

# Early history of Land of Medicine Buddha

By Chiu-Nan Lai, first Co-director

With the hope of giving some insight as to how LMB was able to develop in the face of financial hardship, I am sharing the early history of the Land of Medicine Buddha.

My journey to becoming the first co-director of LMB began in 1987 when I left my cancer research position at U.T. MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston to go to Dharamsala to study Buddhism. I met His Holiness in 1987 in Manali. His Holiness asked me to teach His cooks vegetarian cooking. In early 1988, Lama Zopa Rinpoche invited me to lunch at Tushita Retreat Center. Rinpoche expressed a wish to go to Taiwan, so I offered to help. I had strong karmic connections in Taiwan from having published a booklet and several articles on natural foods and health, a holistic approach to cancer prevention.

In 1988, I arranged for Rinpoche to teach there while acting as his translator. I translated for Rinpoche in Taiwan for a few years until other students were able to perform that function. In 1990, I was asked by Rinpoche to assist in leading the month-long Kopan course with Kirti Tsenshep Rinpoche teaching. There were 150 students from around the world. We did Waidangong together in the early morning and I led the afternoon sessions. I had already been asked by Rinpoche to be the Co-director at LMB. I agreed to teach there three months per year as I still wanted to continue my studies in India.

Later in 1990, I went to LMB for the first time to prepare for the opening of the new center. Guillaume, the other co-director, and I traveled to Houston to do fund-raising. Then the earthquake happened and the price of Green Wood Lodge dropped to \$600,000. Rinpoche had no money to offer to help. When I came back from India to take on the "three month" position, I faced a balloon payment loan of \$600,000 that had to be paid off in two years. The initial mortgage, a few thousand per month, climbed steadily and steeply month by month for those two years. Repairing the earthquake damage to all the buildings at LMB, a job undertaken by Guillaume's construction company, added another \$300,000 to the loan.

LMB was not a center to begin with. There were no members nor community other than a few caretakers that lived on the land. I lived in a cabin that was damaged from the earthquake and often visited by mice. Since I had announced the LMB project at the Kopan course, volunteers from around the world started showing up at the door of LMB. Around 20 of them had to be housed and fed. Faced with a daunting financial responsibility, I could only pray to Guru Chenrezig for help.

After I gave a talk at a Chinese temple in LA on the benefits of Nyungna practice, people were enthused. The very first program at LMB was a Nyungna and 70 people attended. The guests paid \$100 each for the retreat and cleaned out the gift shop. From that auspicious beginning, the energy of the land started to improve. Even neighbors who walked their dogs at LMB commented on that. With each Nyungna retreat, the energy of the land continued to improve. People started to show up to offer to help.

One business executive from San Jose brought a well-known Fengshui master to LMB. He advised that as the director, I needed to live at a specific spot near the cabin in which I stayed for LMB to succeed. Since we had no money to build, I put up a tent there and lived in the tent for two years. During the winters, I would go to Taiwan to teach. As a result of spreading the word about the LMB project, people would come to a one-week long health retreat that I led during the summers at LMB. Two health retreats

per year paid the bills for the entire year. Though dharma programs were extremely beneficial, they did not pay the bills. When my first book came out, it went through seven printings in just over one year. The \$10,000 in book royalties that I received were donated to LMB. Personally, I had only a few thousand in my bank account after taking out \$8,000 to buy a small Toyota Tercel that was used by the staff members as well.

My experience taught me to pray to the Guru and the Triple Gem--they will help. Later life circumstances after three years of service at LMB have shown me to trust the workings of karma -- when helping others as much as possible, the reward is multiplied many fold. The creation of more merit will ensure the success of the Land of Medicine Buddha, a center for healing and developing a good heart.

The idea of holding merit making days where people are invited to turn the prayer wheels was inspired by this motivation. According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche the prayer wheel is a powerful healing tool. For people with cancer, he advised turning it for a few hours a day, visualizing the sickness absorbed into the wheel and the emitted light from the wheel heals the illness. His advice on the practice with the prayer wheel is on the post near the large prayer wheel.