

Fall 2009



Siddhartha School Project Newsletter

Turning the Wheel

www.siddharthaschool.org

Entire 10th Grade Passes State Exams – Again!

Last year we were ecstatic to learn that all ten students in Siddhartha School's first Class 10 had passed the difficult Jammu & Kashmir state matriculation exam, enabling them all to continue their educations. Crowning this extraordinary achievement, our top student, Tsering Llamo, had the highest score in the Leh-Ladakh district.

Now there can be no doubt that Siddhartha School ranks among the finest

private schools in Ladakh. The second Class 10 has done it again! All eleven students passed the state exam. (The pass rate for the region as a whole was below 25%.) Siddhartha's top student, Sonam Angmo, surpassed even Llamo's district-leading score.

The five students in this year's Class 10 take the state exam in March, 2010. We look forward to sharing the news of their results.



Siddhartha School's 2008 Class 10 with Khen Rinpoche

Siddhartha School Now Fully Accredited

In 2009 Siddhartha School became a fully independent high school accredited by Jammu & Kashmir state. (In India, "high school" goes up through 10th grade.) The school's new official name is Siddhartha High School. Its accreditation is conditional based on a reevaluation to take place in 2012. By then we must:

- Build an examination hall/multi-purpose room
- Create athletic fields suitable for team sports like soccer and cricket

- Complete our cafeteria, currently under construction

We need to raise an additional \$25,000 to help complete these projects. Please consider a donation to support these improvements and ensure Siddhartha School retains its accreditation.



Siddhartha School's new sign

Dalai Lama Visits Siddhartha School

On August 12, 2009 we learned that His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama would visit Siddhartha School... early the following morning! We had a lot of work to do in a hurry. My heart pounded as I listened to Khen Rinpoche dole out tasks in Ladakhi. Hours later, aching, dusty and splattered with whitewash, I found myself humming a traditional Tibetan song I picked up from the kids.

Somehow by the appointed time Siddhartha School was transformed. All the buildings were whitewashed; flags lined the driveway; and a long, red carpet led to a small throne on the outdoor stage. Mattresses, rugs and decorative tables made seating more comfortable for teachers, students, and the many Stok villagers who came to the big event. Classrooms were sparkling clean and the humble principal's office was turned into a reception room in case His Holiness wanted to stay for a cup of tea. The school could have been mistaken for a palace!

When the Dalai Lama arrived, accompanied by twenty police cars, we lined up and held out white scarves and yellow flowers. Everyone wore their finest traditional attire. As His Holiness'

car drove up to the red carpet, we all bowed our heads and sang a prayer. His Holiness quickly made his way to the throne, and madness ensued. I found myself practically running with the crowd toward the stage.

The Dalai Lama gave a teaching that lasted for two hours – a great honor for the school. He spoke in Tibetan, and his speech was translated into Hindi for the crowd. Many people prayed as they listened. After his speech His Holiness blessed the teachers by placing white scarves called khatags around their necks and giving them small packets of herbs to be boiled in water as a medicinal drink. I was fortunate to receive his blessing as well, but I was so nervous that when His Holiness asked me where I was from, "United States" came out as a hurried squeak.

Afterwards, the older classes performed traditional Tibetan and Ladakhi dances. The Dalai Lama smiled as he swayed and clapped with the music. Then, in a blur, he drove away, and the crowd was left exhausted but exalted in the hot morning sun.

By Myla Faye. Myla spent almost two months in summer 2009 as a volunteer teacher at Siddhartha School.



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama at Siddhartha School

Please Visit Our New Website

Siddhartha School Project has a new website. Please visit soon and tell us what you think. The URL remains: www.siddharthaschool.org. Filmmaker John Marshall, SSP sponsorship coordinator, designed the new look. We thank Bruce Nichols for his efforts in creating and maintaining our website "from the beginning" until now.

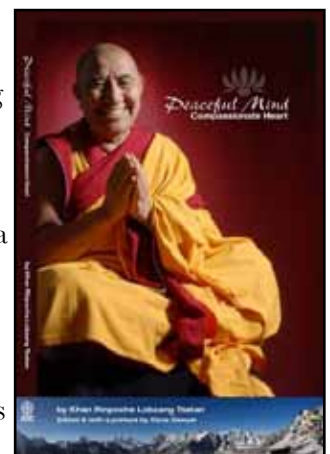


While you're visiting the new website, click Videos to view the new, Emmy-nominated movie (running time 8:56) about Siddhartha School. If you haven't seen it, prepare to be inspired. And please don't forget to share it with friends and family.

Looking for the Perfect Holiday Gift?

Siddhartha School Founding Director Khen Rinpoche Geshe Kachen Lobzang Tsetan has written a wonderfully engaging overview of the Tibetan Buddhist path entitled *Peaceful Mind, Compassionate Heart*. It makes a great gift – not just for Buddhist practitioners but for anyone with an interest in expanding their inner horizons.

The cost is just \$20 + shipping and all proceeds benefit Siddhartha School. The good karma from the purchase is all yours.



A Letter from the Siddhartha School Project President

Dear Friends,

First, I want to thank you all for your support of the Siddhartha School and Khen Rinpoche over the past 14 years. As we move into 2010, I look back at all we have accomplished. We started in 1995, with 25 students, one teacher and a rented room – in a part of the world where illiteracy was over 90% and only 7% of children educated in government schools could pass state-level exams. Today, our school has a student body of over 230. In our first two graduating classes 100% of the students passed the state exams, some of them with honors.

Our school is making a huge difference in the lives of students, their families, their village and beyond. Siddhartha School is the only private school in Ladakh that accepts children regardless of their ability to pay. Our students learn four languages: Tibetan, Ladakhi, Hindi and English. We have a lending library in an area where most families never had a book in their homes.

Siddhartha School actively seeks to preserve the globally significant Tibetan/Ladakhi Buddhist culture, which teaches nonviolence and respect for all life. Ladakhis are able to live sustainably in one of the harshest climates on Earth. Where else in our modern world are these vital principals taught and practiced?

Please join Khen Rinpoche, the Dalai Lama, myself and so many others in contributing to the continued success of the Siddhartha School. As little as a dollar a day can provide a child's education and promote peace in this war-torn world.

With heartfelt thanks,

Joli Greene, President, Siddhartha School Project

Sponsorship Program Update

Siddhartha School Project is committed to raising US\$70,000 to help meet the Siddhartha School's operating expenses for 2010. That amount helps cover staff salaries, building and bus maintenance, supplies, and most other things the school needs. ***90% of Siddhartha School's funding comes from your donations.***

To raise this money, we're looking for a few good people – 195 to be exact – who are willing to contribute one dollar per day to support the education, health care and future prospects of a beautiful Ladakhi child. 195 committed sponsors are all we need to fund the school's operations. That seems like a very realistic and attainable goal to me.

And we're getting there, one child at a time. We currently have 59 active US sponsors with another 26 sponsors coming from our wonderful partner organization in Switzerland, Les Enfants du Sourire. That's 85 sponsors total, just 110 short of our magic number.



What does it take to sponsor a child at Siddhartha School? "A-dollar-a-day" (\$360/year). Payments can be made quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. What do sponsors get in return? You'll get letters and drawings from your student, a welcome packet complete with your child's photo (updated annually), and a DVD of our new film about Siddhartha School. You'll also receive the gratitude of your child and his or her family. All that for a-dollar-a-day!

So... are you willing and ready to sponsor a child? And do you know someone else who might also be interested? Sponsorship makes a great Christmas gift for an individual, family or group. Go on... visit www.siddharthaschool.org and click "Sponsor a Child." You just might fall in love with a child, like I did.

— **John Marshall, Chair, Siddhartha School Project Sponsorship Committee**

P.S.: My telephone number is 207-839-8743. Please call me anytime to talk about sponsorship.

Siddhartha School Project Financial Report

Siddhartha School Project is financially sound, thanks to your donations and a conservative investment strategy. However, as the school continues to grow, our fundraising must keep pace. Besides raising an increased amount to help cover the school's operating expenses, our focus is on building a sustainability fund (similar to an endowment). This is vital to ensuring the long-term financial viability of the Siddhartha School.

2008 Financial Overview

In 2008, Siddhartha School Project raised \$127,845. From this amount, funds were utilized as follows:

- \$59,575 went to Siddhartha School for its operating expenses.
- We were honored to receive \$24,000 from a long-time friend of Siddhartha School, who asked that we apply the gift to creating fundraising tools. This generous gift enabled us to invest \$11,866 to produce our new film (available on our website). An additional \$6,224 was used to self-publish Khen Rinpoche's new book *Peaceful Mind, Compassionate Heart*.
- \$3,000 was spent on books for the school's library. Building on several years of volunteer work by Tamara Blesh, Ph.D. and others, the library is now well-established and managed by school staff.
- \$6,163 was spent on mailings, administrative support, postage and other miscellaneous expenses, including \$1,704 for Khen Rinpoche's travel to/from the US. (All of Rinpoche's travel and other expenses within the US are covered by his hosts in the locations he visits.)
- \$4,236 was placed into our sustainability fund account, which now totals \$106,992. Our goal is \$500,000.

- The remaining \$36,782 we took in was placed in our general fund, which currently totals \$66,702. We plan to use these funds as needed to defray Siddhartha School's operating expenses in 2010.

News and Notes from Siddhartha School

Welcome to Our New Principal

After a long search, Siddhartha School has a well-qualified new Principal, effective October 15th. Formerly the Principal at a government secondary school in Ladakh, her name is Tsewang Dolma. She was Khen Rinpoche's first choice for the position. Welcome, Madam Dolma!



Madam Dolma

Welcome to New Staff

Welcome to the new teachers and staff who joined Siddhartha School

in 2009: Thinles Dorje, computer teacher; Sonam Dardul, physical education teacher; Tenzin Dhasey, English teacher; Phuntsok Dolma, math teacher; Tsering Angchuk, bus driver.

Siddhartha Culture and Welfare Society, which directs Siddhartha School, has hired Tsewang Norbu Vivek to act as a project coordinator or "International Secretary." Vivek will help coordinate activities between Siddhartha School and other organizations both within and outside India.

Pay Raise for Staff

Based on the Sixth Pay Scale per Jammu & Kashmir government mandate, Siddhartha School teachers and other staff will get a significant pay raise beginning in 2010. With this raise plus the addition of new staff, salary expense will increase by over 60% compared with 2008.

More Critical Building Needs

Siddhartha School's new accreditation requires us to build athletic fields and a multi-purpose/exam room. Other critical needs include:

- A boundary wall around the entire school property. This will keep our donkeys and feral dogs, enabling the school to grow trees (for building materials), food plants and flowers. Cost to complete is approximately US\$15,000.
- A new well and solar-powered water pump. Combined with a boundary wall, this will transform the campus into greener, more valuable real estate. Right now all water must be pumped by hand from a shallow well. Cost is approximately US\$5,000-\$10,000.
- 5-6 new computers (about US\$400 each). All students in grades 7-10 take computer classes.

Please consider a donation to our Sustainability Fund to help finance these important projects.

Help Us Save Mailing Costs

Would you prefer to receive Siddhartha School Project correspondence via e-mail? If so, please send your e-mail address along with your name and other contact information to ssp@siddharthaschool.org. Please ask friends to send their information also – we need your help to spread the word about Siddhartha School.



Everybody pitches in to pump water

Learning from Ladakh

This past summer I visited Ladakh for the first time. There's so much I could describe: spectacular scenery, endearing people, inspiring Buddhist shrines, intriguing wildlife. The panic of operating dilapidated rented motorcycles on Himalayan roads. Or my search for Zotpa, the child I sponsored at Siddhartha School for four years and my deepest inspiration for visiting Ladakh, who as it turned out chose to leave school and become a monk.



The new science classroom is impressive.

But what matters most is what I learned in my time at Siddhartha School, which is this: the education those kids are getting is phenomenal! They're studying math and science at a higher level than their age-mates in most US public schools. As for languages, they study *four* and they start in Kindergarten. Students in Class 5 could converse in English easily.

The children are relaxed and light-hearted, but deeply respectful of teachers and the learning process. Every child appreciates the opportunity for a better life that Siddhartha School offers. Sponsored children are truly grateful to their sponsors. Everybody is always smiling and laughing. Ladakhi children must be the happiest children on Earth.

But they need our help. The school's very success could be its downfall.

There is no other private school in Ladakh offering a first-rate education to the poor. Children come by bus from as far away as Leh, the capital. In 2009 the student body grew by 46 children. That means the school needs more teachers, more supplies, more everything – including money.

Please give generously to Siddhartha School this year. Your support means so much to these kids and their futures.

— **Scott Cronenweth, SSP communications/webmaster**

Khen Rinpoche to Offer Long Life Prayer for the Dalai Lama

In his role as Head Abbot of the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in exile, Khen Rinpoche has the enormous honor of presiding at a traditional Long Life Prayer ceremony for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Sponsored by Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, traditionally the seat of the revered Panchen Lama, this is a major event in Tibetan Buddhism worldwide. Abbots and senior lamas of all four lineages will attend, including His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, who visited Siddhartha School in 2001. The day-long ceremony will take place in on December 30th, 2009 in Dharamshala, India.

Help Us Build Our Sustainability Fund

The future of Siddhartha School depends on our ability not only to help meet its growing annual operating expenses, but also to build a Sustainability Fund to cover unanticipated expenses or shortfalls in fundraising. This is particularly important as we prepare for Khen Rinpoche's eventual retirement. To say that no one works harder or with greater success to raise funds for Siddhartha School than Rinpoche is a spectacular understatement!

Here are some ways you can help us build a Sustainability Fund to ensure Siddhartha School's future:

- **Donations.** Every donation is a blessing! Please give all you can. No donation is too small.
- **Bequests and other gifts.** You can designate Siddhartha School Project as a beneficiary in your will. There are a number of ways to do this, which are revocable at any time. We can also benefit from gifts of stock or other property.
- **Host a fundraising event!** It's easy! Think your friends, family, students or colleagues might be interested in hearing about Siddhartha School? We can support you host an informational gathering by providing you with brochures, copies of our new film, information about sponsoring a student, and more. We can even send a representative of the Siddhartha School Project board to help out.
- **Sponsor a child.** Sponsorship helps cover the school's operating costs so more donations can go to the Sustainability fund.

Siddhartha School Project is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Donations are tax-deductible. To learn more, please contact us at 207-523-9388 or visit www.siddharthaschool.org.

Meditation at Morning Exercises

This past summer, I returned as a volunteer teacher at Siddhartha School. It had been four years since my first trip in 2005, but I was greeted with love and familiarity.

Among my motivations for that first visit was to explore how meditation could support classroom learning (a long-standing professional interest). Khen Rinpoche thought it would be a good idea to teach meditation in the classroom. Eventually I bought a singing bowl and began leading meditation during the morning exercises as well.

There was much appreciation and enjoyment of the clear sound ringing from the lustrous bowl. Slight smiles conveyed the feelings of peace it encouraged as we all sat in lotus position on the bare ground in the early morning light. I should not have been surprised when, upon my return, old friends among students and staff asked, "Did you bring your bowl?"

Unfortunately, a five-pound brass bowl was not among the many, many things I'd lugged to the school. At my first opportunity I headed into Leh town to acquire a new singing bowl, which is now the school's "bowl in residence!"

The next morning, I was asked to lead everyone in meditation and was more than happy to comply! As the sound of the bowl rang out, I imagined it echoing off the surrounding mountain ranges and calling us all inward to a place of stillness and peace.

Before lowering my eyes I stole a glance in front of me: over two hundred students ages 4-18, along with their teachers, sitting in lotus position with expressions of serenity filled my view. We resembled a human Buddha Field!

The mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" floated through my consciousness as a smile spread across my face. As I let the vision and thoughts go, my heart



Pre-Kindergarten Students learning meditation at Siddhartha School

sang out a blessing of gratitude and joy to have experienced such a peaceful moment as this.

I continued to lead morning meditations over the next two weeks, as well as teaching some of the students and staff to play the bowl. It was not uncommon to walk into the staff room to find the bowl being stirred and struck lightly as everyone in the room took a turn. It was the perfect accompaniment to our daily morning tea break!

Since returning to the US, I've learned that, though initially reticent about playing it in front of everyone, the teachers have put the bowl back into use and leading group meditation. Of course, I couldn't be happier!

By Lisa V. Blake. A professional educator with broad multi-cultural experience, Lisa recently joined the SSP board.

**Please share
this newsletter
with a friend!**



Thank you for all you do for us!



Yes, I'll help support Siddhartha School!

Enclosed is my donation of | \$ 25 | \$50 | \$100 | \$ _____.

YES, I would like to sponsor a child at Siddhartha School for just "a dollar a day."

I will send payments: monthly _____ (\$30/month)
 quarterly _____ (\$90/quarter)
 annually _____ (\$360/year)

I would prefer to pay by personal check _____ PayPal _____.
(PayPal payments can be made from our website: www.siddharthaschool.org)

YES, I would like to contribute to Siddhartha School's Sustainability Fund to ensure this good work will continue. Enclosed is my donation of \$ _____.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Telephone (optional): _____

Please make checks payable to **Siddhartha School Project** (or SSP) and mail to:
Siddhartha School Project, P.O. Box #524, Freeport, ME 04032-0524
You can also donate online through PayPal at www.siddharthaschool.org. THANK YOU!

Where in the World is Ladakh?

Long an independent Himalayan Buddhist kingdom, today Ladakh is part of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir bordering on China, occupied Tibet and Pakistan.

Often called “Little Tibet,” Ladakh is one of the last places where a Tibetan Buddhist way of life is unrepressed. Buddhism in Ladakh actually predates its establishment in Tibet, and Ladakh’s monastery system today encompasses all four of the principal Tibetan Buddhist lineages. Living close to nature in one of the world’s harshest landscapes, the Ladakhi people have much to teach us about sustainable, cooperative living. But Ladakh’s magnificent culture is threatened – in great part by a lack of education. Indian government schools are simply not equipped to educate Ladakhi children or to foster respect for their vital heritage in the face of globalization and a market economy. This is why your support of Siddhartha School – the only private school in Ladakh that accepts students regardless of their families’ ability to pay tuition – is so vitally important.



Siddhartha School Project

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Linda Ford continues to help Siddhartha School Project manage its membership, sponsorship, finances and more – thank you, Linda!



Our wonderful Siddhartha School teachers