that GRP needs to be actively involved here giving vision, leadership and organization, yet in such a way as we respect their needs and wishes. Evan and Matthew both felt that GRP could really help in the establishment of Je Tsongkhapa Center in UB as a "Healing Center". Bill and Candance felt it important to invest in the real, practical projects running "on the ground" like that of Manla Tus - funneling money to Gerlee and responding to the needs of her work. GRP could also look at expanding its scope to supporting local projects in the area of health care issues, poverty, empowering local woman, micro-loans for small business, green technology etc. Everyone agreed that GRP should leave its "Mongolia Project" as an open concept so it can then support a multiplicity of different endeavors separately, like Geralt Mur and Manla Tus etc.

TOPIC 2 - POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The next topic covered in the Conference Call was concerning the conduct of members in and out of GRP activities. Everyone present on the call felt that volunteering for GRP means that one ought to keep one's personal opinions and politics separate from GRP's various activities. Rinpoche stressed this in particular, stating that our members should not speak on behalf of GRP, in an official manner, when voicing their own interests. There was a call for an official policy on political neutrality regarding our activities, lest our own values and positions get in the way of or even jeopardize our projects - particularly regarding Tibet, such as the issue around forced resettlement of nomads in the Eastern part of the country. Conrad said he would draft such a policy and ask the Board to review and accept it.

The meeting then addressed personnel issues - both asking Conrad to remain as the GRP President and Bill and Candace to join as official members of our organization and our media. Bill agreed to help redesign our GRP website, both in terms of form and content, with new social media plug-ins, videos and relevant links etc. Rinpoche and Candace agreed to help with this by providing videos of their upcoming trip to Mongolia.

The Conference Call concluded by everyone's agreement that the next meeting should occur upon Rinpoche's return to Canada.

Meeting close