Fall 2010

Turning the Wheel

Siddhartha School Project Newsletter

www.siddharthaschool.org

Mudslides Devastate Ladakh

On the night of August 5, 2010 the entire Ladakh region was rocked by devastating flooding and mudslides caused by a single, enormous thunderstorm. The hardest-hit areas were the major population centers around Leh, Choglamsar and Sabu -- just a few miles north of Siddhartha School. Hundreds were killed and thousands lost their homes, possessions, crops, farm animals... everything they had.

Fortunately Siddhartha School was not damaged and none of the children or staff were killed. However, several students and staff lost loved ones and/or their homes in this tragedy.

Across the region there was evidence of Tibetan Buddhist compassion in action, as everyone pitched in cheerfully to begin a cleanup that will take years. Khen Rinpoche helped in many ways, including joining Siddhartha School children digging out the hospital in Leh. The school community also rallied to help affected staff and families whose homes are buried in mud. Teachers and staff donated one week's pay to help out.

Friends of Siddhartha School around the world responded quickly to the disaster. In Ladakh, Khen Rinpoche's nephew Tsewang Norbu Vivek mobilized his International Fellowship of Buddhist Youth Ladakh and began distributing aid. Friends of Siddhartha School in the US and Europe sent over $10,000 to Vivek to purchase blankets, animal fodder and other desperately needed essentials. SSP board member Lisa Blake, who was in Ladakh during the mudslides, organized a benefit that raised over $1,200 for Siddhartha School students and staff who were worst affected.

Digging out the hospital in Leh

The destruction is unimaginable.

Three months after the tragedy, the situation still looks grim throughout Ladakh. The Indian government has been unable to rebuild homes before the frigid winter. Many families are still living in tents, with only the barest essentials. Winter stores are very low and many farm animals are starving. Fortunately, the Indian military has reopened the major roads and rebuilt bridges, so that food and other supplies can be trucked into affected areas.

Rinpoche at a teacher's ruined home

At this time, the best way we can support the Ladakhi people is to continue to work together to support Siddhartha School, which the local community needs now more than ever.

For more information on the situation in Ladakh, please visit the Siddhartha School Project blog at http://siddharthaschoolproject.wordpress.com/. Or sign up to receive our e-newsletters by e-mailing your name and e-mail address to info@siddharthaschool.org.

Siddhartha School Project News & Notes

A Heartfelt "Thank You" to Joli Greene, Outgoing President

Joli Greene has generously volunteered her time and resources as President of the Siddhartha School Project Board of Directors for nearly fifteen years. After a year of preparation, Joli announced her resignation prior to a board meeting on November 7th.

Fellow board members and friends of Siddhartha School worldwide wish to express their deep gratitude to Joli for her years of tireless commitment. Joli will continue to support SSP and Khen Rinpoche in many ways, and will continue to advise the organization going forward.

The SSP board is pleased to announce that Karen Macrae will step in as Acting President. A retired consultant, Karen joined the board last year. Karen looks forward to working with the SSP community to support Siddhartha School's continued success.

Help Us Stay Connected -- Send Us Your E-mail Address

When mudslides struck Ladakh this August, many friends of Siddhartha School heard about it first through the news media. Naturally there was concern about the welfare of the school and the safety of the students. How frustrating it was for SSP that we couldn't reach out quickly to many of you... because we don't have your e-mail addresses.

Like every organization these days, SSP is going digital. We've got a regular e-newsletter, a Facebook group page, a blog and much more happening in general online than in print. *Please take a moment now* to e-mail your name and e-address to info@siddharthaschool.org. Thank you!

Get the Latest from Ladakh on the SSP Blog

Siddhartha School Project has a new blog. This is where we hope to bring you all the latest news from Siddhartha School and Ladakh. There's no need to register or sign up -- just visit http://siddharthaschoolproject.wordpress.com anytime.

15th Anniversary Celebration a Huge Success!

On Saturday, November 6, SSP hosted a celebration honoring the 15th anniversary of the founding of Siddhartha School. Held at Frontier Café in Brunswick, Maine, the event featured a silent auction, live Tibetan music by Penpa Tsering, a talk by Khen Rinpoche about starting the school, and a slide show of images from Ladakh. The venue sold out in advance -- apologies to the many friends we couldn't accommodate. Both outreach and fundraising results far exceeded our expectations. Sincere thanks to all the volunteers who helped make the evening a success, and a whole lot of fun for everyone.

New Executive Director Role

As SSP continues to grow to support the growing needs of Siddhartha School, we're looking to improve how we operate and serve our donors. In March 2010 we created an Executive Director role dedicated to those tasks.

SSP board member Scott Cronenweth assumed the ED role on an interim basis. Scott has given us some new "business" capabilities, including stronger outreach and improved financial systems. Scott has also begun applying for foundation grants. Board member Lisa Blake will assume the ED role beginning early in 2011.

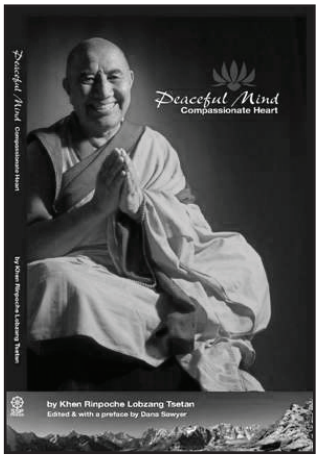
We hope you're noticing a positive difference thanks to these changes. Please give us your input anytime at info@siddharthaschool.org.

Give -- and Get -- the Gift of Good Karma This Holiday Season

Looking for holiday gifts that come from the heart, not from a catalog? Giving gifts that support Siddhartha School Project can make your shopping easy, fun and (we hope!) karmically auspicious.

Khen Rinpoche's book

Peaceful Mind, Compassionate Heart, by Siddhartha School Founding Director Khen Rinpoche Lobzang Tsetan, makes Tibetan Buddhism come alive for anyone with an interest in exploring their personal spiritual path to greater happiness. The cost is just $20 + $5 shipping. To order online visit www.siddharthaschool.org.



The 2011 SSP Calendar

SSP board member Lisa Blake has teamed up with Canadian graphic artist Sachiko Kojima to create a wonderful 2011 calendar featuring drawings by the children of Siddhartha School. The cost is $20 + $5 shipping. To order e-mail info@siddharthaschool.org with your name and address.

Make a named donation

Donating in someone's name to Siddhartha School is an ideal way to share love and compassion during the holiday time. Your recipient will receive a certificate informing them of your gift. You can even donate a sponsorship! Minimum named donation amount is $20. For information please e-mail info@siddharthaschool.org or call 207-523-9388.

A Personal Note from Joli Greene, Outgoing SSP President

Dear Friends,

Way back in 1995, I received a call asking me to help Khen Rinpoche, (then called Geshe-la), with the Siddhartha School. I said I would, but I didn't know how I could help. I was just an artist – what did I know about running a school? Here we are fifteen years later, and I have learned a lot! Khen Rinpoche in his wisdom gave us the Siddhartha School as the stage upon which to learn life lessons of service, compassion and patience, and to understand the interdependence of all life. I can never thank him enough.

Together we've created a school that is changing the lives of so many and supporting a culture that teaches non-violence and true peace. Perhaps some of us will be reborn in Ladakh, and have the great opportunity to attend the Siddhartha School. Perhaps Khen Rinpoche or the Dalai Lama will reincarnate and be a student there with us. Who knows? But I do know one thing -- through our united efforts we have all worked to create a better future.

After fifteen years I am stepping down as President of the Siddhartha School Project Board of Directors. I'm taking a much-needed rest and going back to being "just an artist." Some wonderful people are stepping in to help keep things running. Khen Rinpoche and I have full confidence in them. I hope you all will welcome the new faces and continue to be a part of our wonderful school, which is making a much bigger difference in the world than we can know.

With gratitude,
Joli Greene,
Outgoing President, Siddhartha School Project

Sponsorship Program Update

Siddhartha School Project currently has about 88 active sponsors -- up from 59 at this time last year! -- sponsoring 90 students. Our income from sponsorship so far this year is over $20,500, a vital contribution to Siddhartha School's operation.

Over half our sponsors live in Maine. The rest live across nineteen states and two foreign countries.

Since joining the sponsorship committee last year, Ray Cooper has done a tremendous job getting things flawlessly organized and following up with sponsors (and with the school in Ladakh) on photos, letters and artwork from students, payment reminders, etc. If you're a sponsor, chances are you've connected with Ray.

Our sponsorship program is a wonderful way to support Siddhartha School, while connecting on a personal level with a beautiful Ladakhi child. All it takes is "a-dollar-a-day" ($30/month). That small amount of money, which buys so little in this country, gives a Siddhartha School student a contemporary and culturally supportive education, bus transportation to and from school, a nutritious lunch every school day, basic medical care, uniforms, books, school supplies and much more.

But that's not all, because sponsorship is a gift of love that flows both ways. Sponsors get student photos, letters and artwork, a welcome packet with information and a DVD... and the sincere gratitude and prayers of a lucky child and his or her family. How else can you do so much good for so little money? (Please note that all sponsorship proceeds go into our general fund. No child is denied an education because he or she has no sponsor. But if we had more sponsors, more children could attend Siddhartha School. The demand for enrollment greatly exceeds the school's capacity.)

If you or someone you know might also be interested in sponsorship, please visit www.siddharthaschool.org and click "Sponsor a Child." You'll be so glad you did... and so will your special Ladakhi child, for whom an education at Siddhartha School can mean a completely different economic and personal future.

Siddhartha School Project 2010 Financial Report

Siddhartha School Project remains financially strong, thanks to your generosity and commitment. Our fundraising in 2010 has kept pace with the school's needs, despite "the economy."

Siddhartha School's requirements for operating and capital funds continue to grow each year, however. Our goal for 2011 is to raise $150,000 through donations and grants -- far more than we've ever raised in the past.

This and more is what it will take to 1) build the school's infrastructure in line with Khen Rinpoche's vision and the school's acceditation requirements; 2) create a Sustainability Fund to ensure the school's ongoing operation; and 3) continue to serve Ladakh's enormous and growing need for culturally supportive, contemporary education.

SSP also faces mounting fundraising and administrative expenses to run its nonprofit business and keep up with the growing needs of the school.

2010 Financial Overview
So far in 2010, Siddhartha School Project raised about $133,000. Funds were utilized as follows:

- $120,000 went to Siddhartha School for its operating and capital expenses. This included the purchase of a new bus ($25,000), plus $20,000 for a 2009 wire transfer that did not arrive on time due to a clerical error.
- Siddhartha School's total requirement for operating funds in 2010 was $70,000.
- About $2,000 (1.5% of income) was required for business expenses like printing and postage. Roughly $10,000 (about 8% of income) went for administrative and technical support.
- $3,000 was sent to the school to repair the nursery classroom building, which lost its entire roof in a windstorm in May.
- SSP received $8,000 in foundation grants so far in 2010.
- Sales of Khen Rinpoche's book total $1,675 so far this year.
- SSP's total assets have grown by $21,000 since 2009.

To receive a 2010 financial report please call 207-523-9388 e-mail info@siddharthaschool.org.

Help Build the Sustainability Fund

The long-term future of Siddhartha School depends on a strong Sustainability Fund to cover the school's operating expenses. This is particularly important as we prepare for Khen Rinpoche's impending retirement.

Here are some ways you can help 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.
- **Sponsor a child.** Sponsorship helps cover the school's operating costs so more donations can go to the Sustainability fund.
- **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! We can support your informational gathering with brochures, copies of our DVD, information about sponsoring a student, and more. We can even send a representative of the Siddhartha School Project board to show slides and help out.

The Future of SSP is Here... And His Name is Vivek!

In 2009, the Siddhartha Culture and Welfare Society, which directs Siddhartha School, hired Tsewang Norbu Vivek (who happens to be Khen Rinpoche's nephew) as a project coordinator and "International Secretary."

Vivek is not only an educator but also a businessperson, activist and spiritual teacher. He describes himself simply as a man of action!

Indeed, not only has Vivek amped up communications between SSP and the school as never before, but also he's taken a lead role in distributing aid across Leh-Ladakh in the aftermath of this summer's mudslides.

Thanks to a generous contribution towards his travel expenses, Vivek spent several weeks in the US in November, visiting Maine and California. He participated in a number of public talks, spoke at our 15th Anniversary event, and addressed the SSP board.

SSP looks forward to a long and productive collaboration with this amazing human being. Thank you, Vivek!

Tsewang Norbu Vivek

Capital Project Needs

As Siddhartha School has continued to grow, the need has also grown for various construction projects. If you are interested in supporting one of these projects, please make a donation to our general fund or contact SSP to discuss levels of support needed.

Solar well pump
Siddartha School sits on an arid plain, far from village water sources. Its one hand pump is grossly insufficient for drinking water, let alone irrigation for trees planted this spring. An additional weekly tanker delivery is needed to fill the school's tanks. An economical and eco-friendly solar pump would help turn the school into an oasis, where trees and food crops could generate vital cash. Estimated cost for the pump, photovoltaics, etc. is about US$17,000.

Assembly Hall
Siddhartha School needs an assembly hall by 2012 in order to meet requirements for accreditation by Jammu & Kashmir state. Currently, morning assembly and all other gatherings take place outside in all weather, and the school has no place where the children can sit for exams.

Athletic facilities
Athletic fields suitable for playing cricket and soccer (on dirt) are a prerequisite for meeting state accreditation requirements by 2012. The children would also like very much to have a basketball court.

Additional classrooms
As the school's enrollment grows, larger and additional classrooms are badly needed. The current facilities were constructed for a smaller student body and are becoming overcrowded.

Wooden flooring
Siddhartha School's classroom buildings were constructed with concrete floors. Though durable and economical, these are not well-suited for Ladakh's harsh climate. To help make the classrooms more comfortable in the colder months, the school would like to incorporate traditional wooden flooring into the classroom buildings, especially for the youngest classes, where the children sit on the floor.

Hostel/boarding facilities
Many more nomad families and others would like to send children to Siddhartha School. Currently, these children must be boarded with relatives or in rented rooms. Often they are not well looked-after; for example, they may not have adequate support for doing homework and keeping their uniforms clean. Khen Rinpoche would like to create a small hostel where these children can live together rent-free and benefit from an after-school study program, a healthy environment and proper adult supervision.

School buses
Siddhartha School relies on buses to bring children to the school from miles away. This is safer and saves time for homework and chores that would otherwise be spent walking many miles and/or using overcrowded public buses. New buses are needed on an ongoing basis as the student body grows and the current buses wear out. The cost of a new bus is about US$25,000.

Computers
All students in grades 7 through 10 use the computer lab. New computers are alsways needed as the old ones wear out with the years of constant use.

Class 10 Exam Results

Many Siddhartha School supporters are justifiably proud of the 100% pass rate of our first two 10th grade classes on the Jammu & Kashmir state proficiency exams. The regional pass rate is about 30%. Performance on this exam determines a child's economic future and access to further education.

Siddhartha School's 2009 Class 10 had only five students, several of whom have special learning needs. All five sat for the exams. Despite intensive, individual tutoring, three of our students failed in one or two subjects and will re-test in those subjects. Our other two students passed all subjects.

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.

Siddhartha School Students "Zero In" on Trash

In July 2010, Lisa Blake, a Siddhartha School Project board member, led a team of six people from the US to bring an ecological photo-documentary project to Siddhartha School students during a school break. Thinles Wangmo, a science teacher at the school, helped Lisa and the volunteers teach the students about the dangers of littering the waterways with plastics and trash, and encourage them to discontinue burning trash inside their homes -- currently the most common practice of waste removal in Stok village, where Siddhartha School is located.

For three days, more than fifty students from grades 1 through 10 met each morning and collected trash in teams spread out around the village. As word of the effort spread, a local taxi donated its services to haul bags full of trash to the back yard of Siddhartha School, where it was buried in a big pit that accommodates trash from the school. More than thirty huge bags were collected. The transformation of the village was stunning. Used digital cameras organized by participant

Class 9 girls happy to help keep it clean

Jennifer Spatz, a volunteer and SSP sponsor from Seattle, helped document the effort.

One afternoon, students created signs and asked local shopkeepers to post them. A favorite slogan was: Plastic is not Fantastic! Ban the use of Plastics! The nearby regional capital of Leh has instituted a complete ban on the use of plastic bags. Shops are required to use alternate means of wrapping or bagging goods.

As a final part of the project, upper class girls drafted and typed a proposal called "Zero Trash Policy" and presented it to Tsering

Angdu, a Siddhartha Welfare Society board member and member of the regional government. The policy proposes to create permanent signs in the village warning not to litter and stating that a fine will be collected if the law is violated.

When asked who would collect the fine, the older female students smiled and said, "We will, of course!"

-- by Lisa V. Blake, SSP board

Presenting the "Zero Trash Policy" to Angdu and Madam Dolma, Siddhartha School Principal

A team effort to "go Green" in Stok village

Please share this newsletter with a friend!

And please help SSP communicate with you without using paper -- send your name and e-mail address to info@siddharthaschool.org.

Thank you!

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 _____ Online _____.
(Online 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 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 all students regardless of their families' ability to pay tuition – is so vitally important.

Siddhartha School Project
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Siddhartha School Project Board of Directors

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Tsewang Norbu Vivek, Siddhartha School International Secretary

Julley! Bye-bye! Thank you!