

TIBETAN TEACHER-ARTIST CARVES A BUDDHA

Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, a well-known Tibetan Buddhist lama based in Cottage Grove, Oregon, spent several weeks in September at the Providence Zen Center creating a 15 foot high Shakymuni Buddha statue in cement. The work, which will be completed over the next months, is a gift to Soen Sa Nim and his students from Rinpoche and his assistants, who refused any pay for their work. Rinpoche has created six major statues of Tibetan meditational deities since he came to the United States in 1979. This is his first work on the East Coast. The largest statue, a representation of Guru Rinpoche, is located in an isolated forest in southern Oregon. Rinpoche offers these works for the benefit of all beings.

Rinpoche received instruction from the great Buddhist scholars and yogis of the 1930's in Eastern Tibet and spent many years in meditation retreats. He has professional skills in Tibetan medicine, tantra, ritual, paintings, sculpture and folk arts, and works as medical consultant in Eugene. His permanent seat is the Chagdud Gonpa, where he has a small resident sangha.

The work on the Buddha statue began with the arrival of Rinpoche's assistant Glenn Sandvoss, who helped Rinpoche on previous statues. Glenn arrived at Providence Zen Center a week before Rinpoche to begin the groundwork for the sculpture: preparing the site, ordering supplies, and beginning construction of the internal wire armature for the Buddha. He brought Rinpoche's specifications for the dimensions of the Buddha. Correct proportions for the Buddha have been handed down for centuries.

Glenn began working in the PZC sculpture studio, building a wire armature (internal skeleton) with rebar and wire mesh. Once Rinpoche arrived, work pro-

ceeded from 7 in the morning until 11 at night for two weeks. When the armature was complete, fast-setting cement was applied to the mesh and carved in its semi-moist state into the proper shapes for the Buddha's body and curves of his robe. Hands and feet were constructed separately. A wide variety of tools was used in the process, from a simple kitchen paring knife and clay tools for the wet cement (which has a consistency like clay), to rasps and files and traditional stone carving tools (hammer and chisels) once the cement was hard.

The knots of hair on the Buddha's head were made in a separate mold, ground into

and climbed a ladder to the top of the throne. Assisted by Master Dharma Teacher George Bowman and Lincoln Rhodes, Rinpoche directed the placement of the vase inside the throne, along with other objects including a hunting knife, silk cloth in various colors, handmade objects and clothing, and a child's toy. Then the throne was sealed with cement.

Rinpoche explained that the insertion of precious and sacred objects in the Buddha and the throne makes the statue powerful. A solid copper rod was inserted into the Buddha torso, symbolizing the central spiritual channel in the body. Wrapped around the rod were many precious relics and copies of mantras.

A week later, amid much good humor, the Buddha torso (now weighing at least a ton, minus the head) was lifted by ten men onto a truck and driven up to the throne site. Bill Highsmith, master builder for the



Photo by Sonia Alexander

final shape and added one by one. The hands and head were constructed on small armatures and built up in painstakingly thin layers of cement, applied with a cement bonding glue.

At one point it was discovered that some of the Buddha's parts were not symmetrical. Rinpoche thought it would be too arduous to correct the problem in the usual way: laborious rasping and grinding off of excess cement. At that point Ellen Sidor, the resident stonecarver, picked up a stone hammer and chisel and demonstrated in a few minutes how inches of cement could easily be removed in what had before taken hours. The Buddha carvers have now incorporated this new skill into their repertoire, and the ring of chisels on cement could be heard often late into the evening.

One lengthy part of the statue process is the carving of numerous panels for the base of the throne. Each panel has to be carved separately in semi-moist cement and then fixed to the throne.

Once the hollow torso of the Buddha was complete, Rinpoche called for the next phase, which is traditional in Tibetan Buddhism, the collection and blessing of various precious personal and sacred objects to be inserted in the Buddha and throne. Over several days his assistants went about gathering gifts and donations from housemembers to be placed inside a vase to be put inside the throne. Deshung Rinpoche, a Tibetan lama from Boston, sent many personal offerings of relics and mantras. A beautiful vase two feet high with Chinese painting was purchased. When all was ready, Rinpoche gathered his assistants in the PZC Dharma room to hold a ceremony. The objects were blessed, put into the vase, covered with oil, and sealed with wax.

When the vase was ready, Rinpoche led a procession up to the statue site in the woods

new monastery and a former boat builder, rigged up a block and tackle to a nearby tree. A heavy manila line was tied around the Buddha torso, which was then slowly hauled up a wooden ramp into position on the cement throne. Then the head was added. A cheer went up among the watchers as the Buddha on the throne took its place beside the new monastery.

Glenn Sandvoss stayed on until October to make sure the work was proceeding properly. At some future date a decorative roof may be constructed to protect the statue from the elements. Final decorations to be carved in cement are still underway by new PZC resident Jeff de Castro, a sculptor formerly from Chogye International Zen Center of New York. Others who helped on various stages of the statue were Peter Harrington, Tim Simmons, Hella Patros, and Ellen Sidor, all of PZC; Ed Howell, Sonia Alexander, Ken Pietrzak, Nancy Brown, and Beth Ottenstein, all of Cambridge Zen Center.

Members of the sangha wish to express their gratitude to Rinpoche for his extraordinary gift.

Zen poems

*I eat at rear of Zen center
I see the bamboo grove
bamboo leaves wave
eat rice, drink tea*

*I chop bamboo
from rear of zendo
a monk sits and watches
I chop bamboo*

*with bamboo
I feel stronger
carrying bamboo
dropping bamboo neatly*

*with bamboo
I carve an existence
Katsu! Life has ended
the master walks into rear of zendo*

*bamboo ruins
poetry ruins
I grow older
food never ruined before now*

*bamboo grove
stick fighting
the master points
I have lost a year*

*down in the bamboo
a cat stalks a rat
I sit back of zendo
I try zazen*

*down in bamboo forest
Sekuin wires some dynamite
he releases the charge
broken bamboo timbers crash near by*

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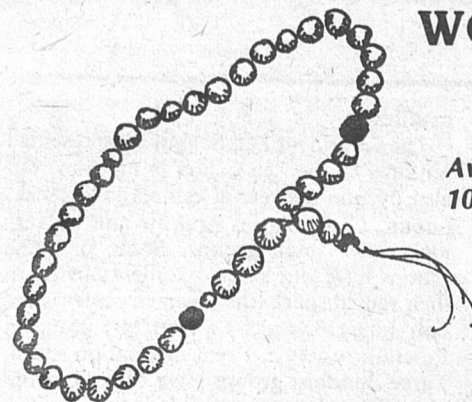
*"Just being together with an
open mind and heart, appreci-
ating this fragile life, is basically
what meditation is."*

Jakusho Kwong Roshi

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