



Buddhist Master, Harvard Ph.D. -- Now Temple Builder Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche Oversees Construction of a New Eco-Monastery at Buddha's Birthplace

LUMBINI, Nepal, March 9, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- He made Buddhist history when he was graduated from Harvard University in 2004.

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Now Trungram Gyaltrul Rinpoche (Ph.D., Indo-Tibetan Buddhism) is about to make another kind of history in one of Buddhism's most significant historical places -- Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha.

On April 4, Rinpoche will preside over the opening of the Lumbini Udyana Mahachaitya -- World Center for Peace and Unity, the latest and largest Buddhist temple and meditation hall complex to be built at the UNESCO World Heritage Site. (www.utbf.org/en/projects/dharmapri/lumbini and www.lumbiniworld.org)

The 48,600-square-foot structure is also the first modern Buddhist temple to be built as an "eco-monastery," one that incorporates a green design that builds in extra insulation while relying on large area solar panels to generate all of the building's lighting needs. It will be the most environmentally friendly of all the buildings in the monastic zone of Lumbini, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In addition to the other ecologically friendly elements, the complex features an anti-earthquake system that can help the building resist temblors as strong as 7.7 on the Richter scale.

The World Center or Mahachaitya, from its architecture to its adornments, is the brainchild of a 42-year-old high-ranking incarnate lama who crisscrosses the world delivering teachings on the Dharma, or Buddhist philosophy.

"This is an effort to save the ancient arts and wisdom, to highlight the importance of our gentleness to the earth, and to promote a sense of peace and unity for all," said Rinpoche.

Mahachaitya is the latest addition to a master-planned monastic community that envisions more than 40 Buddhist temples in different national styles to be built near where Prince Siddhartha Guatama, the Buddha, was born in 583 B.C.

As a young man, Siddhartha renounced the comfort of royal riches and adopted an ascetic

lifestyle to find a solution to end human suffering -- a quest that led to his enlightenment as the Buddha 2500 years ago. His philosophical breakthrough of the "middle-way" and its tenets of non-attachment, revolutionized Eastern thought.

Rinpoche's journey from the halls of Cambridge to the construction trenches in southern Nepal represents a remarkable personal pilgrimage as well.

Recognized as an incarnate lama at age eighteen months, he was given the honorific "Rinpoche," meaning "precious one," by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, leader of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Rinpoche then received the traditional monastic education and meditation training accorded to important Buddhist teachers. But he also realized that to communicate effectively in today's complex world he needed a Western education.

His quest opened the doors to Harvard, from where he was graduated in 2004 with a Ph.D., publishing his dissertation on Gampopa, a 12th century meditation master and forefather of the Kagyu lineage.

It was while studying at Harvard that Buddhist leaders in Nepal approached Rinpoche about building the World Center. After graduating, he applied for and received permission from Lumbini authorities to build the temple in the name of the United Trungram Buddhist Fellowship (UTBF), a nonprofit organization Rinpoche formed as a young man to further dharma work for the public benefit.

While most other Lumbini structures are being built by governments, and thus reflect different nationalistic styles, Rinpoche decided to build a more universal structure that harkened to Buddhism's educational and ecological roots.

He personally designed the central building, named Mahachaitya, to recall the greatness of Nalanda University, the ancient Buddhist seat of learning that served as the Harvard of Asia from the 5th to 12th centuries A.D. The Mahachaitya is modeled on one of the surviving structures of Nalanda -- the Stupa of Shariputra, one of the Buddha's closest disciples.

"Architecturally, I was inspired by the ruins and the sketches of what the Shariputra stupa probably looked like at the ancient Nalanda University. With the help of French, Nepalese, and Taiwanese architects, we were able to come up with this particular design," said Rinpoche.

Rinpoche oversaw construction of the World Center, which was built mostly by hand because of Nepal's chronic power outages. At one point, workmen had to form a chain to lift heavy buckets of wet cement to the top of the structure's dome.

Rinpoche has filled the central meditation hall and surrounding walkways with more than 1000 custom-made copper statues depicting Buddha, his close disciples, and various Buddhist deities in the style of the 7th to 13th centuries, considered the height of Buddhist classical art. By reviving the unadorned, balanced figures, Rinpoche hopes to create an atmosphere of serenity and simplicity, conducive to reflection and meditation.

Rinpoche's efforts to promote serenity through meditation also extends to the United States, where he currently oversees the establishment of the Mahamudra Buddhist Hermitage in the Hudson Valley of New York State. The Hermitage will be nestled on 90 acres near the village of Cragmoor, in Ulster County.

The Hermitage will offer facilities for both short and long-term retreats. It will also feature a teaching center for daily classes on Buddhist philosophy. (www.dharmakaya.org/project)

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